

8595

THE MAYDAYS IN FRANCE

ANARCHY 89
TWO SHILLINGS
OR THIRTY CENTS



Overtaken by events : a Paris journal

ROY PRIOR

Wednesday-Thursday, May 15th-May 16th. The Paris disturbances have been very poorly reported in the English press. First, the disturbance may have arisen out of complaints about the University system, but it has gone far beyond that now. It started with a row at Nanterre, a university outside Paris, when the university was closed for an indefinite period, and seven students were summoned to appear before a university board. The Sorbonne started to get active, in the big main courtyard; the *recteur* called in the police to clear out the students who had gathered to discuss matters. The police carted the students off and there were demonstrations against this action, and against the police. The Sorbonne was closed, and the universities proposed to strike on Monday, May 6th, demonstrations all day long, finishing with 20,000 marching. The police charged the march at St. Germain des Prés, and the barricades started to go up. The police use gas. It finishes up with police hunting students through the streets, beating them with truncheons. On Tuesday, another long march, about 40,000-50,000 people, students and workers. The red flags lead the march and the Internationale is sung at the Arc de Triomphe. More demonstrations on Wednesday, when the left wing parties, hostile hitherto, jump on the bandwagon. Thursday, the Sorbonne is to be reopened: the police are on the scene, and the students demand withdrawal of police, opening of all the colleges again, and the freeing of the arrested students. The Trotskyists hold a meeting where the whole affair begins to open out into a revolutionary movement. On Friday comes the explosion: thousands of students on a demonstration march are stopped by a dam of police: the students retire into the Latin Quarter, filling the Boulevard St. Michel up to the Luxembourg. They spread out and start erecting barricades to fight the police if they charge. At 2 in the morning, the police attack, using gas

ROY PRIOR happened to be in Paris to do some literary research in the libraries there, when he was overtaken by the events of May.

grenades, tear gas, truncheons . . . fighting goes on until 5.30, around about 60 barricades: many students are injured and seven are still missing, no one knows where. On Saturday, tension: the trade unions call for a general strike. The student militants occupy an annex of the University, and use the premises for discussions and debates. On Sunday, the unions discuss and prepare their demonstration. On Monday the strike takes place, and workers and students march together to demonstrate against the police and the government. On Tuesday the government gives in, and says that the student demands for association in the organisation of the University will be met: and the newspapers give the impression that this is what it is all about.

So it was, perhaps, in the first instance, but things have changed. The students have taken over the University completely. The lecture rooms are crowded with committees discussing the whole movement—for it is a movement: the whole structure of western society is being called into question. The groups of the left are of course very prominent in this questioning: Maoists, Trotskyists, Communists and Anarchists have plastered the Sorbonne with posters, declarations, exhortations; a flood of brochures, leaflets, pamphlets and broadsheets, as well as improvised newspapers, pours out. The great courtyard of the Sorbonne is crowded with people: students and workers, and some bourgeois, arguing, forming groups where people stand and discuss, dispute, bellow, disagree, create an atmosphere where one feels that they are awake! This goes on twenty-four hours a day, while people pass in and out of the building, the lecture halls witness continuous meetings and committees and in the courtyard the people go on arguing. Around the courtyard are the placards and proclamations, people sell the newspapers and hand out the sheets: trestle tables along the walls are occupied by various groups selling their literature—Trotskyists, Communists, Maoists: I haven't run across the Anarchists yet but I know they are there: their posters are edged in black. Walking out across the Place de la Sorbonne, you can see the same thing—groups, discussions, everywhere perfect strangers joining arguments, exchanging views, in an atmosphere of charged excitement which is impossible to understand there in London, and which is impossible for me to communicate. The level of discussion is remarkably high, on the whole, and if you can imagine the sort of energy the French put into an argument between two drivers whose cars have collided, transferred to an argument about the organisation of the University, the class struggle, the whole organisation of our society, the possibility of revolution: all this conducted by a free-floating crowd of literally thousands of people, in the Sorbonne, in the street, in the cafes—this all going on day and night—then you may get some idea of the Quartier Latin at the moment.

The moment being 2.15 in the morning (Thursday), and the place being a crowded (at this hour!) cafe in the Place de la Sorbonne. If I were rather younger and a great many illusions richer, I might be tempted to believe in the revolutionary atmosphere all around me. For

the atmosphere, if not the situation, is certainly one of revolution—it reminds me a little of accounts I have read of the society in Spain in the first days of the revolution, feeling of excitement, of tension, of all sorts of possibilities for the future, the illusion that these people might, just might, put a really big crack in the structure of the society which they are questioning so fiercely. In the spectrum of opinion you can recognise the possible chronological pattern of hypothetical revolution, from reformists whose ideas are limited to the granting of certain concessions within—well within—the format of the set-up as it is, through others who advocate a far greater degree of change in the status of the student, those who look for the fall of the present government without thinking much further (even those who would be satisfied with the resignation of a few ministers), those who want to see the students declare their solidarity with the workers, abandoning their present privileged position as those who are destined to be the bastions of capitalism, through to those who look to a total destruction of capitalist society and the establishment of a socialist society of one sort or another, and those who talk as if the revolution were scheduled for tomorrow, or the day after at the very latest. Here it all is, in words at least.

And what will come out of it? Not much perhaps: in fact, my guess would be, concessions in words from the government, soothing noises, a few reforms, a scapegoat or two—the Préfet of Paris, for instance, who did not want to send the police in to the Sorbonne in the first place—and then, nothing. For a while, the question is: is the feeling underlying this revolt so strong that it will break out again? I believe it is: this is absolutely not a question of mild student discontent within the framework of the education system, although it may appear that way, and may have started that way. It looks to me like a deep-rooted discontent and dislike of the whole structure of society together with a total distrust of the discredited leaders of the left. Those of the right are scarcely mentioned, even de Gaulle and Pompidou are not names one hears often, and when one does it is in tones of dismissal. There is no need to attack them in words: they are there, that's all. In fact, there is a very remarkable lack of names—plenty of initials of left wing parties, but no names. No "Leaders" in the old sense: nobody's leading.

4.10 a.m. Les Halles, always a sight worth seeing—Paris's belly, Zola called it, with its almost blocked streets, its furious activity, its enormous collections of fruit and vegetables, its stinking fish market with the enormous articulated lorries bringing in fish from Brittany and the south-west, cheese from Normandy, milk from all over the place. How very far from the atmosphere of the Sorbonne: the students may express solidarity with the workers, but how much solidarity do these workers feel for the students? A certain amount, perhaps, since one of the student grievances—not one that is well publicised however—is that so few children of the working class get to university.

9.20 a.m. This morning I have been with Sorbonne students effecting liaison with the medical students, who are not so enthusiastic or so

well organised. In fact, the Sorbonne people were on picket duty, persuading the medical students to keep up the strike and not enter into discussions with the teaching staff. It is remarkable to see: dispute, argument, persuasion, but never the faintest suggestion of a fist raised in anger. If in normal times Sorbonne students went to the Faculty of Medicine and dared to try to tell them what to do, they would be thrown out, but now the students must above all stay together, otherwise the movement is done for.

I am writing this in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. I look up to the roof, and there flying in the wind is a sight I have never seen before: a flag with no decoration, no addition, no national symbol: a plain red flag. And I can't stop myself from shedding tears.

8.45 p.m. Saturday, May 25th. I ought to have kept a detailed day-by-day account of what I have been doing and what has been happening, but I have been very busy. I have just filled in notes for the last week in my tiny diary, and this helps, but there are still lacunae. I slept most of Thursday, promising myself I would start work next day, and spent the evening at the Sorbonne talking to people and joining in the arguments in the courtyard. Several times I was asked by students what I, as a foreigner coming fresh to these events, thought of all that I saw; they seemed heartened by the fact that I was impressed. One girl said, "You see, we have been in it all the time, and sometimes we wonder if it isn't all just talk, talk, talk." I told her that one of the things that had impressed me most was the talk, the fact that people, all sorts of people, were arguing, and particularly that the arguments so often started from premises which, although I accepted them, I was startled to find the jumping off point of arguments. It was not a question of "Is there something wrong that can be put right?", "Should we change our society and if so in what way?". No: so many people seemed to accept that the society had to go, and the question was, what sort of a society was to take its place, and how could the change be brought about.

View from the Island

On Saturday the Students' Union held its defiant demonstration. Boycotted once more by the communists, dismissed as pointless folly or crazy adventurism by many well-wishers, it nevertheless mustered a good 30,000 marchers. I join in near the head of the column, behind the proudly waving red and black flags. I've never marched under anarchist colours before, but what the hell. Students are laughing at the Humanité report of a speech by Waldeck-Rochet: "Our flags are not those of anarchy but the red flag of socialism and the tricolore, the flag of the nation." But this week the tricolore and the Marsellaise belong to de Gaulle; they've never been so clearly the symbols of conservatism.

—Mervyn Jones, NEW STATESMAN, 7.6.68.

Certain key ideas recurred again and again; the two most important as far as I could see were "autogestion" and a rejection of the consumer society. The original student demands had included participation in the running of the universities, but now it was a question of workers' control of the factories as well as student control of the colleges. As for the consumer society, I was amazed at the vehemence both of the posters and slogans plastered all over the building, and of the people who spoke of it. Everywhere, it seemed, the idea of prosperity and progress seen in terms of consumer goods, money, affluence, television and the motor car was denounced and attacked. Sometimes the arguments against it were based on the concept of affluence as the weapon of a capitalist society; but quite as often, no such analysis was made, the speaker or writer seeming to express himself from the point of view not of left-wing politics but of deep personal awareness that money and material things do not bring happiness. Oh yes indeed, quite the most banal and anti-climatic of platitudes, isn't it? I too cringed when I first heard it that Thursday evening, but one of the remarkable aspects of the whole business was the resuscitation of the platitude. Solidarity between worker and student, unity of the left, comradeship between man and man, between man and woman, the spirit of the harricades, were concepts which had reality and truth. Many might sneer—few did, in fact; for me, certainly, the tired old ideas were reborn.

On Friday, I did a little work at the Bibliothèque Nationale, very unenthusiastically. On Saturday, however, I got very interested in a particular edition of a novel which seemed matter for an article, and worked madly all day. I was at the Sorbonne again that evening; that was the night I went on to the Odéon.

The Odéon Théâtre de France was taken over by students, including drama students, and was thrown open 24 hours a day as a free forum for discussion. It is a remarkable sight, the house packed with people, and three or four organisers in the centre aisle trying to direct the discussion. I say trying, because it is an appallingly difficult task. What happens roughly is that everyone is invited to put forward his views, and at any given moment, in a crowded theatre, a number of people would like to air their opinions, whether from delight in hearing their own voice, pleasure in showing off before a large audience, violent disagreement with the last speaker or the one three before him, disagreement with some other aspect such as the whole idea of a free forum unless it allows only the expression of the correct views, disagreement with the handling of the proceedings, desire to correct the last speaker's facts, desire to correct the last speaker's opinions, desire to alter the last speaker's attitude, desire to beat the last speaker's head in, wish to break up the proceedings, desire to help along the argument, or a wish to silence everyone who is making such a racket and spoiling the whole affair for everyone, and why do all these people yell so that you can't hear the speaker, so you bawl at the top of your voice "SILENCE".

And yet there is—to use one of the key words, even if it is over-worked, of this period—a dialogue. Workers do manage to stand up and say their piece, people do listen, people do start to try to see other

people's position, even learn from them. I stayed at the Odéon for four hours, till four in the morning.

Then I slept on Sunday till nearly midday, got up and went to the ménagerie at the Jardin des Plantes. I fed peanuts to the elephant, admired the alligators, crocodiles, turtles and tortoises, flamingoes, saw a just-born baby bison lying on the ground panting, saw several fine gorillas and some heavily moulted camels.

I continued to the Bois de Vincennes, and there, in search of some green and perhaps a goose or two, failing which, a mallard, I passed through quite the largest functioning fairground I ever saw. Well, it was marked green on the map. However, I got to the other end and found green—in fact, for Paris, an enormous expanse of green; you can walk quite a hundred yards before coming to a "Keep off the Grass" sign. Well, anyway, ninety yards. I walked this, and then came to a lake, with an island in the middle, and a causeway to the island, so that people can saunter across to the island and walk round on the paths admiring the elegant "Keep off the Grass" signs. I preferred to walk around the lake, eyeing the ten yards of water between the mainland grass and the island grass, each equally combed, brushed, barbered, groomed, titivated, beautified, rolled and beaten into a state of supine submission. However, there are ducks and some swans, who do not Keep off the Grass at all, but walk flatly on it, their large flocks of offspring quacking behind. There are a great number of ducklings, many of them swimming in blocks of twenty to thirty, each accompanied by several ducks.

I stopped near a rather short middle aged man who, at a spot where the grass had been swept away to allow the gravel path to go to the edge of the water, was complaining bitterly. It appears that the gentleman was feeding the ducks, and had thrown bread near one of two cygnets. When a duckling had gone after it, one of the swan parents had attacked him—the duckling. The gentleman did not like this, and was trying to hit the swan with a stone. He sent his little girl—about six—granddaughter I think—to get him stones, but she came back with a branch, with which he tried to reach the swan, with much explanation to the people around. I engaged a dialogue with him, explaining that the swan was only trying to protect its young; that it was perfectly natural; that the duckling was unhurt; that if he (the gentleman) continued to try to hurt the swan, I (the speaker) would push him (the gentleman) into the water. He yelled and shouted and insulted me, and then stopped and went on feeding the ducks. The swan came a little closer in search of food, and the gentleman reached out waving his branch and trying to hit the swan, and as I had promised him, I pushed him into the lake.

That evening I discovered the anarchists at the Sorbonne. They are much more organised in France, much more politically active, and they have played a large part in the whole struggle. Since then I have had some interesting discussions with them, and often drop in there. They hold forums similar to those at the Odéon, except that theirs are held to tell people about anarchist ideas, to answer questions, and to

allow debate on their theories. Unfortunately, these three functions in one meeting live very uneasily together. If you are going to tell people about your ideas, you stand up and address them. If you are answering questions about anarchism, someone asks a question, say, "What, comrade, is the place of bird-watching in the future libertarian society after the revolution has destroyed the state, comrade?" and you stand up and answer, saying unto him, "In a libertarian society, comrade, bird-watching will be one among many activities enjoyed by freedom-loving anarchists living in an international federation, and there will be no frontiers to hinder birds from migrating from time to time to other places for the pleasure of other anarchist bird-watchers in those other places, comrade." And if you are allowing debate on anarchist ideas, then the chairman should direct the argument without entering into it. The functions are incompatible, the consequences obvious and the forums less useful than they might be. However, when things do not get mixed up, they do in fact give the people who come a lot of useful information on anarchist ideas. Usually there is a brief summary of the idea of a federalist society and how it might be organised, as well as an attack on a parliamentary "democracy" in which the sole political activity of the mass, and its sole power, is to mark a cross on a piece of paper once every few years, and in France today, to say a blind unqualified yes or no to an elderly paternalist autocrat. Also, the forums may do a little to help dispel the aura of terror which in France still surrounds the words "anarchy" and "anarchist".

On Monday I went to the BN, but they were short-staffed because of the Métro strike and were not opening the Réserve, where my books were. I went to the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, but they were not issuing books for the same reason. So I went back to the Sorbonne. That afternoon I met an American law teacher and freelance journalist called Joe, who was trying to get some personal stories on the "nuit des barricades" of 10-11 mai; as he speaks no French, I went along with him for the evening, and heard a remarkable account by the daughter of a French ambassador, a first-year medical student, about seventeen, tiny, with a very young face; she told of what had happened and how she had got on, and I was moved and appalled at the barbarity of the events, but much more at their juxtaposition to this little girl. I was conscious not so much of her sex, but of her youth; at the total incongruity of this tender thing, and the shields, the yard-long weighted truncheons, the nerve-jumping crack of grenades and the blindness and tears of the gas, the noise and the dirt of the street, and the fear. The fear of the CRS.

On Tuesday, I went to the BN, but they were all on strike, so I could not do anything. (These two days I was trying to contact J.P. which I finally did, and arranged to call on him on Wednesday at 10 a.m.) I read a little on Tuesday afternoon, both work and current events. You must imagine too the enormous amount of newsprint being devoured in Paris by everyone in these tense days. The strike was spreading and spreading; by Tuesday the number of strikers was in the millions. On Tuesday evening I met a Finnish girl, journalist and

translator, and talked about translation and events in Paris until 2 a.m. Wednesday morning I called on J.P., who seems to be quite a pleasant fellow. I worked there from 10 till 1, poking my nose in that time into all twenty-five box-files of papers, taking note of one or two interesting things. At a rate of seven minutes per box two inches thick, I obviously did nothing but skim through; but I found one particularly curious thing, a manuscript which appeared to be the last half of a novel, but which I did not recognise at all. It looked to me like the second half of a work of which the first had been published as an "unfinished" novel. I put it aside for further study.

That evening there was a big demonstration, called by the students to protest against the government's action in forbidding Cohn-Bendit's return to France. I took part, and it was indeed an amazing affair. A crowd of up to 10,000 people, chanting slogans, but most of all, singing the Internationale and chanting "Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands" (We are all German Jews). I was enormously moved—as I have been time after time in these last days. We marched towards the Assemblée Nationale, but were not allowed through to demonstrate in front (that evening they were debating the opposition's foredoomed censure motion). There I had my first sight of the CRS drawn up for action. I had seen them often enough in the days before, in coaches with the windows protected by thick mesh, hanging around the Pont des Arts. But here they were drawn up in line three or four deep right across each of several side roads off the Boulevard St. Germain, where we were, and across the boulevard itself. We were thousands, they were I suppose under a hundred in each side street, considerably more on the boulevard; but, but. They wear close-fitting, gleaming helmets, with a double thonged strap under the chin; jackboots; thick black uniforms with broad heavy belts; carry heavy truncheons. They are armed also with grenades discharging not only tear gas, but other gases of various sorts, some of them said to be banned by the Geneva Convention, some, certainly, of which the details are secret, so that the civilian doctors who treated victims after the first night of the barricades had themselves no accurate information to guide them in treatment. The CRS look awfully like the SS men of the war films. Certainly they would have made excellent SS men. They are, whether by nature or by training, fitted to be concentration camp guards. If called on to support my assertion that man is a stain on nature, the catastrophe of this planet, whose destruction would be a blessing of unimaginable magnitude; if challenged by some humanist to support this contention not by history, but

View from the East

France is the first Western country to demonstrate that the social mechanism created two centuries ago does not correspond to the needs any more. The revolutionary action that has served notice that the idea of a workers' self-managed society is knocking on all doors of the rich industrial countries of the West.

—BORBA (Belgrade), 28.5.68.

by living specimens, and if I couldn't for the moment find any concentration camp guards or Ku Klux Klanners (I have mentioned only two, and those chosen only from the ranks of those who persecute their own species)—why, then a CRS man would refute my hypothetical humanist quite as adequately as Johnson's stone refuted Berkeley. (I am quite aware of the implications of the comparison.)

But the CRS have made their first appearance, have shown themselves sinister, bulky, black, black, medium long shot, a brooding presence which we know we shall see more of; so, we shall leave them. They will be heard from. To be continued in our next.

On Thursday morning I went again to J.P.'s flat, and confirmed that the ms. was indeed part of the "unfinished" novel. When I told J.P. this he was incredulous, and we decided I should look through the documents for the ms. of the published section; it was missing, and I could not find it. The new ms. is about 30,000 words long, and I estimated that with the already published section we had at least 80 per cent of the novel. I left a note for J.P.—I was now very excited about this find.

(From a literary point of view we are doing well; we have two good plots going, one social and political, one academic and personal. Will the sinister CRS destroy the valiant anarchist forum by asking them questions they can't answer? Is our hero's find really the long-lost finale of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony? Will the black uniforms tear up the black flag of the anarchists and steal the precious manuscript? Will the goodies beat the baddies in the end? Read tomorrow's breathtaking thrill-a-minute edition of *Le Monde*.)

Coming back from J.P.'s flat, I had something to eat (I had not stopped all day) and then walked through the Place St. Michel on the way to the Sorbonne. It was about six o'clock, and the usual strollers were around. There was no disorder; yet a squad of CRS had just formed up at the end of the Pont St. Michel, across the whole width of the road, blocking the bridge, carrying their large black shields, ready for action. There was not the slightest need for this: no demonstration had been called for that evening, and none was taking place. If the authorities felt the CRS were necessary to keep order (which seems unlikely, since the effect of their appearance in this way served exactly the opposite purpose), they could have stayed in their coaches, parked nearby, as they had done before, ready to intervene if needed.

I went to the Sorbonne and had a talk with some people I had met, two couples, one an elderly railwayman and his wife, all anarchists. I don't know what time it was when I left them, but we had heard that there was already trouble at the Place St. Michel, and I headed back there.

That was the flashpoint of Thursday night's riots. The police barrier had attracted a large crowd, many of them students, and insults had been hurled at the CRS. It is fairly certain that many of those who hurled the insults were "provocateurs", intending to start trouble; it is less easy to say whether they were extremists from the left wing or the right, or even, improbable though it sounds, working for the government,

to give the public the impression that the students were in the wrong for starting it all. Anyway, the inevitable finally happened, stones and rubbish were thrown at the CRS, back came gas grenades, and the Place St. Michel and the Place St. André des Arts became a battlefield. The "service d'ordre" of the students tried in every way they could to stop it, but it was useless, partly because of the exasperation, partly because of the feeling of solidarity. The police advanced, the grenades and the stones flew, and soon the pavé was being dug up, the thick pierced iron plates that surround the base of the trees pulled up, and barricades went up on the Boulevard St. Michel.

The CRS had four enormous lorries side by side across the whole width of the Boulevard, advancing slowly uphill. Night had fallen, and the tear gas was so thick that it was difficult to see even if your eyes were not streaming tears. Through the haze came flashes—sometimes the lights of news photographers, sometimes, I think, some form of grenade striking. The CRS don't throw the grenades, they have mechanical throwers which send them a long distance and with considerable velocity, which in itself constitutes a considerable hazard when the grenades are thrown haphazard into a crowd. I can testify to this, as I involuntarily stopped a gas grenade with my left leg, getting a large bruise and a severe limp.

I was very frightened. I do not think I am a coward. I think that given a rifle and preferably a little training, I could fight. If they are over there with rifles and we are over here with rifles, I do not think I would run. But to stand your ground with no weapon, no protection—God, how delicate and fragile this flesh stuff is when there is a bang, and you find you are running—to ignore the tear gas—which is bad, there is no doubt: you can stand it quite a time, at least I can, but comes a moment when you are blinded, when your eyes burn uncontrollably and you are in the middle of the Boulevard St. Michel and there are two enormous bangs, you can't open your eyes and you are running across this naked flat plain stretching away to the kerb, and blundering into people as blind as you, your eyes burning, until you stagger into a shop front and put something hard between you and the flying grenades, and then stumble away along the houses trying to keep your eyes shut with the terror of the newly blind forcing them open, trying to see to run away from this hell. And if you run far enough, out of the worst of the gas, and your eyes stop burning, you look back and see that you have escaped from hell, the hell of the medieval painters. All around, blackness, and in the centre, illuminated by the tall licking flames from the barricades, hazy and flickering against the fires, through the steam-cloud of gas you see dancing figures, male and female, yelling and jumping, bending down to pick up something to throw it through the flames into the cloud and darkness beyond. Around them, crashes and bangs, and from a cylinder on the ground the smoke rushes as if an imprisoned genie had been let loose: you expect him to form in the upper darkness and loom above the figures, who duck and run, and then go back to face that huge darkness beyond. And you know what sort of courage that is, and you know you haven't got it.

On Friday morning I dragged myself out of bed after about four hours sleep and went to my usual café for breakfast. The Place St. Michel was a wreck, and even at nine in the morning there was tear gas in the air, stinging the eyes and nostrils. I was limping a little, and conscious that any policeman could easily deduce why. It had been worse the previous night. I had finally taken refuge in the Sorbonne as I found difficulty in walking, and as my way home led me through the CRS whichever way I went. Inside the Sorbonne the atmosphere was that of a siege, and serious discussion took place as to how the place could be defended. I thought the place indefensible against a gas attack, which would be deadly in the enclosed spaces even if only tear gas were used; but it was clear that if an attack came, the Sorbonne would be defended room by room, floor by floor, stair by stair.

It was not attacked. I tried later to leave, and found that nobody was allowed to go out. The reason I was given by the students' service d'ordre was that the CRS outside were clubbing down anyone seen leaving. When I was allowed to go, at about two a.m., I was told that I did so at my own risk. I soon discovered what was meant. There were four CRS men at the corner, and as I came down the steps and across the square on the opposite side of the road to them, they shouted insults at me with the obvious hope that I might answer back. I promptly decided that I could not understand a word of French, and went on. I felt relieved that I had developed the habit of always carrying my passport, arguing that for a foreigner the worst that could happen was a severe beating-up and deportation. I ran less danger than most, but I was terrified. To avoid them as much as possible I took a most roundabout route to my hotel off the Place St. Michel.

J.P. and I were anxious to find the missing manuscript and work on this mystery, but because of the strikes we were badly hampered. One man who might well know something of what had happened to the ms. after its publication lived in Tours, and we did not have his telephone number. Finally we decided I should hitch-hike to Tours that day, since otherwise I might miss him if he were out over the weekend, and we did not want to wait till the Monday. There I should give my letter of introduction to B, and find out what I could.

I got there at about five-thirty, and B. welcomed me most warmly, inviting me to dinner at his home. With him and his family I watched de Gaulle's television speech, which must surely be worth a prize as the anti-climax of the year. We spent a happy evening talking shop: B. was excited about the discovery but could tell me nothing about the missing ms.

At about eleven he drove me back into Tours, and I went into a café to sort out my notes and drink a final beer. Hearing a transistor radio going I went to listen: riots in Paris and most bitter fighting!

It was as if one of those grenades that were flying one hundred and fifty miles away had hit me, not in the leg, but in the head. After de Gaulle's speech, I had totally forgotten Paris, buried in talk about work; now I realized that with a shock that further rioting had been inevitable. I tried to telephone to London, which was impossible, and

then tried H. in Paris, she was not in. Useless. In between attempts to telephone, I walked up and down by the fountains. Anguish at the thought that in Paris the CRS were out again at the massacre, fear for my comrades, unhappiness at being stuck here, in the provinces, powerless, horror that the people I knew at the Sorbonne might attribute my absence to cowardice. I found that I was whimpering.

When I got back to Paris on Saturday afternoon, the devastation in the Latin Quarter was remarkable; according to statistics published on Monday, in Paris a total of nearly thirteen thousand square feet of pavé had been torn up in great chunks, and as much again in scattered patches, and seventy-two trees cut down, apart from the lamp-posts, traffic lights and iron benches torn up. Most amazing to me, a stout metal newspaper kiosk at the corner of the Place de la Sorbonne had been torn up—how, I still don't know; and *Le Monde* indicated that another four of these heavily built structures had been destroyed.

I was depressed. First I had missed the night of the 10th-11th May, and now this. The trade union leaders were negotiating direct with the Government on a programme of claims—the weary old claims that were necessary in themselves, but so irrelevant at this point. Shorter hours, higher minimum wages, earlier retirement for certain classes of worker, better social security—for the French workman, whose conditions had deteriorated so much, and particularly for the lowest paid French worker, these things were vital. Trying to live myself on thirty-five francs a day in Paris, I failed to see how any man could possibly stay alive on the minimum wage of under 400 francs per month for a forty-hour week. But it was clear that the trade union bureaucracy was playing the game with the régime, and wanted none of a revolution. Their wish was as always to share the power with the government, and keep their control over the millions they were supposed to be serving. They would negotiate a bit extra for their supporters and order them back to work like good little sheep, and their names would go down in history. And the workers would let themselves be fooled again. They

View from the Island

Nothing could be more foolish than for us and the Americans to smirk to see the French President in trouble with his syndicalist students and workers.

These present discontents run vastly more widely. We are not all Socialists now. We are all syndicalists now, in a new sense. We want to have a real say in our own affairs. It is a crisis, not just of affluence, but of democracy—and of the so-called people's democracies, too.

It is in their responses to all this that all the rulers are now about to be tested. Not just President de Gaulle. Not just Mr. Wilson. Not just the abdicating President Johnson and the contestants for his crown. Not just the creaking regimes of Eastern Europe. All of them.

—Donald Tyerman, EVENING STANDARD, 21.5.68.

had been woken up by the students, and without any instructions from the top, they had started a strike which their leaders had not wanted. They had shaken the French régime to its foundations, and shown just how powerful they were. Now they would go back to their torpid existence for a few francs extra a week, without even turning out the government. I had a cold, a headache, and no hope for the strike.

That night I had the dream I have from time to time, after which I always wake uneasy and disorientated. It is so vivid, and I so much want to stay in it, that when I wake, it is as if I came from reality into a distortion and caricature of the real. The unreality of that day could be put down to this, and perhaps to the awful solitude of a Paris Sunday. That day the usual Sunday afternoon outing of the Parisian bourgeois family took the shape of a walk around the principal battle fronts to gape at the debris, heads shaking at the devastation. The Latin Quarter was more crowded that afternoon than I have ever seen it. From the beginning of the affair, there had been a certain amount of tourist attraction quality about the Sorbonne and what was going on there, and no doubt a great many people came along to see the wild men, as they would have gone to see the gorillas at the zoo. Moreover, the student revolution in Paris, at least, was the biggest and most exciting "happening" one could imagine, and I had reflected that in fact this heightened vividness with which we lived was surely one of the things which had to be kept, or at least remembered. But on this afternoon, it was no longer a question of people participating to some degree in what was going on. This was spectator passiveness again. You sit in front of the one-eyed monster and ooh, ah, look at that, ooh road accident, ah Vietnam, bang CRS, and you get the extra kick of seeing places you know as a background for the bloodletting. So you take your Sunday afternoon stroll down there to see, and you take your camera along. Look daddy, that's where that man got bashed. Stand there in front of the barricade and let me take a photo of you—that's it, you stand on top of it and hold a stone in your hand. Click. Souvenir of the barricades. In the Rue des Ecoles there were two cars together which had been twisted wildly out of shape; it was difficult to see how such a peculiar malformation had been achieved. These were the favourite spots for photographers, but for every one who snapped the wrecks there were five who snapped their wife or husband or girl friend or entire family standing on or in front of them. I am told that during the Tet offensive in Saigon, people were putting up platforms and selling seats for places from which you got a good view of the fighting. I find no difficulty in believing it.

That evening I was cheered by meeting an American called D. He is a remarkable talker, who handles the English language as one rarely hears it handled, in a style which recalled slightly the prose of Thomas Pynchon. His syntax is more elaborate than is the case in usual speech, but there is no sense of pedantry, merely that of a man manipulating language to express coherently and poetically a complex structure of ideas and an involved narrative. The final result is real poetic prose—

not purple patch prose, but true evocative language which brings to life the concepts it expresses. As to the ideas, the narrative, the concepts themselves, they were the product of a rampant paranoia, the wild magnificent impossibilities of a mind concerned with a world where the computers are all interlinked and a small dedicated band of men are striving to avert the catastrophe whose signs are the student revolts, the Vietnam conference, the Democratic primaries and the taking over of a mental hospital by British intelligence, who use ECT to brainwash people who have learned too much about the conspiracy. That man would be certified without hesitation by any competent psychiatrist, locked away and treated.

On Monday the details of the agreement reached between government and unions were published; and the workers who were to ratify the agreement refused to do so. I was amazed and cheered. On Tuesday the search for the ms. continued, and I nursed my cold as I waited to see how de Gaulle would react to this defiance. We all waited. In the Salle des Anars at the Sorbonne, I looked at the books. The room had been—is—a small library, in which are stored mainly theses which have been written on quite the most remarkable variety of subjects. There was a curious discontinuity between all this buried learning and the living ideas that were the present, less tangible occupants of the building. Yet I found a link, a thesis which listed the contents of the "cahiers" or lists of claims, requests, complaints and protests drawn up in the Paris area, for the meeting of the Etats Généraux in 1789.

On Wednesday, as it began to seem more and more likely that an interim government would be formed and general elections called, J.P. and I went to see another man who might give us information, but again without success. But on Thursday morning we discovered that the ms. was at the publisher's, where it had been ever since publication; the strike, of course, was the reason why we had not been able to establish this in the first place. I arranged to work on the new ms. when it had been copied, at some more propitious time, and since I could do little more now, I decided to pack my bags and try to get a flight back to London. Skyways told me that if I wanted to come to their terminal, I could take a chance on getting a vacancy, and I did this, and waited in the lounge for the chance to get away. De Gaulle, who had disappeared the previous day to think over the decision he had to take, and thus given rise to great speculation, mainly on the lines that he was going to resign, was to speak on the radio at four-thirty. There were over a dozen of us around the radio when he spoke, to say that he had decided to stand firm, to keep his Prime Minister, that he would keep the country from the threatened dictatorship (gasp of astonishment from the listeners) and the international Communist conspiracy. The autocrat was going to hold out till the end, and it was impossible at that moment to give even the wildest guess as to what that end might be.