

## PART I. STUDENTS VERSUS SOCIETY

### *La Phase Nanterroise*

What was most surprising about the revolutionary movement that swept an apparently placid and comfortable France in May 1968 was its rapidity and short duration. It started at the University of Nanterre, where a small kernel of twenty-five grew into over a thousand in a month's time, sufficient to arrest the university's normal functioning. A week after the closing of Nanterre, the group of radicals swelled to fifty thousand and, in another ten days, ten million. In another month, like a comet, it had disappeared; except for some raises in salaries, minor changes in de Gaulle's cabinet, and specks of unwashed graffiti on the walls of the Sorbonne, there was hardly a visible trace of its passing.

How to interpret these events that fit only awkwardly into the annals of history? Should the movement be recognized as a close-but-not-quite fulfillment of the Marxist malediction of capitalist society? Or is the reverse true—that the eventual failure of the movement and de Gaulle's subsequent electoral success is final proof that consumer capitalism and private enterprise will live forever?

It is especially astounding that the movement, which begs by its Marxist, Maoist, and Marcusean inspiration for a socialist explanation, should have started at Nanterre. For this city was a suburban outpost of bourgeois family life, full of young people whose future was staked in the success of capitalism, arch-consumers of a consumer culture.<sup>1</sup> That there arose in such a place, within a few weeks' time, a revolt that shook France to her industrial roots, that made de Gaulle brandish the threat of civil war, that closed every school, paralyzed hundreds of factories and changed forever the politics of the nation, puts historical credibility to the test.

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1. The words "bourgeois" and "proletarian" will recur often in this book. These terms refer, of course, to the upper and working classes of a capitalist society. Although they are hardly used in contemporary American speech anymore, they were commonplace terms in France in 1968, especially on the left, that is to say, among the nearly 50 percent of the population which voted for the Communist and socialist parties.

Before addressing the larger question of the meaning of the Events, the historian must pose more specific ones such as: Why did the movement begin at Nanterre? What is the mystery of this suburban revolt? Why weren't the workers first to the barricades? Their lot had changed little since their last major uprising in 1936, despite the increasing prosperity of France. An answer, but by no means the answer, lies somewhere in a combination of three phenomena that converged on the University of Nanterre in the year 1968.<sup>2</sup>

First of all there was the *phénomène Nanterre* itself, its physical aspect. Ten miles west of Paris, where pastel colors take on an industrial brown, the cobblestone streets and delicate architecture of the city are replaced by urban industry and dingy housing projects. Pasted onto this landscape, on the site of an old army campground surrounded by a high gray stone wall is a complex of buildings, the University of Nanterre, practically indistinguishable from its fellow factories of fresh cement and steel.

Nanterre was a far cry from the Sorbonne where students' lives were unquestionably their own, where they frequented cafés and friends unimpeded in every respect. At Nanterre, with nothing else to do, the students were obliged to stay and attend classes, which meant that they were just about the only permanent residents; professors came seldom and only for courses, ironically because they wanted little to do with the unattractive life of Nanterre and its cloistered students.

The paradox haunted Nanterre for a further reason. The university had been built in a spirit of reform, as a proving ground for experiments in student participation in university governance. The administration was authorized to give wide rein to student expression, letting the campus develop much as its constituent body willed. A young faculty attempted in various ways to reduce the distance that traditionally separated students from professors, and courses from modern life. But even though students and faculty were encouraged to experiment, the immense glacier of French educational bureaucracy ground down their efforts, and no real reforms were ever accepted.

Such was the phenomenon of Nanterre: a student body frustrated by its surroundings, experiencing diffused and undirected discontent, given a sense of its importance, but denied a real voice.

Nanterre's second grave problem was the Fouchet Reforms of

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2. In 1936 a socialist "Popular Front" government was elected. A general strike soon pushed it to the left, and it granted wage increases and instituted major reforms.

French higher education. These reforms were a timid Americanization of the French system—a little more competition, a little less leisure time for exploring what lay beyond the pedagogic mysteries. Generally, the reforms were an encroachment on the free spirit for the sake of efficiency. For instance: laboratory discussion sessions, given in conjunction with large lecture courses, heretofore optional were now required; students had to choose their specialty in the first year of higher education, and, should they fail one year, they were allotted only a single extra year to make it up before being dropped.

The reformers were interested in efficiency. French youth, however, were sensitive to the delicate balance between individuality and culture. Required courses, required attendance, a limited number of years to complete the educational process—all appeared to sacrifice the leisure of learning embedded in French tradition and raised the dreaded specter of a monolithic society.

The day of reckoning for the Fouchet Reforms came on November 10, 1967, when the entire program, despite numerous appeals from professors to apply the reform progressively, was “parachuted” onto the French system. At Nanterre, it simply did not make it through the already sensitized atmosphere. A minority of students refused to attend classes until assured of some revision of the reforms. Only after a group of professors negotiated some concessions with the Ministry did courses resume normally.

These November boycotts left their mark on Nanterre, awakening dormant discontents and bringing a normally apathetic student body into an active relationship with the university and the society. The resultant student agitation was the third factor threatening the order of things at Nanterre.

After November, two groups of activists were distinguishable. On the one hand were those who set about to reform the Fouchet Reforms. From them came the idea of Paritary Commissions—committees of students and professors set up in each department to solve problems related to course schedules, grievances, and the lack of communication between the administration and the student body. It was a fine idea, the most legitimate solution to the university problem, but it was not taken seriously by the Ministry. On the other hand were students who were already politically mature radicals. Among them, the most spectacular were the notorious *enragés*, who rejected the Fouchet Reforms outright.<sup>3</sup>

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3. “*Enragés*” are literally angry. As the name of a political group, the term derives from the French Revolution of 1789.

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They saw the university, and particularly Nanterre, as the Golden Calf of an inhuman government that itself deserved to be destroyed.

These few *enragés* created an alternative solution at Nanterre—one might say an alternative to Nanterre. Flaunting all custom, respecting nothing, breaking up lecture courses in the name of Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, they created a continual political happening. Their basic goals were, first, to leave the authorities no peace; second, to convey the idea that the ills of students were attributable not to the structure of the university, but to the structure of society, and that denunciation and possibly even revolution were the only reasonable means of protest. None of this won them any popularity votes, at the most a few chuckles for their antics, but they did succeed in creating an awareness of political issues among the student population.

Early in 1968 the *enragés* passed from theoretical debates to direct action against the authorities. They had their opportunity following a fortuitous incident on January 26. On this day, the *enragés* were on parade, all forty of them, marching down the long Nanterre corridor when the rumor started that an opposition political group of right-wing militants called *Occident* planned a counterdemonstration. "Counterdemonstration," in this context, could only be a euphemism for a fight. Someone called the police who, on arriving, began to disperse the students with clubs and tear gas. In the closed arena that was Nanterre a crowd soon gathered, angered simply by the presence of law officers in the university; much to the surprise of the police, this amorphous crowd of bystanders returned their blows with rocks and improvised weapons. This was the beginning of the Nanterre mobilization. Little matter how it started, the presence of police in the university was an irreparable offense.

With a little luck, the *enragés* had exposed Nanterre's isolated community to the most unpopular form of authority: physical repression. This produced a visible justification for total opposition to the university. Here was a confirmation of many students' objections to the Fouchet Reforms: the very same government that had conceived of these reforms could bring police onto university grounds in violation of the traditional immunity of the university.<sup>4</sup> A second police invasion followed the January 26 incident; this one took place progressively as a

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4. Since the Middle Ages, French universities have enjoyed a kind of semi-independence from the local authorities. Police on campus was inconceivable to the generation of students and teachers active in 1968.

fifth column of civilian policemen slowly established itself in the classes and halls of Nanterre. These undercover cops had a blacklist of "undesirables" in which the *enragés* professed an honor to be inscribed. What all this meant was that the control was slowly slipping from the grasp of Dean Grappin, the liberal head of the university, and into that of a sinister police crew.

Police in the university dramatized the conflict between state repression and student freedom, and served as proof of the validity of protest.<sup>5</sup> From that point on, a growing number of newly *enragés* swelled meetings in which topics of discussion varied from police brutality to Vietnam to freedom of expression. No organization determined policy; everyone spoke as inspired, and no adherence to a doctrine was required. In contrast to other political organizations on campus, an *enragé* felt no obligation or political commitment, had no card to carry, no register to sign, and this spontaneity in itself added to the group's ambiguous popularity.

The *enragés* learned and conveyed the following lesson: tactical agitation is the Achilles heel of a rigid administration. Conspicuous disturbance frustrates authority, which in turn increases restrictive measures, which in turn more fully justify protest. Once caught in this escalation of protest and repression the administration is bound to lose, whether it capitulates or suppresses its opposition. By early March, the process was well under way. More agitation led to more police, which in turn further poisoned the atmosphere at Nanterre. Meetings now overflowed the capacity of their assigned room, yet Dean Grappin refused to grant another larger room, hoping that if he could not dissuade he could at least squeeze out his opposition. His response only gave the *enragés* another platform for protest. Similarly, in mid-March, Grappin refused to ask for the release of four demonstrators, arrested during a Vietnam protest march at the Paris American Express Office. The four demonstrators became martyrs, and tempers flared.

The escalation of tempers and tension reached a high point on March 22 when five hundred students joined the *enragés* in a meeting and spontaneously decided to take decisive action. Toward evening, a hundred and forty-two members entered the sacred faculty conference room on the eighth floor of a central campus building and occupied it during the entire night, protesting in the name of freedom of expression

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5. For a history of the movement at Nanterre, see A. F. Gausson's "L'Université entre deux âges, II," *Le Monde*, 8 Mai 1968, p. 7.

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and their four arrested comrades. There, on this memorable night, they gave birth and baptism to a new movement. It was incongruous but true that the history of Nanterre and possibly France would hinge on the agitation of so small a group, who called themselves the March 22 Movement from that moment on.

The movement, born in this act of opposition and committed to revolution, created new problems for the administration again and again. They won a major round when Grappin granted them the largest hall in the university, and soon this too held a capacity audience. During succeeding days, meeting followed meeting and their ranks swelled to a thousand. They announced the boycott of midterm exams, to which Dean Grappin replied by closing the university. On the reopening and rescheduling of exams, the March 22 Movement scored a major victory when three hundred students responded to the boycott. Following Easter vacation the movement planned a two-week conference entitled "Anti-imperialist Days," including a series of talks on subjects ranging from Vietnam to student struggles in underdeveloped countries.

On April 17 at Nanterre, Dr. Laurent Schwartz, one of the world's most famous physicists, came to speak on the Fouchet Reforms. Chaos reigned in the hall and some students shouted that an anti-revolutionary should not be allowed to speak.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, redheaded, elastic, and jovial, rose above the confusion without a microphone; when he motioned to be heard, silence was reestablished. "Laurent Schwartz should be allowed to explain himself" he shouted. "Let him speak and afterwards, if we think he is rotten, we will say, 'Monsieur Laurent Schwartz, you are rotten.'" And for the moment, order was restored and everyone got down from the stage.<sup>6</sup> There was no chairperson. Cohn-Bendit refused to impose any authority, so every orator had to express himself and be criticized amid the chaos.

Cohn-Bendit was the symbol and the anti-symbol of the movement. He was the leader, but denied the concept of leadership; he had originated the March 22 Movement, but claimed that the presence of an organization could only work to the detriment of revolt. Although he disclaimed such a thing as a "cult of personality," the spontaneity that was the sense of the movement and the reason for its incredible success was incarnate in him.

A student returning to Nanterre by chance on April 17 after a two-

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6. A. F. Gaussen and Guy Herzlich, "Le Rêve de Nanterre," *Le Monde*, 7 Mai 1968, p. 1.

or three-year absence would have been much surprised. Student political action, particularly since the Algerian war ended in 1962, had worn down to a very low ebb. Foundering in factions, it was an arena of despair, of small, ineffective, squabbling organizations. Cohn-Bendit introduced two major new directions. First, he created a movement that was flexible, in which every political theory could find a place. Second, he wished to unite those holding these various positions in spontaneously inspired direct action. With such a strategy, temporary goals could be proposed, then rendered concrete and acceptable to a broad range of political orientations.

This was something that established political organizations had not been able to do. The only one that had come close was UNEF, the National Union of French Students, which, up to 1963 had held sway among the students. UNEF reached the pinnacle of its influence during the Algerian War when it took a strong stand for Algerian Independence. Its numbers at that time rose to a record high of 100,000. However, following the Algerian crisis, the government (which had previously funded UNEF) withdrew its support. At the same time, student political consciousness decreased considerably, leaving the once central organization with neither political nor monetary substance. Its assemblies became tumultuous circuses of diverse splinter groups, its chapters mostly reduced to small gatherings of desperadoes.

The United States unwittingly changed all this. Its war in Vietnam inspired fresh protest on which there could be wide accord and an extension of activism beyond the university and even beyond France into concern with the ills of imperialism. The March 22 Movement belittled all reforms within the confines of the university, instead advocating direct action to change society. By venturing into the factories that conveniently surrounded Nanterre, talking with workers, and rallying support for greater wage demands, they made a critical point: it was not only the university that was at fault but the entire society.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the movement was its vocal anti-communism. The communists' handicap was similar, in a sense, to that of UNEF: institutionalized protest was not wanted. Ironically, the party's greatest problem at Nanterre in April was at the same time its strongest asset in France—that it was respectable. "We are all undesirable," the famous declaration of Cohn-Bendit, was repugnant to the communist conception of the propriety of protest.

Hardly suspecting that the March 22 Movement would launch a nationwide revolt from the meager beginnings of a dozen anarchists, the party kept its distance. The party was still abusing them on May 3,

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after Nanterre was closed for the second and last time and after the first major confrontation between students and police. "These false revolutionaries," the party organ *Humanité* reported, "ought to be unmasked, because, in fact, they serve the interests of the Gaullist state. . . . It is necessary to combat and completely isolate the extreme leftist 'groupuscules' who want only to harm the democratic process by drowning it in talk."<sup>7</sup>

Like the Communist Party, almost no one took the movement seriously. By its radicalism and its total refusal of any normal order, it seemed to be situated in cloud-cuckoo land, hardly in the reality of national politics. The major unions distributed leaflets in the factories warning workers against young subversives. In fact, as one observer noted, they seemed to live a kind of collective dream, carried away by a movement feeding on its own growth.

May 2 was another spring day at Nanterre, but this one surpassed in disorder even the turmoil and unrest that had become normal there; this day was particularly noteworthy for it marked the end of the *phase nanterroise*. The morning proceeded in an abnormally burlesque fashion: Dean Grappin denied the students' request to use the loudspeaker system, so they entered his office and seized it. Grappin locked them inside the office, but the students exited through an open window. The March 22 Movement then occupied a lecture hall, refusing a history professor his class time, while engineers installed the loudspeaker system and the occupants struck up a verse of the *Internationale*.

In an already strained atmosphere, the day was further marked by an announcement that Cohn-Bendit had been called to appear before a disciplinary council in Paris on Monday. Classes were impossible where disorder reigned. Dean Grappin called the Minister of Education, Alain Peyrefitte, to request permission to close the university for the second time in a month—this time indefinitely. The next time Nanterre would open, it would be a "free and autonomous university" in the service of the revolution.

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7. George Marchais, *L'Humanité*, 3 Mai 1968, p. 10. *Groupuscules* was the derisive name given to the many small political sects on the Left. It would be tedious to describe them all. Most were either Trotskyist, representing various revolutionary Marxist positions critical of the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party, or Maoist, advocating a Chinese-style revolution for France, and also critical of the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party. The Trotskyist movements still exist and have a certain national visibility, if not much support.



*Friday Red I*

May 3, first of the famous Fridays, found Nanterre's militants crowding into the Sorbonne's courtyard where, under the auspices of UNEF, a meeting had been called to explain the closing of Nanterre the day before. As classes concluded, around 1:00 P.M., the courtyard began to fill up. Cohn-Bendit was there, carrying a megaphone, as was his custom.

Parallel to the emergence of Nanterre's boisterous radicalism in past months, a militant right-wing organization known as *Occident* experienced a revival of its own brand of political activity that consisted, in short, of terrorizing left-wing organizations. Its members prided themselves on being the independent "toughs" in defense of freedom and order, and in the *enragés* they found a perfect target for their so-called political program.

The menace of *Occident* had come to weigh more and more heavily on all leftist political activity. For this reason, on Friday afternoon, as a few members of *Occident* lingered several blocks away on the Boulevard St. Michel, the organizers of the Sorbonne meeting took precautions. As had been common practice in almost every meeting during the last few weeks, the organizers appointed student monitors, provided them with motorcycle helmets and chair legs, and designated them to keep on the lookout. In the Sorbonne, Cohn-Bendit appealed to the students not to capitulate in the face of the closing of Nanterre but to renew their attack on France's technocratic universities.

Another member announced amid great applause that Paris had been chosen as the host of peace talks between Vietnam and the United States. A representative from UNEF concluded the meeting by calling a gathering in front of the Sorbonne Monday morning to protest the required appearance before a disciplinary council of Cohn-Bendit and seven comrades from Nanterre. The meeting had begun and ended peacefully, but there was one false note: police protection against a rather dubious *Occident* attack had become surprisingly energetic, so that by 4:00 P.M. police vans completely surrounded the Sorbonne.

At this moment, someone came running into the courtyard shouting, "They are coming!" Who was coming? Against such magnificent protection, *Occident* didn't have a chance. For a moment, a flurry of curiosity ran through the crowd. In another instant, however, all questions were resolved. Standing against the back wall of the courtyard was a line of policemen, fitted out to provoke with helmets and clubs,

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ordering the students to leave. This presented a peculiar contradiction since the main gate had been closed and other exits were blocked. Finally an officer opened the main gate, graciously permitting everyone to go, but as soon as the students passed through the door they were led straight away into paddy wagons.

The students felt themselves dupes of an administration ploy. Shortly, groups from the meeting joined by a number of others who had come to attend 5 o'clock classes, surrounded police cars filled with their friends incongruously peering from behind paddy wagon bars, and demanded to know how protection had become repression. A thousand students gathered during the bizarre process of assembly-line arrests and spontaneously decided to resist in some fashion. In the confusion that reigned in the streets outside the Sorbonne, no one knew for sure the exact moment when nonviolence passed into violence, but the arrests provoked an indignation that would mobilize massive defiance against the university, the police, and de Gaulle during the next week.

The clues to this revolt lie in interministerial phone conversations, clues that answer the all-important question of how police got into the courtyard of the Sorbonne in the first place. It seems that Rector Roche of the Sorbonne, fearing a destructive encounter between rival political groups, called Alain Peyrefitte—the Minister of Education. Peyrefitte had apparently been reluctant to intervene, though he agreed that Roche might speak with the Chief of Police. The Chief also had his reservations about sending police into the university, though finally he agreed to do so if the request was submitted in writing.<sup>8</sup> Roche then dashed off a letter and the train of powder was ignited.

As for the students, their response (and of this there is no doubt) was spontaneous. The invasion was for them a complete surprise; no one could have predicted it. Vague rumors (which were, in the end, untrue) of an attack by *Occident* had inspired the students to take some minor precautions against possible harassment. No one ever imagined an alliance between the university officials and the police to repress a political meeting. Understandably, students fought back.

"A few troublemakers," remarked Peyrefitte, in shoving the issue aside.<sup>9</sup> It was clearly not a question, however, of a few troublemakers or even a few Maoist mercenaries as Prime Minister Pompidou implied the following week. The movement was popular and undirected. A

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8. B. Giron de l'Ain, "Un Manque de sang-froid," *Le Monde*, 6 Mai 1968, p. 9.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

week later, Cohn-Bendit offered a pertinent hindsight after seeing what May 3 and the first Red Friday had started: "No one can point to any person or leader as responsible. How can this be? It is the system which is violent. Of course we have resisted government power; after all it is this power which has sent its police against us. But we, the leaders, never considered sending the students into the streets because they would never have followed us."<sup>10</sup>

Sometime during the fighting, Rector Roche ordered the Sorbonne closed for the first time in history. (And it has a long history, going back to the Middle Ages.) The day ended in a telling paradox: its chief administrator had, in the literal sense of the term, turned the university inside out, flushing its students and professors into the streets in the name of an order that was only questionably threatened. The irony was complete but the revolution had only begun.

### *The Concept of Cobblestones*

Back-to-back, on consecutive days, Dean Grappin and Rector Roche had closed their respective schools. They no doubt figured the odds were in their favor, reasoning that the number of students who incited the protest were few and would remain few, and that the imminent examinations would weigh so heavily on the majority of students that they would demand the early resumption of courses. On both counts they were grossly mistaken. The closing of the universities did not dampen the activists' passion, but justified it. It simply added another and stronger argument against an oppressive, paternalistic system, propelling them into the streets and across their Rubicon.

Friday night had counted a serious toll: six hundred students arrested, of whom twenty-eight were held for questioning, including Cohn-Bendit and Jacques Sauvageot, vice president and acting director of the National French Student Union (UNEF). Despite the fact that the Ministry of Interior and Chief of Police had forbidden all further demonstrations, the leaders of UNEF decided to launch an appeal for every student in Paris to meet for a demonstration in front of the Sorbonne, 9:00 Monday morning. The National Union of Professors of Higher Education (SNEsup) called a nationwide strike, beginning Monday, to demonstrate professors' sympathy with the students.

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10. D. Cohn-Bendit, "Notre Commune de 10 Mai," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 183, 15–21 Mai 1968, p. 33.



The March 22 Movement remained the acknowledged initiator and theoretical inspiration of the emerging mass movement, while its administrative leadership had by Monday morning been assumed by UNEF, which already had an established network of communications and contacts. While Cohn-Bendit remained the agitator, Jacques Sauvageot of UNEF became the spokesman. Alain Geismar, Secretary General of SNEsup, completed the triangle of leadership by which the movement identified itself in the coming week. Their policy was to accept no dialogue or appeasement before satisfaction of three conditions: release of their comrades detained during the events, reopening of the Sorbonne and Nanterre, and withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter.

The scene was set for Monday morning when the dawn came up on a massive troop of riot squad police, the *Comité Républicaine de Sécurité* (CRS), heavily armed with helmets, tear gas, clubs, and rifles. Cohn-Bendit with his seven companions from Nanterre made his way through a crowd of a thousand students who had gathered to support him, toward the Sorbonne and the disciplinary council. His style, not cramped in the slightest, was to walk jauntily, grinning with his companions, who were all singing the *Internationale*. They disappeared into a hedge of police.

The government had prohibited all demonstrations in order to preserve public order, but the prohibition had the reverse effect. A squadron of police, staked out at the base of St. Michel, where the boulevard intersects the river, charged an incipient demonstration and the first haze of tear gas hovered over the day. The escalation had begun. Following the police assault, lines formed and began to march away from the Sorbonne. Shortly, their numbers increased to five thousand as they made a tour of the Latin Quarter, crossing the Seine onto the right bank and back to the left bank by early afternoon, arriving finally at the Sorbonne where they met a major squadron of police head-on.

As the demonstration ascended Rue St. Jacques, just behind the Sorbonne, the CRS launched a brutal attack. The retreat left behind twenty bodies sprawled in the clear space. Before the police regained their position, unexpectedly, students assailed them with improvised weapons. Automobiles were strewn across the streets—blockades and barricades of diverse sorts sprung up. These momentary fortresses briefly warded off a second attack of tear gas, and the students moved backward along the wide Boulevard St. Germain. Repeated CRS charges failed to discourage the daring demonstrators, who eventually

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succeeded in creating an impenetrable bastion surrounded by fires, overturned cars, felled trees, and piles of cobblestones. Inevitably, however, the demonstrators were surrounded. Driven by the necessity of the moment and the impossibility of retreat, they divided up urgent duties: some turned up stones in the street, others formed lines to pass stones to needed locations, others ventured through the tear gas and debris, pitching their improvised missiles.

A scattering of demonstrators rallied again at 6:00 P.M., joined now by four of France's most eminent professors. Soon the crowd reached ten thousand, and marched once again toward the Sorbonne in a desperate attempt to pass the police. A new battle raged near the St. Germain-des-Prés subway station where the violence surpassed anything seen before, the surging masses in combat forming a bizarre sight amid the chic boutiques and cafés of the Parisian elite. The crowd never reached the Sorbonne, but fighting continued until dawn, sparse and mostly desperate skirmishes. Official reports recorded the astounding figures of Monday's debacle: six hundred wounded demonstrators, three hundred forty-five wounded policemen. Residents of the Latin Quarter gathered in the streets until late at night, despite the wreckage and the almost impenetrable haze of tear gas, shocked and dismayed by the brutality of the police that they had witnessed from their windows.

### *The Long Trek and a Short Truce*

*Le Monde* reported Tuesday afternoon: "Paris experienced, Monday, the largest and most serious student demonstration in the last ten years. Even at the time of the Algerian War, there were no riots of this size and particularly of such duration."<sup>11</sup> *France Soir*, another Paris paper, asked, "How had it come to this?" It was a question everyone wanted answered.

But the government maintained a peculiar indifference. For Peyrefitte, what had happened was the regrettable but inevitable culmination of six months of agitation by political groups in the universities. He made no mention of student demands, little mention even of university reform, just a reprimand and an offer of dialogue.

After meetings of the UNEF and SNEsup Tuesday morning, Jacques Sauvageot conveyed the response of these organizations: "Dialogue is impossible between those who strike blows and those who are struck." They reaffirmed their order for a student boycott and a

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11. "Les Manifestations de Lundi," *Le Monde*, 8 Mai 1968, p. 11.

strike by professors. They would cease their movement only when the authorities accepted their oft-repeated demands: release of arrested students with dismissal of all charges, withdrawal of police from the universities, and reopening of the two universities. UNEF called another demonstration for Tuesday evening.

A first attempt at appeasement came from sympathetic professors. Among them, as among the students, there were all sorts; it would be a mistake to assume them homogeneously in favor of the movement, though for the first time since the Algerian War, a significant number of them joined student demonstrations. On Tuesday morning they made two attempts to intervene, not necessarily in favor of the students, but for the prevention of violence. One of these consisted of a committee of seven professors who found themselves flatly refused an audience by Rector Roche. The other, a committee composed of Professors Jacob, Kastler, Lwoff, Mauriac, and Monod, all Nobel prize recipients, sent a telegram to General de Gaulle reiterating the demands of the students. No answer was forthcoming, either from de Gaulle or the Minister of the Interior.

A second sign of alarm, if not an attempt at appeasement, came from the Chief of Police, Grimaud, who was discreetly concerned about the escalation of fighting with the students. The chief sensed that the police invasion of the Sorbonne on Friday, a project that had never really appealed to him, had produced unfortunate results. This he publicly recognized, while at the same time he confirmed the prohibition of the upcoming UNEF march. The war with the police was now cold, but by no means abandoned. A *modus vivendi* was now agreed on—the demonstration would be permitted if the students stayed away from the Sorbonne.

Tuesday's march accomplished its purpose. As it approached the Seine, the original twenty-five thousand increased until, stopped at the river by a dam of police, their number reached approximately forty thousand. Then, quickly shifting direction, the marchers sidestepped police by heading for an unexpected bridge, and arrived at the Champs Elysée, where they showed the right bank of Paris the extent of their determination. Marching up the Champs Elysée to the Arc de Triomphe, singing the *Internationale*, they waved the red flag of communism and the black flag of anarchism. Finally, they headed back to the Latin Quarter. Once there, Sauvageot announced that they would try to reach the Sorbonne. Thirty kilometers of marching, however, had taken the fight out of most of them; shortly after crossing to the left bank, Sauvageot gave an order for dispersion.

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Only a few remained to harass the police during the night, but their demonstration could not be ignored. They had surrounded France's sacred Unknown Soldier's Tomb with their motley revolution, singing the communist anthem under the Arc de Triomphe and publicly displaying their contempt for society's wealth on the jeweled Champs Elysée.

A new hope flourished among the students, that perhaps the literature of the streets: *LIBEREZ NOS CAMARADES, OUVREZ LA SORBONNE, LA SORBONNE AUX ETUDIANTS*, had not been written entirely in the air. The Council of Ministers, becoming more and more convinced of the breadth of the movement, admitted for the first time an extraordinary climate of unrest. Tuesday's long march and truce were proof again that Peyrefitte's first reaction, "a handful of trouble-makers," was more wishful thinking than serious analysis.

### *The Grand Deception*

Passing by the grand facade of the National Assembly on Tuesday evening, the mass of students had a fine opportunity to cast a few derisive slogans but, instead, did not even acknowledge its presence. It was a sign of the times, this complete indifference, omitting from consideration an institution that for ten years had bathed in its own incapacity. The legislators inside, however, did not reciprocate this indifference. In a moment of consensus, rare since the advent of the Fifth Republic, the majority and the opposition minority agreed that, on the morrow, the Assembly should hold an emergency session on the student issue and call in Peyrefitte to tell his story.

Peyrefitte recited a lengthy history of the movement. Then, perhaps moved by the Assembly's sense of urgency, perhaps impressed by the march of the day before, or simply tired of the constant appeals from professors to yield to the student demands, Peyrefitte backed down: "University courses will resume when professors and students are capable of maintaining order despite the agitators, and that may be tomorrow afternoon."<sup>12</sup>

Rain drizzled in Paris on a third day of continued student demonstrations. They were dug in at the Faculty of Sciences, east of the Boulevard St. Michel on the left bank. There, they heard of Peyrefitte's announcement that the Sorbonne would reopen on the morrow on the condition that the students behave properly—a condition vague

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12. "Les délibérations du Conseil des Ministres," *Le Monde*, 9 Mai 1968, p. 8.



enough to give him the option of reasserting his authority if he deemed it necessary. Few took him very seriously, and those who did considered his proposal insufficient. It was unthinkable, at this point, to accept a settlement for less than the three major demands. The twenty thousand students gathered under the column supports of the Faculty of Sciences demonstrated once more in a now familiar pattern: a tour around the Latin Quarter, dispersion at 11:00 P.M. and an occasional skirmish until morning.

Late on Thursday morning Rector Roche finally agreed that the Sorbonne might be opened that afternoon, reaffirming the conditional proposal of the day before. UNEF contented itself with dispersing the demonstrators during the day and ordering all to appear before the Sorbonne for the opening of the doors. As the day waned, an attendant mass gathered along the Boulevard St. Michel, sitting down on the pavement. Shortly, a meeting was under way.

Four o'clock passed, then five, and six. Students started drifting down the boulevard, distraught and incensed, while the Sorbonne remained closed within an increasingly wide and armored hedge of CRS. What had happened in the time between Peyrefitte's address to the National Assembly on Wednesday and his mysterious refusal to follow through on his proposal on Thursday? There existed a certain discord between two very crucial ministers: Peyrefitte of National Education and Fouchet of the Interior and National Security. Fouchet had been convinced by police officials that it was best to open the doors of the Sorbonne and let the students make trouble within the walls of the university rather than in the street. The logic of this policy was simple: inside the campus, student protest would drown in its own chaotic democracy. Peyrefitte, on the other hand, was clearly displeased. He could have expected as much from Fouchet, with whom he had long been at odds. Peyrefitte's domain was the Sorbonne, and he no more wanted the students stirring up dust in his house than Fouchet wanted dust in his streets. As the movement continued to increase in magnitude, and as repeated visits of distinguished professors continued to press him, Peyrefitte dreaded more and more "giving in." A defeat at the hands of the students was bad enough, but defeat within the cabinet was shameful. It was not until Wednesday afternoon, faced with a displeased Assembly, that he had offered his conditional proposal.

There was still a further problem. Peyrefitte had unfortunately not consulted with De Gaulle before announcing on Wednesday his intention to open the Sorbonne, and when de Gaulle found out that Peyrefitte had relaxed his position without his approval, he did not hide

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his displeasure. How could Peyrefitte undertake such an adventure without clearing it with him? So, regretting his announcement since Wednesday night, Peyrefitte hoped to regain favor with de Gaulle by retracting his conditional promise to open the Sorbonne.

He found this pretext on Thursday afternoon, thanks to the several thousand students who had impatiently crowded around the Sorbonne. Cohn-Bendit, Geismar, and Sauvageot were soon using the portable microphone at this spontaneous meeting. Roche telephoned Peyrefitte and said that the students were talking of occupying the Sorbonne. Peyrefitte then had all the information he needed, and shortly after 6:00 P.M. he agreed to open Nanterre but reversed his decision regarding the Sorbonne.<sup>13</sup> No grand opening, just a grand deception.

### *Friday Red II*

By the end of the week, de Gaulle and Peyrefitte began to pay the price for an inconsistent and self-contradictory approach to the student movement. On the one hand, they had refused to admit the gravity of the situation, while on the other they continued to increase the police presence; their aim was, in effect, to publicly belittle the movement's magnitude while, under the guise of keeping order, demoralize the students with a severe repression. This simply added up to ignoring the students in one instant and striking them in the next. The students were not the least bit demoralized by the repression. If anything, they were incited and the public remained unconvinced by the government's insistence that the protests amounted to a "handful of agitators" and "professional hoodlums."

The government's policy had undeniably failed. With the Sorbonne still closed and students still imprisoned, there was not a hint of de-escalation. In the conspicuous absence of Prime Minister Pompidou (in Afghanistan since Tuesday) Minister Joxe, serving in his absence, made a further token attempt to appease the students. He offered two of the three demands: immediate withdrawal of police from the Sorbonne and its reopening. Unsurprisingly, his offer was refused.

Once again, UNEF called a demonstration, the fourth of the week. It began outside the Latin Quarter and headed for the Seine but, since all bridges were blocked, no other route was possible except, oddly

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13. The circumstances and the motivations for Peyrefitte's decision are obscure. See "La Revolution de Mai," *L'Express*, Supplément Exceptionnel, Mai 1968.

enough, the one leading toward the Sorbonne. Thirty to forty thousand students Friday evening found themselves marching up the Boulevard St. Michel. There, as excitement mounted, signposts were lifted from the streets, and the demonstration continued to increase in size. What to do? UNEF had forbidden contact with the police, and enforced this with a large student security force of its own, but where to go? It seemed that the students had come to the end of the road at the corner of Rue Gay-Lussac and Boulevard St. Michel, and there they did what came natural—they sat down. Cohn-Bendit explained it later at length:

On Wednesday, when the demonstration arrived on the upper part of the Boulevard St. Michel, someone asked the students to disperse. We were against this, but that was not important. What was important was the way in which the students received this command: they were floored. I saw some who cried and said: 'OK, so where do we go now? Do we give up? Have we come here for nothing? We have had a thousand wounded in two days already and we're supposed to march from the Bastille to the Place de la Republique and then return home?'<sup>14</sup> What good is that? And that was the sentiment of almost all of the young people there, not only the students but also the young workers who had come to join us.

So on Wednesday night, the March 22 Movement together with the other organizations, agreed: we can no longer remain as we are, the movement has its own dynamism and the young people have decided to fight . . . it is necessary to give them something.

Friday, at Denfert Rochereau, at the moment when the demonstration was formed, we organizers discussed at length what we were going to do and where to go. It was no longer a matter of a simple procession—the students would not have understood—but neither were we looking deliberately for trouble with the police because we could not send students to get massacred. Our idea was then to occupy a specific place, peacefully, and stay there until our three demands had been satisfied: liberation of our comrades, withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter and the reopening of the Sorbonne.

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14. This was the standard itinerary of Paris demonstrations, considered impotent by the speaker.

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We had planned to occupy the Palais de Justice, but the difficulties were too great. Some had thought also of occupying the Place Vendôme but, there too, there were many problems. Finally we went toward the Latin Quarter, and the police let us pass. If there had been blockades, we would have gone on to occupy another place. In fact, the police directed us toward the Latin Quarter. Having arrived at the Boulevard St. Michel, we stopped and the students sat on the ground, while we discussed what we could do. Then, when we went farther up the Boulevard, toward the Place de Luxembourg, I saw that the students had begun already to take up the cobblestones and to make barricades. When everyone began to do so, it became evident that this, in fact, was the best tactic.<sup>15</sup>

The basic idea of the tactic was to abandon the mass demonstration and split up into small groups so that each street to the south of the Sorbonne would be occupied by some students. Shortly after 9:00, the students dispersed throughout the area east of Boulevard St. Michel and began to rip up signs and fences to construct barricades. Once the spirit of defiance was in the air, the barricades cropped up like weeds, a total of ten observed within the first hour in the environs of the Sorbonne and Panthéon alone. Bit by bit, the process of occupation with fortifications spread into all the small streets.

It became evident that this night would only resolve itself in a surrender of the administrators to the students' demands or a massacre of the students. Roche realized this and sent a message to the crowd that he was ready to "receive representatives of the students of the Sorbonne" in order to examine with them the conditions under which courses could resume.

Roche finally and properly panicked; he realized that somebody had to stop the violence that threatened. But he was the only one. The ministers were still very much in their own stew, and were hardly prepared to deal directly with student demands. Peyrefitte was astounded by what he had started and would have liked to wash his hands of it all without, of course, angering the General. Fouchet, hour by hour, as impatient after his own fashion as the students, wanted to

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15. D. Cohn-Bendit, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

abandon the talks and disperse the students. From barricade to barricade, the minister's informants reported a "climate of violence."

At midnight, finally, Roche received the representatives, among whom were Cohn-Bendit, three professors, and two members of UNEF. Peyrefitte, with the Minister of Justice, meanwhile followed the events by transistor radio, and heard that Roche had received Cohn-Bendit in his office. His blood went cold; Roche had admitted an *extremist* into the negotiations!

Peyrefitte called Roche's office on the phone.

- P. Rector, this is Peyrefitte, tell me, exactly, who is in your office?
- R. A delegation from UNEF.
- P. And Cohn-Bendit, he is there too, isn't he?
- R. I do not believe so, Monsieur le Ministre.
- P. Do you not have before you a student with red hair and a round face?
- R. Well, yes indeed.
- P. That, sir, is Cohn-Bendit. Monsieur le Recteur, I want to speak with you in private; please go into the next room.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, with a decisive and burlesque conversation, the last possibility to reconcile with the students and avoid violence ended. Peyrefitte, no doubt chagrined at the idea of negotiating with Cohn-Bendit, told Roche there would be no changes at that time. The delegation invited Roche to accompany them to the streets, to see for himself the storm that was brewing. He refused, preferring to stay by the phone waiting for a new contact with the Minister. The delegation returned to the streets alone, where there were now sixty barricades, red flags flying, and crowds celebrating their fortresses with joyous fever.

Meanwhile, behind the barricades, a curious thing happened. The residents of these streets, enclosed in fortresses of cobblestones, began to help the students in various ways with great enthusiasm. Older gentlemen offered advice on the construction area nearby, where an army of demonstrators supplied themselves with crude weapons. Food and drink, blankets, even mattresses were tossed out of windows.

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16. J. Alia, Y. le Vaillant, and L. Rioux, "Les Sentiers de la dérouté," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 183, 15–21 Mai 1968, p. 27.

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Many residents watched their cars being turned over and set sideways for barricades without objection.<sup>17</sup>

The occupation went well until 2:00 A.M., when fighting began, but then the police spared no one. An unexpected tenacity in the demonstrators struck pangs of fear into the squads, who every few minutes saw one of their members taken out by a well-aimed cobblestone. What was originally their duty was now fueled by anger. At some point, they began to use a different sort of grenade, containing far more noxious chemicals than ordinary tear gas. Police wrenched victims off stretchers, simultaneously beating the wounded as well as the Red Cross. Radio stations pitched in and pleaded help for a blinded girl behind a barricade, closed off by the police who refused to let her be taken out.<sup>18</sup> A savage frenzy consumed the police force, whose leaders admitted a loss of command over their men.

Shortly, the air was saturated with tear gas mixed with waves of smoke rising from the hundreds of overturned cars burning out of control; it was impossible to breathe. The demonstrators retreated from one barricade to another with each attack of the police. From frustration to frenzy, the police took to attacking sympathetic neighbors, launching tear gas grenades into open windows along the streets, and chasing students into the apartments where they sought refuge. The demonstrators in turn headed for the roofs of buildings, preparing to toss Molotov cocktails onto the approaching police.

Inopportune as it was, the government intervened toward 4:00 A.M., well after any chance of remedying the situation had passed, and made it known that dialogue was always possible. Few people could help but be struck by the absurdity of this communication. A particularly harsh response came from two Nobel prize recipients and a host of other professors, who threatened their resignation from the French university if the police did not withdraw. The radio stations pleaded for a cessation of hostilities and residents likewise attempted to intervene between the police and the students.

Their efforts were to little avail. A professor who was located in a Red Cross post, improvised in a garden near the Sorbonne, attempted to prevent the intervention of the police in the building where the

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17. See "Nuit dramatique au Quartier Latin," *Le Monde*, 12–13 Mai 1968, p. 1, for an excellent description of this night's events.

18. News Broadcast, Radio Luxembourg, May 12, 1973.

wounded received treatment. The police responded with several blows, and entered the infirmary to drag out the wounded. Many others, in the process of evacuating the wounded, also found themselves more severely victimized than their patients. One medical aide who had volunteered his services in a temporary infirmary on the street Gay-Lussac, rendered the following remarkable account of a night he would not soon forget:

At the time of the major attack which hit us about 2:15 A.M., we had set up an infirmary in an apartment off Gay-Lussac where we received wounded students. At some point it became necessary to evacuate our entire operation to another location down the street. With some help, I stayed to care for the wounded who continued to arrive. Then there was a savage attack, with the worst sort of gas, leaving us no choice but to quit our temporary post. We wanted to make it out by way of the roof, but police spotted us and shot gas bombs up at us. I made my way down successfully, and when I did, I found three wounded policemen lying on the ground. My duty obliged me to help them, which I did. A student was lying not far away, and when I subsequently went to him, I was violently beaten, kicked to the ground, and taken to a paddy wagon and to the station where once again I was kicked and beaten. I stayed there until the next afternoon when one of the policemen whom I had healed let me go. When I was released and as I left the station, seeing some used tear gas bombs, I picked some up; but immediately I was again seized by the police, beaten again, and put into a cell. This time I saw some shocking things. At the station the wounded were not only left without care but were refused care, and when I tried to help, I was violently prevented. In my cell, I saw a student who had been there two days without food or water. Ten hours later, I was released.<sup>19</sup>

Groups of students resisted until 5:00 in the morning when Cohn-Bendit appealed on the radio to disperse. At 6:00, on the hour, a new shift of CRS replaced the night shift, one of the few regularities that this day would see. A car used by a private radio station, which had continued on the air past its normal hour to serve the demonstration by

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19. "L'Assaut des forces de police," *Le Monde*, 12-13 Mai 1968, p. 3.

reporting the action, was parked and its two reporters were asleep. For the rest of the morning, the streets were left to the police who continued to chase the remaining demonstrators into corners, to street repairmen who replaced the cobblestones, and to a curious early morning audience, bums and reporters who were soon to tell their respective worlds of the previous night's events.

Saturday's newspapers unfolded before the eyes of shocked readers:

LATIN QUARTER TRANSFORMED INTO BATTLEFIELD.  
POLICE LAUNCH ASSAULT ON 60 BARRICADES.  
HUNDREDS WOUNDED AND ARRESTED, CARS  
BURNED, APARTMENTS OCCUPIED.  
PARISIAN POPULATION SUPPORTS DEMONSTRATORS  
IN GENERAL STRIKE MONDAY.

This night of unexpected repression brought the students a massive wave of support. Weeklong marches, along with vociferous condemnations of bourgeois universities and consumer society had served to kindle grievances lying smoldering in many sectors of society, spreading a chain of powder throughout the nation. It might have been diffused and forgotten if met with conciliation, but it was met with a repression so brutal the fuse was lit.<sup>20</sup>

French grievances were many, and the willingness of the French to protest proverbial. For the first time in a long while, following the second Friday night encounter, all the disparate forces of the French left appealed in union for a massive demonstration in the Latin Quarter. Even the Communist Party and General Confederation of Workers (CGT) tendered a distinctly favorable response, calling for a general strike to accompany the march on Monday.<sup>21</sup>

Fitful, and sensing a rapid deterioration of its control, the government made a first, positive attempt at conciliation. Georges Pompidou

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20. "Les grenades utilisées pour les opérations contre les rassemblements," *Le Monde*, 12–13 Mai 1968, p. 2. See also, "Les techniques des manifestations," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 15–21 Mai 1968, p. 29.

21. The French union system is complicated. The majority of workers are non-unionized but small unions exist in most large businesses and government agencies and are often able to lead strikes in which the nonunionized workers participate. The three main unions are, in order of size, the Communist-led CGT, the French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT), and Worker Force (FO). There are also unions of farmers, executives, and other categories not usually unionized in the United States.



had returned from a weeklong visit to Afghanistan. None of France's ministers, excepting Peyrefitte in some rare moments, had up to this point even acknowledged a climate of serious unrest. In returning to find some five hundred wounded in a battle that recalled in miniature the Commune of 1871, Georges Pompidou at least realized that the situation was an emergency.<sup>22</sup>

What could he do that the others had not been able to do up to now, and particularly at this moment, squeezed between Friday night and Monday morning? He simply capitulated, granting the students' every demand: amnesty for all arrested students, liberation of the Sorbonne, withdrawal of police, and even a promise that students inconvenienced by the weeks' disorder would be offered special arrangements for taking the exam.<sup>23</sup> Pompidou had hoped, by capitulating, to produce a miracle, to turn ashes into honey, to return the students to their homes and schools, content and appeased by their victory. But for all its good appearances his action was at best a sleight of hand, clever only because no one had dared to try it before; however, the real solution to the problem was to change the magician and not the tricks.

At this late date, Pompidou's capitulation went largely unheeded. His intervention did little to douse an already flaming blaze. The die of a popular movement had already been cast by the working world, which decided to respond to the student appeal, by the university, which learned that a revolution is fought for and not voted on, and by the police whose actions undermined Pompidou's credibility.

### *Monday May 13*

It was spring in Paris, and de Gaulle's international maneuvering against American imperialism had culminated in one of the greatest coups of his diplomatic career—bringing the Vietnam peace negotiations to his lovely capital city. On Monday, May 13, talks between Americans and Vietnamese were to open, but de Gaulle had little time to strut about; the fierce encounter of the state and the students on Friday night had awakened his population to an "internal imperialism" for which they blamed him. A general strike on Monday the 13th paralyzed the

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22. On March 18, 1871, in the wake of French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, revolutionaries seized power in Paris and ruled the city for seventy-two days. The famous "Commune of Paris" became the symbol of working-class revolution.

23. "Je demande à tous de coopérer à l'apaisement," *Le Monde*, 15 Mai 1968, p. 3.

country, while a demonstration of over a million marched through the streets in sympathy with the students.

As fate would have it, May 13 also commemorated the tenth anniversary of the coup that brought de Gaulle to power, a fact the demonstrators were only too delighted to remember as they marched: TEN YEARS, THAT'S ENOUGH. DE GAULLE TO THE ARCHIVES. DE GAULLE TO THE REST HOME. The march brought to the surface an immense undercurrent of demands long ignored, for greater political and economic rights for workers, democratic reform of the university, full employment, transformation of the economic system by and for the people. These demands gave a deeper purpose to the revolutionary action that, in the coming weeks, seriously shook de Gaulle's regime.

While this day proved that students and workers could present a common front, a fault also appeared in the foundation of their movement. The alliance of Communist Party and union leaders with the students was a contentious and difficult one. A movement built on this alliance inevitably had two contrary faces. The one embodied the energy of student leaders, diffused and avowedly immoderate; this student energy had driven the police to commit brutalities that inspired a popular demonstration unequalled in the history of the Fifth Republic. The other aspect, that of the Communist Party and France's major union, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), presented a reformist, almost moderate face.<sup>24</sup>

Police repression against the students had united the left-wing forces, something heretofore impossible; the Communists and the students muted their mutual hostility in the hope of overthrowing de Gaulle and the capitalist system. Had this proved feasible, the two faces of the movement might have been an asset, uniting the massive following of the one and the youthful spirit of the other to produce a general revolution.

As it was, the two faces of the movement proved incompatible right from the start; even during the march on Monday, they regarded each other with distrust. Disagreement had first arisen on Saturday, following a lengthy debate on the direction of the march. Once this was settled, union leaders showed themselves reluctant to let student leaders stand in front, while students insisted they not be outplaced;

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24. Julien Fanjeaux, "Les Grévistes," *L'Événement*, Juillet-Aout, 1968, pp. 48-54.

after all, students argued, union leaders did not fight for first place on the barricades.

As the march reached its destination, Cohn-Bendit bobbed in and out of the crowds with his megaphone, pleading for a continuation of the march, while at the same time the loudspeaker of the CGT called for dispersion, drowning out his voice. There was great confusion. Only a meager 5000 students followed the leader of the March 22 Movement toward the Eiffel Tower for a meeting.<sup>25</sup> This incident, although inconspicuous and of short duration, must be considered one of the critical moments of the movement. It symbolized not only the feud between Cohn-Bendit and the Communist Party, but also the utter incompatibility of the student movement and the established left parties, which eventually would destroy the movement.

It would be a mistake to presume though that on Monday reform prevailed over revolution simply because union and party leaders prevailed over Cohn-Bendit for an afternoon. After such a demonstration of unity and force as the march on Monday, neither past history nor present conflict among the forces of the left could diminish the hope of change, and a network of revolutionary activity began taking root even as the demonstration dispersed into the streets.

The student front returned to claim their Sorbonne, occupied it and turned it into a fortress of revolutionary culture; two days later they seized the Théâtre de l'Odéon to purge it of its elite culture and declare it open to the people, in the service of the revolution. Workers in the following days occupied their factories without waiting for union orders, progressively paralyzing all industrial activity.

Television and radio personnel, long subjected to political censorship, organized their own strikes, allowing only a minimum of programs on the air and depriving the government of its most effective instrument of persuasion. A flurry of activity among leftist politicians initiated legislative measures: the release of all arrested demonstrators, a motion of censure against de Gaulle, and a pile of parliamentary invectives.

What happened in the next few weeks made some of the better days of many lives. The streets of Paris slowly emptied of gas-starved cars, and pedestrians filled the empty space they left behind. Formerly busy bureaucrats, housewives, shopkeepers, and grocery men inter-

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25. Gérard Desseigne, "Syndicats et Etudiants," *Le Monde*, 17 Mai 1968, p. 6.

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rupted the banal process of making a living to find out what life was all about. As each of the institutions came under revolutionary control (first the Sorbonne, then the Théâtre de l'Odéon, the factories, all the schools of Paris, and soon all of France), everyone on the streets of the Latin Quarter rejoiced and spoke feverishly of what would happen next.

If the pace of this history slows down at this point, it is only by pen of the author and not of the events, for there was never a dull hour. It so happened that, in the first week, anybody could be everywhere at any one time, since everything of major interest took place within a few minutes' walking distance. In the following weeks, however, this was not true. The pace did not slow down, but centers of action multiplied, so that to follow the movement in all its aspects one had to revolutionize his time as well as his politics. The reader must do the same.

The normal day of a revolutionary would begin at a nearby factory, hanging on the outside gates reinforcing the workers' determination (which meant lauding the barricades and condemning the CGT). Then to the Sorbonne for the afternoon, picking up on impromptu conferences in the courtyard, attending scheduled debates in lecture halls, reflecting on police brutality at displays of photos of the fighting, taking notes, and seeking out some new corner of the movement in a committee, perhaps concerning Che Guevara and Freud on human liberation. All Paris schools needed help: Les Beaux Arts (National School of the Arts) appealed for personnel to paste up posters turned out in their studios; the school of medicine called for volunteer first-aid crews; the Sorbonne needed sweepers; all needed members for occupation committees. Nights were spent at the "Ex-Odéon Théâtre Populaire" where revolutionary jargon, poetry, and skirmishes with police crowded the stage until morning.