

STUDENT POWER :

Last spring violence erupted in the city of Paris. Sparked by a confrontation between leftist and fascist students at the Sorbonne, the cry for university reform soon developed into virtually a nationwide strike. Factory workers marched alongside students in a demand for political and social reform that resulted in the dissolution of the French parliament and the calling of a new election by President De Gaulle.

Carol Baker, a first year Canadian student at the Sorbonne, was there. She returned to Canada this summer and is presently enrolled in Glendon College. Here is her personal account of those frightening days in Paris when "student power" turned into student destruction".

To begin with, the students in France have long been suffering from what they call *de bonnes revendications* — a phrase rather difficult to translate into English. It has both the sense of complaint and injustice plus the idea of a grievance which must be satisfied immediately.

Also it is my opinion that the French university system could do with a great deal of shaking up. It is even more solidly bourgeois-based than our own. Like every university in the world, *l'Université de Paris* is faced with the problem of too little space. Facilities are limited. Every year admission is refused to many applicants on the basis of entrance exam results alone. Frequently, the *bureau d'admissions* subordinates the applicant's academic achievement to a consideration of his family background and the position his father holds. The obvious result is that comparatively little of the total enrolment is composed of students whose fathers are, let us say, factory workers.

So a student attends university for four or five years, writes his *concours*, and if he is successful he receives his diploma. Does this mean that he is guaranteed or even qualified for future employment? Far from it! Once again, the sons and daughters of the middle class or those with "connections" will find that doors open for them more readily than for their classmates who, although academically superior, are socially inferior.

The other main *revendication* was the lack of student control or participation in university policy directly affecting students. This is why I have to smile when Jim Park talks about no student freedom at Glendon College. How would he like to attend the *Université de Paris* or any one of a dozen others in France where there is not even a student council, let alone any students sitting on administrative councils along with faculty members?

The actual violence erupted initially in Paris (indeed anything that affects France always commences in Paris) on Friday, May 3 almost a month and a half after Daniel Cohn-Bendit formed his *mouvement du 22 mars*.

Since the *Cours de Civilisation Française* in which I was enrolled was an extension course at the Sorbonne, it was, on the whole, fairly divorced from the actual events at the university. However, on the afternoon of May 3 during our phonetics class on the *Rue Fouarre*, we heard rumours of trouble at the university. We heard it and put it out of our heads. Paris in the spring is much too beautiful to let consideration of more serious matters impede on it.

Later that same afternoon as I was walking back to the residence with another girl, we met a boy running towards us down the street. His face was a mixture of fear and hate — not easy to forget. Half a minute later, perhaps less, a group of policemen rushed past us obviously in pursuit of the boy. They were carrying guns and *matraques* (hard rubber night sticks) and large round shields. They were also wearing hard helmets and goggles. I had never seen policemen armed



Some highlights I remember ... the big poster of Chairman Mao in the courtyard of the Sorbonne ...

and dressed in this way before but my friend, a Cantonese girl, told me that she had seen them once in Hong Kong and that they were riot police. At that instant a bomb went off about 200 yards ahead of us. Simultaneously, a group of students appeared running down a small street on our left hand side. Behind them came another group of policemen.

We decided not to proceed any farther and returned to *St. Germaine*. Here we encountered more shouting crowds, more police. Finally we made it back to the *foyer* where I was staying. I grabbed my suitcase since I was going over to England that weekend, and took a taxi to the *aerogare*. Once on the plane, I dismissed the whole incident.

When I returned Monday afternoon about 6 p.m. I took the *metro* back to the *foyer*. I stopped at station *Maubert-Mutualité* and as I got out of the train I suddenly started to cry. Then I noticed that the people around me were also wiping their eyes. It was tear gas, of course. The police had thrown *lacrimogene* (tear gas) bombs into the *metro* station to prevent the rioters from entering and interfering with the trains.

When I walked out of the station the *paguait* (street fight) was still going on. Apparently it had started at 2 p.m. Large sections of *Boulevard St. Germaine* had been ripped up and the rioters were throwing the bricks and concrete at the police who responded by *matraquing* the students and throwing more tear gas around. A cloud of it hung over the *Place Maubert*. Several shop window fronts were smashed and students had dragged parked cars from the adjoining streets and set them ablaze on the *Place* to make barricades. Several had overturned a *panier de salade* (student slang for the long blue police buses) and smashed all of its windows. Eight *flics* were in it at the time.

Here I should explain that these police were not the *Paris Gendarmerie*, the world's most enthusiastic girl watchers. These were the *C.R.S.* (*Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*). I was told by a girl from *La Martinique* that these men are recruits from the prisons and that many used to be bodyguards for underworld notables. *La Martinique* used to employ them as well, but dispelled them since they delighted in repressive brutality. There was much evidence of this in the nights that were to follow May 6 and in the initial violence at the *Place Maubert*.

Violence soon became a predictable pattern of life for those of us who lived in the *Quartier Latin* which comprises the fifth and sixth *arrondissements* of Paris. Every night this section was blocked off from the rest of Paris and often I was forced to produce proof that I lived there or that I had business there before I was allowed to enter. It was impossible to approach the Sorbonne which had been closed down by the rector of the *Université de Paris*, along with the faculty of *Nanterre*, on May 6. Police were stationed day and night about five deep across every street which led to the Sorbonne.

Most nights, starting around 6 p.m. there would be a *manifestation* (a march in the streets).

Most of these *manifests* were well-organized by the members of *U.N.E.F.* (*Union Nationale d'Etudiants Français*) and conducted quietly (that is, noise but no violence). I participated in two of these marches since at the outset my sympathies were all with the students.

We marched usually up to the *Place du Luxembourg* on the *Boulevard St. Michel* and there the order would be given to disband and go home. Many did so, myself included. Those that stayed,

AGONY IN PARIS

however, were the hard core leftist extremists who around midnight would manage to work themselves up into building barricades and daring the *C.R.S.* to charge them. This is what happened the night of *Guy-Lussac*, May 10. On the *Rue Guy-Lussac* alone, about a dozen barricades were erected; 198 cars were burned; 400 people arrested and around 200 hospitalized.

That marked the end of the moderating influence of the *U.N.E.F.* and the influence of those concerned with university reform and not violence. I do not include *Dany Cohn-Bendit* in this group. In my opinion he is a power-hungry agitator, plain and simple.

This was also the evening that the workingmen *les ouvriers*, showed their *solidarité* with the students by joining them in the destruction of one of the most interesting quarters of Paris. That too was the night I disassociated myself from the student movement. I certainly don't condone police brutality but on the other hand I don't feel that anyone has the right to ruin anything just because they don't like the society it represents.

And so one *paguait* followed another, each one growing in dimension and intensity as both students and police became more skilled in the ways of street warfare. The universities and high schools in the provinces soon followed suit, declaring themselves autonomous. Even public school children congregated behind the barricades. And the wall of ambulance and police sirens was heard continuously day and night.

Some highlights I remember ... the night they set fire to the Stock Exchange ... the night they set fire to the police headquarters near the *Panthéon* and the men trapped inside for an hour and a half before firemen could come to them ... the fact that these firemen were answering about 350 calls a night ... the big poster of Chairmen Mao in the courtyard of the Sorbonne ... the *affiches* plastered over any available wall announcing that the student aims were now bent from university reform towards the destruction of the existing political and social structures ... *Francois Mitterand*, *Mendes-France*, *Alain Peyrefitte* — names which soon became household words ... the trees cut down on the *Boulevard St. Michel*.

To add to the student revolt there was, of course, the wave of strikes which shut down virtually every industry, business, and essential service one after another until we were buried alive in a national tomb, cut off from the rest of the world. Every day the situation changed — every day there was something else which we had to do without.

All this had been touched off by: a confrontation between leftist and fascist students in the Sorbonne; a rector who got scared and called the police; a boy who planted a bomb and then came running along the street ...

And so I am opposed to the *Dany Cohn-Bendits* who uses us to further their own dreams of power. And so I am opposed to student power which I feel becomes inevitably synonymous with student destruction.



... the riots on *Boulevard St. Germaine* where large sections of the pavements were torn up and the bricks and concrete hurled at the police ...



... the night of *Guy-Lussac*, May 10, when 198 cars were burned, 400 people arrested and 200 hospitalized



... the trees cut down on *Boulevard St. Michel* ...



... the cars set ablaze by students on *Place Maubert* and used to make barricades ...