

Paris May '68

Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris

SOYEZ
RÉALISTE.
DEMANDEZ
L'IMPOSSIBLE

Publisher's Note

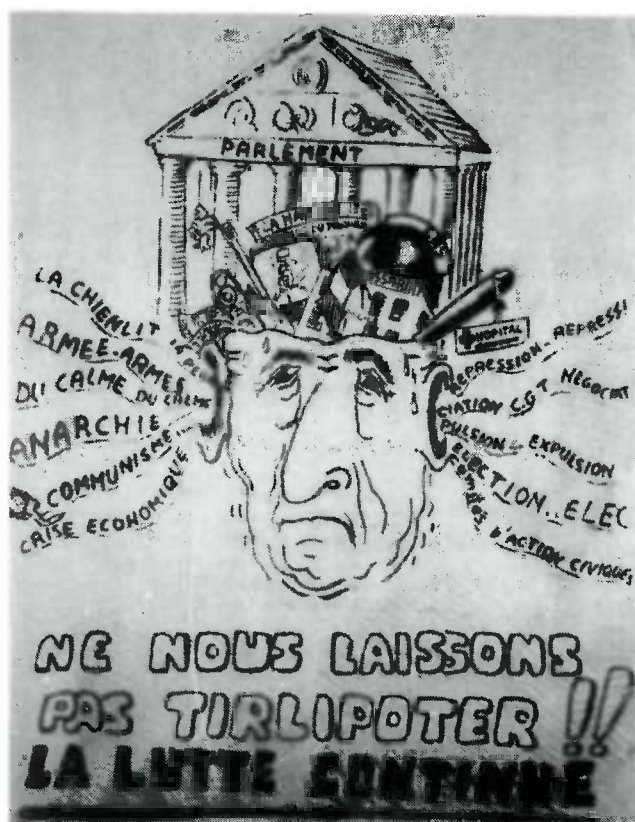
Starting modestly at a branch of the University of Paris in working-class Nanterre in March 1968, a student revolt soon spread to Paris, and in alliance with protesting workers, engulfed all of France by June of that year. Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations mobilized hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of the French capital in May and images of chanting and flag-waving protesters, charging riot police and burning automobiles filled television screens around the world for days. The Fifth Republic of General Charles de Gaulle trembled but survived. The whole world wondered what to make of these startling and unprecedented events.

Was it a *révolution manquée*, a conflict of generations, the cry for recognition of a new class, or a needed blowing off of steam in response to the rapid changes in the French economy and society since the end of the Second World War? One thing is certain: the events that have become known simply as "May '68" spoke to the imagination of an entire generation and have come to symbolize the various revolts of the tumultuous 1960's.

As Alain Touraine points out in his extended preface to the present microfiche collection, the French May continues to tantalize and challenge not only scholars and professional commentators, but also "innumerable jurors" who took part in it or witnessed it, long after the memories of other revolts of that agitated decade have faded.

Until now, however, it would be fair to say that the systematic study of this capital historical phenomenon has been impeded by the relative inaccessibility of the fundamental sources: the thousands of documents generated by the movement, reproduced in primitive form and distributed on the streets and in the schools, offices and factories of Paris and the provinces. Thanks to the foresight and historical consciousness of the Bibliothèque Nationale these thousands of leaflets were collected in the heat of the struggle, thus creating an essential corpus for study.

Now as the result of close cooperation between the Bibliothèque Nationale and IDC this precious documentation has been carefully sorted by group or organization and preserved for the future on microfiche by an IDC camera unit. The BN's classification was followed during the filming and each document was assigned a number which appears in the printed guide accompanying the collection and in the eye-legible headers on each fiche. The guide also contains a subject index to increase the ease of access and useability of the documents and an extended reflection by French sociologist Alain Touraine on the significance of May '68 as we approach its 20th anniversary.



Contents

	Number of docs.	Number of mf.
Paris		
University and <i>lycée</i> world	4,501	194
Towards the workers	829	25
The world of work	1,058	39
Political movements and parties	1,244	44
Other leaflets	388	13
Paris region	710	24
Provinces	1,337	52
Total	10,067	391

May 1968 between memories and history

May 1968 is no longer part of the past, but not yet part of history. It is passing through its purgatory in which an obscure transmutation is in progress. The effervescent impressions of the senses are being replaced by a fixed image that will take its place in the collective memory of those who did not live through the events themselves. Afterwards only a few historians, faithful to the essence of their art, will make the effort to retrace the course of time, free themselves from the prevailing interpretation, recover the multiplicity of components fragily associated in the event and propose new readings that the actors themselves will no longer be there to authenticate. The publication thanks to the Bibliothèque Nationale of thousands of documents on May 1968 is probably the last chance to reflect on the event and to ponder its meaning, before a single image gels, impersonally chosen by the France of the late 20th century, concerned like any society, with producing a coherent past out of the elements the present exalts or rejects.

At the moment the representation of May 1968 is negative. The image that appears little by little at the bottom of the development tank of memory under the action of the salts of interpretation seems black and repulsive. For a certain time partisans and adversaries of the student and worker uprising agreed in recognizing its importance, in seeing in it the birth of new tendencies, ideas and sensibilities. Today on the other hand, almost everybody concurs that this break marked the end of an era rather than the beginning of a new period. Daniel Cohn-Bendit contributed toward tipping the event of which he was one of the central figures into the past, by showing the surprising paths taken by the revolutionaries of yesteryear. If certain of them have succeeded in business, or found their place in government, while others have sunk into violence and suicide, is it not because their youth has vanished? Indeed that youth is as far away from them now as the overheated economy of those days is from the current sluggishness. But which will finally carry the day, the current disenchanting view or the enthusiasm of the past decade? The attorneys for the defense and for society as plaintiff have finished their pleas: each of us, innumerable jurors, must now prepare the answer to the question: was May 1968 the end of a period dominated by the hopes for liberation of the working class and the colonized third world, the last moment when what had been history became no more than words, when the revolutionary will that was rousing the world was reduced to the self-hatred of the sons of the bourgeoisie of a colonizing country? Or was it



rather the tumultuous plunge into another culture, other protests and the search for new forms of political expression? Let us withhold our judgment, let us not pronounce it lightly. At this point when history has not yet handed down its verdict, each of us may adjust the lighting and give a different shape to the event.

What will be the definitive image of May 1968, when very soon it takes its place in history? Let us not give an answer for there is still time to change our minds. Still, it can be said that if the French doubt their ability to manage a future dominated by the confrontation of the super powers, the spread of a transnational culture, and the erosion of their economic dynamism, they will more and more see in May 1968 the embarrassing expression of faults reputed to lie in their national character: ideological excess, intellectual terrorism and inability to deal realistically with real problems. If on the other hand they feel the taste for and possibility of constructing a new type of social and political life, they will find in May 1968, whatever their choices, the strongest expression of their desire for history. May the reading of these texts and the knowledge of the events of May 1968 renew this taste for inventing history.

Alain Touraine

Scope : 10,067 leaflets covering the May 1968 movement from the first stirrings of March-April until the last spasms of July-September

Number of fiches : 391

Reduction factor : 20

Film type : Positive silver-halide

External Finding

Aids : Printed thematic and chronological guide with index, prepared by the Service de l'Histoire de France of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Foreword by André Miquel, Administrateur Général of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Professor at the Collège de France. Preface by Alain Touraine, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

Internal Finding

Aids : Eye-legible headers on fiche containing references to the printed guide.

Order number: KH-6/1



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