

POLITICAL WRITINGS, 1953-1993





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TRANSLATED, WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION, BY ZAKIR PAUL

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## CONTENTS

<i>Translator's Note</i>	ix
<i>Foreword: The Friendship of the No</i>	xi
KEVIN HART	
<i>Introduction: "Affirming the Rupture"</i>	xxxi
ZAKIR PAUL	
<i>Chronology</i>	lvii
PART I: <i>LE 14 JUILLET</i> AND THE <i>REVUE INTERNATIONALE</i> PROJECT, 1953–1962	
An Approach to Communism (Needs, Values)	3
Refusal	7
The Essential Perversion	8
Declaration of the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War	
[Manifesto of the 121]	15
Update	18
[The Declaration of the Right to Insubordination that we have signed]	20
[The Declaration . . . is not a protest manifesto]	22
[For us, the first fact]	24
[It is as a writer]	26
[Interrogation with the judge]	29
[Questioned by the judge]	32
[First I would like to say]	33
[Maurice Blanchot to Jean-Paul Sartre]	36
Letters from the <i>Revue internationale</i>	39
[The gravity of the project]	56
[A review can be the expression]	57

[A Review without any division]	59
Memorandum on the "Course of Things"	60
Course of Things	62
The Course of the World	67
The Conquest of Space	70
Berlin	73
PART II: THE STUDENT-WRITER ACTION COMMITTEE, THE REVIEW <i>COMITÉ</i> , 1968	
Tracts of the Student-Writer Action Committee (Sorbonne- Censier)	
[The solidarity that we assert here]	79
[A government does not govern]	79
[By the power of refusal]	80
Crime	80
[Letter to a representative of Yugoslav radio-television]	82
<i>Comité</i> : The First Issue	
[The possible characteristics]	85
In a State of War	86
Affirming the Rupture	88
[Today]	89
[Political death]	89
[The streets]	91
[Communism without heirs]	92
[For a long time, brutality]	93
[Tracts, posters, bulletins]	94
Letter to Ilija Bojovic	95
[That the immense constraint]	97
[Exemplary acts]	98
[Two characteristic innovations]	99
[A rupture in time: revolution]	100
[For Comrade Castro]	100
[Ideological surrender]	102

[Clandestine resistance out in the open]	103
[Reading Marx]	103
On the Movement	106
Paranoia in Power (The Dialectics of Repression: A Small Contribution to Research)	110
PART III: INTERVENTIONS, 1970–1993	
Refusing the Established Order	117
Thinking the Apocalypse	119
Do Not Forget	124
Yes, Silence Is Necessary for Writing	130
“Factory-Excess,” or Infinity in Pieces	131
In the Night That Is Watched Over	133
For Friendship	134
Our Clandestine Companion	144
The Ascendant Word; or, Are We Still Worthy of Poetry?	153
Encounters (On the Resistance and May 68)	161
Peace, Peace Far and Near	162
Letter to Blandine Jeanson	167
Our Responsibility (On Nelson Mandela)	168
What Is Closest to Me	170
Writing Committed to Silence	171
[I think it suits a writer better] (On Nationalism and Internationalism)	173
[The Inquisition destroyed the Catholic religion] (On Salman Rushdie)	174
<i>Notes</i>	175
<i>Index of Names</i>	199

## On the Movement

*May, a revolution by idea*, desire, and imagination, risks becoming a purely ideal and imaginary event if this revolution does not renounce itself and yield to new organization and strategies.

In other words, the “movement” (insofar as this term has any meaning and does not conceal a restless form of immobility), rather than being sheltered in academic contestation, must try to express itself through a *primarily social struggle*, an always collective struggle involving every oppressed category, mobilizing every form of popular energy. Everything must thus be done so that conflicts that modern society has always avoided and that have now become everyday public reality may express themselves up to the breaking point. An extremely difficult struggle, *which is why small isolated acts*, as well as all initiatives *that tend only toward spectacle* and that cannot be taken up by the entirety of the struggling classes *must be cast aside*. A battle that is all the more difficult given that, in some way and on a representative level, a victorious outcome has already occurred without having been politically and institutionally effective, since the issue outstripped the usual political possibilities, and entirely so.

Thus, the first danger to avoid is that the movement should seem reduced to a student movement, that it confine itself to universities and schools. What was its force in May? The fact is that students never acted as students in this so-called student action, but as those who unveiled a collective crisis, as the bearers of a power of rupture questioning the regime, the State, and society. The University was only a point of departure; we should not look to use it as a shelter out of ease, complacency, and habit. Let us prepare and organize ourselves for other, much more serious, and, admittedly, far more violent battles, for which patience, discipline, and daily and nightly work, in view of a common praxis, will be necessary.

### CRITIQUE OF THE MOVEMENT

I consider it necessary to begin radically and critically to question what we call the movement. This is both necessary and possible. No party would tolerate such questioning, above all if it were a party whose theoretical and



practical struggle is meant to transform the world. The Communist Party would do so less than any other, because it believes it embodies the seriousness and intransigence of a new law that demands and comprehends everything.

1. The weakness of the movement was also its force, and its force is to have succeeded prodigiously, in conditions that made its success brilliant but left it without any future political means, without the power of institution. Very many observers, including well-meaning ones, say that it was important, but that it failed. This is false. It was important and it realized itself in a sovereign manner. We speak of revolution, a very equivocal term, but one must accept that we speak of it and say: it's true, there was a revolution; the revolution took place. The movement of May was a REVOLUTION, with the searing intensity and brilliance of an event that was accomplished and thereby changed everything.

2. A revolution unlike any other, incapable of being incorporated into any model. More philosophical than political; more social than institutional; more exemplary than real; destroying everything without any destructive element, destroying, rather than the past, the very present in which it was accomplished; and not seeking to give itself a future, extremely indifferent toward the possible future, as if the time that it sought to cleave open was already beyond its usual determinations. This took place. The decision of radical, one might say absolute, DISCONTINUITY was made, separating not only two periods in history but history and a possibility that already no longer belongs to it directly.

3. It must be added that all the features that seemed to mark what has been called the failure of May were, on the contrary, signs of its accomplishment. *From the point of view of ideas*, this would be easy to show. But *politically, too*: the regime crumbled; de Gaulle disappeared in a manner much more disastrous for himself and for the order he asserts and pretends to maintain than if he had, indeed, never returned from his trip to Germany and had been buried there somewhere in Frederick Barbarossa's cave.<sup>1</sup> The electoral victory of Gaullism, which was *fabulous* in the strict sense of the word, justly confirmed the ruin of an entire system behind the illusion and saved appearances. A simple fact: it is the political security that such a victory seemed to guarantee to the party of Order, causing the upheaval of the whole to be entirely forgotten, that precipitated the financial collapse of the whole, which was technically unjustified. We are living off appearances. Everything is a sham. Another example: poor Mr. Faure's reform; reform of what, for what?<sup>2</sup> We must say what the lucid teachers already know: there is no more university; there is a great and

venerable, barely camouflaged hole, a game of ceremonies, occasionally traversed by savage forces or by a savagery that is both ritualistic and spectacular. Rectors, deans, professors, students, dissidents, counter-dissidents, all move in order to cover over the void, a void that is governed by the rules of dead time.

4. The fact that May took place, accomplishing its work, this is what needs to be questioned and what, moreover, poses the greatest difficulties to the movement itself: a kind of everyday impossibility that is full of danger (and perhaps promise). I will only articulate some of these dangers, leaving the task of pursuing or contradicting this analysis to others.

(a) The temptation to repeat May, as if May had not taken place or as if it had failed, so that it might someday reach its conclusion. Thus we see the same tactics of agitation that had meaning and effect in February-March-April poorly and painfully retried, with only a supplement of gestures and resources inexhaustibly provided by the errors of a regime that is incapable of realizing that it no longer exists and yet is conscious of its own impotence.

(b) The temptation to continue May, without noticing that all the force of originality of this revolution is to offer no precedent, no foundation, not even for its own success, for it has made itself impossible as such, leaving only a trace that divides everything, sky and earth, like lightening. NOTHING WILL BE AS IT WAS. Thinking and writing, organizing and disorganizing: everything is posed in other terms, and not only are the problems new but the problematic itself has changed. In particular, all the problems of revolutionary struggle, and above all of class struggle, have taken a different form.

(c) The worst aspect (not the most dangerous, only the most tiresome) is that in the destruction of the traditional, a new tradition is being constituted, which is respected, even sanctified, in turn. Here again, only a few suggestions: it suffices that certain key words be uttered—such as *spontaneity*, *self-management*, *dual power*, *symbolic action*, *open general assembly*, *action committee*—for the “movement” to be reassured of itself, certain, then, of prolonging itself without losing any of its original truth. The same holds for the prestige (which must be deemed ill considered) of the word *student*, implicitly considered equivalent to the word *revolutionary* (which is misused no less), to the point that no matter what campus disturbance, wherever in the world it may be—even if it is a pathetic uproar about a thesis or a student procession for Saint Nicholas Day—seems to be a prodigious enterprise of subversion to both the opponents and the bearers of power. And, of course, it is the group in power, equally idiotic and excessively

authoritarian, haunted by the memory of terror with which May has left it, that falls into the trap of repetition each time, locking itself inside, along with its adversaries, and tumbling around with them in an immobile movement in which everything is repeated without being renewed. And yet this struggle forces repetition to exhibit its power of death, a dead power that at length can provoke the invisible dissolution of the whole.

5. These remarks are only projects for reflection. The conclusion toward which some of them tend is that the May revolution, because it was global, because it changed everything, also left everything intact. I do not believe this, but from now on I will hold onto an exigency: to become fully conscious, and always anew, that we are at the end of history, so that most of our inherited notions, beginning with the ones from the revolutionary tradition, must be reexamined and, as such, refuted. The discontinuity that May represented (no less than produced) strikes language and ideological action equally. Let us admit that Marx, Lenin, and Bakunin have come closer together and come farther apart. There is an absolute void behind us and before us—and we must think and act without help, without any other support than the radicality of this emptiness. Once more, everything has changed. Even internationalism is different. Let us not be mystified. Let us put everything into question, including our own certainties and verbal hopes. *THE REVOLUTION IS BEHIND US*: it is already an object of consumption and, occasionally, of enjoyment. But what is before us, and it will be terrible, does not yet have a name.

December 1968

# Paranoia in Power

## (The Dialectics of Repression: A Small Contribution to Research)

How did Gaullist power account for the events of May? Through two contrary explanations that were nonetheless put forth together and that were only made coherent by an unformulated ideology. First, there was the exclamation: “They were rogues,” a cry of the heart. Here we are in the intellectual dregs of Gaullism where de Gaulle (*chienlit*), ferocious stupidity (Poujade, Vivien, Fanton) and simple minds like Fouchet cohabit.<sup>1</sup>

Then there is the explanation meant to alert the ailing part in every possessor of power that watches and wakes every time this power feels itself incomprehensibly shaken: “*It was a conspiracy organized by an international power.*” Pompidou said this, as did Grimaud, as did de Gaulle in turn.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, nothing is more unintelligent, of an almost prodigious mediocrity. And so one has to choose: either this, or else it was the lowlifes, these famous unknowns gone “out of control,” scum of the streets and paving stones, delinquents with criminal records, misfits, *Kantangais*, lawless beings incapable of discipline, rebelling against any and all organization, marvelously unorganizable.<sup>3</sup> But then how is the international conspiracy thesis defensible, as it presupposes at least highly trained armed groups destined to control and “enlist” the masses?

Nonetheless, the two theses have their sense and deserve to be examined. Rogues, boys with “dirty hands,” long hair, and strange outfits, are beings of another species: moreover, they are young, that is, doubly foreign. They frighten because they are other. What’s more, they represent the streets, and the streets, when they speak, are terrible. They are the place of liberty, and maybe sovereignty. Whereas de Gaulle—it must be said—is afraid of the streets. And the word *fear* is intellectually and physically justified here: de Gaulle was afraid of May. From here on, whatever he does, he will always be frightened, with this racist fear that leads to the extermination of the *other*, always considered without place, without right, depraved: a rogue?

The other theme is the one that activates paranoid delirium. It is entirely certain that the Gaullist system has entered into the active phase of psychosis. Whether de Gaulle and his ministers believe the thesis of an externally organized shadowy conspiracy or not (Baumel<sup>4</sup> suspending flights to Cuba and thus making Gaullism tag along with Johnson) is unimportant: his system believes it. And a system is powerful; a system organizes aggressiveness through a delirium that has always explained everything via reason and that ends up forcing reality in turn to organize itself in response to it. The myth of conspiracy, created entirely out of the difficulties of a sick Self (sick of suddenly feeling inferior, the object of contempt, ridiculous in the eyes of everyone, and having almost collapsed for a few days), leads to police and judicial measures. Thus (without any effort of the imagination) we come to declare the dissolution of small opposition groups, some of which do not even exist or have not existed for many years. Marcellin<sup>5</sup> says that "we must lay the ground for the legal possibility of misdemeanor." In other words, the law is designed only to create "crime," to make it emerge from the imaginary. This is the paranoid procedure. Social or individual paranoia, through the irregular reactions of the subject it affects, circumscribes a space where everything takes on an air of irregularity, where every gesture, every word, every manner of being draws suspicion.

Let us follow the development of the psychotic process. In the beginning, the government is still shy; it says the decree will lead to no indictment; all the same, searches take place; there are lockdowns, and people are arrested (especially Frank<sup>6</sup>) and placed in police custody; and above all foreigners are targeted. "The foreigner" is the choice victim of the paranoid; he is not like the others; he does not speak like the others; he "plots," which soon means that he is part of a plot, thus of a terrible conspiracy. When the foreigner is pursued, we can be sure that the passion of persecutory delirium has come into force. And then things go very quickly. There is only a hint of suspicion concerning the disbanded organization that is regrouping. Members of nonexistent small groups, once they are on file (and these days opportunities to create files were innumerable, the arrests during the demonstrations never having had any other end; the very word *arrest* is meaningful: I arrest you, I single you out, I denounce you, from now on and forever you are listed somewhere in my register) obviously have no other means of proving that they have ceased to belong to an organization that does not exist as such. If, by misfortune, one of them happens to leave his place of residence, it becomes evidence: he is an illegal immigrant (consider Pompidou's declaration against illegal

immigrants). If he behaves normally, *continuing* to meet his usual friends and possibly continuing to say what he thinks, then it is worse; it amounts to a confession: he continues; that is literally the crime. He is immediately arrested. And just as quickly society starts *bustling* [s'agite]; mysterious information is spread; a judge gets to work; good people protest; certain protestors even demonstrate; the police beat, again arrest, and put people on file. Hence the conclusion that there was nonetheless "something," since it is talked about. Such is the eternal and indigent madness. How do you stop being Krivine?<sup>7</sup> How do you stop being Jewish?

The dialectic of police repression develops according to a well-known method. It has its own power of organization, which means that, whatever its initial intentions may be, it is carried out precisely to organize any social and political reality through a conspiracy that it later denounces. Everything is a sign; everything is evidence. If in the course of a search one finds *Gramma*, the Cuban journal, Cuba thus becomes the conspiracy. All address books are suspect, just as it is enough that Krivine shakes a passerby's hand for the latter to be immediately arrested, put under police custody, and labeled: after which, if he is released, he is always under surveillance, throwing suspicion in turn on his relations; it is a raging epidemic. But in sickness there is a decisive complication, indicating, by a double development, the approach of the critical moment. Let us briefly describe this double symptom: (a) the invasion of the streets by plainclothes policemen; (b) support for the police and collaboration with them by "patriots of civic action."<sup>8</sup> From here on, everything goes even faster. Anyone can suspect anyone. The paranoia of power, of police, and of justice sets in motion countless little private manias, which the great events have first repressed, then brought to light. From now on, daily life changes. The police are in the streets, without anything to differentiate them; this means: they are everywhere, all the more visible because they want to be invisible; look carefully, you will discover them first near cinemas, in front of drugstores, better yet, in the cafés of a certain neighborhood or another, at times even in museums (for illegal immigrants are supposed to meet there); finally, the police is you. For it does not fail to occur that, when the police dress as civilians, civilians—those who have a shared interest with the government and are officially recognized, constituted by it—become policemen (recall what Sartre rightly termed General de Gaulle's "*call to murder*": "At the summit, it is the politics of cowardice, but at the same time a call to murder is sent out, for de Gaulle's call for the creation of committees of civic action is exactly this. . . . The old man . . . saw red, and told his partisans: 'THE FUN IS OVER, NOW IT'S TIME FOR

BLOWS'” [*Le nouvel observateur*, June 1, 1968, p. 27)]. But specialized civilians organize themselves in turn. Some have worked in the student communities; they will listen, maintain surveillance notebooks, and at times provoke (the extraordinary spread of the term *provocateur* is one of the striking phenomena of the current sickness). Others establish relations with special sections of the police; they are called “the sportsmen” and, given that some police units are composed of agents specially trained in violent disciplines, the mix occurs easily. Finally, the SAC and the CDR try to recruit militants within the police itself.<sup>9</sup> It’s an excellent strategy. Policemen, turned militants, do not feel themselves bound by the orders of their commanders, if the latter happen to forbid certain procedures: if they commit “regrettable excesses,” it is out of pure civic passion and without compromising the regular police. But at the same time they have access to all the information and all the arms of the official bodies. Note, however, that a good part of the police, if only out of esprit de corps, disapprove of this mixture (this has been seen) and denounce these practices, which they themselves call fascist.

Let us conclude without concluding. There is a great paranoia: it is the paranoia of reason as such, of a reason that raves as a fanaticism of reason, wanting to subject everything to reason, to force everyone to reason and to give reasons, and to reduce everything, the whole, to reason. There is the paranoia of old people: it is more fragile, less systematic, irritatingly shaky, and senile from the repetition of themes. It would not be defamation to state that de Gaulle is very old and the society that he represents is very old. But State paranoia is always powerful, and the system that it organizes ignores its limits. It is thus up to us to choose: Will we use the repression that is developing to force all the—tolerant or intolerant—repressive functions at work in society to spread and thus become more apparent? Or will we respond to paranoia, which always takes itself excessively seriously, by a strategy of unseriousness, by undoing a game that escapes the spirit of play, or are we entering a war, a war that is certainly new and whose rules even the regime does not suspect? There is a question. Let us not expect—and such is our contribution to the myth of mysterious conspiracy—to find a clear answer here.