

Our Man in Europe Views Paris

Lenny Rubenstein

1967

Every third corner of Paris has a commemorative stone to honor those who died for the liberation of the city in August 1944. Every provincial town has some plaque to name its *mort pour la France*. As testimony to the nation's suffering, these slabs of stone and steel are laudable, but as remembrances of glory and duty they should be destroyed.

Cited as the most revolutionary and conscious working class in Europe, the French proletariat has not seen fit to erect a monument to the regiments who refused to fight in 1917, to the Paris Commune of 1871, or even to their former neighbor, the Spanish Republic of 1936.

There is universal conscription for one year in France, and as far as this author knows, there is no organized movement to prevent it. Everyone goes. Even such an antiquated totem as Napoleons tomb has all the earmarks of a church, to the effect that "a quiet and respectful attitude must be maintained."

Aside from the monuments and the preserved glories, one can see modern Paris in the attitudes of the *gendarmes*, *les flics*, the cops. Most people know about their very full capes, how they can be lined with lead or stones and flung at the heads of demonstrators, but the capes also hide their more conventional truncheon and pistol, and in very special cases, small; automatic weapons.

The cops are everywhere, outside embassies in their dress clothes, at busy intersections, on the Metro, or in the streets. Most of them are middle-aged with fat faces and mean moustaches. They're usually a vainer lot than most cops In New York or London, the paranoid can visualize being arrested for having smoked grass or owning a cube.

In Paris, where drugs haven't been discovered by either the intellectual left or the popular press, the cops come on as if they'll deport you for looking hippy or having long hair (they did this last summer and this year won't be any different. In England, they're used to the sight of shaggy types, but in Paris they stare. Yes, in Paris, where only the old and the workers wear Berets, they usually wear their hair like young executives.

Paris, despite the French, is a real scary city, after the townyness of London. The people are nocturnal, talkative, and busy, while traffic is an inexorable problem. The student section is traditional but viable and bookshops are innumerable, though there are few public libraries. Supposedly, there is even a peace group in Paris to help Americans who refuse to go into the army, which underlines the French situation, since WHO helps the 19-year-old French boy who doesn't want to go?



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