

In the Thick of It

Guerre au Paradis

January 2010

“There are no miracles to be found on this Earth, but even the strongest boards can be pierced.” — Hannah Arendt

Here and there, the questions arise: does the current reconstruction of capitalism not raise certain new and particular characteristics? Has something not been profoundly shaken in the reproduction of the social relations created by this society? Is there not, under our surprised eyes, a wide open breach, a space into which to rush, a moment to be seized in the midst of the many existing tensions?

When the economy coughs while catching its breath, in the course of its regular grooming, the State injects millions of euros into it as though giving aspirin to a feverish patient. After the “crisis” passes, everything returns to its normal course, between the tyranny of welfare blackmail and the misery of workplace exploitation.

All of a sudden, we shout for the return of the class war, that good old proletarian violence, instantly reborn in the gas canisters and the boss-nappings¹. Don’t doubt it, the bourgeoisie is trembling before the brewing uprising (sic).

You have buried the revolutionary subject, oh incredulous ones, the very same who has returned by the grand door of History, from Clairoux² to the factories of Pyeongtaek in Korea³. So many anxiously await this moment, their feet frisky in the starting blocks of the great, mass social movement. The proletarians are on the move, so now we can follow them!

Once again, we can begin to dig mass graves beneath the windows of the stock exchange for the traders to throw themselves into, convinced that the end is nigh.

The crisis, the war to end all wars, I’ll give you my ticket! Why bother thinking of ways to attack the system when by all accounts it will collapse on its own?

Courageous revolters! You who dream of influencing the course of things, defying history with your individual pride, you are only naive relics of the legend of David slaying Goliath, but in reality your few rebel slings hold no weight.

¹ A neologism, used in this case to refer to the action of the French workers who temporarily held high factory officials hostage.

² The Continental tire plant in Clairoux was one of many sites of militant and wildcat workers’ action in France in 2009, after the company announced its intention to close the facility down in 2010.

³ In May 2006, 13 000 Korean soldiers and riot police descended on Pyeongtaek to defend the construction of a US military base on expropriated farm land. People fought back with pipes and sticks.

Why must we explain it to you again?

The Reason is in history, and you, little ones, little things determined entirely by the greater whole, you are nearly nothing, a nothing which acts vainly, brandishing its free will like a standard. If everything is written in advance, nothing is preferable to anything, and there are no good choices given that choice is an illusion when everything is determined. No practises to diffuse, nor to exclude. Anyway, communisation is coming in great, invisible steps, from which point the historic movement will have eliminated the final obstacles to its triumph.

Except... from our point of view, domestication was never so sophisticated, and so present in its grip on our lives, from the schools to the police patrols, from the prison to the wage, from the Police Emploi⁴ to those thousands of eyes — volunteering citizens or surveillance cameras — scrutinizing our slightest movements at every street corner, which accompanies the generalized fear and a certain resignation in the face of the shit that holds us hostage.

Far be it from us to say that nothing will happen, quite the opposite. But where things happen, it is from the decisions of individuals to act, with resolution and will. It is not abstractions that can bring an end to oppression, but revolts which are very real and concrete. And these revolts, this rage which has piled up for too long, they are not a panacea, they do not always tell us of the motivations of those who revolt, nor of their desires, nor of their perspectives.

And the quasi-general discrediting of the parties and the unions, if we find joy in that in and of itself, is not enough to give a reliable indication of the degree of conflict between the exploited and Power, or on the present capacity of the former to act autonomously, moving beyond mediators and intermediaries, including “base unionists”, the latest sensation. It is no more than the use of empty gas canisters placed symbolically in front of the factories for a picture in the paper, or the “withholding” of the directors to get a slightly better severance package, or to diminish the package of employees transferred from another firm. In other words, the form tells us nothing, or not much, or not enough, about the meaning of the actions. And if everyone feels that the social peace is all relative, the tensions at work today are not only random and limited in time (taking each case separately, the global social tension being permanent), but they display neither openly nor clearly the willingness to break with this system in its entirety. We are not writing to play the game of the purists, but out of the necessity to observe events with lucidity rather than through the blurry lenses of ideology and low propaganda. Situations of tension offer no certitude from their outset, only possibilities, such as that of participating in an anti-authoritarian antagonism while breaking the isolation created by control and repression.

In any case, we cannot stay at the mercy of any authorization, any legitimacy, nor remain in the wake of some great movement (whatever one thinks of the rest), nor wait for capital to collapse on its own. Waiting and patience have their limits, and placing the essence of our revolutionary claims in the hands of a miracle to come is to condemn ourselves to the role of spectator, in the best case that of lucidspectator, analyzing what happens around us in order to decide what is THE right moment to finally act. But spectators still, followers forever, and, in certain cases, vile pimps.

We want, in that which concerns us, to strike, to begin again with a taste for the offensive, and we must reflect on these matters seriously. This journal aims to contribute to this effort.

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⁴ Pole Emploi: Job-center.

The debate on the revolutionary question, fed on texts and discussions which are for the most part informal, is never-ending. This debate sometimes seems to focus itself on the sole problem of the method to adopt in order to bring about an end supposed to be common to all revolutionaries.

Many traits have marked this discussion of late: first of all, the question of the Unity of revolutionaries (and more specifically, the unity of anarchists), having been rejected long ago, is experiencing a resurgence in a more subtle form, that of a strong incitement to participate in common, united campaigns, on a consensual basis determined a priori, which resolve many divergences. From “Pack Your Pope!” to “No to NATO!”, through referenda to save the State public service (i.e. the postal system), all these attempts were supposed to show the merits of a collective step self-defined as “social anarchism”, or worse, “political anarchism”.

Alongside this apparent search for “common bases” to unite the anarchists, it is clear that certain practises and ideas see themselves excluded from the framework of these discussions, either by bitter criticism or by ignorance and silence, which amount to the same thing. Let us be clear: we are in favour of lively critiques of everyone’s positions, whether they wear the gloves of politesse or not. Everyone, or nearly everyone, among the most concerned agrees that there is no “big family” of revolutionaries or anarchists, cohesive and uniform, even if some convey this image to the outside world, using expressions like “THE ANARCHISTS are in favour of...”, “For THE ANARCHISTS...”, etc.

The disagreements are real, profound, and it seems evident that if it is easy to get a large number of people to agree on the necessity of tearing down the State and capitalism, the proposals for getting there are numerous, and sometimes incompatible. Equally, it seems to us that the problem of oppression does not stop at the State and its cops, no more than at economic exploitation alone, but is brought about by other phenomena, sometimes larger and less visible. Not that anti-cop rage, even in its most simplistic form, tends to displease us; the same goes for class hatred for the bosses and other wardens, that goes without saying.

To return to the facts, we wish to say that two great “tendencies”, or rather two great questions must be interrogated, developed, and critiqued: the questions of the individual and of the offensive.

If these themes are not new, and if they still stir passions, it is because they are extremely sensitive, and because to overlook them when speaking of the struggle for freedom seems a bit absurd.

It is very difficult for us to imagine a social revolution if we conceive of it as a sort of quasi-mechanical movement put to work by obscure and mysterious forces, indecipherable for mere mortals, except for the privileged few who have understood historical materialism and who, from the height of their HQ, have grasped nearly everything.

In other words, it is strange to think of a revolution that would come about without the people knowing about it, or without real people making it; a revolution which does not depend on the human will of each person and on the link between desires and efforts. To the question: “What does a practise of radical criticism of the State and capitalism serve?”, they would tell us, “Nothing. Capital, by its contradictions, carries within itself its own criticism, and eventually, its own abolition. History will be the sole and ultimate judge of this condemned system.”

So lean back, and wait for the end. All those people you see throwing stones, beating up their boss, burning their factory, fighting the cops, all for nothing, because the individual is nothing, there is only a determined phenomenon.

What is the individual, short of her social relationships? Nothing.

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Some ask themselves: "Is voluntary servitude a reality?" We cry out in contempt.

Let's pose things differently: this world must be subverted; very well.

Can this world be turned upside down while respecting its own way of doing things, while following its march toward sustainable oblivion, while following its own logic?

Can the student bring down her teacher without sticking her foot out, without laying traps in his path, without sawing the legs off his chair?

Can the prisoner escape without finding a blind spot in the prison surveillance? Without gaining the upper hand on the guards, without digging a tunnel? Can the prisoner escape if he doesn't feel the urge?

Will soldiers surrender their weapons if they do not have the will, or if they are not forced to by unfavourable situation? Will the political pimps disappear without a good kick in the ass?

Will the bosses decide to put the key under the door of capitalism? Will the dominant miraculously abandon the power they exercise, without real social pressure?

The prisons, the temples, the factories, will they collapse of their own weight, under the force of an autumn breeze?

No.

So we ask ourselves: why is this system still in place?

This question is judged more tolerable. So many attempts at an answer are sketched out:

- This system responds to the expectations of the great majority, and only minute fraction of the population really desires revolutionary upheaval.
- No one likes this system, but fear weighs down upon the revolt, and repression upon the rebels.
- The other possible systems have been tried, they are worse than capitalist democracy, so, even by default, let's be content with what we've got.

Nothing is very satisfying in these responses. It goes without saying that a certain number of people want this world and its logic to stay just as they are. Because they have an interest in it being so. Because they like, it seems, to have slaves at their service. Because they have huge cars rolling along at breakneck speed on beautiful, smooth highways. Because they can look down on the restless city from the height of their luxury apartments. Because butter croissants are made every morning by the maid. Because there is never a lack of money, the police do their job, and justice looks after the bad apples.

But also because it is better to have social housing with leaky pipes than to be in the street, to have a stupid job than to have to beg for that stupid job or another or to get a little bit of cash. Because you get less shit from the cops when you're "legal" than if you don't have the guarantees that the State requires.

Follow the law, be servile, and you will have social housing and a few cents. Be more servile and you will have your two bedroom furnished apartment. Be even more servile still and every meal could be a feast. Be zealous, faithful among the faithful, and you could even have vacations in the Caribbean, a shiny new 4×4, a beautiful loft in a beautiful rich neighbourhood, a beautiful secretary to do your work for you, a big salary, and a relatively easy life.

Climb, rise, progress. Obey, be wise, don't put one foot out of line.

To have, and to believe in the possibility of achieving that which society can still promise under certain conditions, the possibility of being the norm, or of being normal.

And they talk to us of individuals? And this society is supposed to be individualistic?

Come on! Is individualism the forced and mimetic march, the idiotic race to catch the bone held aloft by the arrogant master?

Is individualism this grotesque effort to finally resemble the model, the pitiable self-sacrifice before the idol of authority? Is it the ambition to become one of these models which establishes the norm that others blindly follow?

Is individualism uniformity in sadness and despair? Is individualism something other than a lie that this desolate mass society sells us at a high price? Is it the retreat from all struggle, the withdrawal to the countryside while waiting for the sky to fall upon our heads, the negation of human relationships, of affinity, of friendship?

We see instead bullying, sanctions, repression, punishment, threats, corruption, rackets of all kinds, and blackmail exercised against the millions of human beings judged undesirable.

We see a million social barriers erected by centuries of civilization and domestication, as an obstacle to any possibility of the real development of individuality.

The individual?

It is our search, our own effort, the tension that drives us, that tends to the realization of our strange dreams of freedom. The search for a greater possible coherence between our ideas and practises.

It is our wish to act as much as possible according to the ethics which we have given ourselves.

It is our capacity to say "no" where they seek to make us say "yes, master". Or, like Clément Duval⁵ and his dagger, to say "in the name of freedom, I'll fuck you up" to the tune of "In the name of the law, you're under arrest"⁶.

It is our capacity to recognise the infamy of constraint and the ugliness of its agents.

It is the recognition of the individuality of those who live life in search of freedom. The possibility of a profound affinity with them, of a real reciprocity and of free association.

It is the visceral hatred of all domination and exploitation.

Starting from this, from constant reflection and burning resentment, from anti-authoritarian thought and sensibility, we seek the means to loosen the vice, and to break it for good. And one does not wait until a grinding machine has had its mechanisms rust to a halt before breaking it, nor rest with one's arms crossed, exploring the profundities of metaphysics.

The image of the vice is not chosen at random, for oppression is certainly something which tends to crush us, but also something which surrounds and envelops us, like a police ambush closes in upon trapped demonstrators. Sometimes the demonstrators can move, find some adjacent street by which to escape. But the retreat is never more than temporary.

⁵ Clément Duval (1850–1935) was a French anarchist criminal who, in 1886, stabbed a policeman trying to arrest him after he was caught trying to fence goods stolen from the mansion of a Parisian socialite, which he had accidentally burnt down in the process. In the paper *Révolution*, he wrote "Theft exists only through the exploitation of man by man... when Society refuses you the right to exist, you must take it... the policeman arrested me in the name of the Law, I struck him in the name of Liberty." After 14 years in prison and over 20 failed attempts, he successfully escaped, living to the age of 85 in New York City.

⁶ In the original, the lines 'je te casse la tête' and 'je vous arrête', of course, rhyme.

There is no “autonomous zone”, no liberated territory on this world, no space or individual outside of it. You can feel “free in your mind”, but in reality this changes next to nothing. The cop will come looking for you when the time comes, nuclear radiation and GMOs will still bombard your body, the law will not forget you, and your illusion of being outside the world will not last more than a second.

We are inside it, we are individuals in the thick of it, and it is from here that our revolt begins. It is in this environment that we begin our struggles against the existent, trying to scale the walls, ideological and material, which imprison us. It is against these walls and against the force of present social relations that struggle either dies or prevails, it is against these walls that revolts strike, tiring themselves out, pushing their limits, but they are desperate and they do not give up.

An insurrection in this light is not, therefore, a problem whose defining characteristics are easily identified, nor is it controllable, nor reducible to any ideology – necessarily reductive as ideology is – but a desire shared by thousands of people, which crystallises itself in certain moments. And the prophets who would try to predict these rare moments succeed only in heaping scorn upon themselves, or wearing the clothes of modern-day Blanquism⁷.

Moments where it is possible for everyone to take position, the same position that one can take in everyday life, with the limitation that a situation more or less pacified situation is implied. Moments where time as determined by social constraints stops, and where everyone can set to calling to mind all that has prevented them from living over the years, and settle their account. Where we have more to reflect on in our dull day-to-day lives than alienation and exploitation, where we know that tomorrow we will get up, not to make some boss rich, but to make him miserable and ransack his business.

Moments where the anti-strikers finally learn to keep a low profile, where commercial arteries are transformed into a terrain of conflict with the State, where street furniture regains its use value in the barricades.

We are convinced that the insurrection does not belong to anyone, and that we can not have it “here, now, immediately”. That is all impossible to foresee, and in one sense, so much the better. No one is master of this type of uprising. But this doesn’t forbid us from speaking of our perspectives, those towards which we tend despite our intrinsic weaknesses, towards which we orient our revolts, which are entirely in our hands, for they are in our hearts.

The insurrection is a real social fact, the extensions of a revolt against the social conditions which made us, its intensification in an open conflict against Power. It is not at all a question of two armies facing off and confronting one another, but of a sparse, diffuse, and widespread struggle, which renders control and repression more and more incapable of reestablishing order.

When we speak of social war, we are not speaking of military-type conflict, and only swindlers speak of it in these terms. War means all types of fighting, armed or not, opposing hostile entities among them. Of course, we cannot want this war for itself, no one fights without a goal, except perhaps hooligans and mercenaries. But there is no more reason to strike the word “war” from our vocabulary than to strike “struggle”, “conflict”, or “fight”, under the pretext that the first will be judged too pretentious or that it reveals an undeniable pathological tendency to exaggerate. Historically, we always spoke of class war, though, without it raising the shields of the moderators.

⁷ Blanquism refers to the ideology of Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), being, simplistically, that socialist revolution should be carried out in the form of a coup d’état by dedicated and secretive revolutionaries.

Social war is an old story, it is the finding that diverse conflictualities have opposed domination with responses of various forms. From attacks which are diffuse, great or small, with or without communiques, reproducible at will, to wildcat strikes, occupations, sabotage to the point of rioting, the taking up of arms, the insurrection... The break from domination has never been total, and our goal is to viciously smash it, but with the joy that characterizes emancipation. The social war is ongoing, we can only contribute to it.

There are reasons for this hostility to domination, just as there are reasons for all enmity; we know why we hate religions, nations and their borders, democracies and their prisons, schools and their domestication, the cops and their justice, the macho dudes and the racists, the State and money, the salary-earners and the mafias.

We also know that we have only one life, but nevermind.

From the instant we have one sufficiently precise image of all that prevents us from living freely, we do not need the comfort of some prefabricated dogma which will dictate to us the path to follow. Rather, we need a lucid enough analysis of the power relations and tensions continuously at work all around us. An analysis which can indicate to us which schema will never be ours (from politics to all collaboration with authoritarians, no matter what they're mad about), which means will or won't be ours, according to our anarchist ethics; but also with whom to build real affinity — free from the shameful re-evaluations of the tactician — and with whom no agreement at all is possible nor reconciliation foreseeable. Starting from this analysis, we can imagine our concrete offensive possibilities against all forms of domination.

It goes without saying, in view of these remarks, that the use of violence, once we have freed it from the fantasies which surround it, is determined in our practises by three principal considerations: our way of looking at things, our morality, and the possibilities created by the level of struggle in different contexts.

Different factors which we cannot separate, without at the same time altering that for which we are fighting.

Violence against the violence of domination, in a revolutionary lens, and not lucubrations⁸ on the benefits of civil war, which can certainly please only the nihilists, or the powerful, who have every interest in the undesirables of the world tearing and destroying amongst themselves. In a certain sense, the civil war is already here, under our noses, in the imposed collectivity of identity, as racism, sexism, latent homophobia, as competition at work and elsewhere, snitching, and other plagues. And it is precisely against this situation that we fight in our daily lives, persuaded that the cult of violence in itself gets us nowhere, like an insurrectionalism empty of all content and sacrificing reflection. There is a powerful illusion at work that knows how to use spectacular means, but certainly nothing of that which seduces us.

So, all those who refuse to preach the catechism of numbers have, in fact, made a difficult, modest but autonomous gamble, to cast the substance and the form as an inseparable whole, and of possibilities and their diffusion. A wager which accepts without regret the abandonment of the inherent illusions of the invocation of crowds, of mass struggle, of the revolutionary subject which changes its name according to fashion, but which is no less contained within the limits of ideological abstraction.

⁸ Élucubrations: long and serious treatises which are the product of much labour; connotes an end-product which is unconvincing, pretentious, or wingnuttty.

And yes, we start with and from ourselves, not aspiring to represent any but ourselves, nor to constitute some imaginary party or some stinking and necessarily authoritarian vanguard.

And again, it seems to us that the isolation in which the State wishes to keep us cornered can only be broken if each individual who feels anger coursing through their veins takes responsibility and rolls up their sleeves, without looking for some kind of legitimacy, that very democratic doctrine, the tyranny of the majority, which can only be granted by the State or by those who dream of taking its place.

Also, when they reproach our denial of the impotence they would ascribe us, our stubborn intention to maintain the offensive with our limited means, our pretension “to make the insurrection now, with some paving stones, smoke, and paint bombs”, we think that there has been a misunderstanding.

We do not confuse each particular action with the revolution, but we do not totally separate them either. Some broken windows are not a revolution, no more than a riot is an insurrection, but they are a contribution among possible others to the development of a perspective, and everyone has the possibility to bring their own, by placing it in a clear social antagonism with oppression and its agents.

Impotence is therefore more related to the more or less pacified nature of the context, an insufficiency of the revolutionary tension, than to our practises, which, if they are conscious of their limits, do not resign themselves to abandonment and renunciation, attitudes which bring joy to the enemies of freedom.

Ultimately, we have only certain answers to give to numerous critiques formulated here and there, never the key to the problem, the magic formula, the pretentious claim to hold the truth of the struggle, solutions drawn out to completion.

One thing, nevertheless, seems clear to us:

The attacks must multiply, as true as to say that our revolts create our solidarities.

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