

# **Dynamics Inherent to Protest Movements**

I.M.

Summer 2019

# Contents

Context: a “historic” struggle . . . . .	3
The forces involved . . . . .	3
Myths put to the test: unity, horizontality, consensus . . . . .	4
Chronicle of an ongoing bureaucratisation . . . . .	6
Bureaucratisation from above . . . . .	7
Bureaucratisation from below . . . . .	7
Is this dynamic specific to the NDDL ZAD? . . . . .	8
Territories in struggle and class struggle . . . . .	9
A rebellion in the process of integration	
Acceptance and pacification: practical case: the D281 road . . . . .	10
Delegation and negotiation . . . . .	12
Legalisation and evictions . . . . .	13
Integration of the rebellion . . . . .	14
Conclusion? The eviction of conflictuality . . . . .	15

The reflections developed here are based on several months of being side-by-side on the ZAD [*Zone à Défendre*] of Notre-Dame-des-Landes [France]. They have also been elaborated collectively, which resulted in the organising of the “*off*” festival at the moment of the “*Fête de la victoire*” the 10th of February 2018 [at the time that the state announced that it will abandon the airport project]. The situation is so complex and evolving so quickly that trying to get an analysis into a few pages is a challenge. This is therefore only a partial and subjective point of view.

This struggle has marked the imaginaries of a number of militants for a decade, especially since many images about its organisation were created from within the ZAD to turn it into a model struggle. It is also enticed by these images that we came to the ZAD to see more closely.

We will try to propose some key points to understand what is happening in NDDL, but also in other struggles at the moment.

## Context: a “historic” struggle

After the announcement on the 17th of January 2018 of the abandonment of the NDDL airport project, by the Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, many celebrated the victory after fifty years of more or less intense struggles. From a distance, this fight is seen as exemplary, firstly by its duration, and now also its “victorious” outcome. We will not talk about the reasons for this outcome, nor about the meaning that some give to this victory. Several texts talk about that [specifically: *Mouvement où est ta victoire ?*]. As one occupant puts it, “The ZAD is used as a megaphone for practices and strategies of struggle that will be held up as examples for decades” [*The “Movement” is Dead, Long Live... Reform!*, February 2018].

## The forces involved

Let’s briefly recall the main forces involved. On the one hand, the citizenist components [*composantes*]: the *Coordination des opposants* (which includes some sixty parties, labour unions and associations; the most present on the ground is the ACIPA), COPAIN (which includes mainly farmers, of which the most influential are members of the *Confédération Paysanne*, who do not live on the ZAD), the “historical” farmers organised in the ADECA (on the ZAD and did not sell their lands to VINCI [company that would build the airport]), the ecologists in struggle. These groups, although not homogeneous, have as their line of action addressing the State in a legal and rather juridical framework. These components were struggling against the airport.

In 2009, at the call of some residents, young people came from different horizons: squatting, anti-authoritarian, autonomous, ecologist, or without political baggage. Looked upon with a suspicious eye at the beginning, they were finally accepted by the other components thanks to their determination facing the violence of the mobile gendarmes [militarised police forces] during the attempted eviction (Operation César in 2012). These occupants have added to the slogan “against the airport” of the ACIPA: and its world.

About 200 support committees have also been created, often with the same differences as in the ZAD and the other components.

Between the occupants, little by little, very marked scenes were formed. To simplify, we can speak of two modes of organisation underpinned by two visions of struggles: the anti-authoritarian and feminist on the one hand, and the autonomous [meaning the heirs to the

Autonomous movement and its political derivatives of the 70s] and “appelist” [see Tiqqun, *The Call (l'Appel)*, *The Coming Insurrection* etc.] on the other hand. Those last ones organised for about two years within the CMDO (*Comité pour le maintien des occupations* [name ripped off from *Conseil pour le maintien des occupations* – created during May 1968 at the Sorbonne by members of the Situationist International]). Between these two poles, more or less lasting groups have been formed, trying different paths. Other occupants, who do not see themselves in these fairly structured organisational forms, have always kept away from official meetings and actions. Nevertheless, the latter, called in NDDL “the people of the East” because they built their homes rather east of the ZAD, do not remain inactive or unorganized. Among other things, they imposed on the farmers a non-motorised area. To continue the description in broad strokes, it can be said that the occupants of organised groups are mainly from the intellectual petty bourgeoisie in the process of being downgraded, and that people “of the East” are rather from the impoverished popular classes.

## **Myths put to the test: unity, horizontality, consensus**

If you managed to find your bearings in this social landscape, you understood that the myth propagated, in particular by the official texts of the ZAD (“in truth, if we won, it’s because there were so many modes of different actions with so many different people that the cops never knew how to react, and it was so cool”) or the books written by the collective *Mauvaise Troupe*, this myth of “unity in diversity”, is a deception that benefits the dominant forces. For the citizens, it was unthinkable to question the state or the capitalist system. It was just a case of defending the agricultural and real estate lands against the airport project. For the occupants, the airport was certainly important, but it was inconceivable to fight against this Useless Project without calling into question the state and the capitalist system that are at the root of it. The former nevertheless had to make arrangements with the latter as long as the preservation of the airport project, with the threat of violent militarised expulsion, was brandished by the various Hollande [previously PM, of the Socialist Party] governments.

This myth of unity in diversity has done and continues to do, damage. Within the anti-airport movement, it muzzled the occupants, organised or not, but who were critical of the mechanism of confiscation of the struggle. They did not want to risk breaking the unity that “is the strength of the movement”. On the outside, this myth of unity in diversity has created imaginaries of idyllic struggle. Idealisation and a guilt complex are still the lot of many supporters of this struggle who think they are not able to do the same.

On the 1st of August 2017, at the GA [General Assembly] of the movement, the *Coordination* tested, through a theatrical staging, the strength of this myth. They took advantage of three actions of hostility at rallies that they had organised [*Fête des bâtons*, October 2016: a scuffle with journalists. Election campaign, April 2017: excrements on the windscreen of a car of a journalist during a press conference of a candidate from *France Insoumise* [left-wing political party] at *la Vache Rit*. *Fête de la Coordination*, July 2017: an altercation against Nexus experts who had a stand there after participating in a conference of the *Front National*] and which they held all the occupants responsible for. They asked the occupants to condemn the perpetrators of these “incivilities”. Faced with the refusal of the assembly, the members of the *Coordination* left angrily. Some CMDO members followed suit. They left the occupants alone, seemingly breaking

the sacrosanct unity of the movement, to better recompose a facade of unity that would exclude the less integratable occupants without ever publicly admitting it.

Another myth of which reality has taken care of twisting by the neck is that of the “horizontal” functioning of meetings. You know the classic vertical functioning of associations or collectives, with a board of directors or at least with decision-making by majority vote. The occupants, for their part, sought to implement a horizontal functioning in the meetings.

This organisation should have facilitated taking the floor. But horizontality is also a deceit, no one deals with it with similar characteristics.

Speaking does not only depend on a moderator, but especially on the ability of each participant to express themselves within the codes in force in the GA, on feeling legitimate to intervene, including against the majority of the group, on the ability to overcome sneers, humiliation or even intimidation. These skills, which depend mainly on whether or not they possess a certain cultural capital, are not evenly distributed among participants in a GA. Whatever the attitude of a group, it will always be the same people who will be more comfortable, excluding – even if they do not want to – those who in reaction will no longer speak, and then will not come to these meetings any more. It will always be the same who will have the opportunity to advance their interests.

One relies only on the rich – more or less consistently, this cultural capital goes hand in hand with a social capital – so that it becomes possible to operate their political and support networks on the outside. Thus, some living places on the ZAD found themselves at the head of material means put at their disposal to carry out their projects: agricultural machinery or construction equipment, for example, which were often not made available to all. Can we talk about horizontality if we do not ensure, within the movement, the equal redistribution of material and financial resources from the outside?

Another resource unevenly distributed among the occupants is the time available for reading, writing, documenting, searching for information and disseminating it, organising meetings, etc. And this time is all the more available when one lives in a brick house or a comfortable self-built home, without the worry of having to search for water or a washing machine, where one has access to electricity and heating, resources that not all the inhabitants of the ZAD have. Rather than talking about diversity, it would be more accurate to talk about inequality within the movement. Inequality which, even if it has been fought against by certain people, persists and still has its effects.

The seizure of power is all the easier if a group endowed with all these types of material, social and cultural capital decides to take over the running of the meetings, to ally effectiveness and defence of its own interests; all on behalf of the common interest, of course. And we can wonder about the “benevolence” of this group when it decides to boycott, as did the CMDO in the autumn, the weekly - more anti-authoritarian - meeting of the inhabitants under the pretext that it is useless. Especially since at the same time, the same group sets up new governing bodies. Let us once again note the unequal positions between the strategy of the CMDO that builds this power and overtakes the majority of inhabitants, and some of the occupants who continue to state publicly that the movement must move forward “to the rhythm of those who stumble” (speech prepared at the meeting of the inhabitants, at which the CMDO is officially absent, and pronounced on the 10th of February).

On the ZAD, the myth of “the seeking for consensus” has had a hard time. It was loudly proclaimed that decisions were made by consensus. This made the more vertical components grumble, who thought it was a waste of time. It is clear from the analysis of horizontality that

there can be no consensus if all participants do not approach a meeting on equal footing, let alone if a good deal exclude themselves from a functioning that excludes them de facto. But on the 18th of January, the day after the “victory”, the external components, having in mind only the new phase of the struggle, that is to say the future negotiations with the government [We now know that the delegation was rejected by the state on 28th February and then on 20th March. The negotiations dreamed of by the components are no longer relevant. On the other hand, targeted evictions are maintained. The failure of the delegates does not seem to encourage them to question themselves], threw off their masks. As these negotiations involved the redistribution of private property (lands and farms), there was no longer any question of consensus or decisions taken by the entire movement.

The *Coordination* and COPAIN, followed by the CMDO, informed the GA that they were going to destroy the cabins and chicanes [street barriers] that had been built after the Operation César on the D281 route and maintained since, on the pretext that the government asked for it. These components were anxious to show the state their ability to control the situation internally.

Other coups have occurred, such as quietly adding a phrase that may provoke opposition to the common communique of “victory” adopted in the GA [more in: *Contre l’aéroport - et pour son monde, ou quoi ?*]; such as the threat to leave the movement and leave the occupants of the dominated fraction, the “losers” as some of them call themselves, alone in the face of the police forces or the Prefecture if those defiant refused the compromises.

## Chronicle of an ongoing bureaucratisation

[for a more in-depth vision: *The “Movement” is Dead, Long Live... Reform!*]

It is always easier to understand the processes at the beginning of their establishment, when they are still visible because they face resistance, than when they are well oiled and have forced the acceptance of all. The different options still possible in the premises have disappeared, and the established processes are no longer put in question.

The process of bureaucratisation ensuring the power grab of the dominant factions of the movement (essentially COPAIN, the *Coordination* and the CMDO [“The fundamental struggle today is between, on the one hand, the mass of workers – who do not have a direct say – and, on the other hand, the leftist political and trade union bureaucracies that control – even if only 14% of the labour force is unionised – the gates of the factories and the right to negotiate on behalf of the occupants. These bureaucracies are not fallen and treacherous workers’ organisations, but a mechanism of integration into capitalist society.” CMDO (the original not the copy), Paris, 22nd May 1968]) was slow and all the more insidious because it was the work of friends with whom complicities and bonds were formed in the sharing of everyday life over the years. The ZAD is particular in that these are closely intertwined places of life and places of struggle. These emotional ties have weakened the alertness of the anti-authoritarian occupants, although aware of these kind of processes. The vagueness (in which the members willingly remained) of groups organised within the movement does not make it possible to clearly name adversaries. Self-censorship also came from the reaction of close friends exclaiming “you’re annoying!” at the slightest critical remark. The isolation and the feeling of being “paranoid” and to be told so has made many occupants powerless. Those who were lucid about the turn of events, tired of being alone in denouncing it, often left the movement once and for all.

## Bureaucratisation from above

First, it was the control of key positions, such as the press group or the external communication, which centralised the information, without redistributing it in full, and spreading the fable of the united and consensual ZAD on the zad.nadir site and the mailing lists. It was the mandates, not re-discussed, preventing the control by all of positions of power. It was the specialisation of functions, preventing the rotation of tasks. It was the preparatory meetings for the GA, announced but difficult to reach by individuals not organised in structured groups, or simply unannounced and therefore not open, which allowed the elites to have decisions adopted in the GA that were favourable to them through a pre-defined group strategy.

These manipulations of decisions are also made through informal lobbying: construction projects, “strategy workshops”: “It’s about inviting people from COPAIN, committees, probably from ACIPA, to a meal where discussions are held on a so-called informal way. My theory is that these meals are organised when there is an idea that has to get adopted [...] to prepare the ground and influence future decisions.” [*De la bile sur le feu et autres états d’âme anti-autoritaires*. ZAD, 2017]

It was especially, during the autumn of 2017, the creation by the CMDO supported by the other components, of new decision-making bodies: the *GA des Usages*, actually coming into competition with the old GA of the movement, monthly, where everyone can come to debate and participate in decisions. In the *GA des Usages*, certainly consensus is still part of the facade, but the positions are previously discussed within each component that informs the GA.

The validation of these decisions by the GA takes the appearance of a farce since they can only be contradicted by a text, duly argued, presented by a group or a living place, within a time frame of one month. A selective procedure excluding many occupants who do not have access to the internet, do not sufficiently master the writing or the art of argumentation, or do not organise themselves into an internal collective.

This pivotal GA is backed by commissions, open to all at the face of it, but requiring availability and knowledge that not everyone has. A “*Hypothèses pour l’avenir*” commission to study the legal possibilities of the division of land, including the different types of lease that can be negotiated with the State, and the statutes of an Association intended to sign the possible agreements and to manage the lands that the State would leave to the movement. A commission to resolve the conflicts that will undoubtedly arise, and a “welcome” commission to accommodate the applicants for a plot on the ZAD, and bring them up to date with the conditions of entry. It is now within these commissions that the structures of the future are being elaborated. In February, these commissions were transformed, by a process that remained opaque for many, into a set of working groups whose right of entry remained the same.

## Bureaucratisation from below

Many of the occupants, who are not part of the dominant fraction, are nonetheless seduced by the formidable efficiency put in place in these structures, and are hired or recruited to do research and present in the GA the different, envisaged legal options. By that, they agree to work in the only authorised framework. Gradually, they begin to think what, a few weeks before, they would never have imagined thinking, and assume rewarding roles of responsibility that

they never imagined being capable of accepting. Because of this position “between two”, they agree to play a role of intermediary with the other occupants, either trying a kind of impossible conciliation given the seriousness of the issues, or trying to persuade once again the most “anti-system” ones to adapt to the more moderate ones.

## **Is this dynamic specific to the NDDL ZAD?**

Perhaps you wonder if these bureaucratic “excesses” are the result of opportunistic individuals who run rampant on the ZAD? Perhaps you have in mind personal examples of struggles confiscated in the same way by an organised group?

We will not return to the dynamics of bureaucratisation of social struggles in the workplace. It goes beyond this framework to dissect the roles of political, associative or syndicalist leaders whose function is very often to get onboard to better control the direction, and to cool down the machine before pushing the brake. Many texts and testimonies denounce these associative, political and syndicalist bureaucracies at work against employees or residents of marginalised neighbourhoods.

We are interested here in the so-called territorial struggles, quite new in the panorama of protest movements.

The Italian No TAV struggle, against the construction of the high-speed train Lyon - Torino in Val di Susa, is emblematic. It is mythified by *Mauvaise Troupe*, as a sister struggle to that of NDDL, notably in the book *Contrées*, 2016.

It would be a popular struggle in which the anarchists have found themselves, it is said, fighting alongside grandmothers and councillors. Anarchists ready for illegal sabotage, once arrested, have been disavowed by much of the No TAV movement opting for a respectable “composition” of the struggle.

“The ritual of the legitimising of the opposition to the TAV is that of “popular assemblies”, a sort of (so-called) moment of direct democracy.”

But this myth of the assembly, falsely horizontal, carries a lot of political elements. It leaves the field open to the leadership of the crowd leaders. It usually restrains implicitly, but sometimes also explicitly, individual initiative or that of small groups. It endorses the “valsusin” centralism (the opinion of the “people of the valley” take precedence over those of others, simply because of their geographical origin) and the constant compromise with the authoritarian components (for the most part from the Autonomists) or legalists (a good number of committees, the pacifists, sometimes parties) of the “movement of a thousand souls”. All these elements are erased in favour of the only aspect that matters: that of seeking an investiture in the “masses” [more: *No-TAV, défendre un territoire ou détruire le vieux monde ?*].

In Bure, where the February expulsions did not spell the end of the resistance, the most seasoned militants also face the challenges of unity and consensus. Few texts from Bure have been written analysing these problems, but in informal conversations, activists often say that they are aware that the unity between political activists, local residents and associations or affinity groups is a deceit. In the assemblies, they encounter the same limits of a horizontal functioning that does not question the interests defended by each one. But since the struggle is in its activist phase, being more recent, the same processes are not so advanced. However, the risk is great to see, here



too, the most radical forced to tone down to preserve unity until a hypothetical “abandonment of the project”.

In the struggles against extraction, in France or elsewhere [more: *Extractivisme, exploitation industrielle de la nature*, Anna Bednik, Le passager Clandestin, 2016], we also encounter these inter-classist compositions. So as not to divide the resistance that defends a territory, all classes are mixed up: villagers and landowners, as well as grassroots volunteers and organising activists, supposedly side by side, maintaining an ideological confusion for the benefit of the latter of each. There is a social correlation not to be forgotten between those who frame the struggles and those who are able to derive the most benefits from it. The executives are never the losers.

In struggles against mining, as in all environmental struggles, those in command have no motivation to fight against the capitalist world, in which they manage to defend their interests. Moreover, they have the means to impose a “goodwill between the different components”, thus deferring the responsibility of internal conflicts to those whose engagement in this struggle is essentially based on anti-capitalist or “anti-system” positions: their radicality can be exploited for actions or threats of illegal actions, in which the citizens refuse to get involved. This “goodwill” is actually a kind of holy water to chase away that cursed “class struggle”.

If these territorial struggles are new, the mechanisms described above are not. Marc Ferro [*Des soviets au communisme bureaucratique Les mécanismes d’une subversion*, 1980] analyses their establishment in the first years of the Soviet revolution. In particular, it details, with references to support, the processes of bureaucratisation from above and bureaucratisation from below. “[...] the phenomenon of bureaucratic capture is not the right of two members of each organisation to the Executive Committee, because this proposal was freely discussed and voted on by the general assembly. The bureaucratic phenomenon appears from when the choice of the two delegates is no longer the responsibility of the assembly but of the governing bodies of each organisation, their Bureau. The general assembly has lost its right of control.” In NDDL, it was according to this procedure that the members of the *Délégation inter-composantes* who wished to negotiate with the state as well as the members of the *Collège de l’Association* were appointed.

“Thus, bureaucratisation from above appears as one of the forms of the struggle that the institutions are engaged in for the conquest of power. It is one of the procedures used by any power to reinforce itself by subverting elective practices, democratic in principle, but constantly distorted. These traits are corroborated by the specific characters of bureaucratisation from below.” (Marc Ferro)

## **Territories in struggle and class struggle**

The environmental struggles to which many activists are rushing, are intended to oppose the statist development of the territory, but they leave aside the problems of wage exploitation and private property, the abolition of which is fundamental for the advent of an egalitarian society. Obscuring those aspects on which all current social movements have come up short, the activists and their citizen allies believe that the class struggle is no longer relevant. Only, whether we like it or not, it is rampant, even in the territorial struggles. Disguising class relations in neighbourhoods and social and economic inequalities in local complicities is a perversion, denounced in the No TAV struggle, which also allowed the ZAD to accept the immediate destruction of the road of chicanes “to reassure neighbours”. Refusing to see these antagonisms, kept under wraps for a

time but which reappear as soon as possible, under the pretext that “we have won these struggles together, all sensibilities of actions mixed up, and we will finish them together” [*Soutenir Bure, toujours*] is to prepare oneself for disillusionment that would not be necessary if these dynamics of reformism and bureaucratisation were denounced from the beginning in an attempt to stop them.

We have not dealt with all aspects of this struggle (material necessities subordinated to organisational tasks, for example [The pyramidal aspect of even horizontal struggles: there are always fewer people making proposals than people required to implement them, it would be important to analyse the roots of this difference in numbers. In addition, there are people who surf the - especially long - struggles for a career. Until we analyse and resolve this problem, it will be difficult to move forward. The division between manual and intellectual work in each group and at different levels is another theme.]), and some considered here would have deserved more investigation. Let’s hope that these few keys will allow you to open discussions on NDDL, and more generally on the dash for power in the struggles that we live in with each other.

The bureaucratisation of the struggle at NDDL is all the more irksome because the occupation of the ZAD has led to exciting experiments in non-standardised agriculture, self-built homes, artisans and artistic activities outside of control, attempts at social relations without sexist or racist domination, for nearly ten years. This struggle is also interesting because of the reflections of those who undergo these dynamics of taking power, who are gradually becoming aware of it, and then who try to oppose it without much effectiveness until now, but who do not give up.

Let’s hear the words of an occupant of the ZAD: “I think this is the most exciting thing we can do here: inventing new forms of organisation, not being fooled and finding ways to adapt when we have the impression of being trampled on, thinking collectively about what we dream of building here.” [*De la bile sur le feu, ZAD, 2017*]

## **A rebellion in the process of integration**

### **Acceptance and pacification: practical case: the D281 road**

What has been described above are mechanisms that have been put in place gradually during many months. Some will say from the beginning of the occupations, practically. Since the fight has moved to another phase on the 17th of January, where are we at now (March 2018)?

For the components that were ready to negotiate, there was no time to lose. Since the establishment of the new *GA des Usages* and its satellite commissions, the substantive discussions were dismissed under the well known pretext of the urgency of the moment. On the 18th of January there was no more hesitation. During the evening’s exceptional GA, COPAIN and the *Coordination*, followed by the CMDO, announced that, as requested by the State, they would begin dismantling the “chicanes” road as early as Monday, 22nd of January. No discussion possible, no concessions possible. The occupants, in the shock of this coup that a farmer of COPAIN admitted a month later to be “crappy”, could only comply under the thinly veiled threat of being alone and stigmatised if they objected. Everyone had in mind the precedent of the GA of the 1st of August (see above).

The ones refractory to free movement on the road of the chicanes (to maintain a pressure in the event of threat of eviction) had been brought to think about a possible development of this road during the winter. Not about the question of the normalisation or not of this road, mind

you, but the question of how to normalise it. “*Cercles de qualité*” were set up during which these modalities were discussed. Little by little, it was no longer conceivable to keep it as it was. It had to be surrendered to the state...

The following week was crucial for the future. The support committees, called in as reinforcements, understood on the job that the “all together” with which their organisers had enticed them, did not stand the test of facts. The initiators of this destruction, supported by the tractors, feared that opposition would turn to violence. They were so aware of the movement’s internal tension that they kept the press off the road, although they have been so fond of good media relations for years. Bit by bit, the chicanes were destroyed, the tires and carcasses of cars swept away. Many occupants were keen to do it properly because it had to be done. Other occupants played the role of intermediary with the refractory ones, to “appease”, to try against all evidence reduce the gap between the different fractions of the movement. It was clear to all now that some components were calling the shots and would use these schemes in the future to assert their private property interests [more: *Déchicanisons : comme un malaise*], and that others would be the butt of the joke, and that their interests (whose main one was to live on the ZAD, in the non-motorised zone, but not only) would not be taken into account. Between these two poles, isolated individuals radicalised themselves, seeing the irreparable created by this coup de force, or on the contrary made concession upon concession to mitigate the consequences.

Since then, the road is officially “open”. The workers took turns to clean it (pruning hedges, cleaning ditches, draining entrances to fields or paths, working on the pavement). The Prefecture, which controls these works, paid no attention to the demands (can one speak of claims faced with such a disproportionate balance of power?). The ecologists in struggle were a cog in the appeasement by negotiating for the works to be “respectful of biodiversity”. At the end of the works, it was clear that they had been the most destructive: there is not a plant left between the roadway and the hedges and the latter are see-through because they were massacred. But it’s done: the land is laid bare, and the “neighbours” come with their family to take their Sunday walk...

The road is open also to the presence of the forces of the state. Gendarme, intelligence and anti-terrorist squadrons also accompanied the workers every day. Officially to “protect” them. But in reality to capture all the information possible: registration of persons, observation of places, and even searches of homes nearby in the absence of occupants. It took a lot of energy to constantly monitor the cops to avoid intrusions, to play the appeasement again to prevent that a slip-up could trigger repression. Especially since the people who made sure that the cops stayed on the road were alone. No taking turns, no solidarity. In this way the dominant fractions of the movement extracted the price of the rebellion of the precarious and despised part of the movement. While preparing the negotiations, they obtained, through fatigue and demoralisation, an acceptance and pacification that they could only obtain thanks to the work of the occupants in the intermediary position.

This does not mean that there was no resistance. In a meadow adjacent to the road, *Lama Fâché* has been rebuilt: a beautiful shed offered by a neighbour, a canteen working with equipment and food given by some living places in the ZAD (but not all). And some works of the DDE [state service in charge of infrastructure works] are sabotaged as soon as finished. But at the end of February, solidarity with the evicted from Bure was difficult to organise. These occupants, despised and left alone in front of the cops (“It’s your fault if the cops are in the area”), do not see why they should be spending energy on solidarity which they themselves do not receive.

## Delegation and negotiation

The problem of delegation to negotiate with the state is another path to the integration of this "Zadist" rebellion. If the perspective of negotiating with the state, which had been fought against for decades until the abandonment of the airport project, was prepared long ago by the citizen components, the same could not be said for some of the occupants who had fought against the airport but who were determined to continue fighting against its world. The farmers of the *Confédération Paysanne* now put forward the satisfaction of their interests: they expect from a negotiation the freezing of land use, giving them the time to organise. "*Foncier droit devant*" [word play: the expression would be *Foncer droit devant* which translates as "Charging straight ahead", instead the word *foncier* is used which could be translated as "profound(ly)" or, alternatively, "real estate" and *droit foncier* also translates as "land rights"] says the leaflet signed by the CMDO on the 10th of February [more: *ZAD will survive* (in French)]. They showed their ability to manage the "Zadists" and to keep them in a framework acceptable to the state. Their struggle is now directed against the FNSEA [big union of farmers] and they hope that the state will, if not be on their side, at least be a "benevolent" referee. The elites of the occupants, in particular the CMDO and its relatives, expect from this negotiation a recognition as interlocutors, for the continued existence of their presence in the area, in order to maintain their material and social resources that would allow "to ensure the influence of the struggle of the ZAD at the international level".

To keep up this image of a democracy that cares for all, it was necessary to convince the maximum of anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist occupants to participate in this negotiation. It is not nothing for people who have refused for years to have spokespersons to designate delegates. It is not nothing neither for people who experienced the police violence of 2012, at Sivens or Bure, the state violence of social exclusion of all kinds, to accept to recognise the state as interlocutor.

For this, there were many meetings, of different forms, to get people to think inside the frame. Meetings that were well controlled by experienced "facilitators" who knew how to cut short the unwelcome or reframe the undecided. For example, we could discuss what we would ask for during the negotiations or what we would never accept as a compromise. But we could never question the very desirability of this negotiation. One could think about the skills required of the delegates, and their numbers, but not whether the occupants wanted them. Little by little, reluctance diminished. And the most critical occupants adapted to the constraints imposed. Even the militarised eviction of the occupants of Bure, fighting against the project of burying nuclear waste, which made 15 arrests, did not call into question the negotiation process. Solidarity with Bure certainly, but that it doesn't disturb our future businesses.

It should be noted, for the record, that the CMDO, which is made up of occupants, has decided to send a delegate only for its group, and therefore does not represent the other occupants. Also note that in the end, there is still a large part of the occupants who did not play the game of these long and tedious meetings, and who remained on the side. They do not feel represented in any way. They are not taken into account: "they will only get what they have been asking for!".

On 28th of February, the Prefect objected to the delegation: she did not want to hear about the association, the freezing of land use, or amnesty. She has issued a warning for evictions "of people who are against the rule of law but who are receiving the RSA [welfare benefit]". She intends to conduct discussions with all "partners" (FNSEA, Chamber of Agriculture, ...) within a monitoring committee and not bilateral negotiations (with only the movement's delegation). On

20th of March, Sébastien Lecornu, the right hand of Nicolas Hulot [then Minister of ecological and fair transition], confirmed the same positions.

As a result, the thinking heads went for the principle of facing reality. They took the hit by saying: “it had been planned, the state tests us at the first appointment”.

The appellists tried to raise the bar by organising a rally (“excessively calm” to reassure the ADECA who will sit on the monitoring committee) in front of the Prefecture on 19th of March and calling on all the associations to protest against all evictions on 31st of March, end of the winter ceasefire in Nantes. They still hope to force open the Prefect’s door and arrange negotiations with the state. Other occupants are still hoping, after this failure, to recover the lost unity by launching actions against the evictions.

## Legalisation and evictions

Legalisation to avoid the eviction promised by [the PM] Edouard Philippe at the end of the winter ceasefire is one of the lines thrown out by the government to get out of this conflict with their heads held high. He also doesn’t want to tarnish his image by embarking on a process of hazardous evictions. Occupants often have experience with these kind of situations, and even if they do not look for them, they will be difficult customers.

The government proposes to continue the existence of the presence of a large number of occupants, provided that they agree to legalise their “illegal” activities. Illegal activities include self-built homes without permits, non-standardised forestry or agricultural activities, the residence of people without papers or evading control, for example.

How many occupants will be ready to be registered, how many will be able to conform to the regulations, to pay the various taxes? How many will agree to live a standardised life while many artisan, agricultural, social, artistic experiences abound without asking any authorisation from anyone (except the concerned surrounding)? These are questions that underlie many conversations, but are never discussed in a meeting. Too delicate, no time...

Farmers from CLIC (occupants with agricultural activities for their own account) intend to take advantage of the hand extended by the Prefect and to legalise their activities, without taking into account their former struggle “outside of the framework”, meaning “not conforming to the norms”.

As for the evictions, we understand a little more at each meeting the fraud of the dominant fraction of the movement. The delegation, despite the received mandate, did not leave the Prefect’s office when she sent them packing: “there will be targeted evictions”. Of course, ADECA, ACIPA and the *Confederation* had just received their invitation for the monitoring committee. The occupants did not break the unity by leaving the office alone... The closer the time of the evictions, the more the positions of the components became cynical: “we agree to oppose evictions within the movement but the saboteurs on the road have put themselves outside of the movement.”

And it is now said that it is not possible to organise for the evictions: impossible to predict, since they are targeted. But they commit themselves “to rebuild more beautiful cabins”, with a contempt and paternalism that is chilling to the bone. The dominant fractions possess the art of not seeing the capacity for reconstruction of the “people of the East” who did not wait for them

to rebuild the *Lama Fâché*. And these interventions are made by people “in-between” who are more and more moving towards the dominants.

## Integration of the rebellion

Although we were aware of the way in which power grabs have taken place in the past and in contemporary struggles, now we have suffered the effects on us. We return for a few moments to a kind of political “self-analysis” to try to understand the implemented mechanisms. The ones described below are not the only ones, there are more violent ones which allow to bring the most recalcitrant ones to reason, in particular the insults, the personal attacks, the blackmail, the threats or the realisation of threats.

We were surprised to realise, after the fact, that we had “believed” in the fable of the Prefect accepting that a “punk-with-dog shed” (*Lama Fâché*) would continue to exist in the middle of a departmental road limited at 90km/h. It was rationally inconceivable. But we ended up believing it. Right, we were not surprised when COPAIN announced that “the Prefect wanted its destruction”. Another example: we were sure, with the experience of others, that negotiating with the state cannot be done without putting in place a balance of power. But we “believed”, carried away by the collective illusion, that this delegation could get a little something, even if insufficient. We were not surprised, however, by the dismissal of the Prefect. This formidable psychological mechanism of double thought, which consists in retaining at the same time two thoughts which cancel each other while denying their opposition, obstructs all resistance. This double thought is still at work in the minds of many occupants who, despite the evidence of inequality and domination they had in front of them, continued to irrationally believe in the “unity of the movement”.

A first mechanism at work in this struggle was the setting up of many internal meetings for the occupants, not closed but not open, often called by emergency messages, where the occupants were led to position themselves in an imposed framework. They are called “*cercles de qualité*”: just like at Toyota where the workers meet to improve the conditions of their exploitation, the occupants were led to reflect on the acceptance of what they refused. This was the case first of all for the destruction of the road, then for the idea of negotiating with the State, then to designate delegates without voting. After the failure of the delegation, this was the case for the ways of not opposing evictions, but to rebuild afterwards “more beautifully”. At first, the idea itself is disgusting, then as friends make the first step down a slippery slope, we fit ourselves into the imposed framework and we surprise ourselves grappling at the snares of this on-board thinking. Suddenly, this bureaucratic glue prevents a profound autonomous thought. For or against, it is always defined in relation to this frame.

A second mechanism that destabilises reflection is ideological shelling through different people, a sort of crossfire. There is the madness of the power trip of that leaflet “Zad will survive” published in thousands of copies for the carnival of the 10th of February, it is one of the last examples (“we are the strongest and we will deceive the state”). On the other hand, the moving of critical people towards dominant positions really destabilises, even though they had positions or written texts with which we agreed in the past. This is the role of “in-between”, it is very effective. Especially since this movement is not a sudden reversal, but an insidious step-by-step that also testifies to the destabilisation of these people. So finding ourselves reflecting with shifting people (in the same vein as sands that are moving), we begin to doubt the relevance of our analysis and

even the radicality of our positions. Alertness is all the more weakened because these people are close to us.

A third mechanism is that of the division of labour of domination. In the past few months, many committees transformed into working groups and have captured the energy of all kinds of occupants: from the thinking heads to the intermediaries who are concerned about being recognised for their skills, through the leaders of components with an external network they claimed to be powerful. This hierarchy in the elaboration of the future, leaving a large number of occupants on the sidelines, deprives them of knowledge that is being built without them. We are from school onwards conditioned to experience a certain fascination, not to say submission, to any procedure, any regulation. Those figures of authority who proclaim they are the most competent and who, in fact, have the cards in hand, disarm those who do not sit in these entities. As always, we feel inferior to these experts, we restrain criticism, we just allow a timid question.

This is how the assimilation to the dominant line takes place.

Based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, we can describe three forms. The objectified form, which takes the very concrete aspect of documents and texts. We think here of *Sursis ou sursaut*, published in the *ZadNews*, in the summer of 2017, or *Le manteau et le corps*, published a few weeks later. These texts carry the analysis of the CMDO to all the cabins, and into the heads that live there. It also takes the institutionalised form, new commissions and the *GA des Usages*, which were created with rules that keep out opposition [...]. These bureaucratic procedures eliminate many opponents who entrench themselves in an ineffective scene. The embodied form is the most formidable. This form is not imaginary. It's the brain that actually works. We come to say, by a formidable psychological reversal: "the *GA des Usages* thinks like me". And we comply, without realising it, with what has been validated in the chambers of decisions beforehand.

This is how we come to think of as unavoidable situations that were considered unthinkable.

As in the USSR, relatively speaking, the opponents of the dominant fraction, which was gradually gaining power, were silent. Outwards: to avoid tarnishing the image of the "Movement" and undermining the solidarity essential to achieving the goal: the abandonment of the airport project. Inwards too: self-censorship has been powerful. And it took weeks, after the announcement of this abandonment on the 17th of January 2018, for the words to be released and critical analysis texts to be published. As with the USSR, the first to denounce this situation were not believed, they were even called "liars", "paranoid", "divisive" ... As in the USSR, the opponents at first did everything to ensure the group's long-term survival. The idea of rupture was unacceptable. The interests of the collective went before their personal interests. Many of them participated fully in the preparation of demonstrations that they criticised [as with *Fête des bâtons*, 8th October 2017, and *Fête de la victoire*, 10th February 2018], considering that it was their duty "to make the ZAD function even if we do not agree", even feeling guilty because they don't live up to the imposed pace of work.

## **Conclusion? The eviction of conflictuality**

There is no conclusion possible. The story is not over.

At the time of writing, the date of the ultimatum for the evictions has not yet been exceeded. Let's bet that it is the most precarious, the most "border-line", those who will be pointed out by the state, or who cannot or will not comply with the diktats of the state, who will pay for the

normalisation. Many will no longer see any sense in living in an area that has become a tourist or ecological reserve [more: *Ça y est, on a gagné*] and will leave on their own. Others, out of bravado or because they have nowhere to go, will wait to be evicted, in small waves.

To tell the truth, the evictions started long ago, with the departure of the opponents who no longer saw any sense in staying while they saw a devastating normalisation that few people wanted or could fight against.

The evictions took another turn the 1st of June 2018, when the Prime Minister appointed a mediator and the components of the struggle (except the occupants) rushed to be heard. Then in February and March, when the delegates (including the occupants) went to the Prefecture, hoping for a negotiation that the state refused them. It was the eviction of the conflictuality that took place then. Quietly, evacuated in the car trunk of delegates... Since then, it was never able to return.

*“Winston dropped his arms and slowly filled his lungs with air. His mind escaped to the labyrinth of double thought. To know and not to know. In full awareness and with absolute good faith, utter carefully arranged lies. To simultaneously retain two opinions that cancel each other out when we know they are contradictory and believe in both. Use logic against logic. To repudiate morality when one appeals to it. [...] Above all, apply the same process to the process itself. There was the ultimate subtlety. Persuade consciously the unconscious, then become unconscious of the act of hypnosis that has just been perpetrated. The very understanding of the word “double thought” implied the use of double thought.” - George Orwell, 1984.*



The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



I.M.  
Dynamics Inherent to Protest Movements  
Summer 2019

Translated for The Local Kids, Issue 4  
First appeared as *Des dynamiques inhérents aux mouvements de contestation* by I.M., March 2018

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**