

# To Seize the Moment

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More than one hundred thousand enraged persons who for almost 4 weeks now occupy roundabouts and toll booths, who try to block or slow down the operating of logistical hubs and supermarkets, oil depots or at times factories, who gather each Saturday in small towns as well as big cities to attack local state headquarters and city halls, or just to destroy and loot what surrounds them. Behold, the autumn gives birth out of the blue to yet another social movement. Enough to have those who have a nose for the smell of herds come running to attempt to steer it, or just to be there where it happens, following the smell of teargas. Like during the syndicalist movement against the Loi Travail in 2016 (March till September) and its follow-up against the regulatory implementations in 2017 (September till November), or against the reform of the railway company this year (April till June). But it didn't really go down like that this time.

For once a movement emerged in a self-organized manner outside of parties and syndicates, for once it has from the start set its own dates on a local as well as on a national level – mostly daily and not on a weekly or monthly rhythm of big days orchestrated by the leaders of the herd and from the start controlled by the police – setting out even its own places and trajectories of confrontation and of blockades, resolutely refusing to beg for a state authorisation in advance. [...]

[The following paragraphs are a harsh critique of an anti-authoritarian milieu that was disorientated by the eruption of this movement and was missing the usual framework of leftist slogans, demands and leaders. When the comfortable position of “most radical” of the left is not available, many seemingly choose to stay behind their screens and dismiss the events as not enough this or that to meet their stand-

ards for what constitutes a legitimate movement (apparently one spearheaded by an authoritarian left is preferable). The original text is quite specific to the French context and also in the meantime many seem to have been able to overcome their initial aversion (see the follow-up text). Thus this translation skips a few pages. – TLK]

[...] To drown with delight in the red herd or to jump with reluctance into the yellow herd; that is a good example of a fake dichotomy, because the terms itself of the question are flawed. In our view the question is never to take part or not take part in a movement, to be spectator or actor, but only to act to destroy the existent in all circumstances, with or without the context of a particular struggle, that others are motivated at the start by this or that more or less (un)interesting crumb, as long as we act with our own ideas, practices and perspectives. Inside, outside or next to a movement, in relation to it or far off it. Alone or with several. Daylight or night time.

As for the insurrectionary question; it is true that if we want to bring down the state and destroy all authority, it seems to be an essential prerequisite – which in any case will not be only an act of anarchists and revolutionaries (it's precisely for this reason that the authoritarian neo-Blanquists [Auguste Blanqui – revolutionary socialist and non-Marxist – in favour of conspirators seizing power through an insurrection and starting to implement a new society from above – France, 1805-1881] spend their time attempting to steer struggles and movements, to find a mass to direct, or that others persistently attempt to recruit followers in them). Revolts and insurrections emerge already without us, and when we neither have a desire to manage these movements nor a contempt towards slaves that revolt for their own reasons, the interesting question

becomes rather: what do we want to do? To act already without waiting, here and now, doesn't exclude the possibility to act all the more so when a chaotic mess of a situation emerges. Certainly when we have reflected a minimum on our own perspectives. When we are then capable in all autonomy to *seize the moment* that is presented to realise our own subversive projects.

As for revolution; we agree with what some Italian anarchists have written in a text about what has been happening in France (*Di che colore è la tua Mesa?*), from which we take up one of the threads. For those who still cherish this desire; how do we imagine a revolution could emerge? Do we really think it would be the work of a convergence of social movements, all endowed with a legitimate claim, motivated through decisions by unanimity in assemblies where the most radical idea will win the day? Thus in such a scenario a movement would be born with an impeccable cause, with at its helm the most enlightened militants that will guide it from battle to battle, winning inspiring victories, its ranks growing, its reputation increasing, its example spreading like a virus, other similar movements popping up, their forces meeting, enriching and multiplying each other, till arriving at the final confrontation during which the state is finally brought down... Such a nice tale! Who produced it, Netflix? Which episode are we at? If we don't want to ridicule, we can also stay serious. Better, we can even scientifically analyse. Like the visionary Bordigists [Bordiga – Marxist, anti-Stalinist and pro-dictatorship of the proletariat – the political party and programme are the unambiguous expression of the real movement of the proletariat towards communism – Italy, 1889-1970] who knew from August 1936 there was no revolution happening in Spain. The reason for it was evident, an obvious fact before everyone's eyes, it's even embarrassing having to recall it: without revolutionary theory no revolution, without revolutionary party no revolutionary theory. Was there a revolutionary party in Spain (theirs, of course)? No? Thus, what could we be talking about?

Because in the course of history the spark of riots, insurrections and revolutions has almost never come from profound reasons but from simple pretexts (for example: the moving of a gun battery triggered the Paris Commune [March till May 1871 – while the

French army retreats and the Prussian army surrounds Paris, its streets are transformed by an insurrection, eventually smothered in blood by the French army], a protest against the hotchpotch made by the German naval military ignited the November Revolution [in 1918 – inspired by the Spartakusbund, an anti-war and revolutionary socialist group – a second uprising in January 1919 against the anti-revolutionary and pro-war social-democrats ended with the murder of two Spartacus leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht], the suicide of a street vendor launched the Arab Spring, the cutting down of some trees brought about the Gezi Park revolt in Turkey). We find it really embarrassing that those faced with the yellow vests (or yesterday, the Catalan autonomy protests) only focus their gaze on it to find traces of the communist programme, or the anarchist idea, or radical theory, or anti-industrial critique, or... After which – following the disappointment of not having identified a sufficiently subversive content in the streets, of not having counted enough masses, of not having noticed enough proletarian roots, of not having recorded a sufficiently equal female presence, of not having heard a sufficiently correct language, and we could go on forever – there can only be disgust and the question of who could benefit from all this social agitation. *Cui prodest?* [Legal term: Whom does it profit? To whose benefit is the crime done?]

If some put the riots that shook the country in November 2005 down to a pre-electoral ploy of Sarkozy – who would have intentionally put oil on a small flame (one of many police atrocities) to ignite and then put out, to be afterwards rewarded as a competent firefighter – in the same vein, it would be easy today to see the hand of Le Pen in the popular demand for the resignation of Macron. At the moment when a strong wind in favour of the right blows through Europe, why wait until the next electoral deadline while it is possible to bring it closer with a slight nudge? This is a conspiracy theory that, also in its logical trait, is above all totally idiotic to formulate. But, of course, the lion tamer Sarkozy or the aspiring circus director Le Pen could secretly have opened the gates of the wild animals to spread panic and, when the emergency situation is over, could be called upon to replace the incompetent that wasn't capable of protecting society!

But let's imagine, even if it's absurd, that it would have happened like this... and so? Those wild animals are all of us, and it's exactly during moments of free movement that our possibilities increase to get rid of the cages of this world. As long as we are locked in, we stay mainly powerless, only capable of roaring and baring our teeth – always more decayed. But during these days of freedom, even if we are chased after, everything becomes possible again, including the impossible. Has it been decided that our freedom should only be temporary, a short-term arrangement for an investment in the middle or long term? Then it is up to us that it becomes permanent, screwing up the plans of those who were certain of being capable of controlling the demon of revolt after having summoned it. If someone leaves the cage open then it makes not a lot of sense to lose oneself in elaborate imaginings on their real intentions or to stay inside as not to serve some obscure plot. Better hurry out and attempt at all costs to not get caught again.

All said, for who still cherishes such a desire, how do we imagine the eruption of a revolution? Conscious that it probably only can spring from a heterogeneous situation, in the midst of opposed interests, expressed in a confused and contradictory way; should we however defend opposed interests, expressed in a confused and contradictory way? The fact that the pretext of riots, insurrections and revolutions is almost always trivial – does that mean that we should repeat the triviality?

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The trap for all militants – irrespective of being defeatist or enthusiast – is that in situations of social turmoil their brain is fine-tuned to pose only one question; which *direct* and *productive* links to create with the protest movements. They are obsessed with the quest for the revolutionary subject to place themselves at the service of, or just to praise. Thus one can hype the slightest confrontation in the outskirts with the cops or authorities without caring about the question of individual motivations (maybe linked with the trade in illegal substances, with a problem of hiring a local workforce, with a conflict over mob territory, with a religious drive, *or with still more things?*) while stubbornly refusing to consider the slightest confrontation of the yellow vests on the



squares and roundabouts with the cops or authorities because one suspects too much individual motivations (maybe linked with the trade in legal substances, with a problem of hiring workforce, with a discontent with taxes, with a nationalist drive, *or with still more things?*).

It's like reinventing the same wheel every time: no, the others in revolt are not anarchists, they join in for their own reasons, that we can find passionate or futile, that we can know clearly *or not*. But what is of interest to us, is that the revolt here opens up space there, in a diffuse possibility to go from the centre to the periphery, that it allows to experiment with forms of direct or indirect complicity, and that it breaks a normality that has been going on for too long. It's up to the anarchists to stir up their own perspectives by feeding the communicating vessels of idea and action, it's not up to others. During quiet moments as well as during storms. And so, maybe, our dreams and anger find an echo in other rebellious hearts.

Gladly though, not everyone is a *militant*, and so can be more interested in what any conflict or disturbance opens up, not so much for others, but for themselves as well. In the midst of this mess that slows down the intervention of repression and facilitates the "not seen, not caught", do possibilities exist that are otherwise too hard, or even impossible? Far away from this mess on which repression is concentrating, can we attain objectives otherwise untouchable? Upon closely examining the movement of the yellow vests, we can see that many have already begun answering these questions, al-

lowing us to set out some leads on the possibilities to seize the moment. These are only some examples, far from making a comprehensive list, banal leads maybe, more or less shareable, but all suggest something to nourish the imagination.

The 24<sup>th</sup> of November on the Champs-Élysée, when it wasn't clear yet that the upcoming Saturdays would take a riotous turn beyond the forces of police, unknowns had set out to free themselves of the horrors of wage labour by organising to loot the Dior store. Almost 500,000 euros of jewellery and other gadgets have changed hands in a few minutes side by side with ongoing confrontations. Beyond the expropriation of a wide range of common consumer products from sports shops and supermarkets, to mobile phones and laptops (Paris, Marseille, La Réunion, Toulouse, Saint-Étienne, Le Havre, Bordeaux, Charleville-Mézières, Saint-Avold, Le Mans, Bourg-en-Bresse), also some other jeweller's shops or upscale stores here and there have been stripped bare. Generally speaking, alone in the capital, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry counted 142 businesses looted or trashed (+95 with only a broken front window) during the riot of the 1<sup>st</sup> of December and 144 businesses looted or trashed (+102 with only a broken front window) on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December.

In the same vein, one could question what other possibilities the occupation of a roundabout and the complicity in action would offer, besides blocking or slowing down the circulation of products. To this end, the example of what happened in Belgium can be particularly telling. Not content with having burned a fuel tanker in Feluy (20<sup>th</sup> of November) and having heavily clashed with the cops during several days, five blocked lorries were relieved of their load the following days (21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November). Next the movement of the yellow vests was joined by several hundreds when the conflict zone moved from the highway to the city of Charleroi, sidestepping the question of the social or geographical origins, the practice of looting continued. Besides the traditional supermarket, also a ATM of BNP was not only destroyed but first pulled off its base to be emptied (23<sup>rd</sup> of November).

In a similar way at the start of the movement, a truck loaded with 900 tires was fast immobilized in Le Havre on a roundabout occupied by yellow vests

(20<sup>th</sup> of November). Once the security system deactivated, some individuals set about emptying it and not less than 250 new tires vanished, in spite of the opposition of the more legalistic attendees. One hour later, emboldened by the new possibilities, a IT shop next to the roundabout was completely looted (as well as the restaurant of the commercial zone).

Looting of jeweller's stores, lorries, ATM's; how many more possibilities when a movement as this of the yellow vests opens up space for everybody and everyone, without leaders nor security stewards nor trajectory designed with the cops?

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December in Avignon while in lots of other cities the demonstrators were gathering in front of the city hall or prefecture to attempt to storm it (the one of Puy-en-Velay was partially burned on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December to the cries of "You will fry like chickens"), a small group decided to take care of the courthouse: almost 30 meters of thick windows were smashed. In Charleroi the tribunal also received Molotovs during the riots.

In Toulouse on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December during a destructive riot that lasted for hours, a group similarly decided to pay a visit to the control room of the CCTV of the city situated in the Saint-Cyprien neighbourhood. While the municipal stalkers were inside, its windows were being smashed and its own camera stoned. While the attack was very brief, the syndicates nonetheless demanded to move the HQ of CCTV, it became a bit too hot this time. In Blagnac on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December instead of simply blocking the Saint-Exupéry secondary school, the



pupils ignited the heap of trash wisely piled up in front of the entrance: the fire destroyed the reception room and hall, while the rooms for the teachers, the school library, the administrative premises and the science rooms were severely damaged (1 million euros in damages) and the school closed for a week. At the tollbooths of the highway Narbonne-Sud, blocked by yellow vests, during the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December a group didn't only trash it (as in Virsac, Perpignan, Bollène, La Ciotat, Sète, Mui, Carcassonne) but also burned the infrastructure of Vinci [this omnipresent company also operates toll roads] and of the police station. Aside from 800 m<sup>2</sup> of premises and its security HQ, Vinci also lost some 30 vehicles, while the servicemen lost two vans aside from their premises and material (computers, radio, uniforms).

Attacks on courthouses, CCTV headquarters, police stations or schools; how many more possibilities when a movement like the yellow vests opens up space for everybody and everyone, without leaders nor stewards nor trajectory designed with the cops?

Finally, further away from the crowds, either to take advantage of repressive forces overburdened elsewhere, or to nourish the conflict with their own objectives, night birds went for a walk in the moon light. Several tax and social welfare offices were attacked with different means (with burning tires as in Vénissieux the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, in Riom the 4<sup>th</sup> and in Semur-en-Auxois the 14<sup>th</sup>, with gas bottles and Molotovs in Saint-Andiol the 4<sup>th</sup> and in Saint-Avoid the 14<sup>th</sup>, with a burning rubbish container in Chalon-sur-Saône the 27<sup>th</sup> of November). While there's no reason during a period of blocking traffic to only focus on roads; a relay station for railway signals was burned in Castellans on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. And four yellow vests that met on a roundabout in the Lorraine region, embarked on a nocturnal spree the 28<sup>th</sup> of November. They sabotaged 9 railway crossings between Saint-Dié and Nancy, opening with a crowbar the control boxes to force the barrier arms to close, thus blocking all road traffic. Elsewhere a campaign office of a deputy of the LREM [party of

Macron] lost its windows in Vernon (Eure) the 29<sup>th</sup> of November and likewise in Nantes on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December. Or some aimed directly at the homes of two others: in Vézac (Dordogne) on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December the car of a deputy and her husband was reduced to ashes and in Bourgtheroulde (Eure) on the 15<sup>th</sup>, yellow vests marked with 20 signs the road leading up to the house of a deputy who heard six shots of a hunting rifle in front of his door.

Destruction of institutional premises, sabotage of major railway routes, visits of offices and homes of deputies, how many more possibilities for those who want to make their own nocturnal contribution, *including one not based in a consensus*, through acts that go against the demands of the movement as well as against the interests of the state? When a cell tower of Orange is sabotaged on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November in Villeparisis, we don't think that it fits directly into a struggle stuck in the technological cages. So what? When three sites of Enedis [company that manages the electricity network distribution] are delivered to the flames as in Foix on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, we don't think that it fits directly into a struggle that demands more state and local public services. So what?

There are as many possibilities of nourishing social war as there are individuals. Inside, outside or besides a movement, in relation to it or far off it. Alone or with several. Daylight or night time. *As long as we do it with our own ideas, practices and perspectives*, far from politics, herd mentality or composition [a concept in fashion in the radical leftist milieus of France – attempting through political strategy and discourse to steer different sectors of a struggle or movement in a same direction, by fabricating (and enforcing) consensus on aims and means and suppressing contradictory or dissent voices]. With this movement of yellow vests as on a more general level, one of the knots of the question is certainly there: actually, what is our perspective? And which means do we give ourselves to reach it, in calm as well as hectic conditions? *Un peu d'imagination, que diable!*