



**IN OTHER WORDS:
THE SITUATION IS
EXCELLENT**

AN INTERVIEW WITH
JULIEN COUPAT

LE MONDE | 5.25.09 – Here are the responses to the questions that we [Isabelle Mandraud and Caroline Monnot] posed in writing to Julien Coupat. Placed under investigation on 15 November 2008 for “terrorism,” along with eight other people interrogated in Tarnac (Correze) and Paris, he is suspected of having sabotaged the suspended electrical cables of the SNCF. He is the last one still incarcerated. (He has asked that certain words be in italics.)

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The revolt has conditions, but not *causes*. How many Ministries of National Identity, lay-offs, raids of those without proper papers or those who are political opponents, young people beaten up by the police in the banlieus, and ministers threatening to deprive diplomas from those who dare to occupy their schools are necessary before one decides that such a regime — even if installed in power by an apparently democratic plebiscite — has no reason to exist and only merits being brought down? It is a matter of sensitivity.

Servitude is the intolerable thing that can be tolerated indefinitely. Because this is a matter of sensitivity and this sensitivity is *immediately political* — not that it wonders “Who should I vote for?” but “Is *this* compatible with my existence?” — it is, for power, a question of anesthetizing the response [to the second question] through the administration of ever more massively distracting doses of fear and stupidity. And there where the anesthesia no longer works, this order, which has united against it all the *reasons* for revolt, tries to dissuade us by stuffing us into a small, tight-fitting [ajustee] terror.

My comrades and I are only a variable in this adjustment. One suspects us like so many others, so many “youths,” so many “gangs,” of having no solidarity with a world that is collapsing. On this one point, one doesn’t lie. Fortunately, this heap of swindlers, impostors, industrialists, financiers and prostitutes; this entire Mazarin’s court full of neuroleptics, Disney versions of Louis Napoleon, and Sunday shows that grip the country for an hour lack an elementary sense of dialectics. Each step that they take towards total control brings them closer to their fear. Each new “victory” with which they flatter themselves spreads a little further the desire to see them defeated in their turn. Each maneuver that they figure comforts their power ends up rendering it detestable. In other words: the situation is excellent. This isn’t the moment to lose courage.

which the mind is brought by re-reading *Surveiller et Punir* in prison. Of course, one isn't suggesting, given what the Foucaultians have done with the works of Foucault for the last twenty years, that they should spend some time in jail.

HOW DO YOU ANALYZE WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?

A. Enlighten yourself: what has happened to us, to my comrades and I, will also happen to you. This is the first mystification by power: nine people are prosecuted in the framework of a judicial proceeding against an “association of evil-doers in connection with a terrorist enterprise,” and they must be particularly concerned by these grave accusations. But there is no “Tarnac Affair,” no “Coupat Affair,” no “Hazan Affair” (Hazan published *The Coming Insurrection*). What there is, is an oligarchy that is very wobbly and becomes ferocious like any power when it feels itself to be *really threatened*. When his views no longer elicit anything among the people other than hatred and scorn, the prince has no other support than the fear that he inspires.

What there is before us is a bifurcation that is both historical and metaphysical: either we pass from a paradigm of government to a paradigm of living, at the price of a cruel but deeply moving revolt, or we allow the instauration at the planetary level of an air-conditioned disaster in which — under the yoke of a “simplified” management — an imperial elite of citizens and marginalized plebeian classes coexist. Thus there surely is a *war*, a war between the beneficiaries of the catastrophe and those who are accustomed to a less skeletal idea of life. One has never seen a dominant class commit suicide willingly.

HOW ARE YOU SPENDING YOUR TIME?

A. Very well, thank you. Chin-ups, jogging and reading.

CAN YOU RECALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUR ARREST FOR US?

A. A gang of youths, hooded and armed to the teeth, broke into our house. They threatened us, handcuffed us, and took us away, after having broken everything to pieces. They first took us into very fast cars capable of moving at more than 170 kilometers an hour on the highways. In their conversations, the name of a certain Mr Marion (former leader of the anti-terrorist police) came up often. His virile exploits amused them very much, such as the time he slapped one of his colleagues in the face, in good spirits and at a going-away party. They sequestered us for four days in one of their “people’s prisons,” where they stunned us with questions in which absurdity competed with obscenity.

The one who seemed to be the brains of the operation vaguely excused himself from this circus by explaining that it was the fault of the “services,” the higher-ups, all kinds of people who want [to talk to] us very much. Today, my kidnappers are still free. Certain recent and diverse facts attest to the fact that they continue to rage with total impunity.

THE SABOTAGE OF THE SNCF CABLES IN FRANCE WAS CLAIMED [BY SOMEONE] IN GERMANY. WHAT DO YOU SAY ABOUT THAT?

A. At the moment of our arrest, the French police were already in possession of the communique that claimed, in addition to the acts of sabotage that they want to attribute to us, other simultaneous attacks in Germany. This communique is inconvenient to the police for a number of reasons: it was mailed from Hanover, drafted in German and sent to newspapers in the Outer Rhine area exclusively; but it is especially inconvenient because it does not fit the framework of the mediatic¹ fable about us: a small nucleus of fanatics bringing the battle to the heart of the State by hanging three iron bars on the cables. From then on, they took care to not mention this communique too much, either in court or in the public lie.

It is true that the sabotage of the train lines lost much of its mysterious aura as a result: now it would be a matter of simple protest against the transportation of ultra-radioactive nuclear wastes to Germany over railroads and denunciations (made in passing) of the great rip-off known as “the crisis.” The communique concludes with a very SNCF-like “*We thank the travelers on the trains concerned for their understanding.*” What tact there is among these “terrorists”!

DO YOU RECOGNIZE YOURSELF IN THE PHRASES “ANARCHO-AUTONOMOUS CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE” AND “ULTRA-LEFT”?

A. Let me resume what I was saying. In France, we are currently living through the end of a period of historical freezing, the founding act of which was the accord reached in 1945 by the Gaullists and the Stalinists to disarm the people under the

¹ There is no adequate English equivalent for *mediatique*, which not only refers to the media, but to the spectacular, as well.

tors who are concerned with the “meaning of the penalty”; in sum, all of the debate on the horror of incarceration and the necessity of humanizing detention is as old as the prison system itself. It is part of its efficacy, which permits the State to combine the terror that the prison must inspire with the hypocritical legal status of “civilized” punishment. The little system of prison-based spying, humiliation and violence [de ravage] that the French State uses more fanatically than any other State in Europe isn’t even scandalous. The State pays for it a hundred times over in the banlieus, and this, from all the evidence, is only a beginning: vengeance is the hygiene of the plebes.

But the most remarkable imposture of the judicial-penal system certainly consists in pretending that it exists to punish criminals when, in fact, it only *manages illegality*. Any boss — not just the boss of Everything — any president of a general council — not just the President of Hauts-de-Sein — any cop knows that illegality is necessary for the correct performance of his or her trade. In our time, the chaos of the laws is such that one would do well to not seek to make the laws respected too much and the drug enforcements agents [les stup] should stick to regulating trafficking and not repressing it, which would be social and political suicide.

The discussion is not — as the judicial fiction would have it — between the legal and the illegal, between the innocents and the criminals, but between the criminal whom one judges suitable for prosecution and the criminal whom one leaves in peace, as the general powers of society require. The race of the innocents was wiped out long ago, and the penalty is not what condemns you to justice: the penalty *is justice itself*; thus, it isn’t a matter of my comrades and I “claiming our innocence,” despite what is ritualistically repeated in the press, but trying to derail the hazardous political offensive that these vile proceedings constitute. These were some of the conclusions to

YOU'VE READ *DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH* BY MICHEL FOUCAULT. DOES THIS ANALYSIS STILL SEEM PERTINENT TO YOU?

A. The prison is indeed the *dirty little secret* of French society, the key to and not the margins of the most respectable social relations. What is concentrated in the prison is not a pile of wild barbarians, as it pleases some people to think, but in fact the ensemble of the disciplines that weave together so-called “normal” existence outside. Supervisors, the canteen, soccer games in the courtyard, one’s use of time, divisions, camaraderie, fights and ugly architecture: one has to have been in prison to take the full measure of the carceral in the school, the “innocent” schools of the Republic.

Envisioned from this impregnable angle, prison isn’t a pit [repaire] for society’s failures; instead, current society is a failed prison. The same organization of separations, the same administration of misery through shit,⁶ TV, sports and porno reigns everywhere else, but much less methodically than in prison. To conclude: these high walls only hide from view this truth of explosive banality: there are lives and souls, entirely equal, who drag themselves along on both sides of the barbed wire, and because of it.

If one avidly tracks down the testimonies “from the inside” that finally expose the secrets that the prison conceals, it is done to better to hide the secret that the prison *is*: the secret of your servitude, you who are reputedly free, while its menace weighs invisibly on each of your gestures.

All of the virtuous indignation that surrounds the black hole [la noirceur] of French prisons and their suicide rates; all the crude counter-propaganda of the penal administrators who bring on camera the disciplinarians [des matons] devoted to the well-being of the detainees and the metal-plated direc-

⁶ English in original.

pretext of “avoiding a civil war.” The terms of this pact can be formulated thus: while the Right will renounce its overtly fascist accents, the Left will abandon all serious revolutionary perspectives. For four years, the advantage of Sarkozy’s clique has been the fact that it unilaterally took the initiative by breaking this pact and renewing “without apologies” the classics of pure reaction concerning the insane, religion, the West, Africa, work, the history of France and national identity.

Faced with a power *at war* that dares to think strategically and divide the world into “friends,” “enemies” and “negligible quantities,” the Left remains frozen, as if sick with tetanus. It is too cowardly, too compromised and, more than anything else, too discredited to offer the least resistance to a power that it doesn’t dare treat as an enemy and that, one by one, snatches away the sly *devils* [les malins] among its ranks. As for the extreme Left (Besancenot, for example): whatever its electoral results, and even if it has emerged from the groupuscular state in which it long vegetated, it hasn’t a more desirable perspective to offer than Soviet gray that has been slightly retouched in Photoshop. Its destiny is to deceive and disappoint.

Thus, in the sphere of political representation, the established power has nothing to fear from anyone. And certainly not the union bureaucracies, which are more corrupt than ever and now importune power [for help]. They do this, they who have danced an obscene ballet with the government for the last two years! In such conditions, the only force that can put a check on the Sarkozy gang, its only *real* enemy in this country, is the street, the street and its old revolutionary penchants. During the riots that followed the second part of the ritualized plebiscite of May 2007, only the street knew how to rise to the occasion. In the Antilles, during the recent occupations of companies and factories, it alone knew how to make another voice heard.

This summary analysis of the theater of operations was soon to be confirmed in June 2007, when the intelligence agencies published — under the bylines of journalists working under orders (notably for *Le Monde*) — the first articles bringing to light the terrible peril that is placed upon all social life by the “anarcho-autonomes.” To start, one attributed to them the *organization of spontaneous riots*, which, in so many towns, saluted the “electoral triumph” of the new president.

With this fable of “anarcho-autonomes,” one has sketched out the *profile of the menace* to which the Minister of the Interior is docilely committed to give a little flesh and a few faces by organizing targeted arrests in mediatic police raids. When one can no longer contain what overflows, one can still assign it a case number and incarcerate it. Thus, the case of the “rioter,” in which the workers of Clairoix, urban youths, student blockaders and anti-summit demonstrators are dumped pell-mell — this is certainly an effective move in the current management of social pacification — permits the State to criminalize actions, not existences.² And it is indeed the intention of the new power to attack the enemy, *as such*, without waiting for him to declare himself. Such is the vocation of the new categories of repression.

Finally, it hardly matters that no one in France recognizes him or herself as “anarcho-autonomous” or that the ultra-left is a political current that had its moment of glory in the 1920s and that, subsequently, never produced anything other than inoffensive volumes of Marxology. Moreover, the recent fortunes of the term “ultra-left,” which have permitted some journalists to catalogue the Greek rioters of last December without striking a blow, speak to the fact that no one knows what the ultra-left was nor even that it ever existed.

² There could be typos in or words left out of the original French. The context suggests that the case of the “*casseur*” allows the State to criminalize existences and actions.

What founds the accusation of terrorism where we are concerned are suspicions about the coincidence of thought and life; what founds the accusation concerning the association of evil-doers is the suspicion that this coincidence couldn't have been the result of individual heroism, but communal attention. Negatively, this means that one does not suspect any of those who sign their names to so many fierce critiques of the system of putting the least of their firm resolutions into practice; the insult is strong enough. Unfortunately, I am not the author of *The Coming Insurrection*, and this whole affair will end up convincing us of the essentially *repressive* [policiere] character of the author's function.

On the other hand, I am a reader. Re-reading it, just last week, I better understood the hysterical bad temper that, from high up, motivates the State to hound its presumed authors. The scandal of the book is that all that figures in it is rigorously, catastrophically true and it does not cease to prove itself true, little by little, each day. Because what proves itself, under the outward appearance of this “economic crisis,” this “collapse of confidence,” and this “massive rejection of the ruling classes,” is indeed the end of a civilization, the implosion of a paradigm, namely, that of the *government*, which rules everything in the West — the relations of beings to themselves no less than to the political order, religion or the organization of business. At all levels of the present, there is a gigantic *loss of mastery* that no word-games [maraboutage] by the police will be able to remedy.

It is not by skewering us with prison terms, microscopic surveillance, judicial supervision and prohibitions upon communication because we might be the authors of these lucid findings that one will make what has been found disappear. The characteristic of truth is that it escapes, barely enunciated, from those who formulate it. Governments: it doesn't accomplish anything if you send us to jail; quite the contrary.

WHY TARNAC?

A. Go there, you will understand. If you don't, no one could *explain* it to you, I fear.

DO YOU DEFINE YOURSELF AS AN INTELLECTUAL? A PHILOSOPHER?

A. Philosophy was born like chatty grief from original wisdom. Plato already heard the words of Heraclitus as if they had escaped from a bygone world. In the era of diffused intellectuality, one can't see what "the intellectual" might make specific, unless it is the expanse of the gap that separates the faculty of thinking from the aptitude for living. Intellectual and philosopher are, in truth, sad titles. But *for whom* exactly is it necessary to define oneself?

ARE YOU THE AUTHOR OF *THE COMING INSURRECTION*?

A. This is the most formidable aspect of these proceedings: a book *integrally* versed in the case histories of instructional manuals, in the interrogations in which one tries to make you say that you live just as described in *The Coming Insurrection*; that you protest⁵ as *The Coming Insurrection* advocates; and that you sabotaged train lines to commemorate the Bolshevik coup d'Etat of October 1917. Because this idea is mentioned in *The Coming Insurrection*, its publisher was questioned by the anti-terrorist services.

In French memory, one hasn't seen power become fearful of a book for a very long time. Instead, one had the custom of believing that as long as leftists were preoccupied with writing, at least they weren't making revolution. Assuredly, times change. Serious history returns.

⁵ *vous manifeste* can also mean "demonstrate" and "reveal yourself."

At this point — and in the anticipation of outbursts that can only be systematized in the face of the provocations of a hard-pressed global and French oligarchy — the utility of these categories to the police must no longer be debated. Nevertheless, one cannot predict whether "anarcho-autonomous" or "ultra-left" will finally carry off the favors of the Spectacle and relegate a totally justified revolt to the inexplicable.

THE POLICE CONSIDER YOU THE LEADER OF A GROUP ON THE POINT OF TIPPING OVER INTO TERRORISM. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?

A. Such a pathetic allegation can only be the work of a regime that is on the point of tipping over into nothingness.

WHAT DOES THE WORD TERRORISM MEAN TO YOU?

A. Nothing allows one to explain why the Algerian Department of Intelligence and Security, suspected of having orchestrated — with the knowledge of the DST³ — the wave of attacks in 1995, is not classed among the international terrorist organizations. Nothing allows one to explain the sudden transformation of "terrorists" into heroes in the manner of the Liberation, into partners suitable for the Evian Accords, into Iraqi police officers and "moderate members of the Taliban," according to the most recent sudden reversal of the American strategic doctrine.

[It means] nothing, if not sovereignty. It is the sovereign in this world who designates the terrorist. He who refuses to take part in *this* sovereignty will take care not to respond to your question. He who covets a few crumbs will comply [with the question] promptly. He who doesn't suffocate from bad

³ The French FBI.

faith will find instructive the case of the two ex-“terrorists” who became the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority, respectively, and who — to top it all off — were both given Noble Peace Prizes.

The fuzziness that surrounds the designation “terrorist,” the manifest impossibility of defining “terrorism,” does not affect several provisional lacunae in French law: terrorists are at the source of this thing that one can define very easily: anti-terrorism, for which “terrorism” forms the *pre-condition*. Anti-terrorism is a technique of government that thrusts its roots down into the old art of counter-insurrection, so-called “psychological warfare,” to be polite.

Anti-terrorism, contrary to what the term itself insinuates, is not a means of fighting against terrorism, but is the method by which one positively *produces* the political enemy *as terrorist*. By means of a wealth of provocations, infiltrations, surveillance, intimidation and propaganda; by means of the science of mediatic manipulation, “psychological action,” the fabrication of both evidence and crimes; by means of the fusion of the police and the judicial; and by means of the annihilation of the “subversive menace” by associating the internal enemy, the *political* enemy — which is at the heart of the population — with the affect of terror.

In *modern warfare*, the essential aspect is the “battle for hearts and minds” in which blows are permitted. The elementary procedure here is invariable: *individualize* the enemy so as to cut him off from the people and from communal reason; display him in the costume of a monster; defame him, publicly humiliate him, incite the vilest people to heap their spit upon him; encourage hatred of him. *“The law must be utilized simply as another weapon in the arsenal of the government and, in this case, represents nothing other than a propaganda cover to get rid of undesirable members of the public. For maximum*

efficiency, it would be suitable that the activities of the judicial services are tied to the war effort in the most discrete fashion possible,” advised Brigadier Frank Kitson (former general in the British Army, theoretician of counter-insurrectionary war), who knew something of the subject.

Once is not a pattern: in our case, anti-terrorism has been a flop. In France, one isn’t ready to let oneself be terrorized by us. The prolongation of my detention for a “reasonable” period of time is petty revenge, quite comprehensible due to the means mobilized and the depth of the failure; as comprehensible as the petty fury of the [intelligence] “services,” which since 11 November [2008] have through the press attributed to us the most fantastic misdeeds and stalked our comrades. How this logic of reprisals has seized control of the minds of the police and the small hearts of the judges, this is what the cadenced arrests of those “close to Julien Coupat” will have had the merit of revealing.

It is necessary to say that certain people are using this affair to extend their lamentable careers, like Alain Bauer (a criminologist), for example; others are using it to launch their latest ventures, like poor M. Squarcini (the Central Director of Domestic Intelligence); while still others are trying to rehabilitate the credibility that they’ve never had and never will have, like Michele Alliot-Marie.⁴

YOU COME FROM A VERY WELL-TO-DO BACKGROUND, WHICH ORIENTED YOU IN ANOTHER DIRECTION. . .

A. “There are plebes in all classes.” (Hegel).

⁴ Minister of the Interior.