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A JOBLESS STROLL



FOLLOWED BY

A LETTER TO MY UNEMPLOYMENT COUNSELOR

(ANONYMOUS, 2016-2017)

ZANZARA AIHEE

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A Jobless Stroll (Balade sans emploi) was initially published in the anarchist agitation leaflet *Du pain sur la planche* n°5 (Marseille, February-March 2017).

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A Letter to my Unemployment Counselor (Lettre à ma conseillère Pôle Emploi) was initially published on Iaata's website on the 22nd of September, 2016 [<https://iaata.info/Sabotage-Lettre-a-ma-conseillere-Pole-Emploi-1554.html>].

Translated in January 2021 by Camille

Zanzara athée, February 2021
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[Sabotage] A Letter to my Unemployment Counselor

On the night of the 18th of September 2016, the electrical panel of the Pôle Emploi in Purpan (in Toulouse) was burnt. The place was closed for 3 days.

Bonjour,

You had a meeting scheduled with me on the 19th of September. Given the fact that I didn't have any more vacation days that I could inadvertently take on the same day, I decided to burn down your electrical panel. I have to confess: I hate work almost as much as I hate the law.

I hope that the three days during which Purpan's Pôle Emploi was closed allowed you to better understand my intentions, and that you were able to enjoy your short-term (and paid) unemployment.

Warmest wishes.

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guaranteed income proposition wouldn't change a thing). It is in the State's interest that the myth of the Welfare State does not completely disappear. It is even the State's main argument so that we might accept it: "Look at how generous Democracy might be!" And at the same time, the State resorts to the direst, most drastic and bloody means to maintain this morbid peace.

They want to make us use our time to produce what They want: goods that will be sold to increase profit, be they guns or potato chips, or labor that will reproduce the existing social order, through control, surveillance, repression and management.

Let us be unformattable: only in this society ruled by cash and exploitation are we reduced to proletarians, welfare beneficiaries, workers, producers, employees, or "collaborators".

Let us strive towards another timetable: destroying this unbearable society which labor reproduces every day.

**Yesterday, today, tomorrow:
Rather be unmanageable than agents of
integration.**

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A Jobless Stroll

To those who dream of whacking one of the ASSEDIC¹ guys.

Yeah, talk about a stroll... I would have preferred to walk in the Calanques² or go on a nice hike in the mountains, to leave the city behind for a few hours. After walking for an hour and a half to get to the way end of the Boulevard de la Valbarelle, in a dismal industrial zone, I end up in a sort of prefab building for an hour-long interview, which is sure to be dreadful.

To have interviews in such a place makes you feel like they're trying to punish someone. Among the hundred or so people summoned there, maybe a third won't show up, just because of the length

[1] *Note of Camille:* The ASSEDIC (*Association pour l'emploi dans l'industrie et le commerce*) was a French agency created in 1958 which collected and paid unemployment insurance contributions. In 2008, it combined with another agency, the ANPE, to form *Pôle emploi*.

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commute. The consequences of not showing up are easy to guess... If I have to get up early, and be at the foot of Mont Carpiagne by 9h30, I might as well continue on my walk. But I bloody can't: there's 450 euros that I need to salvage. The RSA.³

400 crumbs for rent, 400 crumbs for bills, 400 crumbs for food, 400 crumbs for everything else that needs paying, everything that is too difficult to steal. And even stealing isn't free. Every hustler knows how much the threat of repression weighs on them when they take the illegal actions necessary to survive: arrests, police custody, trials, criminal records, prison... What bleak accounting between goods and lack of money. We can also suffer through a shitty job to make 100 or 200 extra euros, but having to endure hours of work and put up with the boss' orders adds an immeasurable cost to the whole balance. Yet, what choice do we have in the infernal equation between work, prison, and remaining in permanent survival mode?

An hour long walk usually gives enough time to imagine what bullshit you might tell your "orientation counselor". Despite the fact that

[3] *Note of Camille*: RSA means *Revenu de solidarité active*. A welfare benefit for unemployed which amounted to about 450 euros at the time of this text's publication.

any other of these survival administrations. As a result: no mercy for these social cops!

Six long years of dealing with these interviews, with a little bit of work here and there. A long journey on which to avoid the obstacles and mechanisms developed to force us to spend our days begging for any random job to any random employer for any random salary in any random company.

Despite the permanent guilt-tripping imposed on the unemployed, it's worth noting that unemployment is not the opposite of work; it's work's antechamber. Today's "unemployed person" is often but yesterday's, or tomorrow's, worker. Unemployment statistics are always used to pressure each and every potentially exploited individual into accepting any job, at any given salary and any given condition. Unemployment welfare is just a part of the salary paid to what we call the "labor force". The State and the capitalists continuously readjust their calculations: it's better for them to pay a few hundred euros to a few million people, rather than have these few million people sink into poverty and destitution. They are ready to pay for this welfare system in order to ensure a relative social peace (and the renowned universal

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“We decided it was time to settle our accounts with the mission locale⁶, because it had never offered us a training program in pillow-fighting, or in roof-jogging, or in elaborating strategies for rock-paper-scissors or in any of those little things that make our lives unproductive and a little bit more exciting. Instead, the mission locale offered us to play boring games which we always wined up losing, and accelerated training programs to throw us into the bullring of the labor market.”

[Broken windows at the mission locale in Toulouse in February 2017, published on the 12th of February 2017 on Iaata.info.]

Caught up in this unemployment spiral, you often feel like you’re dealing with a well-oiled and impersonal machine. And yet it only works because thousands of people participate, so that this machine, this shredder, might pressure individuals into becoming cogs for the economy. Without them, it would be impossible to isolate, monitor and punish the millions of people that have to check into Pôle Emploi, or at the CAF⁷ or

[6] Note of Zanzara athée: The Mission locale is an agency which aims at professional and social integration for young adults.

[7] Note of Camille: The Caisse d’allocations familiales (CAF) is the main French social welfare agency.

you often have a month to get yourself ready, think up a story, and work on a persona, you often have much better things to do, especially when you’re unemployed and have plenty of time on your hands. So I go on perfecting my special “professional insertion interview” persona as I walk: it’s someone who apparently does not want to work, and who doesn’t really want to explain why, at the very least not to a person paid precisely to force them back to work. Someone somewhat demotivated, or rather never motivated at all. Someone a little slow, a little soft, a little quiet, not very reactive and not very willful. Someone who has to make an effort to not say “I have nothing to declare”⁴ as a reflex. Someone who isn’t depressed, because you always have to be wary with these kinds of counselors who might want to get a psychologist to look into you. Someone who isn’t completely disconnected with society, but who isn’t too integrated either. Definitely a slacker, and who isn’t afraid to show it; but who shows a little bit of restraint because some anonymous bureaucrats might want to stick a “voluntary poverty” reference on your file and take you off the unemployment list. To resist giving this kind

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of interview is a real form of art, never quite adequately appreciated for what it is. In any case, everything seems to be have been crafted so as to make you play the rules of the game, and a very sad game at that: wear a real champion's costume, show you want it all, that you're ready to give your life in order to find a job, show yourself to be a good citizen, no matter how big the lie you're uttering is. You can also make a big deal about how many "barriers to employment" hinder your way forward. And you very often leave the interview exhausted by the continuous hypocrisy and sham of it all, with the urgent desire to rip that horrible mask off, to take a shower and wash all that slime away. Ouf! You feel that need to quickly move on to something else.

I know that the interview, whatever or wherever it might be, always lasts about an hour. An hour of school-like humiliation. A few questions, and then some data is typed into the computer to feed my administrative file information about "my career", "my situation", or to determine "my professional profile" and "orientational diagnostic", and, if need be, to "reorient" myself. Having lost my professional compass a while back, I have had to "reorient" myself a number of times. I've been bounced from "integration workshops" to Pôle

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emploi⁵, and been through most of the long list of agencies to which the State delegates the task of shaping you into a good job applicant. Nothing ever changes, except for maybe the color of the partition walls.

However much zealousness these "integration agents" put into their work, their methods are always the same: pressuring the unemployed by threatening to remove them from the unemployment list, by summoning them in front of the disciplinary commission, by progressively reducing the amount of their monthly welfare... What a skillful mix of paternalism, condescendence and guilt-tripping. All of this in order to make you feel the acid breath of the Institution, the tingling of the call to Order, and the shadow of Control above your head. These scumbags go to great lengths to make us swallow their moralistic discourse, to remind us as often as possible that society does not finance a "right to laziness", and that the State never gives anything in return. This was tested in certain regions where the RSA was only paid in exchange for a few hours of "voluntary mandatory work" (*sic*).

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