INTERVIEWS WITH ANARCHISTS
CONCERNING THE YELLOW VESTS MOVEMENT
PARIS AND SUBURBS / TOULOUSE / DIJON / CAEN
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Translation from French: Camille, Tigrane & anonymous.
Also in French, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish:
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The cover picture was taken in Bordeaux on February 16, 2019. The picture on the last page was taken inside the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, on December 1st, 2018.

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Anticopyright.
Black Vests, Yellow Raincoats
Interviews with anarchists concerning the Yellow Vests movement
Paris & suburbs/Toulouse/Dijon/Caen
February-April 2019

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«See you next Saturday (and the ones after)».
Introduction

This booklet originated in the initiative of a Brazilian anarchist magazine, *Crônica Subversiva*, from Porto Alegre. In January 2019, they wanted to interview a few anarchists about the Yellow Vests movement. Bits of these interviews have been published in Portuguese in the 3rd issue of *Crônica Subversiva*, and more will be in the 4th issue soon.

The idea was, in particular, to think about what makes this movement resemble the 2013-2014 movement in Brazil, in which social anger was also expressed through massive demonstrations without being hogged or encompassed by political parties or trade unions. It was during these demonstrations that the black bloc emerged in Brazil. Workers, students, favela youth and other angry people, politically aware or not, took to the streets and attacked symbols of capital and symbols of the state. These massive demonstrations allowed for the emergence of several self-organized and horizontal initiatives. Porto Alegre saw the birth of new self-governed political spaces, occupations of public places such as the City Council that lasted for weeks, but also the arrival of younger people into the fight, who occupied their schools for months and took part in renewed demonstrations in 2015 and 2016. The consequences of this social movement are hard to evaluate today. Five years after the “June of 2013 days”, Jair Bolsonaro, a fascist and a valet of North American imperialism, was democratically elected by the Brazilian “people”. His “conquest” of power partly relied on the capture of some social movements and on the instrumentalization of the hate towards the Workers’s Party (PT), which had disappointed many of its voters. At the end of 2014, an extreme-right (anti-native, anti-black, anti-LGBT, etc.) movement was born, the MBL (*Movimento Brasil Livre*, or Free Brazil Movement), which gathered a lot of politically lost people and consolidated itself into the future president’s base to access power. If the 2013-2014 social movement in Brazil was not responsible for Bolsonaro’s rise to power, it was not strong enough to block the rise of fascism in the country from 2015 on.

The heritage from the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 movements lives in the heart of all the rioters and black bloc participants who, at
some point, tenaciously clashed against the police and against their
daily oppressions. That heritage also lives in the different possible
futures that insurrectional action allowed them to envision. These
movements opened up new paths and educated their participants’
odies and minds to action. The Yellow Vests movement also lets us
catch a glimpse of a country and of its representatives rattled by a
wave of insurrection, which shakes us too at the other end of the
world.

We think that, as anarchists, it is crucial that we ask ourselves certain
questions, especially that of our role among social movements. How
can we take part in a movement without renouncing our convictions?
Without becoming a revolutionary avant-garde? How can we share
and spread our ideas towards people who, at first sight have entirely
differing world views, in some cases contradictory even to ours? Is
creating chaos our only objective?

There’s been a lot of talk about the black bloc in France lately, and
this is used by the media, the political class and the citizenists to
create an essential and false distinction between obedient and law-
abiding Gilets jaunes (yellow vests) on the one hand and a minority of
ultraviolent extremists on the other hand. It has become clear about
this movement that it’s very hard to distinguish the K-way noirs
(black raincoats), typical of the black bloc anarchist strategy, from the
numerous Gilets jaunes who started this movement having never had
any experience of a riot. The Yellow Vests uprising has been (and still
is) the feat of a lot of diverse people, with different social, cultural
and political backgrounds, bringing together so many rebels to the
established social order and a popular anger which had seldom been
so intensely expressed... On March 16, 2019 in Paris, even more than
in December 2018, there was a happy insurrectional melting pot of
political identities, summed up by the tag in the cover picture : “Gilets
noirs, K-way jaunes”. Let us also remember that it was of the Champs-
Elysées avenue, ravaged by rioting and pillaging, that thousands of
people chanted a simple but promising slogan : “Revolution”.

Concerning the interviews, the idea is to get a few leads from them
on how some anarchists took part in the Gilets jaunes movement in
different regions of a territory controlled by the french state. Their
aim is to provoke us, as the positions and analyses presented here
are diverse and sometimes contradictory. In any case, they invite us
to partake in insurrectional action and confirm again that pacifism
and passivity are not valid options against the daily violence of a self-proclaimed all-powerful state. They state no fixed positions to adopt regarding the ongoing movement. They are here to feed reflection, reinforce the fight and show how some anarchists can take part or intervene in insurrectional or even revolutionary situations, but however show confusion in their political perspectives.

Done via email between February and April 2019, these interviews are also snapshots of a movement that oscillates, whose intensity increases and decreases in turns and which seems much less predictable than the social movements of the last decades in France. We chose to publish them the way we got them. They were all done in the written form, and we left the choice to everyone to feminize/neutalize/un-gender their words or not, in their own way.

In addition, we have quite an massive amount of digitalized documents pertaining to the *Gilets jaunes* movement (leaflets, political writings, pictures, posters, videos...). These archives are being sorted and are of course available for sharing. Contact us if you’re interested! The same goes for translations of this magazine/brochure: a Portuguese version is on the way, maybe also a Spanish and an Italian one. If you’d like to translate it into other languages, please contact us!

Paris-suburbs and Porto Alegre, April 10, 2019  
*Enkapuzado & Zanzara athée*

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*Toulouse, December 22nd, 2018.*
T, an anarchist from the Paris suburbs, 1-11 February 2019

[The first three questions were answered on the 1st of February, the fourth on the 4th of February, and the last one on the 11th of February.]

Enkapuzado: First of all, could you explain to us how the Yellow Vests movement was born? And at first sight, what was the reaction of (the) anarchist movement(s) in relation to the social movement?

T: The movement first started in October 2018 on the Internet, in “social media”, following the rise of gas prices. The first few people who initiated the movement didn’t know each other, and did not come from militant/activist circles/backgrounds.

The movement became consistent following the first occupations of roundabouts and the first turbulent gatherings on the Champs-Elysées, in Paris, on November 17 2018, which took on a unique shape and displayed distrust and even hostility towards [political] parties.

From the very first day, this movement gathered very different people, politically and socially. And very quickly, the question of taxes and the rise in gas prices was bypassed: this primary demand seemed secondary compared to the generalized anger. The anger of the Yellow Vests movement is primarily a feeling of exasperation with social inequalities, with the struggle to get through each month, and with the fact that the wealthy (the politicians, the bourgeoisie of all sorts) are “gorging themselves on our backs”, to use an expression often used by this movement. Finally, since the beginning of the movement, only one slogan is unanimous during the big days of mobilization (the famous weekly “Acts” that started on November 17): “Macron resign”.

First of all, with its initial focus on the question of taxes and based on the fact that it regrouped people from opposing political strands, the Yellow Vests movement inspired both suspicion and enthusiasm from anarchists. Some of them actively participated in the movement from the first day, while others still refuse to do so. Similarly to the anarchist movement, maybe even more so than in “normal” times, there is no common position
gathering all trends/tendencies. And even within these trends/tendencies, you can find individuals, peer groups, collectives and organizations who have diverging views with regards to this movement.

Enkapuzado: Over here, we hear that this movement claims no attachment to any political party or trade union, as if it emanated from some general weariness towards social misery and a rejection of traditional politics. Do you think this might be “fertile ground” to propagate anarchist ideas and practices?

T: Definitely. A large part of this movement carries this rejection, and has affirmed it since the very beginning. There is actually a lot in common between the Yellow Vests and anarchist militants: the rejection of the government, of political parties, of trade unions and other “social partners” (considered as “intermediary bodies” that are supposed to defuse any revolt and to soothe the relations between the State and protesters); and, of course, the recourse to direct action. The movement exists through illegal acts, going from symbolically blockading roundabouts to burning down a prefecture/police Department. These actions have been carried out since November 2018, and are as numerous as they are diverse. They are typical of an insurrection (blockades, sabotage, riots...) and the targets are almost always those usually attacked by anarchists (capitalist and/or State equipment and buildings).

In November and December 2018, we witnessed a lot of rebels surge into the richest neighborhoods of Paris to sack almost everything they found in their way, including the world-famous Champs-Elysées avenue. They were carried by a kind of “class hate”, which demonstrated how all of this went far beyond a simple gas tax (this tax had been cancelled as early as December 5, which had not stopped the movement from continuing).

Finally, another point in common with anarchist practices is that fact that this movement functions without leaders, with the multiplication and dissemination of assemblies to organize in a self-directed way. Different assemblies were formed during the movement: they still exist, or are dismantled and reappear in alternative forms. There is a lot of discussions on forums, on digital groups on Facebook or on private messaging apps like Signal, Telegram, Whatsapp...

To contextualize these affirmations, one must understand that this movement is very heterogeneous, and that it brings together people from a wide variety of political cultures. While the principal common factor
tying together all those participating in the Yellow Vests movement is their repulsion towards the system, there are also a certain number of people trying to build their careers off the back of the movement: some old politicians joined the movement to find a few followers, and others have gone as far as creating political parties or electoral lists for the next European elections. But this is easier said than done: those who have proclaimed themselves as “representatives” of the Yellow Vests and have sought to meet ministers and other State representatives have been confronted with the movement’s wrath. They have received constructive criticism, but also insults, death threats...

Enkapuzado: We also felt a nice overflowing of the movement which translated into direct actions that targeted material symbols of the state and of the capital, in the streets of big cities but also all over France. We can imagine that the media and the government tried to spin this violence to divide the movement into the “good-citizen demonstrators” and the “rioters”. What effect did that have inside the social movement and on the relationship between the anarchists and the Yellow Vests?

T: Much like on most other subjects, there is no consensus among the Yellow Vests. As in every revolt, the State and its allies described the movement as a scandal, criticizing the rebels’ violence without ever talking about the day-to-day social violence that caused the revolts. The president, Macron, his first minister Edouard Philippe and the Minister of Interior, Christophe Castaner, were relentless in smearing the “bad Yellow Vests”. Same thing goes for the media: a number of journalists, politicians and experts called for the repression to be toughened. While a large part of the population rises up in rebellion, many different politicians, from the far right (of Marine Le Pen’s “Rassemblement national”) to the far left (of Jean-Luc Melenchon’s “France insoumise”), including all the so-called “moderate” parties, have stigmatized the “rioters”. At the same time however, they reluctantly and implicitly recognize that without these “rioters”, Macron would never have budged on the tax issue.

However, we also find what could be called “pacifying firemen” in this movement, who appear quite frequently in this type of uprising and remain very bothersome. Of course, it’s much easier to openly proclaim, in front of an assembly of 80 people or in front of a TV camera, that one is against the protesters’ violence. On the other hand, it’s much harder to describe why we think it’s right and just to smash a ministry’s door down, to throw stones at polices, to loot a luxury boutique or to burn a cop car.
As anarchists, it’s very important to address this issue with pertinent arguments, to affirm direct action as a means of struggle, whatever the alleged degree of violence. And, of course, it’s important to act “as usual”, alongside the rebels, in solidarity in times of aggressive action as well as while under repression. As we used to say in 2006 during the movement against the CPE and in 2016 during the movement against the Loi Travail, “we are all rioters”!

**Enkapuzado:** We can imagine that among anarchists there are also different ways to take part in the movement, could you tell us which is yours and why?

*T:* My answer here will be based on my personal experience, about my choices to participate and intervene inside the Yellow Vests movement, because it would be too long and too difficult to correctly list the different approaches that anarchists have towards the movement.

It took me longer than most to figure out that this movement carried an insurrectional tide, and that it was going to go far beyond the issue of gas taxes. But since the beginning of December, I’m in it 100%! I participate and bring along my political experience and know-how, which has turned out to be useful, for me as well as for the rest of the movement. I can affirm, without false modesty, that twenty years of protests, riots, assemblies, occupations, blockades, and strikes is pretty significant, especially when one finds oneself amongst people expressing their intense rage, sometimes at 35 years old, for the first time in a protest. While I can affirm this without false modesty, I also recognize that the fresh rebelliousness of the movement in November and December led to direct action of almost unprecedented scale. The practical knowledge and movement habits are assets to share, but they can also have limits. It’s difficult to analyze the apparent absence of fear and apprehension amongst rioters in the streets of Paris (and elsewhere, I’m sure), at least during the period ranging from November 24 to December 8, and, in a lesser way, on January 5. The social unrest clearly overwhelmed the more traditional activists and their militant habits. We could say the same thing about relatively recent moments of uprising, such as the fierce uprising in the autumn of 2005, the movement against the CPE in 2006, and the more recent ones in 2016 against the Loi Travail and in February 2017 after the police assault against Théo. I think that a variety of factors explain the different shapes of the Yellow Vests’s explosion of anger: on one hand, the offensive achievements of these recent periods of social struggle, which have left strong impressions on the participants of these struggles, to which we can add the riots on the Champs-Elysées after France’s football World
Cup victory in July 2018 (this avenue is untouchable during the usual social movement demonstrations, despite the fact that it is an evident economic and symbolic target), the rural riots on the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes in 2012, the Bonnets rouges movement in 2013-2014, among other moments which have impregnated our ideas of how and why to revolt. All of this has left a strong impression on the imaginary of the “rebel” that is present in our minds, and not only for the anarchists! On the other hand, a lot of people came along with their anger and their know-how. For example, during early December and early January, construction machines were used during riots in the richest streets of the capital to move burning vehicles into the middles of the road to reinforce barricades, or to smash down the door of a ministry and bank windows... Personally, I had never seen anything quite like this before. Up until that point, construction machines were, at best, burnt down. Here, they were used at their maximum potential before being burnt.

But I’m getting lost in my fiery train of thought!

Anarchist skills are always useful in moments of rioting and spontaneous illegal demonstrations. But my participation in this movement is less focused on rioting than “usual”, despite everything I’ve just said. First of all, because at least until mid-January, while many anarchists participated in the riots, our presence wasn’t a decisive factor, or at least much less than during 2016 and the movement against the Loi Travail, where we were under the impression that without us (anarchists and other rebels, autonomist militants, antifa, etc), there would only have been soft and weak protests with a few stale slogans, the union hotdogs and terrible music.

However, a certain confusion reigns amongst the Yellow Vests movement’s ideas and perspectives. This is due to the orginality of the movement’s composition: there are mostly people who hate the system and the bourgeoisie, sometimes named “oligarchy”, there are a lot of self-proclaimed “apolitical” or “apartisan” people, and there are also a lot of politicized people, from anarchists and antifa to the far right, alongside members of different political parties (sovereignists/nationalists and/or far-left). Because of this, I decided it was important to actively participate in the political debate inside the movement, which meant attending the different assemblies, distributing pamphlets and writing on the walls... Well, it’s not as if I don’t “normally” do this, but I just felt like it was very important to do this during this movement.

Oh yes, the newest thing for me was to have made the effort to sign up and
participate in the digital Yellow Vests groups on different messenger apps: Signal, Whatsapp, Telegram... It’s obviously not the most interesting means of participation in a struggle, but it’s undeniably a very pertinent way to get an idea of what the movement’s participants are thinking whilst adding our own ideas to the debate. It was mostly useful, and still is today, to warn about the presence of the far-right in the movement, or to discuss the use of violence (because, as paradoxical as it may seem, we still find a lot of people that affirm that the movement is “pacifist” and the “rioters discredit the movement”, even after all the incredible riots).

Enkapuzado: After almost three months of a social movement which doesn’t seem to be running out, what are the perspectives? Quickly, seen from here, the extreme-right seems less and less present. Does this mean there is a seizing of the movement by the unionist left? How do the anarchist Yellow Vests stand on, for example, the candidacy of a Gilets jaunes list for the European elections?

T: On Tuesday, February 5, the Yellow Vests, the main trade unions (CGT, Solidaires...) and some far-left parties (NPA...) called for a general strike, which failed as expected. In the end, the Yellow Vests took to the streets aggressively on the following Saturday, for Part XIII. In Paris, the protest renewed its links with the wild, rioting aspects of early December, but there were no longer as many people present. While there are still a lot of assemblies and organisation, the movement seems to be waning and continues to be very heterogeneous. It’s pretty difficult to get an overall perspective, even if the anger against the economic and political elites remains as vibrant as ever.

Of course, we must talk about the far-right. Many far-right groups are still present. Last Saturday (February 9), antifa and fascists clashed in Lyon, and the fascists were routed, despite being very well established in the city. The previous week, the Yellow Vests had already kicked fascists out of the protest in Paris. Similar scenarios happened in Bordeaux and other cities over the past few weeks. However, it’s still too early to conclude that the far-right has been totally kicked out of the movement.

The unionist left has started to show up in the demonstrations, but remains far behind in terms of its [implication/significance], and the Yellow Vests continue to express their strong distrust of trade unions. Generally speaking, whatever their political affiliations or tendencies, the Yellow Vests are very critical of anything that might resemble a political hijacking of the movement. The electoral lists self-proclaiming themselves as Yellow
Vests have been very unpopular, perhaps even more unpopular amongst Yellow Vests than in the general population. The leaders of these electoral lists are perceived as traitors or hijackers. The point of view of anarchist Yellow Vests on this particular point is pretty easy to guess: it’s a shared perspective.

A number of anarchists involving themselves in the Yellow Vests movement push forward the ideas of self-determination, and horizontal and decentralized organization, through the form of assemblies, and try to organize these assemblies at a higher level whilst always relying on the local assemblies. On the other hand, the demand for the RIC (Citizen’s Initiative for a Referendum) is perceived as a means to calm the revolt by creating an illusion of popular power through the possibility of participating in thematic votes. In the first case, there are principles of self-determination that don’t need a State or any form of political hierarchy. In the second, there would be a renewal of socially reformist relations with the same forms of political campaigns (with all the usual problems of funding, mediatization and brainwashing typical of our Spectacular-market society) to push us to vote “yes” or “no” for a given proposition, with the State giving the final say. Without wanting to idealize the forms and substance of Yellow Vests assemblies, there is no doubt as to the preferable options in sight, between the assemblies, the RIC or the electoral lists for the European elections.

A small quote to conclude:

“In France, unfortunately, people don’t always like the police, people want to kill police-officers. We have to make this clear: on social networks, we can see the incitements to murder; there are people calling to beat up cops, this is a real problem. There are Molotov cocktails thrown at police, police officers are hit by bocce balls, by bottles of acid, by shovel shafts, so it would really be nice to have pacifist protests, we would really like that.”
Axel Ronde, Secretary general of the VIGI Police trade union (ex-CGT), 18th of January 2019, on “Arrêts sur Images”, Les bavures policières, c’est l’omerta absolue.

On the contrary, despite the self-victimizing speeches and discourses given by police representatives, we count at least 20 people who have lost an eye, 5 people who had their hand torn off, and 1 person killed by police and their weapons in less than three months since the movement began on November 17.
Enkapuzado: First of all, could you explain to us how the Yellow Vests movement was born? And at first sight, what was the reaction of (the) anarchist movement(s) in relation to the social movement?

E&L: The movement arose from a call on social media to protest the price of petrol. In the Toulouse region, it was made concrete through a daily presence on roundabouts around the city and at toll booths. The first Saturday demonstrations started after two weeks. For us, it was a bit hard in the beginning to know where to stand and seize the opportunity, because of a wide and blurry political spectrum, including nationalistic claims (such as closing borders or even reporting migrants on a roundabout in the North of France). What sparked the interest of the anarchist movement was the riotous character of the demonstrations, the rejection of parties and unions and the class-related demands. However, it also opened a way to fascist dynamics, and it feels like it took us some time to find our own way in that movement (which is still not easy today).

Enkapuzado: Over here, we hear that this movement claims no attachment to any political party or trade union, as if it emanated from some general weariness towards social misery and a rejection of traditional politics. Do you think this might be “fertile ground” to propagate anarchist ideas and practices?

E&L: In Toulouse, the links between the anarchist movement and Gilets jaunes are realized mostly through anti-repression frameworks and forms of action. For example, we noticed it was pretty hard to bring about “fundamental” political questions. Some of these people insist on maintaining a political blur, to prevent at all costs a splitting of the movement. This prevents making a clear stand concerning basic and essential questions. For example, we could see some people protecting the cops while chanting “Tout le monde déteste la police” (“everybody hates the police”). That’s quite weird. Despite a disrupted relation to the “political”, a large portion of the movement still claims the movement as “apolitical”. And so, as much as there are some opportunities for propaganda leading to interesting discussions, we sometimes run into a wall where our texts and leaflets are perceived as “too radical” or as showing a will to divide.
**Enkapuzado:** We also felt a nice overflowing of the movement which translated into direct actions that targeted material symbols of the state and of the capital, in the streets of big cities but also all over France. We can imagine that the media and the government tried to spin this violence to divide the movement into the “good-citizen demonstrators” and the “rioters”. What effect did that have inside the social movement and on the relationship between the anarchists and the Yellow Vests?

**E&L:** Even though it’s not that clear, we can see that a part of the movement describes itself as “citizenist” and another part claims solidarity with the diversity of tactics in the movement. For instance, during Act XII, some anti-riot Gilets jaunes went to meet the mayor of Toulouse to negotiate an itinerary for the march and declare the demonstration. Fortunately, that was hugely criticized and only 30 people showed up to their protest. This initiative came mainly from the storekeepers. In the end, the attempt at dividing the movement failed completely here.

In court, the people who were arrested usually take responsibility and own up to their actions, both criticizing the justice system and claiming their participation in the movement. Similarly, most of the people who were imprisoned show solidarity with the movement as a whole, by maintaining anti-division positions and solidarity with the movement despite sentences which are often heavy. Starting from the organisational framework against the repression attacking the Gilets jaunes, some anarchists are trying to bring forward the question of prison in general, by breaking down the specificity of solidarity with only the political prisoners.

As for the media, we can see a rejection of the bourgeois/mainstream press as a whole, both in words and in action: journalists who were thrown out of the protests or media headquarters attacked. This mistrust of the media stems in particular from the image that the media conveyed about “rioters” [casseurs] and about the population’s supposed contempt for the movement.

Concerning the attacks themselves, it is clear that the targets accepted by everyone are the banks, insurance companies and more and more the real estate agencies. But there remains reluctance and division regarding street furniture (bus stops, advertising billboards, ...) and the practice of self-discount/looting in stores.
Enkapuzado: We can imagine that among anarchists there are also different ways to take part in the movement, could you tell us which is yours and why?

E&L: A presence in the streets for one, to shout slogans, to mess with fascists and to be part of the direct actions. In a more organized way, it seemed maybe more “simple” to get into the anti-repression framework by organizing a turning presence/hotline for the friends and families of inmates, writing letters for imprisoned people and distributing legal advice in leaflets or workshops. Approaching the movement under the angle of anti-repression is an “easier” way to be useful to it and still be able to bring in political ideas that we hold dear.

Enkapuzado: After almost three months of a social movement which doesn’t seem to be running out, what are the perspectives? Quickly, seen from here, the extreme-right seems less and less present. Does this mean there is a seizing of the movement by the unionist left? How do the anarchist Yellow Vests stand on, for example, the candidacy of a Gilets jaunes list for the European elections?

E&L: Well first, in Toulouse, we noticed that the presence of an “active” extreme-right was more pronounced these last weeks, with fascists attacking a Maoist group during a protest, with the presence of Alain Soral’s TV channel and with a profusion of antisemitic tags in the streets. We can also note that in the beginning, the Gilets jaunes seemed pretty angry when fascists were physically thrown out of protests, always with that argument that “there’s no point in being radical” and that it would only divide the movement. On that level, things started to change when the Maoists were attacked by fascists who were making Nazi salutes. It’s kind of reassuring to see the emergence of some limits to a democratic principle that claims to be absolute and stronger than anything, even though it’s still not enough and we’d like to see some other lines or perspectives appear, that would be politically clearer. That’s the scary thing about this movement, the lack of political perspectives per se, other than “Macron démission” (“Macron, resign!”). Everything seems to center around common practices and the fear of division.

There also appears to be fewer occupied roundabouts and more than a few Gilets jaunes start to be discouraged among certain committees. In general, the unionist left seems at a loss with partly failed attempts at a general strike and attempts at attending Gilets jaunes general assemblies.
A, an anarchist from the Paris suburbs,
March 9, 2019

Enkapuzado: First of all, could you explain to us how the Yellow Vests movement was born? And at first sight, what was the reaction of (the) anarchist movement(s) in relation to the social movement?

A: The Gilets jaunes movement was first born in reaction to the dramatic increase in the price of petrol at the gas station. This piled up on top of the explosion in the number of speed cameras, on ever-more frequent traffic-related fines when the Macron administration lowered the speed limitation on non-highway roads from 90km/h down to 80 in July 2018, and on the scandal of the French highways. In the 1970s, the state subsidized the construction of these highways through a public-private partnership with Vinci and other companies. Basically, the French “tax dollars” (francs back then) paid for a part of the works and once the investment was recuperated for these industry giants the tolls were supposed to disappear. And the complete opposite happened: in 1995 the Jospin administration sold the highways to these big companies and inserted terms in the contract that bound them with the state, an annual increase in toll prices even stronger than inflation. Just to give you an idea, a highway drive in France today costs as much in tolls as it does in petrol, and even more so before the last oil shock. It’s no wonder this movement was born on the roundabouts: it was first a movement of people who lived outside of the cities and for whom driving their car is a huge portion of their expenses. However, even though a vast majority of the initial demands were about purchasing power, it would be wrong to reduce the movement only to those concerns. Because quickly, as of December 1 at the latest (the movement started on November 17), the perspectives widened: reinstatement of the ISF¹, getting the rich to pay; possibility for the people to remove its rulers, desire for a direct and true “democracy”. What I think is important to see is that, very fast, the movement showed a generalized and uncompromising defiance towards any and all institutional (or not) intermediaries: politicians, media, unions, cops, big companies... in short, almost all the major players in a capitalist society.

The anarchists’ view of this movement is, still today, very diverse. A lot of anarchists looked down on it when it started. In my opinion, out of scorn for

¹ Note of translators: Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune, “Solidarity Tax on Fortunes”.
the working middle class who live on credits, consume, etc. and don’t use
the language and talking points of the sworn militants. Others kept away out
in fear of its theoretical emptiness, of its apparent political poorness. Others
joined out of (sometimes blind) love for insurrection, ready to welcome the
“Grand Soir”\(^2\). Finally, some just went there to have a look, before starting
to act.

*Enkapuzado*: We can imagine that among anarchists there are also
different ways to take part in the movement, could you tell us which is
yours and why?

*A*: What I think is essential to understand is that an overwhelming majority
of the Gilets jaunes are first-time protesters. For most of them, this was
the first time that they ever occupied or blocked anything, that they acted
outside the law. This appears clearly in the naivety with which they faced
police and judiciary repression. The numbers are hard to check but there
were, for December only, over 4,000 arrests, at least 200 prison sentences,
systematically coupled to provisions banning them from protesting for three
years (that is unprecedented in France, but it seems to be just a beginning).

\[2\] *Note of translators*: Great Evening, the moment that will change everything by
starting or accomplishing the Social Revolution.
Among the convicted people, almost everyone had a blank record and was convicted based only on their own confessions. Like: “yes, I threw a bottle at the cops because they hit us for no reason, I was only defending myself”, etc. When we’re aware of the justice system’s reaction to procedures which are, most of the time, devoid of any material evidence, we understand better the naive nature of such confessions.

But I consider that such candour should not be looked down upon. I believed in the justice system before my first time in police custody... People need to have these experiences, and as “experienced” anarchists, I think we absolutely must give it time, take the time, because this movement is only beginning. When the two previous movements, called Loi Travail, had shown the incapability of the “professionals of autonomous social fight” to invent new forms of mobilization or to truly go beyond unionist protest marches, people who had never demonstrated, and who were looked down on by some, actually managed it in two months.

Enkapuzado: After almost three months of a social movement which doesn’t seem to be running out, what are the perspectives? Quickly, seen from here, the extreme-right seems less and less present. Does this mean there is a seizing of the movement by the unionist left? How do the anarchist Yellow Vests stand on, for example, the candidacy of a Gilets jaunes list for the European elections?

A: As for the various attempts at recuperating the movement, they have all failed until now, and spectacularly so! The half-dozen self-proclaimed leaders of the movement, some of whom are trying to build up a list for the European elections, all received death threats. So much so that most of them quickly let go of the project. These threats were not only simple anonymous letters, and just like people regularly attack the personal homes of elected representatives (attempt at arson on Richard Ferrand’s home, who is the president of the National Assembly; Johanna Rolland, the mayor of Nantes, had her personal car burnt in front of her home; numerous local headquarters of political parties were attacked, ...), the message is clear for anyone who would try to speak instead of the others. The myriad of attacks, arsons, sabotages that have kept happening since early December are apparently committed by some “hardcore” Gilets jaunes. Apart from the fire at France Bleu Isère (local radio among the national France Bleu network) in Grenoble in January, which some anarchists comrades claimed responsibility for, an overwhelming majority of these actions were committed by ordinary “wo.men in the streets”. Which, by the way, explains how easy it was for the enforcers of repression to find the “perpetrators”, almost systematically
(people who weren’t wearing gloves or masks, using their smartphones while rioting and, as I mentioned, prone to confession).

As a result, I would tend to regard as doomed any attempt at recuperation, wherever it comes from. And, if it’s true that the extreme-right is less and less present, also thanks to the physical presence of anti-fascist groups who literally chase them away from most protests, the marches in Paris resemble more and more the social spectrum of the traditional extreme-left. As for recuperation, I’d say that the only success of the citizenist-pacifist left didn’t happen in the ideological field, because the Gilets jaunes movement is revolutionary in that sense that it banishes even the idea of a complicity with any agent of capitalism, but rather in sneakily imposing more traditional Saturday marches in Paris, with an officially declared itinerary, meaning also far from the richer neighborhoods and managed “the German way”, flanked by hundreds of cops on every sidewalk.

Since the beginning of February, the counter-revolutionary forces have been working at full capacity. The administration, seeing the impossibility of managing the movement through recuperation, decided to go with plain repression. We’d just never seen that, not even in 1968, according to the elders. The numbers increase day by day but roughly: 3,000 gravely injured; 22 eyes lost (the majority of which belonging to outright pacifists!); 5 hands ripped off (by the infamous GLI-F4 grenades, which contain TNT); 6,000 arrests since November, 5,000 people in police custody, at least 2,000 sentences (a lot of trials still haven’t taken place yet), 250 prison sentences (often for things like transporting swimming goggles...). Add on top of that the new “anti-rioter” law, which has been ready for 10 years but that no previous government had dared pass, and for good reason: it allows for and organizes the preventive arrest of anyone suspected by the State from, maybe, one day, inshallah... committing an act of violence. It’s really like Minority Report in Voltaire’s country. And in order to cover its iron fist in a velvet glove, the latest idea of the government is not just a little daring. When the protest on February 16 saw Alain Finkelkraut expelled from the march by barely five people, shouting “dirty hateful Zionist”, the State seized the opportunity to accuse the movement of antisemitism, which is supposed to prove it was recuperated by an extreme-left which is also said to be antisemitic. In December, the Gilets jaunes were all Rednecks infiltrated by Nazis, today they’re anti-semites converted by the extreme-left, tomorrow maybe we’ll be nasty Russian agents at the Smurfs’ service?! Anyways the fact remains that, on a much less fun note, Macron himself called for punishing antizionism by law, as just an avatar for antisemitism...
Enkapuzado: First of all, could you explain to us how the Yellow Vests movement was born? And at first sight, what was the reaction of (the) anarchist movement(s) in relation to the social movement?

J: Hello, the Yellow Vests movement emerged out of a protest against a fuel tax, but when you spoke with the participants, you quickly realized that there were other reasons behind their anger. Most of our comrades were pretty disdainful of the movement because they saw it as a protest of rednecks that were complaining because they wanted cheaper petrol. In Dijon, we were less than ten comrades at the first protest. Our friends quickly changed their mind when they saw how big the protests became.

Enkapuzado: Over here, we hear that this movement claims no attachment to any political party or trade union, as if it emanated from some general weariness towards social misery and a rejection of traditional politics. Do you think this might be “fertile ground” to propagate anarchist ideas and practices?

J: The movement defines itself as such. The “leaders”, or those that are called that way by the media, don’t behave according to the way the institutions would have hoped. The government doesn’t have any partners with whom to dialogue, like with the unions, and so they don’t have anyone to relay the calls for calm and dialogue.

There are a lot of unionized people among the Yellow Vests, and they’ve realized that what happens in their union looks a lot like what goes on in political parties. Certain people profit off of their work. They stay in the unions because it can be useful at work, at a smaller scale. But on Saturdays, they put on their Yellow Vests, and then everyone forgets the boring protests that the unions have gotten everyone accustomed to.

Of course these are fertile grounds for our ideas and practices, because everyone understands that by attacking the symbols of capitalism (even they aren’t described as such) or by blocking the economy (by barricading Paris on Saturday afternoons), you’ll be taken seriously. After that, either they send the cops or they answer your demands. For now, the State has always sent the cops, which has at least helped us spread our ideas.
Enkapuzado: We also felt a nice overflowing of the movement which translated into direct actions that targeted material symbols of the state and of the capital, in the streets of big cities but also all over France. We can imagine that the media and the government tried to spin this violence to divide the movement into the “good-citizen demonstrators” and the “rioters”. What effect did that have inside the social movement and on the relationship between the anarchists and the Yellow Vests?

J: From what I’ve seen in Dijon, the comrades either go to Yellow Vests protests in a disorganized way, or don’t go very often all. Only on a few saturdays did we go with objectives, and with the numbers to achieve them. It’s important to underline this, because the protests blow up every saturday and it isn’t us that decide what happens: the Yellow Vests do.

From what I’ve heard in the assemblies I’ve attended, the Yellow Vests don’t distinguish between themselves and the “rioters”. For them, everyone remains a gilet jaune and the different forms of practices and actions are

“Yellow alert, strong winds, no slowing down in sight”.
Petite rue de la monnaie, Dijon, February 2nd, 2019.
complementary. This pretty quickly became the common discourse here and that’s really good news.

Enkapuzado: We can imagine that among anarchists there are also different ways to take part in the movement, could you tell us which is yours and why?

J: I went to the first protest to observe, because I saw this thing becoming bigger and bigger on the internet and in the media, and because most of the comrades presented this as something the fascists were going to hijack, so I was both scared and at the same time, I didn’t believe that would happen. So I went to the protest. And it was the biggest protest I had ever seen in Dijon. 10,000 people, and the Yellow Vests announced that they wanted to go onto the highway, so the prefecture/police Department closed the highways to cars so that we could go protest. The crowd refused to go there, they discussed the matter and said “we want to march in the city, we’ll show them what it’s like when we’re angry”. And since that first Saturday, up until last Saturday, the crowd did what it wanted and got its share of tear gas.

Enkapuzado: After almost three months of a social movement which doesn’t seem to be running out, what are the perspectives? Quickly, seen from here, the extreme-right seems less and less present. Does this mean there is a seizing of the movement by the unionist left? How do the anarchist Yellow Vests stand on, for example, the candidacy of a Gilets jaunes list for the European elections?

J: It’s hard to say what our perspectives are exactly. Seeing what happened on the March 16, the unions aren’t really ready to take over the movement, and that’s good news. I think that they’re as lost as the government.

In the Yellow Vests assemblies, there are very few discussions on the elections, or none. And that’s pretty reassuring. We hope it’s not going to stop. With the repression and all the rest, we’ll see how it’s going to go. We hope that with nicer weather, it’s going to keep on going strong! See you!
Enkapuzado: First of all, could you explain to us how the Yellow Vests movement was born? And at first sight, what was the reaction of (the) anarchist movement(s) in relation to the social movement?

R&R: The movement was born on social media first and foremost. A video posted on a social medium gets millions of views. It expressed the author’s discontent regarding the administration’s policies and particularly the tax increase on diesel. In the wake of that, the Automobilistes en colère also appeared on social media in a more or less organized manner. There were a few gatherings before November 17, the official starting date of the Gilets jaunes movement which is still active today. It should be noted that this date of November 17 was the one when the most people were present (282,000 according to the government), especially on the roundabouts or on major roads, and also a bit on the streets.

The reactions among the revolutionary movement were very diverse. Depending on each person’s experiences, ideological bases or geographical location, some militants took part in the movement from the beginning, occupying roundabouts. Others, more skeptical and afraid to see the movement infiltrated and turned by the extreme right, waited a few weeks before joining it. Some are only there for moments of clashing (during protests) and take only little part in the organization of the movement. Finally, there certainly are those who, in a very critical way, require a firmer political coherence and do not participate at all.

Enkapuzado: Over here, we hear that this movement claims no attachment to any political party or trade union, as if it emanated from some general weariness towards social misery and a rejection of traditional politics. Do you think this might be “fertile ground” to propagate anarchist ideas and practices?

R&R: Indeed, from the beginning of the movement, a clear will was expressed to get rid of any kind of representation. No party or union, that is for sure and it goes our way. On the other hand, having no representative
or spokesperson at all is more delicate. In certain places, self-proclaimed spokespeople emerged. Sometimes with a relative success (setting the tone during protests, being present on the capital’s media, etc.) and sometimes with a blatant lack of success (booed during protests, expelled from them). So it depends on the place. As for us, we could say it’s “fertile ground” for propagating our ideas and our practices, because the spokespeople were quickly removed. The modes of action that are used (sabotaging speed cameras, direct action, clashing with the police) also confirm this. Then, as for the modes of organization, apart from social media, which are not really our thing, there have been general assemblies of nearly 300 people since the start of the movement. One of those took place in a migrants’ squat (the “squat du Marais”, which houses 200 to 250 people). Certain contacts taken with the first Gilets jaunes led to the organization of that assembly and, from the start of it, solidarity with the foreigners who are mistreated by the French state was put forth.

*Enkapuzado*: We also felt a nice overflowing of the movement which translated into direct actions that targeted material symbols of the state and of the capital, in the streets of big cities but also all over France. We can imagine that the media and the government tried to spin this violence to divide the movement into the “good-citizen demonstrators” and the “rioters”. What effect did that have inside the social movement and on the relationship between the anarchists and the Yellow Vests?

*R&R*: The distinction between the “good protesters” and the “rioters” was already widely interiorized by most Gilets jaunes who, it’s worth saying, did not show a very seasoned political culture. This distinction is old but it took even more importance during the protests against the *Loi Travail* in 2016. And so, the media and the government just kept going, using stronger and stronger words, from simple “rioters” in 2016 to “professional rioters” during this movement. From the beginning, in certain cities, a person who would dress in black and wear a mask risked expulsion from the protests. Today, the black blocs are more easily accepted and sometimes celebrated on Facebook or during protests. But it has become evident that the so-called “professional rioters” who get arrested, brought up for immediate trials and sometimes convicted are actually, very often at least, working-class people who are not at all used to collectively expressing their anger by destroying a bank window here or throwing paving stones at the cops there. That could also partly explain why the movement still lives on today, when there has been considerable destruction of the symbols of state and capitalism every Saturday for several months now, in several cities across the country.
So the mixing during protests between on the one hand inexperienced Gilets jaunes and on the other militants more accustomed to destroying what oppresses them, went quite well from our perspective. The question was raised, around the middle of January, of steward/marshal services that had different roles here and there. When some such services sought to protect the protesters against impulsive car drivers (as a reminder, there has been a dozen deaths linked to traffic accidents since the beginning of the movement), others were clearly trying to pacify the more offensive Gilets jaunes. But, even so everyone knows there is a high risk of clashing with the police every Saturday, most Gilets jaunes just go on marching and a small minority leaves the protests. In other words, this movement has become insurrectional without really knowing it. The government though, has understood that and keeps repeating, in order to try and divide the movement, that those who keep protesting are irresponsible people only desiring unrest and chaos.

Enkapuzado: We can imagine that among anarchists there are also different ways to take part in the movement, could you tell us which is yours and why?

R&R: Where we live, we have been quite lucky. Of course, the identitarians and other mindless little fascists participated in the movement (blockades, demonstrations, etc.) but they were never numerous enough to actually initiate anything or to influence any political orientation locally. We called them out soon and they had to keep an even lower profile than they already had for the bulk of the Gilets jaunes. Also, the organization arose without any leader or spokesperson, horizontally in general assemblies with various comittees (anti-repression, actions, communication, perspectives, street-medics).

Enkapuzado: After almost three months of a social movement which doesn’t seem to be running out, what are the perspectives? Quickly, seen from here, the extreme-right seems less and less present. Does this mean there is a seizing of the movement by the unionist left? How do the anarchist Yellow Vests stand on, for example, the candidacy of a Gilets jaunes list for the European elections?

R&R: Unfortunately, the perspectives are few and sometimes not so interesting. Some Yellow Vests cling to the RIC (Citizens’ Initiative Referendum) and the European elections. This is obviously not our thing and we are pushing to step up the fight and establish a balance of power that has already brought the government to its knees, although it has not happened for more than
ten years (in 2006, during the anti-CPE movement). Fortunately, in Caen, participation in elections is not a stated demand.

There was the assembly of the assemblies in Commercy (a small town in eastern France) where several delegations met in February. We heard about the desire to open “houses of the people” but without really knowing what is behind them (collaboration with local authorities or seeking autonomy through the opening of squats).

We cannot really talk about the recuperation of the trade union left, in which no one believes anymore given the failures it has produced. Some trade unionists have been present individually since the beginning, but the unions have had almost no control over the movement and are clumsily trying to make up for it by calling for a strike day from time to time, highlighting the mix of struggles. The movement is still divided within the unions, especially since the Yellow Vests have very little involvement in the world of work and call for a strike only weakly. For some unions, it is therefore a question of avoiding falling into total oblivion, or of trying to pacify the confusion by reminding them of the importance of the hazy “social dialogue”.

Presently, a second coordination of the Yellow Vests assemblies will be held in Saint-Nazaire in April and each city is called upon to have mandates concerning local practices. For example, to collectivize anti-repression at the national level, share communication tools, etc.

The repression is so high that we no longer even manage to have a reliable count locally, for our small town: more than 250 people arrested, 140 legal proceedings including 50 trials, at least 12 Yellow Vests in prison, more than 35,000 euros in fines... The two heaviest offenders in France are from Caen, with sentences of 3 years and 3 months, and 3 years, including 6 months suspended. This police and judicial attack, against people unfamiliar with militancy and for the most part precarious, will have at least had the effect of raising a general questioning of state violence. We have seen protestors calling for the ban of LBD-40 (ex-Flashball). Recently, too, an emerging demand has been for an amnesty for all imprisoned Yellow Vests.
“Concerning the interviews (...), their aim is to provoke us, as the positions and analyses presented here are diverse and sometimes contradictory. In any case, they invite us to partake in insurrectional action and confirm again that pacifism and passivity are not valid options against the daily violence of a self-proclaimed all-powerful state.”