

DESTROYING THE REPUBLIC SEEMS LIKE A REASONABLE GOAL

About the riots for Nahel

1.

In just six days, the riots for Nahel triggered an unprecedented level of negation in France: negation of law, property and rightful institutions. As far as revolutionary violence was concerned, much time was saved. Up until then, we were either told that such attacks were uncalled for and too nihilistic or that such relentlessness was out of reach and unachievable given the opponent's organizing abilities. Such disempowering and disheartening claims suddenly became obsolete. The use of political violence enacted by a revolutionary process demands exactly the same level of *disrespect* towards the law, the commodities and the rightful institutions (from kindergartens to public transportation). Despite what conservative rhetoric may have foretold, there was no overall collapse: normal life carried on (sadly); fear did not win (fortunately). However, a revolutionary process never merely comes down to the use of violence. It becomes at least three other things: **a potency to paralyze the country, a strategic potency, and a potency of positioning (and of discussion)**. Having said that, channelling, directing or even redirecting violence is out of the question. It could not have picked better targets. As such, it is political, as political as can be.

2.

What happened then? Suburban youth, previously described as extremely depoliticized under the combined influence of business, religion and the pacification carried out by the «older brothers», leaped *on their own* into an episode of revolutionary violence. Following the most intense phase of the movement against the pension reform, where setting fire to garbage bins and targeting town halls became habits, and three months after police vans were set aflame in Sainte-Soline, the suburban revolt shattered the ceiling of possible action. In terms of repression, the cost has been insane, leading in the short term to more suburban isolation. There's a crack in the wall, though. Action may have involved white people at times, but that's not the point. This tactical possibility strengthens a more decisive truth: only radical politics may take down this wall. The problem of the suburbs can and should be considered within the broader context of revolutionary construction. This does not mean there will be no failures, hardships, or even misunderstandings. But it is our only chance of not handing it over, in one way or another, to social and racial fatalism.

3.

One more death, at least two people in a coma, armored vehicles and special police units sent in to suppress the riots, public transportation curfews, state of emergency threats, maximum prison sentences as deterrents, a scandalously successful funding campaign for the involved police officer, media obsessing over damage costs, the disclosure of Nahel's driving offenses in minute detail, the censoring of social networks accounts and calls for rebellion, no questioning of the prevailing model, clear conscience vs. guilty conscience, whining leftists, refusing to call for peace and then

remaining silent... How to describe the reaction to riots? Class violence, racial violence, State violence, republican violence, colonial violence, reformist violence. These are all valid manifestations. In a word: civilized violence. This is politics, not abstraction. It corresponds to a strategy that has tangible effects: everlasting counter-insurgency. It defines the framework of our present. As for the suburbs, once reassessed the republican order power and the cost of its disruption, what will change? Nada. Our fists are shaking with rage. As invincible as the counterpart may seem, the absence of a Republican Front (all the more remarkable given the radical nature of the riots) deprives the State of its left hand. Firmness alone prevails and hectic leaders are forced to *persist in their cluelessness*. Struggling with yet another crisis, they actually show weakness.

4.

The riots for Nahel carry a wider meaning. The insurrectionary turn they took is eye-opening. Disorder breaks loose and exposes the nature of order. In a bewildering shortcut, everything that is established by order (and which in turn establishes it) is laid bare before our eyes. And what's that? *Law and property*. The law that holds property together, property that holds the law together. Very concrete allegories of order could be witnessed in the streets with, among other examples, three RAID armored vehicles in front of a looted supermarket. There lies all the irony of the civilized condition: the SWAT officer, while standing as the best embodiment of order, remains after all a mere security guard. Why do anti-terrorist units have to be involved to remind us that our addiction to order means nothing more than an addiction to the «natural laws of economics and necessity»? Comedy and tragedy are obviously intertwined and the latter always prevails eventually: refusing to comply with social command means either prison or death.

5.

- Against the law and its enforcement, riot shall prevail.
- Against property, looting shall prevail. It has a bad ring to it. It's said to be as driven by greed as the economy. It has become so commonplace these days that it appears in a whole new light. Commodity and property ultimately depend on strict control over how the consumer goods exit the store; looting simply means *breaking and exiting* out of property. Regardless of individual or collective motives, it is destitution in deed. How goods may eventually turn back into commodities is another matter entirely. There lies the great revelation: the Yop-commodity exists in a very different way than the freed Yop.
- Against the institutions, fire shall prevail. Assaults on police stations, courthouses and even prisons. In regard to this week's achievements, the parliament, the state departments and the presidential palace appear more than ever as mere stains on the landscape, political anomalies.
- But against the republic itself, it's politics against politics.

6.

Control operations are not to be trifled with. The actual reason riots ever happened challenges social order as a whole. Let's get back to the starting point. Someone *killable* is killed. A guard does his job. It comes as no surprise, nor can we pretend to discover the existence of this implicit republican register (hidden in plain sight): the *killable*. Those who died are justified by their status. «He died because he was *killable*, move along». Murder is thus ritualized as a simple police operation. The *killable* status must be destroyed for at least one person to be avenged out of thousands killed. Such is the underlying motive behind the current riots, the political problem they challenge. However, the *killable* status is a cornerstone of the Republic. Generally speaking, any form of government must, in order to produce people, its people, its political workforce, map out the social area of dangerous elements. The actual oldest profession in the world, the citizen, is pursued first and foremost against the enemies of society. They are put in the lowest boxes of these domination systems: justice, race, class, nation, age, etc. The criminal, the non-white, the poor, the semi-French

and the young are feared, hunted down and ultimately needed. Someone like Nahel cannot easily get through the civil security gates. The riots have not taken this insurrectionary turn by accident. The general mood is perfectly consistent with the nature of the obstacle. There is no way out of the problem as long as you follow the rules of the republican game. The republic itself stands as the obstacle that must be toppled. Expecting it to let go of its colonial features is pointless. The colonial continuum is part of the preexisting continuum of sovereignty, of governmentality, in short, of the politics of civilization.

7.

Killing is one thing; *legitimizing death* is something else, drawing back to the very depths of the politics of civilization. Who would dare frowning upon civilization? Who else but those whose existence critically seems to match the wrong status? Civilization does not rely on death, but on legitimate death. The *well-deserved* death of nuisances. “Monopoly of the legitimate use of violence”: until now, «violence» has been the center of attention, while its «legitimate» aspect seemed to raise less concern. Severing these two dimensions is the key. Civilization claimed monopoly in each and every field, including giving death. It’s not exactly death itself that is confiscated, but why it is inflicted. A critical issue. Any sort of violence, wherever it comes from, requires reasons (not be confused with a universal moral grounding). Contrary to popular belief, those reasons concern us first and foremost, as people who may exercise it. Because violence without reason has the power to destroy whoever uses it, to take away their sanity, to make them faceless¹. In legitimizing death, civilized politics accomplish two things: they naturalize violence, instituting it as police and in the meantime they crush any other reason to use violence, so that those who resort to it will never be able to access their own reasons for doing so. And each new reason for violence will eventually wear the dominant reason’s clothing: the restoration of governmentality, the definition of a *rightful side*. Legitimacy is nothing more than perversion in politics. It’s always the sauce with which we are eaten.

8.

“We must work in depth to counter this process of *decivilization*», Macron said carelessly a month ago. In the enemy’s fantasy, decivilization obviously looks like an outburst of arbitrary violence. For us, in simple words, it’s just the world freeing itself from governmentality. The only revolution worth fighting for negates not only a specific government but also governmentality itself; not only a distinct sovereign but sovereignty itself; not only the law but legitimacy.

9.

Most of the time, when police kills, we feel unable to fight back. Every additional death makes us feel more resentful and humiliated. Such feelings are only the *token of our weakness*. To experience them is not the issue. The real one is when we quit fighting their origin and ultimately identify ourselves with them and take pride in them. Anything that validates and fuels those feelings, rather than draining them dry, is utterly wrong. Resentment can be *nurtured* (by hope, consolation, amnesia, conformity, cynicism, but also by despair and violence) or it can be *drained* – but how? Radicalism today seems to reach its highest point when one has the decency *not to call for peace*. No one will risk saying anything too impactful because Nahel’s death raises a massive political question: revolution, and nothing less. Revolution is often described as resentment in power, when it is actually the only force that may extinguish resentment.

¹ In the words of C.L.R. James in his book on the Haitian Revolution: «The massacre of the whites was a tragedy; not for the whites. For these old slave-owners, those who burnt a little gunpowder in the arse of a Negro, who buried him alive for insects to eat [...]; for these there is no need to waste one tear or one drop of ink. The tragedy was for the blacks and the Mulattoes [...]. Such purposeless massacres degrade and brutalise a population, especially one which was just beginning as a nation and had had so bitter a past.»

10.

Overcoming resentment may be the longest fight, but choosing where to start from is decisive. We cannot remain in a defensive posture indefinitely. We need a greater reason to fight than what is crushing us. Besides, «we» should not stand at the center of political attention. We are not just fighting for ourselves (the «no new friends» mistake), and especially not for everyone else (a colonial trick). Truth be told, we're not here to save anyone, but to destroy *what destroys us*. This is not nihilism, indeed it's the exact opposite. Nihilism is the destruction of meaning. As such, meaning is under constant attack and is relentlessly humiliated by civilization politics. Civilization is the actual nihilism. As far as the motives for violence as concerned, or anything else for that matter, the extinction of meaning is the central political phenomenon of our times. Everyone has it confirmed each time they have to deal with institutions, especially at work. How come? Because meaning resists any form of objective conditioning, because it is irreducible and because every institution is above all an operation of reduction. Hence the need to fight the hegemony of institutions, i.e. governmentality. Whatever current trends may claim, we do not fight it because «there is no meaning» but precisely because against all odds, there is one. We are here to destroy what destroys meaning, not to produce it. Every order, from the most archaic to the most modern, from family to social networks, that pretends to the *production of meaning*, actually destroys it, by definition. The less room there is for meaning, the more room remains for power (domination, alienation, destruction of the non-human). Here is the source of all our troubles. Beneath our respective grievances against this world lies the political imperative of finding our own potency, to meet the meaning of our actions.

Not only is there no clearer reason to fight as far as we know, but the other existing reasons prove unsustainable: fighting «for human dignity» in a world that destroys the non-human; «saving the planet» without destroying the social order; «fighting alienation» by looking down on all forms of domination; «fighting domination» while being trapped in its prism²; or simply adding up these partial reasons without worrying about the blatant contradictions between them.

11.

Whatever institutes meaning destroys it. This rule applies to a revolutionary process, as much as it does to anything else. The meaning of our actions is the only thing we can rely on. It is the most crucial issue on which we agree, guaranteed by no universal nor particular law. The only chance resides in sharing that issue, without losing sight of its potential ensuing dissolution. All forms stem from this. Here is why no revolutionary process shall be content with taking to the streets and blocking the country – as shown by the actions and the assumptions of the first half of 2023. Revolutionary force shall not be reduced to tactics. Tactical action, in its spreading, calls for strategic decisions. When actions or forms of action become more than one, they still lack something. This additional element, usually labeled as «coordination», is essentially the decision on how they are to be balanced in any given space or time. What shapes such a decision by the way? First, what insurance do we have that all the political forms essential to revolutionary construction are on deck? This question is not strategic in itself though it implies access to another level: the level of political «doctrine», of partisan thought. In turn, strategic potency calls for a potency of positioning. A revolutionary process must learn how to detect in the situation the way towards its own potency. It shall not add up to a series of actions, it must learn how to balance them. It shall not only assess their impact, weigh out their political significance, it shall *draw a line*. There is no universal answer to emerging questions: debate is mandatory. A revolutionary process grows and becomes what it is, through the clash between positions, whether situated or general, at each turning point. Every strategic choice matters. Decisions do not fall from the sky. Each time the fundamental division between reformism and revolution becomes more substantial, the process

² Every form of domination results in absolute wrongdoing. Focusing on a particular form of domination provides an alibi for all the other ones. To fight them all, we need to target what enables them, thereby escaping the prism of domination.

gains weight – or instead loses some and steps backwards. Once again, against the Republic, it's politics against politics.

12.

Times are accelerating: as time goes on, linear thinking, whereby events follow one another in an unchanging framework, becomes less realistic. Regime crises are coming ever closer together, bringing to the surface entities that are all the easier to name as they lack any real political consistency (Yellow Vests, radical ecologists, pension reform protesters, suburban youth). We do not believe in a political subjectivity that comes down to a category, simply because we do not believe in a collective commitment exempt from real commitment. There lies no more hope in categories than in their convergence or unification. The emergence of a revolutionary subjectivity requires the elaboration of the revolutionary question. All the forces that put it on their agenda become interlocutors. As for the fascist «revolution», it simply usurps the name. Anti-republicanism is neither a new phenomenon nor a value in itself. Everyone needs to clarify their position not only on capitalism, but on civilization.

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