

Julien Coupat: “The cynicism of our rulers is inflexible”

by Aude Lanceline¹

Though his troubles have started up again, Julien Coupat, the principal defendant in the Tarnac Affair,² responds to our questions about his legal future, the laws about spying, and France after the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings.

He hasn't expressed himself through the press since 2009.³ After having been incarcerated for six months due to accusations of “terrorism,” Julien Coupat became for the Left one of the most powerful symbols of the authoritarian downward spiral of Sarkozyist power, which was accused of over-exaggerating the sabotage of the catenaries of a high-speed train line in an attempt to create [the spectacle of] an “domestic enemy.” The intellectual leader of the radical-Left group “from Tarnac,” Coupat didn't stop denouncing manipulation by the police, leading a tough legal battle alongside the other defendants.

As we know, the Socialist government of the last five years has not reversed the [Sarkozyist] trend. Just two days after the Assembly voted upon the law on spying, on 7 May [2015], Julien Coupat, 40 years old, received a summons to appear in court for “criminal association in relation with a terrorist enterprise,” alongside two young women, including his companion, Yildune Lévy. One François Hollande, then the President of the General Council of Corrèze,⁴ the area in which Tarnac is located, had, in the Spring of 2009, taken up his pen to mock the description of the acts in question as “terrorism” and to denounce it as a “political affair.” Today Julien Coupat breaks his silence. What follows are excerpts.

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² For background information, cf. <http://www.notbored.org/tarnac.html>.

³ *Le Monde*, 25 May 2009. Translated into English here: <http://www.notbored.org/julien-coupat.html>.

⁴ A “Socialist” and currently the President of the French Republic.

“In any other European country, a case such as this one would have been dismissed with the authorities’ discreet excuses long ago.”

“Ever since our arrest, we have always found hilarious the charges that have weighed upon us. And we also think it’s hilarious that the public prosecutor’s office, in order to prop up the accusations of ‘terrorism,’ relies in its indictment on a book that is widely available through FNAC,⁵ *L’insurrection qui vient*,⁶ and on the anonymous testimony of a compulsive liar who confessed on French television⁷ to being manipulated by the anti-terrorist police. The prosecutors are the authors of failed crime stories.”

“We haven’t fought, and we aren’t fighting now, to have some of kind of innocence be recognized or so that the justice system in its great goodwill deigns to give up its unfounded legal proceedings. We fight because they have tried and are still trying to destroy us, to definitely remove the political possibility that the State has made us an example of from the map.”

“The fact that, 15 years after the *Patriot Act*,⁸ after the American Senate’s report on torture,⁹ after Snowden’s revelations,¹⁰ they are adopting such exorbitant measures [as the spying law of May 5] speaks to both the inflexible cynicism and the pathetic mimicry of the French rulers. They truly believe that, 15 years later, they will be able to renovate warlike neo-conservatism and that we are all too stupid, too cowardly and too passive to rise up against it.”

“The current Social-Democrat regime, as everyone can see, is in the process of successfully doing what Nicolas Sarkozy wasn’t able to do when it comes to ‘austerity,’ anti-terrorism, the right to work and the repression of everything on its Left.”

“Long ago, the political line of *Charlie Hebdo* became so right-wing that it was, I believe, the only publication that had its offices trashed during the demonstrations against the CPE.¹¹ On the other hand, if Cabu¹² was *Hara-Kiri*¹³

⁵ *Fédération nationale d’achats des cadres*, a huge chain of French retailers.

⁶ Translated as *The Coming Insurrection* (Semiotexte, 2009).

⁷ The *20-Heures* show on FT1.

⁸ English in original.

⁹ Issued in December 2014.

¹⁰ June 2013.

¹¹ The *Contrat Première Embauche*, which was violently opposed by French youths in March 2006.

¹² Jean Cabut was a caricaturist who participated in *Hara-Kiri* and *Charlie Hebdo*. He was one of those murdered on 7 January 2015.

¹³ Satirical French magazine founded in 1960.

and *L'Enragé*¹⁴ for the 1968 generation, for my generation he was *Récré A2*.¹⁵ How crazy would the world have to be if there were an armed attack against *Club Dorothée*?”

“In the past, the Internet and social networks acted like pressure-release valves, but today they’re becoming advanced police tools. Incrimination for ‘supporting terrorism’ exists so that any audacious expression produces the required terror. (...) The facts that Snowden has been forced to take refuge in Putin’s Russia and that [Julian] Assange, whom we went to London to meet, has no hope of leaving the tiny embassy in which he is cloistered say a lot about what the word ‘democracy’ really means.”

“We live in radical times. This state of things cannot last; the choice between revolution and reaction becomes clearer. If the on-going decomposition essentially profits the fascistic forces, this isn’t because ‘people’ are spontaneously inclining towards them, but because the fascists speak up, make bets, take the risk of losing. We revolutionaries, on the other hand, are held back by the invisible strings of a tradition that we continually fear that we will betray. (...) But in the current situation, isn’t there greater risk in *not* taking any risks?”

¹⁴ Short-lived satirical journal founded in May 1968 by Jean-Jacques Pauvert.

¹⁵ Children’s TV program (1978-1988) on which Cabu worked.