

# Concerning the “Yellow Vests”: Everything is possible, even self-managing assemblies in the middle of street intersections, villages and neighborhoods

## An interview with Raoul Vaneigem<sup>1</sup>

**Question:** In *Contribution à l'émergence de territoires libérés de l'emprise étatique et marchande*,<sup>2</sup> you write that “preferring the evil of today to what will be worse tomorrow prevents us from rising up.” Nevertheless, the “Yellow Vests”<sup>3</sup> have risen up and precisely to preserve their places in this civilization of consumerism and cars, which you condemn.

**Answer:** It should not escape you that the principal purpose of my book was to shake up the resignation, indifference and apathy that until today have allowed people to tolerate the facts that the desertification of the earth and life itself are coldly planned and imposed – with an increasing cynicism – at the expense of the world’s populations. That a great explosion of anger has suddenly and unexpectedly broken out, with apparently futile motives, gives me great satisfaction. You say that they have risen up to preserve their places? What places? They have no places in this beautiful wheeler-dealer [*affairiste*] world that exploits them like they are nothing but remote-controlled consumers, producers of goods that they themselves must pay for, and bureaucratically regulated suppliers of taxes and fees that bail out embezzling bankers. Quite certainly the cries of “Enough!”<sup>4</sup> and “We are sick of it!” can subside or turn around. Voluntary servitude has known many revolts that have gone nowhere. But even if the anger of the Yellow Vests

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<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted on 11 December 2018 by email for *Le Nouveau Magazine littéraire* and published 21 December 2018. Reprinted 25 December 2018 by *La Voie du Jaguar*: <https://lavoiedujaguar.net/Tout-est-possible-meme-les-assemblees-d-autogestion-au-milieu-des-carrefours>. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! on 28 December 2018. All footnotes by the translator.

<sup>2</sup> Here *La Voie du Jaguar* provides a link to a review of this as-of-yet untranslated book by Vaneigem: <https://lavoiedujaguar.net/Contribution-a-l-emergence-de-territoires-liberes-de-l-emprise-etatique-et>.

<sup>3</sup> *Les gilets jaunes* refers to the hundreds of thousands of people who, dressed in yellow safety vests, have recently taken to the streets all over France to protest a proposed measure to raise taxes on gasoline, among other things.

<sup>4</sup> *¡ya basta !* (Spanish in original.)

stagnates or ebbs, a great truly popular<sup>5</sup> – not “populist” – wave has arose and proved that nothing can resist the impetus of life.

**Q:** Are the Yellow Vests a new name for the class that is subjected to “an exhausting chore whose monetary compensation is principally used to purchase merchandise”?

**A:** They aren’t a class, they are a heterogeneous movement, a nebula in which all kinds of politicized people and those who have dropped politics from their [everyday] preoccupations are all mixed together. The global character of their anger prevents traditional representatives of the people from recuperating and manipulating the herd. Because here, unlike in the past, there isn’t a herd that bleats in response to its butchers. Here there are individuals who are thinking about the more and more precarious conditions of their everyday lives. Here there is the intelligence of [human] beings and a refusal of the disgraceful fate that is made for them. Lucidity is groping, finding its way through uncertainties. The fact that power and its flunkies in the media take the insurgents for idiots demonstrates the weakness and vulnerability of capitalism, which endlessly repeats to us that it is inevitable and invincible.

**Q:** To the idea that, “made stupid by an abundance of crap, people who will be shipwrecked in the future play on deck while the boat sinks,” they retort that “you are preoccupied with the end of the world, while we are worried about the end of the month.” What do you say to them?

**A:** Outside of the wheeler-dealers who govern us, there is no one who, in addition to worrying about the end of the month, doesn’t also care about, not the end of *the* world, but the end of *a* world that no longer needs us; there is no one who doesn’t care about the fate reserved for us and our children by a world given over to the barbarism of “egotistical calculations.” And this isn’t metaphysical thinking; this is thinking that is formulated amidst taxes to be paid, work to be done, administrative restrictions, lies in the news media and the “stupidity due to an abundance of crap” that is deliberately maintained by the opinion-makers who turn people into idiots. A burst of intelligence has arrived today like a breathe of fresh air in the cesspools where we are held at every minute by the dictatorship of money.

**Q.** Are the Yellow Vests an example of the proletariat that has “regressed to its old status as plebs”? A victim of the financial capitalism that has lost “its human

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<sup>5</sup> The French word used here, *populaire*, can also mean working-class.

conscience and its class consciousness,” it no longer makes revolutions; it merely rebels.

A: Yes, they are an example of this regression. But, as I have written, the proletarian consciousness that wrested its social benefits from the State was only a historical form of human consciousness. This consciousness is being reborn before our very eyes, reviving solidarity, generosity, hospitality, beauty, poetry, and all the values that, today, have been suffocated by profit-making efficiency.

Q: When someone belongs to the displaced [*excentrées*] lower-middle classes – low-paying jobs, the necessity of using your car everywhere you go, houses to be paid off or rented out – can one still speak of reclaiming “the self-management of everyday life”?

A: Stop lowering these demands to the level of shopping baskets! You will see that these demands are global. They come from everywhere, from people who are retired, from high-school students, from farmers, from drivers whose cars take them more often to work than to a yacht on which they bask – all these women and men, these anonymous people who realize that they exist, who want to live and who are tired of being scorned by a Republic of Revenue [*une République du chiffre d'affaires*].

Q: You refer to a State “reduced to its simple repressive function.” Is it the one whose face we see in France today?

A: This isn’t a national problem; it’s an international one. I don’t know what the face of France is, or if France *has* a face, but the reality that reclaims [*recouvre*] this fictional representation is that of men and women who are exploited at will, millions of people who are totally indentured to a *totalitarian democracy* that treats them like commodities.

Q. The fight of the Yellow Vests and those of the forces that you salute in your book (ZADists,<sup>6</sup> feminists, ecological activists . . .), can they converge? Or are they essentially opposed to each other?

A: They are neither opposed nor convergent. We have entered into a critical period in which the smallest particular protest hinges upon [*s’articule sur*] an ensemble of global demands. The tomato plant is more important than the military and

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<sup>6</sup> Partisans of a ZAD, *zone à défendre*, a “zone to be defended.”

governmental boots that come to crush it – as at Notre-Dame-des-Landes.<sup>7</sup> The political leaders and those who press against the doors in the hope of replacing them think the opposite is true, just as they think that taxing the fuel of those for whom the usage of cars and gasoline have become indispensable dispenses with the possibility of doing something about the enormous profits of Total and the other oil companies. The zones to be defended (ZAD) don't limit themselves to fighting against the pollution that the multinational companies implant with scorn for the inhabitants of the Earth; they are the place where experiments with new forms of society take their first steps. “Everything is possible!” is also the message of the Yellow Vests. Everything is possible, even self-managing assemblies in the middle of street intersections, villages and neighborhoods.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. François de Beaulieu, “Usage of the Commons at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Yesterday and Today”: <http://www.notbored.org/Beaulieu.pdf>