

The CPE, a drop in a lake of rage



Comments on violence,
illegality and the direction
of social struggles
by *Les enragé-e-s ouvrent le bal*
(Grenoble, France, april 2006)

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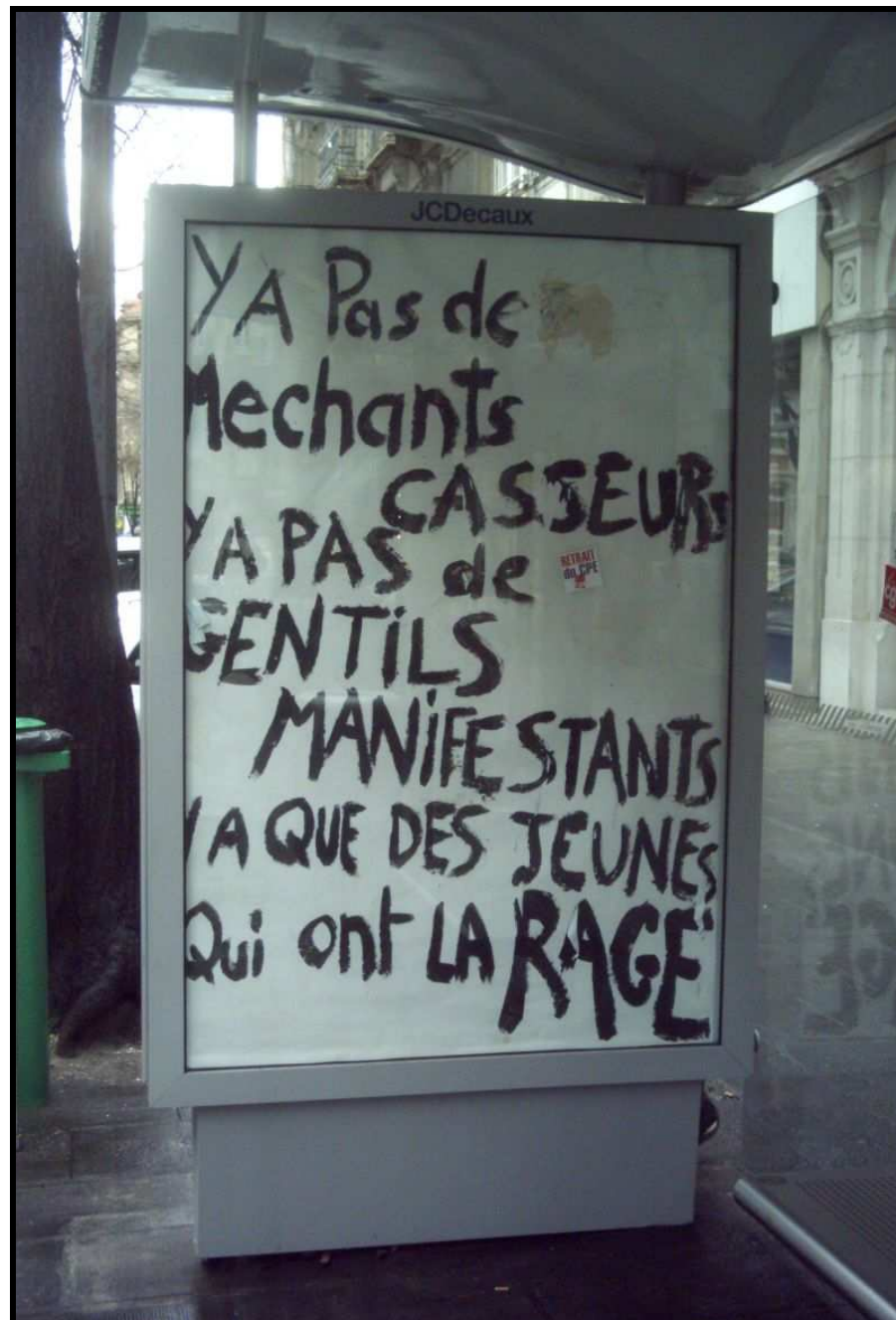
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The cover picture was taken in Grenoble during the clashes of March 23rd 2006.

a-b-c-d-e-f notes are written by the translator.

1-2 notes are written by *Les enragé-e-s ouvrent le bal.*



Subverted advertising board, in a street of Grenoble,
March 28th 2006.

Comments on violence, illegality and the direction of social struggles

This text jumbles some reflections born in Grenoble during what was called, until recently, the anti-CPE movement... While it may not be very structured, its aim is to raise issues to be explored in greater depth. That's something for a beginning.

Violence as a way of getting heard

"If ever there was a connection between students and suburban youth, anything could happen. Including a general explosion and an awful end for this five-year period."

Nicolas Sarkozy, Interior minister, on Sunday 12th March 2006, quoted in "La grande peur de Sarko" on page 2 of the *Canard enchaîné* (no4455, March 15th 2006).

"These riots are no accident. Teachers are serving government, not students."

A temporary teacher from 94th department, on Monday March 20th 2006, on France inter.

"My great fear is that we could find ourselves facing not an opposition to the CPE anymore, but provocations and a trail of violence. So I am asking for a withdrawal of the CPE, a responsible attitude and a return to social peace. We are in a crazy situation. The picture France is currently giving abroad has to be seen, especially after what happened last November. It's an appalling image."

Michel Destot, Grenoble Mayor, interviewed in the *Dauphiné libéré* of Friday March 31st 2006 (no19092).

As weeks went by, from the first demonstrations in February on, the students-schools-unions movement against the CPE has slowly been growing into a social revolt, reviving some of the violent practices of October-November 2005, when riots erupted in many poor districts all around France.

Now, as the CPE has been "replaced" (rather than "withdrawn"), as left-wing as a whole brags about a great victory, society still stays the same, shit is everywhere, and neither governmental left or right wing nor medias will reckon that the fall of the CPE is due more than anything else to the movement's perpetual outflankings.

However, without violence, without the protester's different illegal practices, we'd still be in front of TV sets asking ourselves "How come nothing is changing when we are millions quietly demonstrating in the streets? Is our good citizenship something worthless?"

There is an irony at the origin of this text which lies in the following paradox:

- If the CPE is *no more*, it is because tens of thousands of revolting people have been stirring up the shit from Paris to Toulouse, from Rennes to Grenoble, etc. However, most of these rebels are still dissatisfied and full of rage, their revolt intact. For them, the CPE was just a detail.

- Those who crow over victory in front of cameras and rejoice in microphones of the end of the CPE are the same ones thanks to whom nothing would have happened if we had just followed their orders ("disperse, now!"). They are also the ones who were outraged by the "rioters", who were preventing all "wild" protests, who have tried to contain revolt into the legal boundaries of official authorised marches. From the UNEF to the CGT, they all should reckon that it is mainly because of the rioters, of all those who undertook sabotage and blockading actions, of all those who took their motto "*...or it's gonna blow up, gonna blow up!*"^(a) quite literally (while themselves fearing only one thing – that this would actually happen), that the CPE was stillborn and that Villepin, at the head of the state, has been ridiculed.

All this, of course, could not have happened either without hundreds of thousands or even millions people mobilising during various protests from early February to mid April. Beyond conflicts with the unions, one of our great strengths has been the way our methods of actions complemented each other.

Actually, what we will remember the most, more than the "replacement" or "withdrawal" of the CPE, is our UMP (*united movement of the people*) against the other UMP^(b) and what will stay in our memories is what happened between us, what we started building up together as well as what we started pulling down together.

In Grenoble, the first demonstration (on February 7th) announced it all when at the end of the march the prefecture square was invaded by dozens of protesters, who took down the three national flags that were there and replaced them with red

(a)– A popular leftist slogan chanted at demonstrations: "Shared working time, shared wealth, or it's gonna blow up, gonna blow up!"

(b)– The UMP, or "Union pour un mouvement populaire" (Union for a Popular Movement), is the political party to which Chirac, Villepin and Sarkozy belong.

and black flags. The border of legality had been crossed. And it didn't stop from this day to the April 11th actions targeting temporary employment agencies, real-estate agencies, ANPE offices^(c) and local medias (Dauphiné libéré, France bleu Isère, M6-Grenoble) in one go.

On March 18th, at the end of the march, while the BAC^(d) were still parading in the midst of protesters, a big part of the power balance prevailing for the rest of the movement played itself out in Grenoble: after arresting two people, the BAC cops had to pull out their flash-ball guns and tonfa sticks

to push back the angry protesters who had started indiscriminately stoning BAC and CRS cops^(e). From this day, the BAC guys would only come wearing helmets and keep well apart from the crowd. Consciousness and revolt were rising up.



Tear gas in Victor Hugo Square, in Grenoble, on March 28th 2006.

On March 23rd and 28th, there were downright riots in the city centre. What Sarkozy dreaded became reality, the connection between students and suburban youth happened intensely (one could of course regret that most often these moments of struggling together have been without tomorrows – for the moment at least). There was a tangible power struggle, the revolt was no more symbolic but practical. When causing trouble for the police and more generally for advocates of public order, we can leave behind the usual feelings of resignation and powerlessness. Smashing things and turning the pacified town into a riot place is a form of creation, and conversely. All of us are more or less aware that it is becoming impossible to live in a world where we would make our own choices without totally destroying the world as it currently stands. Thus, when we are destroying what oppresses us, we are opening a space where we can create new types of social relations.

(c)– The ANPE, or "Agence nationale pour l'emploi", is the French agency pushing the unemployed to get a job.

(d)– The BAC is a specialised police body targeting "delinquents", hosting some of the meanest bastards of all the French police.

(e)– CRS are riot police under the direct supervision of the Interior Ministry.



A wall in Grenoble, on March 28th 2006.

The insurrectional (and thus destructive) violence of the protesters bears the seeds of an exciting life to be built, a life reaching beyond mere *survival* (whichever style – working-class or middle-class, "western" or "third world"), a life taken back from the hands of state and bosses, abolishing the *work-family-country-TV* routine. The creativity residing inside this violence is the expression of an impatience to do away with the dispossession of our lives, the practical negation of the roles that we are supposed to stick to.

If the riotous moments have not been as violent in Grenoble as in Paris or other places, if the outflankings were more discreet in some towns than in Grenoble, it is clear that there was the same insurgent spirit everywhere. The means for spontaneously materialising revolt were sometimes lacking. Some connections may get stronger over time and last. We may be able to take better riot initiatives in the future, without waiting for the cops to open up the fight (it was noted on April 4th that they can hold back in the face of stone throwing if it happens at a moment strategically inappropriate for them).

During the whole movement, direct action was useful. Throwing stones at the cops, breaking a shop window or turning a car upside-down does not always have a direct impact on the government in power, but it increases tension, it deteriorates social peace, widens the impact of our struggle. Of course, it is always more interesting, if possible, for our actions to be well targeted.

Illegality as the consequence of disobedience

"Refusing to be a slave really is what changes the world."

Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, 1967, p.265.

Delinquency, as a spontaneous form of disobedience, a radical opposition to good citizenship, deeply contradicts the rules set up by this society. In the face of the widespread scorn it gets back in a passive (massive disinterest for *civic* life or *institutional* politics) or active (offences of all sorts – riots, sabotage, damage, theft, underground economy, etc.) form, government keeps on multiplying the tools at its disposal for the control of the population.

As a very civic comment puts: "The more offences you commit, the more controls will be set up to prevent you from doing that"; any *good citizen* should follow through his/her police thinking and conclude with a "Submit, give up living" which would be of very best taste.

Democracy has managed to buy social peace with lots of leisure (TV, gadgets, all the *spectacle* stuff). By adding a *participative* layer (through associations, festivals, elections, discussions with our saviours the "elected ones", etc.)¹, the civic left had been hoping to channel social discontent, but it hasn't been much more successful in this area than religious groups and other hijackers of dissent. Actually, the ultimate solution for the state/capital coalition really is repression, best supported by preventive security measures. The law-and-order ideology didn't wait for an increase in delinquency and illegal practices to reinforce its tools (police, army, private militias, "social" services, prisons, video surveillance, satellites and other communications control, RFID chips, biometrics, etc.). Now we reverse the aforementioned civic comment: "The more means of control the state and private firms will set up to prevent us from living outside the law, the more ways we will develop of resisting and escaping it". Any good *delinquent* should follow through his/her active disobedience and conclude with an "Insubordinate! Now is the time to live" which would be of the very best taste².

Talking of common delinquency, all media recently rushed on the controversy over damages supposedly worth 300,000 euros committed in the Amphitheatres Hall of

(1)– It should be noted that left-wing is far from having a monopoly on "participative" things as all TV or radio programmes ask their viewers or listeners to "participate" and "intervene" one way or another (asking a question on the air, participating in a game, a poll, a "vote", and let's not forget all the "reality show" stuff). That is "participatory democracy" too.

(2)– And beyond individual approaches, doesn't it seem necessary to think about collectively setting up *criminal* networks (in a subversive sense) of resistance and offensive?

the UPMF (Pierre Mendes-France University), "devastated" mostly by graffiti on its walls... This place, which is usually strictly devoted to the passive reception of courses leading students down a straight path towards integration in the world of private or civil service, as ever subservient and profitable servants, has been turned for some thirty days of occupation into a living place, a space for human relations, and whatever is said, a space for creation and self-management, this creation sometimes involving the destruction (quite partial) of a place which is not inhabitable anyway, and in the hands of a university chancellor (Mr Courlet) whose sole person is a display of all the foulest features of this world's institutions (both the arrogance and hypocrisy of power, its lies and tricks, and above all the will to keep their privileges). Who decides what regarding the Amphitheatres Hall? Who decides what in this university and in others? Who decides what in this world? Who *can* decide what?

Of course, self-management as a way of creating a new life, was something new for most of us. While it is practiced in some squats and collectives, it is still to be experimented on a longer term, by being more and more people to take it as both a means and an end, and keeping in mind that authorities are intent on two things regarding this approach, which both follow the same logic of putting spokes in our wheels:

- Use law enforcement against our experiments, which are inevitably illegal since they are autonomous. This limits self-management and autonomy because it makes them "precarious", tied to the power balance we manage to set up between us and the authorities of this system which we are stuck in, anyway.
- Invite us to practice self-management (or co-management) within businesses or places legally tied to the system (through security standards, rent, limited objectives / associations, etc.).

The aim is always to put us back in line and make us harmless and acceptable.

About medias and the direction of social struggles

Medias, trying to fabricate reality, ceaselessly put across antistrike comments at the first sign of blockading. It's nothing new, and it confirmed itself over the last two months. Journalists, in their great kindness, give people the opportunity to speak. But not just to anyone, rather the one who is complaining, the moaning one, the perpetual victim, the one with nothing against bosses and state but who won't suffer being prevented from going to work, the one who never once thinks about showing

solidarity with the strikers.

Among the pleasures felt during this movement were making encounters and forming a collective force during riots and other unauthorised demonstrations. There have been big changes in social relations during the Amphitheatres Hall occupation and secondary schools blockades. There was also a joy arising from different displays of solidarity, by all sorts of people, during demonstrations as well as riots... Sometimes workers were really disturbed by some types of blockade, however it sometimes felt crazy to us that while several riots were taking place simultaneously in town, life was going on for some people as if nothing special was happening (it was not always the case, and on some days whole shopping streets shut their shops preventively, or when they saw demonstrators and the smell of tear gas coming their way).

"On February 9th 1961 in Naples, workers coming out of factories at night don't find the tramways usually transporting them, their drivers having started a surprise strike because many of them have been laid off. Workers manifest their solidarity with strikers by throwing various projectiles at the company's offices, and then petrol bottles which set afire a part of the tramway station. They then burn down buses, victoriously battle the police and firemen. Many thousands of them spread into town, breaking windows and neon signs. During the night, the army needs to be called to restore order, and tanks head for Naples."

Internationale situationniste no7, "Notes éditoriales" (Les mauvais jours finiront), 1962, p.11.

Once more, during the movement against the CPE and its world, we saw that government and medias only speak of us in "positive" terms when they consider us harmless, somehow trying to impose directions to our struggles. When we become a threat, a hazard for their privileges, for the *status quo*, for social peace, the way they talk can change from one day to the next, turning us into "thugs" and "rioters" who have "nothing to do with protesters". From this point, it is up to us to make our struggle known, up to us to create independent medias and reach out to the people as often as possible (by meeting people and talking to them). We are too much used to communicate indirectly (including through this text – we don't want to imply that we should stop writing, only remind that the strongest moments during this movement were experienced directly, between persons).

Medias, once again, try to *discredit* our struggle by announcing everywhere that the great winners of the anti-CPE movement are Sarkozy (becoming the only possible

presidential candidate for the UMP), the Socialist Party (a united left-wing is always profitable to the most crooked ones) and unions (especially the CFDT^(f) whose great merit is supposedly to have been there till the end... The end of what?).

What we know for sure is that *we* come out of this movement more determined than ever. This movement will be prolonged in other forms. During these weeks of struggle, riots, blockades and occupations, we have lived the way we chose (as far as "choosing" was possible). We have not been doing *as we were told*. We have met people with whom we have had collective practices and reflections standing in sharp contrast with institutional politics and electioneering.

It is by keeping quiet that we would have played the "game" of Sarkozy, the Socialist Party and the CFDT! Indeed it is when we calm down that they glee in anticipation of the 2007 elections. *Why should we keep quiet?*

The current autonomy of our struggles is solid because it is both uncontrollable and active.

While staying uncontrollable, we could be even stronger by organising ourselves in mutual help networks. Let's keep in touch, and let's keep on making new contacts.

Let our desires spread.

Grenoble, April 20th 2006
Les enragé-e-s ouvrent le bal



Sharon Stone contre le CPE et son monde :

"Je comprends tout à fait les raisons de ces manifestations. Je partage la rage et la colère qui s'y expriment. Que ce soit en France, aux Etats-Unis ou ailleurs, l'Etat est essentiellement une structure de domination. Partout, notre objectif est de l'abattre. Par tous les moyens nécessaires."

(Message aux rebelles de tous horizons, Paris, 20 mars 2006)

Infos, armes,	http://infokiosques.net/
reflexions,	http://grenoble.indymedia.org/
subversion...	http://cettesemaine.free.fr/spip/

(f)– The CFDT is a workers union usually very submissive to bosses.

About the anti-CPE movement and its wake, stories and reflections can be found on the following Internet sites:

- <http://grenoble.indymedia.org/>

An open publishing site. Many records of actions and demonstrations that happened in February to April 2006 can be found on it (as well as many reflections on work, suburbs, violence, etc.). Also working in Nantes, Lille, Paris, Toulouse, Marseille, Nice, Liège, etc.

- <http://cettesemaine.free.fr/spip/>

News of disorder.

- <http://infokiosques.net/>

More in-depth texts, all available in booklet format, ready to be printed, photocopied and wildly distributed.



One of the walls the Amphitheatres Hall (Pierre Mendès-France University, Grenoble/Saint-Martin-d'Hères campus), on April 10th 2006.



Police station in Saint-Bruno district (Grenoble), on April 18th 2006.

«When causing trouble for the police and more generally for advocates of public order, we can leave behind the usual feelings of resignation and powerlessness. Smashing things and turning the pacified town into a riot place is a form of creation, and conversely.»

ZANZARA ATHEE