

# Letters from René Riesel to José Bové<sup>1</sup>

3 September 1999

My dear José:

Outside I cannot have the same appreciation of the situation as you do inside.<sup>2</sup> But aside from our differences, we have, I believe, a sufficient basic agreement on the meaning of what has been undertaken these past two years,<sup>3</sup> in particular and of what we would do if there was an incarceration (which we have sought out), so that there is no need of more oratory precautions before, quite briefly, telling you my feelings and giving my analysis of the situation that each new rebound of your “affair” reinforces.

– We are in the process of completely losing the initiative. This affair, which has this time become really mediatic,<sup>4</sup> escapes us. Consequently, it is completely possible to give it new meaning and pursue what you have called the pedagogy of action. More or less confusedly, everyone – close to our positions or hostile to them – feels it and maladroitly has the responses that they typically have to all things, without hiding the fact that an opportunity is being lost here.

– But it is we who are especially losing the opportunity to push further: this time the quantity has not produced quality, in any case, not as we would like.

– I believe that in this case, where it nevertheless goes without saying, that the tactical recourse to the Conf<sup>5</sup> umbrella (corporatist motivations = “professionals,” protect Roquefort,<sup>6</sup> etc.) was a primary strategic error. Not for the Conf, which gained the greatest possible benefit, but for the goals that we pursue (even accounting for the numbers of those who “radicalized” the Conf by evolving the relations of force in it). For the record, I only mention the confusion concerning unionist freedom (at the minimum, it would be necessary to know which unionism, without counting that this would imply that a non-unionist person would *ipso facto* be condemned to stagnate in jail or pay [a fine]).

– The second global error of appreciation was surely not accounting for the risk in such an objective of the increase in power over the last two years (in the sense that it would have been necessary to foresee the cumulative exasperation of the judges in Aveyron and “the independence of the judiciary,” if they objectively played an unexpected dirty trick on the State, they would take us for idiots, because there is no doubt that this was the most “explicit” opportunity to imprison you).

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the NOT BORED! website (notbored.org) in 2007.

<sup>2</sup> At the time this was written, José Bové was in jail for his role in the widely reported attack against a McDonald’s restaurant in Montpellier, France.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix (below) for a list, drafted by Riesel, of the actions that were taken during those years.

<sup>4</sup> The French here is *médiatique*, for which there is no equivalent in English.

<sup>5</sup> The Peasants’ Confederation.

<sup>6</sup> *gardarem lou roquefort*, an alteration of *Gardarem lou Larzac* (“We will protect Larzac”) a battle cry during the early 1970s and the title of a documentary directed by Philippe Haudiquet (1974). Roquefort is a classic French cheese, threatened by export limitations.

– The essential now is to make use of the opportunity to once again seize the attention of young people and first of all by subdued speech or writing. I will try to do what I can in a certain isolation, thus in a subterranean fashion, with the limits that this involves. Everything will rest upon you after your release. Prepare yourself well, this will be difficult. But this is the opportunity to speak clearly about the real links between the actions, the direct actions, against GMOs<sup>7</sup> and the eugenic poisoners, against the reformist illusions of the Tobin type<sup>8</sup> and obviously the State!

And so, rhizome (this is how you are referred to by Mermet's scoundrels),<sup>9</sup> have courage.

I embrace you,  
René

2 November 1999

My dear José:

José:

You telephoned me this past Saturday, for the third time since your release from prison. As you suspected, I had literally have nothing more to say to you. For your part, you have again seized upon a new pretext of the most tenuous nature to call me (I have had my telephone service disconnected for about a dozen days, I did not go to the sheep [breeders'] meeting in Clermont-Ferrand; in brief, one wonders what has become of me).

We have exchanged several notes without interest. All this ended up being quite clumsy, I was going to say that no, I will not participate in the slapstick comedy in Seattle,<sup>10</sup> and that you have said everything and the contrary of everything for several weeks, comrade.

This has led you to conclude that it would perhaps be useful if we spoke and why not have breakfast, come by train, in Paris. Such a detour would be useless.

We have worked very intelligently for almost two years concerning the question of genetic engineering. The divergences in our approaches were obvious but we managed – in the enlargement of the action and the deepening of its meaning – to give each other the space that we each needed. We even spoke quite openly about it.

Our last contact before these three phone calls was arranged by an intermediary. To the letter that I sent you in prison<sup>11</sup> a few days before your release, you responded that you were in agreement.

If the quick analysis that I proposed to you was succinct, it was [also] just, which what has followed has not ceased to demonstrate. You have chosen to close the fragile perspectives

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<sup>7</sup> Genetically modified organisms.

<sup>8</sup> Named after the economist James Tobin, the Tobin tax is designed to penalize short-term speculation on currency exchange.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Mermet, a French journalist.

<sup>10</sup> One wonders if Riesel regretted this decision, given the intensity of the subversive activity (and the police repression) that took place in Seattle, Washington at the meeting of the World Trade Organization on 30 November 1999.

<sup>11</sup> See above.

that opened up by indulging yourself in ostentatious associations with the most unspeakable scoundrels, mouth-to-mouth with the first social traitors to arrive, with the most shameful alliances, the most pitiful consensual clownish antics. You knew how to do better, through your own means as well as through what I warned you about.

Do not imagine that this divergence – one too many – can be considered merely tactical. We do not share the same methods or the same associations, because we do not share the same goals, that's all.

Do you know what they say in the *banlieus*,<sup>12</sup> among the young poor people, as among your citizen friends who dream of inclusion in their world of shit and their equitable trade? “Bové has lost his skirt!” which practically means, “he walks next to his shoes.”<sup>13</sup> This is a more trustworthy judgment than that of any international tribunal.

It will be necessary to make this matter public.

René Riesel

## Appendix

### The First Direct Action Campaign in France against Genetic Engineering by René Riesel<sup>14</sup>

#### Chronology

7 June 1997. St Georges d'Espéranthes (Isère). Destruction of a field of experimental Monsanto rapeseed by the Confédération Paysanne and Green activists.

27 November 1997. Novartis Bt maize authorized by Jospin/Voynet government.

8 January 1998. Nérac (Lot-et-Garonne). Destruction of Novartis maize. Riesel: “Declaration before the Agen Court.”

5 February 1998. Government decree formalizes authorization of 27 November 1997.

18 February 1998. Lightning occupation of Novartis premises at Rueil-Malmaison (Hauts-de-Seine) by about thirty unemployed people. Verdict at Agen trial: suspended sentences.

20-21 June 1998. Consensus Conference of “citizens.”

30 July 1998. Government authorizes new varieties of transgenic maize.

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<sup>12</sup> The outskirts of Paris, dominated by low-income housing units.

<sup>13</sup> The French here is *Bové, il a paumé sa jupe* and *il marche à côté des ses pompes*.

<sup>14</sup> Published in Riesel's *Déclaration sur L'Agriculture Transgénique et Ceux Qui Pretendent S'y Opposer* (Editions Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 2000), this list was translated into English by Bernard Cooper and Michael William and published in *Against the Engineering of Life* (Venomous Butterfly Publications, Portland, OR, no date).

10 September 1998. Monbéqui (Tarn et Garonne). Destruction of experimental maize and soy plots, and the contents of a greenhouse, at a Monsanto site. Monsanto brings civil suit against Riesel and the Confédération Paysanne (FF 1.3m).

24 November 1998. Partial sabotage of a debate organized by the newspaper *Le Monde* at the Cité des Sciences (Paris). Participants bombarded with rotten eggs, etc. The pamphlet “Rendez-Vous, Citoyens!” [Give Yourself Up, Citizens!] is distributed by a group called A Few Enemies of the Transgenic Brave New World.

27 March 1999. Lyons. Blockade of the “Biovision Forum.”

April 1999. Publication by the Encyclopédie des Nuisances of the book *Remarks on Genetically Modified Agriculture and the Degradation of Species*.

30 May 1999 Inter-Continental Caravan. Bassane (Gironde). A half-hectare of AgrEvo transgenic rapeseed destroyed (by grinding).

2 June 1999. Inter-Continental Caravan. One hectare of transgenic rapeseed cut down and burnt at Gaudiès (Ariège). Banner: “We are angry. We cut everything down to start with.”

5 June 1999 Inter-Continental Caravan. Montpellier. CIRAD governmental research center broken into by about 150 people. Experimental rice plants destroyed. Posters left at the site say: “Expose the researchers! Close down the laboratories!” and “The experts are our friends. They have never ever lied to us.”

3 July 1999. Rodez (Aveyron). Confédération Paysanne destroys a plot of Monsanto/RAGT-Semences maize.

6 July 1999. Lightning occupation of CIRAD headquarters by A Few Enemies of the Transgenic Brave New World.

10 July 1999. Porcaro (Morbihan). Confédération Paysanne and environmentalists destroy 600 square meters of Monsanto maize.

12 August 1999. Millau Aveyron. Dismantling of half-built McDonald’s Restaurant in protest against US import restrictions on Roquefort. Media circus. Bové and nine others charged. Bové sentenced to three months in prison.