

Yellow Vests, One More Effort in Favor of the Living!

By Raoul Vaneigem¹

While we are witnessing the mental, economic, political and psychological collapse of a world governed by Profit, new forms of resistance appear everywhere. They mark a clear break with the authoritarianism and bureaucratization that characterize the older struggles and that, in the process, explain the failure of the proletariat to create a classless society.

The appearance of the Yellow Vests² has awoken among thousands of men and women the feeling and the awareness of an obvious fact: we are rich in a life that is ceaselessly impoverished by the obligation to work in order to survive. What's surprising about the fact that Power attempts to hide, through lies and truncheons, what is subversive in the simple joy of living?

Spontaneous agitation no longer needs vests to propagate itself with a joy that is absent from the whiny processions of anti-capitalism.

The subordinate managers on the Right and the Left are aghast. The demonstrators themselves, like children, seem disconcerted by their own sudden audacity. People invoke reasonable pretexts, but no one is fooled.

The main demand is for life. An eminently precious life, a life unduly threatened by the shopkeepers of death. A life that wants to be free and unencumbered by religion, ideology, politics, and hierarchical, governmental and globalist structures.

Life above all else is the broken gun that, through the harassment of its omnipresence, prevents the transformations of the subject into an object, of being into having, and of existence into a commodity.

Nevertheless, nihilism has never been the philosophy of business to the extent that it is today. An attitude of "let go of everything" caused by the disillusionment of a heartless world is preparing to direct our fate.

We are ensnared by a universe in which the wrong way is as good as the right way, in which the rottenness of good feelings, the cynicism of the assassins of order and disorder, and the spinelessness of a cold dehumanization have accumulated an immense fatigue that has only one pressing desire, which is to empty itself out.

It goes without saying that the "let go of everything" reflex diverges in its ultimate intentions depending on whether it abandons itself to the comforts of death or whether it conducts a guerilla war in favor of the living with no other weapon than an exuberant ingenuity whose secrets are known by human nature.

The camp of the old apocalyptic tradition prophesies a fall into the abyss of despair; it conjectures a humanitarian suicide by capitalist self-destruction. But, in doing so, it arouses in the opposite camp a great burst of life. The streets and people's minds fill up like the air of the

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, "Gilets Jaunes, Encore un Effort en Faveur du Vivant!" dated July 2024. Translated from the French by Bill Brown on 1 September 2024. All footnotes by the translator.

² Vaneigem has spoken about the Yellow Vests before. See "Concerning the 'Yellow Vests': Everything is possible, even self-managing assemblies in the middle of street intersections, villages and neighborhoods," interview conducted December 2018: <https://notbored.org/yellow-vests.pdf>.

times with resonances in which radicalism radiates in silence. Nothing is finished, everything begins!³

However numerous the henchmen of the vilest servitude, of aggressive resentment, of hatred and of denunciation, there will always be a surge of generosity that breaks their grip.

All the Powers are dilapidated citadels to which we give firmness when we pledge allegiance to them. When will we be dissuaded from allowing the authoritarianism that we claim to fight to embed itself within us?

Without bosses, without self-proclaimed leaders, without political-trade union apparatuses, the insurgents of everyday life weave the fabric of a truly human society. What's possible needs imagination. Curiosity is insatiable.

The return to life will see the triumph of acrary, that is to say, the surpassing of the regimes that are called democracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and plutocracy, which jointly propose a happiness from which the people's whipped asses are still sore.

The return to life entails the return to the local, the reconversion of the individualist into the autonomous individual and the [nullification of the] egotistical calculations that dehumanize her.

Only the recourse to the experimental and poetic practices of self-management and the harmonization of desire will allow the concrete posing of the question of the government by and for the people.

Will it be enough for us to contemplate the ruins of the various empires and States that have dictated to us their laws and vomited their orders for us to vanquish the pusillanimity that has prevented us from clearing a path to social self-organization?

It will be easy for others to mock the Paris Commune, crushed by the bourgeoisie, the soviets of the workers, peasants and sailors, liquidated by the Bolsheviks, and the anarchist collectives of the Spanish Revolution, decimated by the Communist Party. But these are in fact barely sketched out attempts from which it is up to us to draw salutary lessons. Since everything seems lost, what have we to lose by encouraging the creation of small collectives that are concerned with locally and concretely addressing the problems that the State and its monopolistic patrons can only deal with in a lying, statistical and abstract fashion?

In the debacle of "let go of everything," we will learn to let go of nothing.

That which is given without reserve has within it the grace of effort that helps it to flourish.

Audacity is at the heart of all desires to live.

³ This phrase serves as the title of the book by Vaneigem that Éditions Allia published in 2014.