

Behind TGV Sabotage in France: Manipulations and Provocations

by Karel Vereycken

In the early hours of Nov. 11, 2008, one hundred and fifty policemen, operating over the entire territory of France, arrested nine individuals suspected of being the authors of coordinated sabotage actions against the French high-speed TGV lines the previous weekend, which caused long delays for more than 100 trains and several thousand Paris commuters.

The “Invisible Cell,” as they call themselves, had set up its headquarters at a farm which they transformed into a local grocery store in Tarnac, in the heart of the sparsely populated Corrèze region, in central France. The “brains” of the youthful group is believed to be an idealistic “philosopher,” Julien Coupat (34), and his sidekick Benjamin Rosoux (30), once the former executive president of the Brussels-based Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG).

Were these young people just “brilliant young students, disgusted by our society of over-consumption, and trying to found a new society,” as some media claim—honest militants of the “anarcho-autonomous ultra-left” who went too far? Or is this a real “terrorist group,” attempting to bring down the democratic state?

We don’t know yet. Violent anarchism and terrorism have very often been the instruments of irregular warfare conducted by the financial oligarchy against republics and other nation-states. It is well documented today that the waves of left- and right-wing terror hitting Europe in the 1970s, were part of a “strategy of tension” orchestrated by specific networks inside NATO, such as the British-dominated “stay behind” networks of Gladio, and aimed at imposing fascist dictatorships in Europe.¹ Is such a scenario back on the agenda? Nothing would be more dangerous in the current global systemic breakdown crisis.

1. See Claudio Celani, “Strategy of Tension: The Case of Italy,” *EIR*, March 26, April 2, April 9, and April 30, 2004.

Julien Coupat

Julien Coupat, born in 1974, is the only son of a doctor and a woman who holds a high-level position in a major French pharmaceutical company. While the media presented Julien as a brilliant student, first, of an Ivy League-style commercial school, and later, of an even more prestigious university of social sciences, Julien in fact has multiple faces.

According to *Le Figaro* of Nov. 21, “J.C.” heads a tiny real estate company, located at his parents’ home, in charge of “rental of land and other real estate,” a business that “provided him with over Euro 60,000 in 2007.” Julien’s sidekick, Benjamin Rosoux, is the company’s manager. That income is estimated to be more than enough to run the farm and grocery store, even at a loss. The group of “nice young people” have become somewhat popular among local elected officials, as they appear to bring some economic and social activity to the area.

Julien’s Dad told *Le Figaro* that he would like to “understand what’s on the mind of this generation.” But according to *Le Monde*, it was the same Dad “who discovered Tarnac one year ago, and bought the property with its grocery. He also bought for his son, in the 20th arrondissement [district] of Paris, a 50-square-meter former workshop of a craftsman, which was to house the editorial staff of a future project for a militant newspaper.”

Far more worrying than his parents’ help, is the support he received from other quarters. Before moving to Tarnac, Coupat was involved in the Parisian intellectual scene, of those whom Erasmus used to call the “folliesophers.”

According to *Le Monde*, in Paris Coupat developed, a “real relationship with the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whom he met at a seminar. They played soccer once in a while, and the philosopher helped him when he launched *Tiqqun* magazine, by finding him a



GDU FDU/Hendricke

Anti-nuclear demonstrators battle with police near the Gorleben Nuclear Waste Disposal Center, May 1966. Waste from Germany's nuclear power plants is sent to Cherbourg, France, for reprocessing; what remains is shipped back to Germany for final storage at Gorleben. Recent attacks on trains, including the TGV, have been traced to the fact that the saboteurs wanted to block the nuclear waste convoys.

publisher in Italy”—the prestigious Einaudi firm in Turin. Coupat became the main writer of that post-situationist-inspired paper, whose first issue appeared in Venice, in 1999, where Agamben was teaching at the university. (*Tiqqun* in Hebrew means “to heal,” as in “*tikkun olam*,” heal the world, but also has been used by Kabbalists and other mystics as “redemption.”) *Tiqqun* defines itself as “the conscious organ of the imaginary party,” and claims that “the historical period which we are entering has to be a time of extreme violence and great disorders.”

Enter Giorgio Agamben

Coupat’s real mentor and mind controller, Giorgio Agamben, signed one of his articles as “philosopher-mutineer.” This Italian is considered an expert on Aristotle, Karl Marx, and Walter Benjamin (a collaborator of Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School) and also of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, a former member of the Nazi party, whose seminars on Heraclitus and Hegel Agamben attended in 1968.

In 1974, Agamben was a Fellow of the London-based Warburg Institute, invited by Dame Francis Yates,

the leading British expert on occult neo-Platonism and the Rosicrucians, and a member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). Agamben taught at several American, German, and Swiss universities, and at the Paris-based Collège International de la Philosophie.

Agamben developed relations with many “important figures” of his time, among whom, to name only a few, are Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy, and the major situationist, structuralist, and deconstructionist French thinkers, such as Guy Debord, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, as well as with Antonio Negri, an ideologue close to the Italian Red Brigades, who lived and taught for several years in France.

It is not possible to summarize Agamben’s philosophy in a few lines, especially given the influence it had on the minds of those who, charmed by the “magic” of his ideas,

have been drawn into the current of the “Invisible Cell.” One can, however, describe some of the basic traits of the mindset that inspired those who revolted.

Against the ‘Bio-Power’ of the Nation-State

To lure in people who are traumatized by the current state of our society, Agamben invokes the very real dangers that threaten democracy and freedom when a global systemic financial, economic, and political crisis breaks out. In this context, he says, certain states will call for a state of emergency, such as that decreed by German Nazi crown jurist Carl Schmitt. Agamben rightly denounces the permanent warfare policy of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, as leading to the “suspension” of civil rights, as can be seen in the treatment of the prisoners at Guantanamo.

However, through different nominalist acrobatics, Agamben then arrives at the conclusion that, in practice, there is hardly any difference between the so-called “democratic” rule of our states, and open, full-fledged fascist dictatorships. Therefore, sovereignty, says Agamben, is reduced to the mere right of the sovereign to declare a state of emergency. The nation-state, re-

characterized as “a permanent state of emergency,” is therefore the enemy of any citizen.

The worrisome increased “policing” of our society becomes the pretext to justify violent action. In line with Michel Foucault, Agamben denounces the “biopolitics” conducted by the “bio-power” of states, which, by this definition, reduces man to what the Greeks called the “naked life” (*zôê*), an existence reduced to the simple “fact of being alive.” Sovereignty, according to Agamben, is no longer the instrument to defend the citizen, his speech, and his rights, but the power to impose the “naked life” and the silence that is forced upon refugees, deportees, and the exiled. Agamben denounces police-state control over our “modern” societies, which are incapable of real human relations, but are well equipped with surveillance cameras, biometric passports, geo-traceable cell phones, and DNA police files.

However, instead of calling for a rebirth of true republics, and for the type of non-violent action needed to reconstruct them politically, Agamben calls for “another policy,” which is to do away with all sovereignty, by confronting it or by subverting it. Hence the attraction of the vast autonomist milieu for his thinking. To resist, the victims can use “minor bio-power” as a counterpoint to the bio-power of a state which, he concludes (as does Negri), is nothing but an “empire.” That resistance can be carried out by hunger strikes or the strict refusal to submit to any biometric control mechanisms whatsoever.

Agamben himself, for example, refuses to return to the United States, since a biometric passport is now required for entry. By demanding the physical means to live, retroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS, guaranteed minimum income, free housing, or legal and safe drugs, the victims of bio-power can confront the empire’s power structure where it is manifest: in the administrations, in the public health bureaucracies, or in ordinary courts, among other state institutions. But Agamben’s message is a call for revolt, not for revolution. Confronting the empire means legitimizing it, so confronting the state is not necessary—anyway, “it will destroy itself.” Therefore, it is sufficient to “abstain from it.”

Julien Coupat confirmed his loyalty to this radical mindset, when taken into custody. He vehemently refused to give a blood sample or to have any physical contact with anything that could provide material for genetic identification. He even washed his own under-

wear, and made sure not to touch a fork or knife while eating.

The ‘Black Block’

Let us now take a look at his close friend and accomplice, Benjamin Rosoux, whose case is probably even more revealing.

Around 2001, Rosoux arrived in the French university city of Rennes in Bretagne, western France, after having studied “developmental sociology” and “environmental responsibility” in Edinburgh, U.K. As noted above, the Belgian-born Rosoux was, for a short period, the head of the Brussels-based Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG), a position that gave him the opportunity to establish contacts with the Green parties’ vast networks all over Europe. In 2005, he became the manager of Coupat’s tiny real estate company.

According to the regional daily *Ouest-France*, Rosoux was known in Rennes as the founder of two “squats” (apartments occupied illegally by youth squatters), started by students of the Institut des Etudes Politiques (IEP or Science-Po), an elite political science school that gave Rosoux his degree. “The first squat, La Marmite [the kettle], was an artistic squat,” according to a former resident. After it was closed down, Rosoux opened a new one, l’Ekluserie, which was more political. “They lived on welfare and retrieved food from the garbage cans of supermarkets after closing hours,” confessed a former friend.

Everything remained nice and friendly until the July 2001 Genoa G-8 summit, “a strong marker that branded the minds of a whole generation,” according to the newspaper. Several residents of l’Ekluserie made the trip to Italy, where they took part in the violent clashes between the police and the demonstrators that left one demonstrator dead. “They came back in total shock, convinced they had been face to face with modern fascism. The action of the Black Blocks, partisans of violent confrontation with the police, had fascinated them,” *Ouest-France* continued.

The Black Block phenomenon surfaced in the early 1980s, with the German autonomous group Schwarzer Block, in demonstrations such as that against the Brokdorf nuclear power plant, the defense of the *Freiräume* (autonomous living areas), and demonstrations of solidarity with the imprisoned members of the Baader Meinhof gang (Red Army Faction, RAF).

A Black Block might appear on the fringe of any demonstration, which its members eventually would



GNU FDL/Ares Ferrari

Vehicles are burned by terrorists on the main route to the July 2001 Geneva summit.

use as a shield. At a pre-determined moment, the Black Block members—left- and right-wing extremists—put aside their ideological differences, unite, don black masks, and go into action.

They then proceed from the doctrine of “direct action”: destroying banks, official buildings or those of transnational corporations, shops, surveillance cameras, etc. The aim is not to attack persons, but the property of capital. The goal is to cause maximum financial losses to those companies targeted. Activists do not hesitate to directly confront the police forces considered as the “armed arm” of capitalism.

After a long absence, the Black Block reappeared, with the demonstrations against the 1991 Gulf War. Although there were only 200 of them to protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, where they created a “temporary autonomous zone,” the movement attracted over 5,000 at the June 2007 Heiligendamm G-8 summit in Germany.



Terrorists at the Genoa summit of the G-8 in July 2001. That summit, with the explosion of “Black Block” violence, branded the minds of a generation.

A former friend of Rosoux decried his shift of attitude: “He was non-violent, anti-globalization, but I saw him slipping away progressively towards libertarian ecology and radical action. In the end, I even remember German militants coming to the Rennes squat to explain how to block train convoys transporting nuclear waste....”

German Connections

The German angle of the investigation became clearer with the Nov. 8 sabotage of the TGV lines in France. A “Castor” convoy transporting nuclear waste from the French nuclear reprocessing plant near Cherbourg to the German nuclear storage center at Gorleben, took 80 hours to arrive, because radical greens, especially on the German side of the track, physically tried to stop it; over a thousand blocked the en-

trance to the Gorleben facility.

Also, according to well-informed sources, a letter was sent to the German daily *Berliner Zeitung* from Hannover, claiming that the actions conducted both in France and Germany were in protest against that convoy. After blasting capitalism, the letter stated that they “had acted that night by using metal rods”—heavy, Y-shaped, steel bars—four of which were found by the French authorities on the TGV’s power cables. The letter was signed “in memory of Sébastien,” referring to Sébastien Briat, a French radical green who died opposing a Castor convoy in 2004. German police told their French counterparts that the use of steel rods, identical to those found in France, is common practice among the German

green radicals. The last incident in which these devices were used, took place on Oct. 12, 2008, in Bischoffsheim. Moreover, a German friend of Coupat is on trial for similar deeds committed in 1996.

Given these elements, there is good reason to believe that the pairing of the “Agambenist” Coupat and the radical green Rosoux supplied the intellectual ingredients for an explosive cocktail. One can easily conceive how the initial situationist mindset, during a breakdown crisis, would tend to mutate into “de-humanizing” and “regenerative violence,” *à la* Georges Sorel.

Provocations, from Genoa to Vichy

It was at the July 2001 G-8 Genoa summit that Coupat and Rosoux, the duo suspected of sabotage against the TGV, had direct experience with Black Block techniques.

In “L’Appel” (The Call), a pamphlet circulating in the autonomist milieu in praise of “direct action”—as opposed to simple militance or impotent activism—one can read the following revealing anecdote:

“We remember the scene in Genoa: some fifty militants of the [French] Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) show their flags labelled ‘100% to the left.’ They are immobile, timeless. They shout their carefully calculated slogans, protected by their own goons. At the same time, just meters away, some of us confront the carabinieri, throw back tear gas bombs, break apart the sidewalks to produce projectiles and prepare Molotov cocktails with bottles found in the garbage cans, and gasoline from overturned Vespas. The militants speak about adventurism, irresponsibility. They claim that conditions are not yet ripe. We answer that nothing was lacking, everything was there, except for them.”

After Genoa, l’Ekluzerie became the “meeting place for all radical causes.” Those that went there despised any form of *citoyennisme* (citizenry), a term designating “all those who accept democracy, including José Bové and the LCR.”

The squat was closed on Feb. 24, 2005, when the building was demolished. Its founders left Rennes and spread all over France, to “create new urban and rural squats,” such as the one at Tarnac.

In France, the demonstrations in 2006 against the CPE (Contrat de Premier Emploi, a law offering low-wage, useless jobs to youth) served as the initial laboratory to test new urban guerrilla techniques. In a booklet, *The Coming Insurrection*, thought to be written by

Coupat and Rosoux, one reads: “The movement against the CPE didn’t hesitate to block railroad stations, beltways, factories, highways, supermarkets and even airports. Three hundred persons were sufficient in Rennes, to block the highway around the city for hours and to cause a forty-kilometer traffic jam. To block everything, is from now on the first reflex of any force opposing the current order. In a globalized economy, where companies operate with the ‘just-in-time’ method, and where value comes from connection to the network, where the highways are but elements of the de-materialized production chain, going from one subcontractor to another and then to assembly in the factory, to block production, means blocking circulation as well.”

More recently, at the EU summit on immigration in Vichy Nov. 2-4, Coupat and his group maneuvered to transform the peaceful “counter-summit”—a just and lawful challenge to the unsavory anti-immigration policies adopted by the EU—into a riot. Rosoux was on the site, and Coupat was seen at the head of a little army of 50 men, instructing his troops to storm a police barricade protecting the conference hall. A young accomplice of Coupat who participated in that storming, admitted she had been active with the Black Block in Germany, and had participated in blocking train stations during the 2006 anti-CPE demonstrations.

In “l’Appel,” one also reads: “We don’t contest anything, we’re not claiming responsibility for anything. We constitute a material autonomous force at the center of a world civil war. The urgency of the situation frees us from any legal consideration or consideration of legitimacy. The perspective of forming gangs doesn’t frighten us; that of appearing as a mafia rather amuses us. On the one side, we want to live communism; on the other, we want to spread anarchy.”

While the document calls for action, it says that its followers do not want to hurt or kill anybody—not for moral reasons, but for reasons of strategy: “It seems more judicious to attack material equipment than the people who give it a face. We have to turn to forms of operations used by all guerrillas: anonymous sabotage, non-claimed actions.”

Who’s Backing Coupat?

Only days after his followers’ arrest, Agamben took up their defense in a column published in the French daily *Libération*, reproduced in English and Italian by many websites under the title “Free the Tarnac 9”: “The people involved are Julien Coupat, a young philosopher



A poster attacking the G8 meeting in Hokkaido, Japan in July 2008. Autonomist attacks on these meetings have become a regular occurrence.

who previously, with some of his friends, led *Tiqqun*, a magazine of political analysis, certainly debatable, but still today among the most intelligent of that period. I knew Julien Coupat at that time, and from the intellectual standpoint, I still have lasting esteem for him. Let's examine the sole concrete fact of this whole affair. The activity of those arrested has been linked to malevolent acts committed against the [French national railroad company] SNCF, which caused the delay of certain TGV trains on the Paris-Lille line. The devices employed, if one believes the declaration of the police and the SNCF officials themselves, can in no way injure persons: at most they can cut off the electricity to the trains' pantographs, causing delays in the trains' arrival. In Italy, trains often arrive late, but nobody ever thought of accusing the national railroad company of terrorism. We're talking about a minor offense, even if nobody wants to back them up. . . ."

Interrogated by *Le Monde*, Agamben also declared: "We're not going to treat them like the Red Brigades, nothing comparable! One looks for terrorism and ends up creating it—all of this to spread fear among youth."

Rather astonishing support of Coupat came from Guillaume Dasquié, who is close to certain intelligence sectors and is currently on the rampage at *Libération*. In an article published on Nov. 24 in that paper, Dasquié claims a vast conspiracy against the ultra-left by Interior Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie.

The French Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST, counterintelligence), he claims, alerted by security "expert" Alain Bauer about Coupat's book *The*

Coming Insurrection, would have taken the case very seriously. The book was published by Editions La Fabrique, a tiny publishing house headed by Eric Hazan, the author of *Changement de propriétaire, la guerre civile continue* (*The Civil War Continues, Under New Management*).

While written in the poetical-political-depressive style à la Guy Debord, its authors remain unidentified and sign their work as the "invisible committee." The book describes with great delight their temptation to commit sabotage of all kinds, including against TGV lines and other "fluxes," by what they consider to be actions that could accelerate the end of "a civilization in the state of clinical death."

The former chief editor of "Intelligence Online," a professional newsletter of political risk analysis and economic intelligence, Dasquié is the co-author of *L'effroyable mensonge* (*The Awful Lie*, published by La Découverte in 2002 and co-written with spook Jean Guisnel), a book that falsely claims that Thierry Meyssan's book *L'Effroyable imposture* (*9/11: The Big Lie*), exposing the "inside job" done on 9/11, was totally inspired by the "babblings" of Lyndon LaRouche and Jacques Cheminade. In this case, Dasquié's imagination seems as delirious as it is opportunistic. Greatly welcomed by both the *New York Times* and the London *Financial Times*, his writings have always been appreciated by the upper crust of U.S. neo-conservatism, always ready to accuse those unwilling to submit to their power of being wild-eyed conspiracy theorists.

What can one conclude from this affair? Whatever the responsibilities and intentions of this or that person may be, it reflects a spirit of impotent revolt, degenerating into provocations to commit violence. Those who create the intellectual climate for such actions, aim at destabilizing the nation-state and thus serve, wittingly or unwittingly, the aims of the "new global governance" called for by the bankers of the City of London and the managing director of the IMF. The "autonomists" who attack public equipment and infrastructure are probably only an unconscious link in a chain, rather more victims of their acts than responsible for them, and unaware of the true objectives. Looking back to the recent past, it is widely acknowledged that the Red Brigades were manipulated by a "Black Order" whose aim was to impose a fascist coup d'état on Italy.