

SUPPORT RENÉ RIESEL!

Assuming failure of the very last remaining judicial recourse, namely a request that the Nérac suspended sentence not be revoked, then the decision handed down on 19 December 2002 by the Appeals Court means that Joseph Bové and René Riesel will each, as expected, serve fourteen-month prison terms. In addition, they must each pay a fine of 7,622 euros and damages, interest and costs of 12,103 euros. The sentence is in accord with Articles 475-1 and 618-1 of the Code of Legal Procedure and Article 1018A of the General Tax Code. The crime was the organizing, on 5 June 1999, of the destruction of experimental transgenic rice at a state-run agronomic research facility, the CIRAD of Montpellier.

As was likewise to be expected, the only reaction of which the Confédération Paysanne [Farmers' Confederation] and its citizenist allies proved capable was to appeal for pardon to the President of the Republic, for consideration from the European Court of Justice, for solidarity from the moribund left, and for compassion from public opinion. What we can now see is the real alignment of forces, and the real worth of the "strategy" of watering down our critique in the mistaken belief that it would thus become more acceptable to progressives. At the end of the day nothing is left of the rejection of the technologies of death, and it becomes possible to cast aside every trace of shame and insult the sabotage we engaged in by characterizing it as nothing more than a legitimate exercise of "trade-union rights". This is yet another demonstration of the rule according to which the media will always hand the microphone to those who have nothing to say (and now that Bové has passed his sell-by date, it is the media people themselves who delight in telling us how he fell into the trap of media exposure).

We are witness to the ignominious collapse of the noisy sideshow that has been going on since August 1999 (beginning with the dismantling of the Millau McDonald's). That pantomime is over, but it has fulfilled its function, successfully obscuring the meaning of the practical critique that had begun to take shape thanks to the destruction of genetic monstrosities. Consumerist verbiage and "antiglobalist" rhetoric have managed to block any effective challenge to the universal artificialization of life and its irreversible subordination to industrial despotism (i.e. to capitalism in its reality, not to the fantasy capitalism portrayed by the simplistic image of a predatory and metanational financial globalization).

As René Riesel has made clear in a rectification printed (though in a much abbreviated form) by *Le Monde* of 24 November, he forbids anyone [and notably the Confédération Paysanne--*Trans.*] to promote the idea that he would be so lacking in firmness as to ask for any kind of pardon or allow one to be sought in his name by the citizenist crew or by the gravediggers of the old workers' movement.

It is precisely because René Riesel has compromised himself with no demagogic strategy, no mass campaign devoid of principle, that he is not *alone* today. It behoves us to prove this by mobilizing in solidarity with the actions Riesel has taken and defended in his writings. This solidarity may be expressed immediately by helping him confront the devastating expenses that he is bound to incur, whatever the outcome concerning his last possibility of obtaining a reduced gaol term. (By law, it should be noted, the fines themselves must be shouldered by the guilty party alone.)

Paris, 26 November 2002

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[The following is a translation of an article by Hervé Kempf that appeared in Le Monde for 25 November 2002 following a number of inaccurate reports on former enraged and situationist René Riesel's sentencing, his refusal to request a presidential pardon and his earlier break with José Bové and the Farmers' Confederation. The article gives a brief history of the affair and outlines Riesel's current positions.-- Reuben Keehan]

WHY SHOULD SOLDIERS BOVÉ AND RIESEL BE RESCUED?

The resignation that has greeted the Court of Appeals' confirmation of the sentencing of José Bové and René Riesel to fourteen months in prison testifies to a singular amnesia on the part of French society and its political representation. For, in an astonishing paradox, France is prepared to lock up agitators for actions in Nérac and Montpellier that it has since itself acknowledged to be well founded. In order to understand this, we have to look at the recent past.

At the beginning of 1998, the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) was confused. One after the other the Juppé and Jospin governments made ambiguous decisions: in February 1997, Alain Juppé prohibited the farming of transgenic maize, but authorized its importation; in November, Laurent Jospin prohibited the farming of GM rapeseed and beetroot, but authorized that of maize.

Public opinion was hesitant, numerous opponents made themselves known, consumers showed reluctance in face of products that offered them nothing. Meanwhile the transgenic corn of the Novartis company remained legal and, in Nérac (Lot-et-Garonne), its warehouses contained tonnes of GM seeds ready for commercialization. GM could easily have been imposed on Europe without any real debate ever taking place.

It was at this point that the Farmers' Confederation chose to intervene: on 8 January 1998, led by National Secretary René Riesel and José Bové, one hundred farmers overran the Nérac warehouse, rendering the seeds unusable by dousing them with water. They appeared in court in Agen in February, José Bové declaring, "When was there a debate about GMOs? When were the farmers and consumers consulted? Never."

Bové and Riesel were convicted, but shortly afterwards the government announced a public debate in the form of a "Citizens' Conference". This took place in Parliament in June 1998. The citizens in question expressed many reservations with regard to GM crops, particularly the maize, which contained a gene resistant to antibiotics. And in September 1998, the Council of State suspended the authorized cultivation of the cereal concerned.

The debate continued all winter in France, just as it did in England, in Italy and in Germany, and opinion proved to be hostile toward GM. But tests continued in secret here and there, as at CIRAD in Montpellier, where preparations were made for an experimental crop of transgenic rice to be raised in the Camargue. On 5 June 1999, Riesel and Bové organized the sabotage of CIRAD's experiments.

A couple of weeks later, on 24 June, Europe placed a moratorium on GMOs, France being one of the countries most actively in favor of this decision. It was a decision, moreover, that transcended the left-right divide, for just last October the Raffarin government chose to support the extension of the moratorium, which Europe has renewed.

These events and dates oblige us to conclude that José Bové and René Riesel did openly what France desired secretly. Their acts stimulated several important political decisions. To support these decisions means supporting those acts. Locking their authors up therefore constitutes a political contradiction.

Another aspect of this affair is especially relevant in view of the intellectual coma into which the French left seems to have lapsed. The media has focused on José Bové, completely neglecting René Riesel.

Now, Riesel is no simple sidekick. He has left the Farmers' Confederation, and he has criticized José Bové for adopting a media-manipulating strategy that has become even more pronounced since Bové's destruction of a McDonald's restaurant in Millau in August 1999.

THE RUIN OF NATURE

Riesel directs a radical critique at the "citizenists" and ATTAC, with whom Bové has allied himself. According to Riesel, these tendencies merely want to be managers of the techno-commodity system. "ATTAC and the citizenists are neo-Statists who want nothing more than the return of the Welfare State; they want to regulate the system, not to challenge it in any real sense. They have nothing to say about alienation because it doesn't interest them: they are nothing but old leftists, old Stalinists who have updated their theses ever so slightly."

For Riesel social criticism must on the contrary focus on the logic of the technological system. According to him, the dominant phenomenon of the times is "the continuing artificialization of life, at work now for a century", a process in which science and the economy, each supporting the other, have invaded the entire social spectrum. They prevent other types of knowledge and social relations from finding expression, and create a technological system that has become autonomous to the detriment of life and liberty.

This domination leads as much to the ruin of nature as it does to the alienation of human beings. In this perspective, the advent of GMOs heralds a new level of artificialization of the biosphere, just as genetic engineering seeks to manipulate the human genome itself.

Riesel's radicalism is located within a tenuous but lively network centred on the Encyclopédie des Nuisances group (which publishes his writings) and the Society Against Scientific Obscurantism and Industrial Terrorism [sic: actually "Despotism"--Trans.] The influence of these groups is marginal, but they incisively expose the soft underbelly of leftism and anti-globalism: the incapacity to criticize the technological system and debunk the myth of Progress.

That myth has in fact already been largely dismantled by others, notably Pierre-Henri Taguieff in *Du progrès* [On Progress] (Paris: Librio, 2001).

For René Riesel, the failure of his erstwhile comrade José Bové, reduced today to seeking a pardon from the President of the Republic, reveals the impasse of an oppositional discourse that must itself be called into question. The left, or more generally all those who care about reforging the legitimacy of politics in disenchanted times, could do worse than lend an ear to this distinctly maverick account of things.

Hervé KEMPF

Le Monde, 25 November 2002

Translation: Reuben Keehan (slightly revised by Dave Barbu)

Anyone interested in the latest news on Rene Riesel, his direct action against genetically modified foods in France, and his recent jail sentence, should go to

<http://slash.autonome.org>.

Look for the "Analysis and Polemic" section, then "Support Rene Riesel!" There are links there too to an account of recent developments from LE MONDE and to a long article of Riesel's on GMOs and his positions (as distinct from those of his erstwhile comrade Jose Bove). All this stuff is in English translation.

Also see :

<http://www.rr.existences.net>

and :

<http://www.netmc.9online.fr>