

ONLY ONE SOLUTION:
TO REMAIN TOGETHER!
UNE SEULE SOLUTION: RESTER ENSEMBLE!

by AN OCCUPANT-E OF THE ZAD
translated from the French by JAKE NABASNY

Observation: things aren't looking good at all, shit's hit the fan!!! It might have been like this for a while, but now, I have the impression that we've reached a critical moment, a moment when we risk losing everything. I am not only speaking of our cabins, of where we live, but about the strength of our movement, our ideals, etc. This is not an objective text; I'm not looking to expound all points of view and find some fault in everyone. This text expresses my feelings on living here for some months, my emotions, and my personal point of view.

I would like to start by talking about what the ZAD produces in us, the imaginaries and fantasies to which it gives birth. The field of possibilities, the power to create, the force of subversion (denouncing and destabilizing the established order), the HQ of a political force (libertarian? revolutionary? anarchist? Communist?), a place of refuge. As many ideals as individuals, as many political stances as dreams, as many modes of action as objectives. With, above everything, the supreme creed: "OUR STRENGTH IS OUR DIVERSITY."

I believed in many things when I arrived here in August 2015, starting with imagining this place as a zone of two hun-

dred fifty extremely pissed off veterans from 2012, who spend most of their day making Molotov cocktails and preparing for assaults in order to smash everything in town.....Well, let's just say it wasn't really the case. Rather, what I heard from those who endured in the 2012 expulsions is: "in truth if we won, it is because there were so many different modes of action with so many different people that the cops never knew how to react, and that was really awesome! It was a very intense and unbelievable moment in my life, but I really don't want to relive it."

So then, what is this diversity? What is this thing full of different worlds and realities that yearn to act together? This is what I wanted and want to believe in. If this world and this society give me little hope, I would at least like to be able to believe in this place and what it represents. You can't believe how it feels when you read your ZAD news in the morning, and rather than finding antagonistic messages, settling of accounts, and hatred, there are messages of support coming from many other places around the world, all basically saying: "wow, what you've succeeded in creating with the ZAD in terms of agricultural experiments and social experiences is really great. It would be amazing if you could come visit us and explain how your communal life 'works'." Seriously, it brings tears to my eyes to see how much people count on what goes on here, the extent to which it can be a source of inspiration and courage. At the same time, I am ashamed to see how much time we can spend insulting each other, fueling resentment, rehashing the

antagonisms of the past, living so often in mistrust of one another, and continuing to regard each other as enemies.

In the end, I see that our movement, this thing that unites us internationally, this political stance of wanting to RADICALLY change this world (and not simply modify the existing here and there in order to make it a little more acceptable) is a marginal and fragile stance—a MINORITY stance. We are few, too few. And here we are dividing ourselves. Criticizing what another person does, denouncing practices that are not my own and proving (to reassure myself?) that I am the most radical.

No, I have not stopped changing my political views here. Surely because the DIVERSITY of political opinions made me find something good, some interest, logic, and respect in everything I heard. I repeat, all this is personal, but I found it interesting to put my certainties (which in fact were not so certain) in question again, to find myself faced with arguments where I didn't have much to say, and above all to admit my contradictions, that I fail to put into practice all the amazing things I have been able to conceive of in theory (by the way, if people are looking for a good vacation spot: right now, in theory, it's twenty-nine degrees Celsius in the shade, no one is starving, and everyone is super nice). It might be easier that way (a cowardice, perhaps), but I am more successful when doing my best rather than trying to do the best, to have the only solution.

I am lucky to have met a lot of people here, and I love having this possibility to choose different moods, different contexts, geared to different people; that, above all, constitutes the wealth I found here. I cannot imagine living with just my small

1. Acronym for the Council for Maintaining Occupations (Conseil pour le Maintien des Occupations), which was a revolutionary council created during the student and worker riots of May 1968. The council organized wildcat strikes and occupations across France.

2. Appeliste is a term to describe an adherent of the particular brand of post-left anarchism presented by the anonymous French anarchist collective known as The Invisible Committee (also closely associated with another collective named Tiqqun), which has written provocative insurrectionary works such as *Call* (*l'Appel*). *Call* earned some notoriety in the United States in 2010 when right-wing pundit Glenn Beck introduced it to an American audience as the “most evil thing” he has ever read.

3. Here and later in the essay, “collaborator” (or “collaborating”) is used pejoratively. The word has had negative political connotations in French culture since World War II, when it designated French citizens who worked with the Nazis.

affinity group in an urban squat, or on a country farm. I would greatly miss rubbing shoulders with truly different people all day and every day, people who are not homogenized, who consider themselves as living individuals and thus consider the people around them as living individuals as well.

So, it does hurt me when I hear hardcore phrases like: “Yeah, people from the east, they have nothing to get busy with except for going to the non-market.” “Meh, don’t even bother asking people from the west for a hitch or whatever. You live in the east, nobody will give you anything.” “Naw, I don’t care about the road. They wanted cops, they were looking for it.” “What, you are living at the mill??? Ah naw, I won’t jam with a CMDO type.”¹ “Farmers despise us anyway. As soon as they’ll get the chance to, they’ll find an excuse to clear out our cabins and take back their fields.” “Most vegans are actually ball-busters.” “I am stronger than you anyway.” “CMDOs are just Appelists-Communists-Stalinists-Productivists-Fascists.”² “You are collaborators!”³ “Suckers don’t organize anyway.” “In fact, some people only seek out conflict and need things to blow up at some point.”

And then people also end up doing hard-core stuff. Like on the zone, the catchphrase we hear is: “I have the right to express myself and to say what I want.” Well, I will dare to put something forward. I find it shocking, dishonest, and lastly horrible to use the passing of a comrade, a buddy, to promote and support one’s political stances, especially to demonstrate it on February 10th before lots of people who do not understand at all, or hardly, what is going on here. I ask myself many questions about what it could mean and it scares me. But it scares me just as much to see that they could dismantle a cabin when a guy was still perched on top, and try to pull him down by force. Surely the demolition of Lama Faché⁴ was inevitable, but I think it made us realize a lot about ourselves.

And then we arrive at the bitter sensation of having to choose a camp. With this “us” and “them” business. But why? What does it mean? Who is it? Who feeds it? Obviously, we do not all want the same thing, we do not have the same expectations, the same sensibilities, or really even the same reality. There will always be people who do not agree with each other, and that’s all the better. The problem is that there’s no room for debate, at least not for the purpose

4. Lama Faché (literally, “angry llama”) is a self-described “anarcho-pirate” camp on the zone that operates on an organizational model of autonomous self-management and seeks to explicitly combat structural oppression. The camp was destroyed in a January 2018 police raid. Rebuilding operations began immediately.

of finding a compromise. The point is to convey one's ideas, and if that is not possible, to scuttle and discredit "adverse" ideas. It's easy to notice that little by little, certain disagreements lead to division. But how do we prevent this division?

Very often I heard, "It is a fundamental problem. Since we're apparently always in a state of emergency, we never take time to discuss the fundamentals" and, "We don't know each other well enough, we must do things to meet one another." But seriously!!!! And to say that there must be other spaces for discussion, beyond assemblies, to meet and exchange ideas. Totally!!!! But kidding aside, we can't say that no one has ever wondered about it, that it does not yet exist, and in such different forms. Whether it's the AG,⁵ the assemblies, all the "little" spaces of discussion like "the lil' mornings," the belote⁶ evenings, the concert evenings, the screenings, the celebrations, the fest-noz,⁷ the techno parties, the farming and animal breeding groups, the collective projects in the fields for collective food, those for collective constructions, the work sites of the 4 seasons, the ZAD cafeteria, the Black-Plouc,⁸ Abracadabois,⁹ the writing workshop at the studio, the mechanics workshop, all the artisan groups, Radio Klaxon, the

5. Abbreviation for General Assembly.

6. Card game played in France and Bulgaria.

7. Traditional Breton festival with group dancing and live music.

8. Restaurant in the Zone.

9. Often written as AbracadaBois (a homonymous portmanteau of "abracadabra" and "the woods"), it is a collective in the zone that manages the woods and hedges.

ZAD News, the medic team, the automedia,¹⁰ etc...All these spaces were created because at a certain moment someone said to themselves: "I wish it existed." And I think that here lies a real POWER, the power to do, the power to try.¹¹

But if it could also be so simple! Since I've been living here, I've observed two very annoying things that impede this freedom of action from taking place, from being recognized in what we do, and from being satisfying. The lack of consideration for those who do not think or see things as I do, because I have given it so much thought, that I cannot conceive how anyone could question what I propose, that in any case, these are my political convictions, my personal struggle. Things must go my way or the way of my affinity group, and in any case, we must move forward, we must stop being afraid, in fact, there is no time for anything else. In short, rotten ways of organizing and taking decisions that lead to exclusion (and even contempt), i.e. "I only care about my own opinion." Next, the obsession with wanting to block all projects, initiatives, or even political stances that are not as radical as my own. To never seek compromise (because that means collaborating), to equate people who live here, who are supposed to be comrades (cf. beginning of

10. ZAD collective responsible for audiovisual resources.

11. "Power" (*pouvoir*) in this sentence can hold multiple meanings in French. "*Pouvoir*" is the verb for "can" or "to be able to," thus denoting an ability or capacity of action, but it can also be translated more literally as "power." It is used in cases of physical power (i.e. the expression of force) and abstract power (e.g. legal or political authority). For example, the public administration is called "*les pouvoirs publics*."

12. The name of the construction company that was planning to build an airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, which was the impetus for the ZAD occupation in 2012.

the text when I said that we are not so many), with the worst scumbags that we are openly fighting against, like cops, Vinci,¹² etc. To say, “I don’t give a damn, I’m an anarchist, anyone who doesn’t agree with me is a collaborator and an enemy.” In short, “I only care about my own opinion.”

Personally, I really liked the first day at the work site of the 4 seasons in April 2017. It was a super beautiful day to begin with. But also speaking of the need to the need to meet and do things together, I found it perfect. In just one day, I was able to meet a lot of people because the work site wasn’t divided strictly between affinity groups. So yes, we must raise the stakes, leave our comfort zones, work on our tolerance and preconceptions; but preconceptions (precisely) do not hurt. We worked together by trying to be mindful of everyone. We went through rough times together. We heard, saw, and felt shitty things, voiced it and moved forward. In brief, are these not the stakes??? To be able to prove that, yes, we can live and do things together, even if we are different, without there being any cops or liberty-killing laws to control us??? And yet no!!! We had to hear that the fountain project at Gourbi’s watering hole was a “foul project,” not to say disgusting,

and that “we are Vinci” when we fill pot holes with concrete...it’s outrageous, offensive, and so unwarranted!!!!

(I find it quite funny coming from people who criticize this society and especially for its reactionary nature—not wanting to evolve and change—to see that any change to the ZAD, or the smallest project, will be belittled, rejected, and blocked, because change imposes...well, changes in our lives and habits that would tickle our little personal paradise, which we especially do not want to change. As if it always revolved around you.)

And precisely! When do we talk about the “individual VS the common good”? When does my individuality, my integrity, become trampled by the necessity of the collective, of collective organization? When we start reproducing what we hate—the dictatorship of the majority over the minority or minorities? When does our excitement to undertake together and do crazy things together start going against a consideration for each individual with their own expectations, feelings, emotions, and sensibility? But also, when do my personal aspirations start going totally against collective processes, and an unwillingness to compromise inevitably leads to an adversarial stance, a position of conflict? When do I start recognizing this position, of not wanting to create together, not wanting to go in the same direction as others? When do my personal choices start to have consequences for people with whom I am living? When do my personal choices start to put others in danger, without me giving a damn about it? If I recognize the importance of my individuality and want it to be respected, when do I begin disre-

specting the individuality of those with whom I do not share the same political stance? When does freedom become transformed into: “I have the right to do whatever I want”? When does *Libertaire*¹³ lead to Liberal?

13. *Libertaire* describes a person opposed to authority or the abuse of power. In France, it is frequently used to describe anarchists in particular. It should not be confused with *libertarien* (“libertarian”).

14. “Switzerland” is a metaphor for neutrality that became popular after the Second World War, in which Switzerland infamously remained neutral.

Despite all the pertinent things I have heard, coming from all sides, I cannot do it, I do not want to choose a side. And yet I don't want to be told that I hold “weak” positions, want to be friends with everyone, should stop pretending to be Switzerland,¹⁴ am falling between two stools, and never come to making a choice. Well no!!! I did make a choice!!!! The choice of trying to take into account everything I hear fairly. The choice of not blindly believing my buddies, and of meeting people who do not have the same goals as me. The choice of believing in this diversity that includes a lot of people who are...diverse (honestly), and therefore the choice to look for solutions from this perspective, in order to protect the greatest number of people and ideas, so that this space can endure, not as it is (I absolutely do not care for its legalization), but for the continuation of spreading RADICAL and REVOLUTIONARY political ideas. I find it quite sad and dreadful to hear and see all the criticism that we give each oth-

er about who will be the most radical, the most sturdy in their boots, the most irreproachable.

I made the choice to recognize that even if I consider myself at home in this zone, even if I claim a personal (private) space where I sleep, eat, and live, where I do not want to be told what I need to do, this zone does not belong to me, no more than it belongs to the State, the autonomists, the suckers, the Appelists, the peasants, the citizens... It belongs—and I fight for it—to a group of people who recognize themselves in it, who believe in its potential, who accept to see it evolve as long as it belongs to us. I hear that depending on what the ZAD will achieve, many people will leave because they will no longer identify with it politically. Of course, I understand that it is normal, but why is this sad? Why not use all this energy and radical willpower elsewhere, wherever we are sorely lacking support? If we want this place to be defended by all means, legal and illegal, it must speak to the greatest number of people and, therefore, be aligned also with people who do not (or not yet) hold such radical positions. We must adapt. Work to adapt to others. I am not afraid of losing our subversive and offensive potential, because it is in us, it is our essence, it is who we are. No one prevents you from responding to the press, from supporting the rehabilitation of D281,¹⁵ from dressing in colorful clothes,

15. D281 is one of the main roads leading into the ZAD. Rehabilitation refers to trimming the invading foliage on each side of the road and preserving the innumerable barricades along it. D281 also receives a lot of attention from the police, who setup traffic stops as a way to regulate the flow of people to and from the zone.

from accepting the legalization of the ZAD...or even from organizing yourself with your affinity group to go fuck up banks, police stations, slaughterhouses, construction sites everywhere, in your name, as an individual and/or by claiming your actions in the name of the F.A.I. or F.R.I.¹⁶ On the other hand, I sincerely believe that this place offers a truly new space for encounters and organizations, and for planning these kinds of actions; provided that it belongs to us and that we are no longer threatened with expulsion. Yes, snatch the luxury of longevity. The luxury of being able to imagine a not-too-rotten future in this damned world.

16. Acronyms for the *Fédération Anarchiste Informelle* (Informal Anarchist Federation) and *Front Révolutionnaire International* (International Revolutionary Front), respectively.

So, this is the wager. A wager that we have made with our lives, with our collective and personal limitations. Oh sure, if we could see into the future, we would make far fewer mistakes. But doing nothing because it will inevitably lead to annoying and undesirable consequences, and waiting, is for me already a mistake. I prefer making mistakes, being forced to admit that I fucked up, that what I believed politically was more or less shit. I am ready to live with all that as long as we do it TOGETHER. As long as we stay TOGETHER. The enemies are not in the zone (apart from the two or three potential infiltrators that we will manage to catch one day). Even if we must remain

vigilant with our own shit, with seizures of power, with rotten excluding processes, with oversized and misplaced egos; the real enemies are in suits, in uniforms, behind desks, and on the good side of the prison bars.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Since 1963, the French government had been planning to build the Grand Ouest Airport in a rural area just north of Nantes. After the project was approved in 2008, local farmers and eco-activists occupied the site in an attempt to prevent its construction. The area, known as Notre-Dame-des-Landes, was soon christened the *Zone à Défendre* (ZAD), or defensive zone. In 2012, French government forces tried and failed to evict the occupants of the ZAD (known colloquially as *zadistes*), who thus established the ZAD as a semi-permanent commune. Since then, the ZAD has flourished and its hundreds of residents have built up the zone with cabins, gardens, farms, markets, a radio station, and at least one restaurant. In January 2018, the government announced that the airport project had been officially cancelled. Less than a month later, however, the national guard descended on Notre-Dame-

des-Landes to once again try to destroy the ZAD.

"Only One Solution: To Remain Together!" was written by an anonymous occupier about two weeks after the second major eviction campaign on February 10th. The atmosphere on the ZAD was tense and the author begins by noting their concern that the government will come again, and this time succeed in tearing down their homes.

The author's concerns were not misguided. On April 9th, 2018, in the largest police operation since the student and worker uprisings of May 1968, 2,500 heavily-armored national guard soldiers and their tanks began eviction operations. Intense fighting continued for a week during which over 150 *zadistes* were injured by tear gas, flash grenades, and other weapons. Dozens were arrested. Even as bulldozers destroyed many of the cabins and other structures on the zone, the "occupiers" (who are now residents

that have lived there for several years) remained in place. After most of the structures were destroyed fighting died down, only to flare up again in May when over 1,500 gendarmes converged on the zone to evacuate the few remaining squats. Yet again, the project of rebuilding began immediately after. There have not been any police operations on this scale since then. Just recently however, on March 16th, 2019, the rebuilt camp known as Lama Faché and two others were torn down. It occurred in the early morning, when a delegation from the ZAD was meeting with elected officials to discuss the future of the land they inhabit.

A recent statement released on the ZAD's website laments the complete absence of media coverage after a separate incident in which 30 police vehicles and construction equipment arrived at the zone to demolish several huts. There is no doubt that the news cycle has moved on, current-

ly obsessed with the outbursts of anger and violence by the world-renowned "yellow vests" (*gilets jaunes*), who have recently set the Champs-Élysées ablaze. But even when every storefront is reduced to ashes and every police force disbanded, the project of rebuilding another world will be necessary. To this end, we have a lot to learn from the *zadistes*, who know all too well that an insurrection does not end when the police pack up for the day.

JAKE NABASNY is a translator and Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University at Buffalo. His translations have appeared in *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, *El Libertario*, and *Postmodern Culture*. His dissertation examines the rise of eugenics in France and the United States during the early twentieth century in the fields of philosophy, literature, and social science.