

In late October 2010 about forty people gathered at the self-managed space named « Les Tanneries » in Dijon, for the first gathering of the RtF french-speaking local group. The lines that follow are a piece of a collective testimony of the rich intercommunications that took place for two days.

Friday, in the late afternoon people living and involved in the Tanneries welcomed new coming people by introducing the place and its human history as well as their engagement with the social movement taking place in France at that time. Following introductions revealed people from cities, rural areas and/or interested by links between the two; people with or without direct agricultural activities ; with different degrees of involvement in militant struggles ; people interested by traditional agricultural installation and other by squatting land... All different and interested by access to land. For most of us this was a first contact with the RtF constellation.

Talks were first focused on Reclaim the Fields, the history and functioning of the constellation. Then different known experiences about access to land with a collective and militant dimension in France were shared, so as the RtF links and connection at the European scale. It was a great feeling to see that many initiatives are happening in many places. Brains were already giving out heat when meetings and talks continued while sharing dinner.

On Saturday, four questions were discussed in small groups. Each question was quickly discussed and groups would alternate. In the afternoon we headed to the « Lentillères » collective garden (opened and cultivated since spring 2010, cf. Bulletin n°1) to share the morning collective reflections. Here are the four discussed questions and a summary of the elements of answers that came up.

Why fighting for land access in Europe and locally?

The first goal of fighting for land is to live! And then to fight ...

...AGAINST: cities extension, private property, massive concreting, land concentration in the hand of a few agro managers, dependency on world market and capitalism!

... FOR: food autonomy, re-localisation of rural economy, recreate fertile land, to convey and keep living various know-hows, common or shared property, avoid point of non-return (e.g. Soil death and erosion), for an equilibrium between cities and countryside (virtuous circle: making rural areas more dynamic can attract urban people blocked in cities and lead to more legitimacy from conventional peasants), to stop moving our problems to others places and countries, to allow space for different social experimentations, to create a basis for emancipation, anticapitalist struggle, to enhance fruitful practices based on exchange and solidarity, for life rather than survival !

Struggle for whom? And what for?

On the first question two answers that can be complementary rose:

- For one self and close people (to be self sufficient)

- For everyone on a global scale, to be united with fighting people (share food production) and with all those who die by working for others' food supply.

The question « struggle with whom? » seems to make more sense but we ran out of time to go further in that direction.

On the «what for? » question we talked about the agricultural dimension as a tool to develop autarky, know-hows, to try out. But agriculture allows the development of collective and political dimensions in our lives. It is a tool going much further than satisfying the need for food. On the collective and social levels we talked about link building, exchanges, hosting capacities, promote solidarity... And on the political level ideas were on practically questioning private property, to create links and convergences among various struggle and fights.

What shapes to give to these fights? What technical and juridical Tools do we need?

There is a difference between Tools needed for access to land by squatting and by using conventional ways. In both cases a juridical knowledge is needed in order to use well the law or to by pass it efficiently,

especially when combined forms of access to land are picked (e.g. living spaces in a bought piece of land while farming in squatted land around).

This subject brought various ideas on the necessity of creating shared tools and web like organisation (to mutualise experiences, competences and support – especially for squatted places); on the necessity of internal communication (act in order not get overwhelmed by relative distances, remoteness and differences in life contexts), and external communication (especially about promoting the idea that squatting is a lever for land access).

It was strongly underlined that creating a confrontation based on a power struggle is indispensable and that the use of juridical tools or juridical strategies are far from sufficient.

Which peasantries and Small farming for which society? What kind of solidarities should we develop on these struggles?

Time was missing to get more in depth with these questions. Ideas went around “small farming” (local scale, collective functioning...) to replace mass agriculture but without reducing agriculture only to a production act. Small farming is a way of living. Changing peasantry and agriculture forms is seen as a basis to change society and its rhythm toward production re-localisation, less urbanisation and wage system, toward the emancipation of the market system, more responsibility awareness and autonomy of individuals.

Then, two persons shared experiences relating to the time they had passed in the many squatted villages of the Spanish Pyrennees mountains. We came back to the Tanneries and struggles testimonies went on with people living the occupation of Notre Dame des Landes (see the ZAD occupation call). After this rich and well-filled day, everyone relaxed having dinner and partying.

Saturday exchanges and debates brought many questionings and ideas that inspired the three sunday workshops. In small groups we talked about sharing juridical knowledge, the RtF formation network and the potential connections between RtF and the NDDL occupation *movement*.

On juridical aspects of access to land a need to share all the knowledge we already have and to develop new tools was *expressed*. In particular all the aspect concerning risks taken when squatting land, agricultural status, the different ways of land acquisition and collective property.

We decided to start by listing known collective experiences orientated towards how access to land was gained, how the power struggle went on and which juridical tools were used or passed by to succeed. At the same time a gathering of all the existing tools we have is launched, means that can be used to store and share information are food for thinking as well.

About the RtF farm network is was decided to set up a charter in tree versions in order to define the objectives and modalities of the agricultural and political approach to the training by using existing thought and documents. One version would concern people from the hosting farm, one other the person wiling to be trained and the third for the RtF intermediary. Information collection on farms interested on being part of the network and their agricultural activities has started, as well as collection of contacts of local groups and people that can relay information and put interested people in touch.

A questioning exists on the formation framework. Is there a need for an associative status in order to give a cover for trained persons?

About Notre Dame des Landes occupation we talked about what we would like and could do there. This struggle is globally linked to RtF concerns (land access, agricultural settling, fight against land destruction, anticapitalism, global and practical ecology...). Proposals are the organisation there of the next French speaking RtF gathering and to check the possibility of having a European gathering there and to stay aware and active on this struggle, there and elsewhere.

It was pretty difficult to get closer to the finishing of the weekend since tons of discussion subjects had not been tackled, but we agreed on a next French speaking meeting (in NDDL and around February 5 and 6th). Various groups were formed to list farms for the network interested by RtF, to work on the charter. The objective of sharing our tools, knowledge and references on questioned juridical tools was also set.

Anyway it was frustrating to end everything quickly on the sunday afternoon, next gatherings could be organised on 3 to 4 days with a weekend in the middle where decision taking process would be concentrated.

To be continued...