

RG: Good sir, I will ask you, please, for your name and date and place of birth to begin

OR: It started as in a ...

RG: Yes, but that's for later

OR: No, I say that for fun ... So my name is Olivier Rolin and I was born in May 1947, on May 17th, if you want to wish me my birthday, in a very short time I will be sixty years old, in a very few days

RG: Congratulations!

OR: I was born in Boulogne-Billancourt, in the Parisian suburbs

RG: Can you tell me something about your family of origin and your childhood?

OR: My dad was a weird guy, he did all kinds of jobs. He had started out as a military doctor in Africa, in what were the colonies at the time. Then he immediately rallied to de Gaulle in June '40. So at that time he was stationed in the equatorial forest, in a territory called Likouala-aux-herbes, it is a tributary of the right bank of the Congo, it is a region that is located now between Zaire and the Central African Republic. Anyway he was in the forest, with other friends of his he went up the Congo, he went down the Nile, he arrived in Egypt, and so he joined the Free French who were there and he was then throughout the war one of the doctors of the French Free Division. I'm very happy with that, I don't would have liked to have a Vichy father. Oddly enough, when he behaved well, he had been in the whole war, he left the army at the end of the war, he returned to what was called at the time France. Overseas, that is to say the administration of the empire, although he was, at least when I knew him myself, quite anti-colonialist. But he was still a colonial official in Indochina and then in Africa, and then when the colonies ceased, when these countries gained their independence, he was versed in diplomacy. So he ended his career as a diplomat, albeit exceedingly undiplomatically. He was a diplomat although he was not very diplomatic, he was a colonial administrator although he was very little colonialist,

RG: And your mother?

OR: And my mother was the daughter of ... so my father was from a very family - I think that explains part of his career - I think he became a soldier to escape his family, which was a very family. Catholic, very military, and my mother was from a family, backwards, her parents were teachers, lay people, socialists, republicans, and she had no job, she did not work, she was a woman home

RG: Where did they meet, if not ...?

OR: They met at the Liberation, my father was a handsome soldier I think, I'll show you his photo if you want, well they met in '45, I know more exactly where, but on the occasion of the effusions of the Liberation

RG: So he's a somewhat paradoxical figure, a soldier who was anti-militarist, in the colonial administration and who was anti-colonialist, you say

OR: Absolutely. He is finished his days ... my mother was horrified, well, very worried that we are, because my brother was also in the movement, she would have wanted us to continue studying. She was much more conformist, she would have liked us to become a diplomat, etc., things like that. And my father, on the contrary, was very happy, allowed what we were doing very well, and then I almost disappointed him when I ended up giving up this activity, when we dispersed, when we dissolved, he was almost disappointed, because he ended his life almost being a leftist

RG: But politically, who were they voting for?

OR: I remember, my first memory of the name of a politician was Mendes France, he was a mendessist, he was on the left. My father had started his life, according to my mother, when she knew him he was not at all on the left, if he had been Free French, it was out of patriotism, not even especially for anti-fascism, it was more for patriotism than for other

reasons. But he had evolved all his life towards the left, me my first memories, he was more of the left, yes, a mendesist

RG: And you got along well with your father?

OR: Very well, there was not a great familiarity, since it was still a long time ago, but we got along very well.

RG: What about your studies?

OR: I did part of my studies in Africa, because at one point my father was stationed in Africa, in Dakar, and then I returned to Paris, I prepared the entrance examination for Normale Supérieure. I did hypokhagne and khagne, therefore literary studies, Latin, Greek, history, philosophy, etc. I entered the École Normale Supérieure, I was admitted in 1967, a bit by miracle besides because At the time I was much more involved in political action than preparing for competitions, but I returned anyway. And there I practically stopped my studies at that time, from the end of '67, the beginning of '68, I only did politics, I stopped reading, etc. I continued a bit of philosophy studies, but very symbolic

RG: You haven't earned a diploma?

OR: Yes, a license and a master's degree in philosophy

RG: Still!

OR: All the same, but I refused to take the aggregation, which resulted in me being kicked out of Normale Sup

RG: When?

OR: Quite normally, I didn't find that scandalous, it must have been in '70 I think, there you have it, my studies ended there

RG: Did you do your bachelor's and master's degrees at the École Normale or at the Sorbonne?

OR: No, no, at the Sorbonne, the École Normale does not award diplomas, I took very very little, I took a few philosophy courses at Normale sup, I took a course or two from Althusser, which was obviously my model, but Althusser at that time was very ill, as we learned later, and therefore he was not teaching. I took a few courses, I followed the courses of Deleuze, things of Spinoza, but on the whole I have almost completely (inaudible 8:12) from '68, in any case the studies, I completely abandoned them from '68

RG: And you spent more time with your comrades?

OR: Of course, yes

RG: Who were who at the time?

OR: Do you mean what they were called?

RG: Yes. That is to say the people with whom you militated

OR: Yes, I am a full-time activist anyway from '68, and even no, before, from '67 practically I did more than that. So '67 I still took the competitive examination at the School, I still took a few courses, I passed my license and my master's degree, but from '68 I only did politics

RG: Can you tell me a bit about your political awareness and your commitment, how did it go?

OR: I'm just doing this reserve, I have a very bad memory, it's been a very long time, what I can tell you is maybe the reconstructions

RG: But was the war in Algeria when you were younger? Was it the Vietnam War or?

OR: It was the Vietnam War, the engine, the pretext, the occasion of my politicization and I think of that of my generation, it was the opposition to the Vietnam War. So I became a far left activist because of the Vietnam War. But also, it's something that we have a bit of trouble to realize now, but at the time it was almost obvious for a young intellectual to be a Marxist for example.

RG: Yes, absolutely

OR: At a pinch, he could be in the Communist Party, although there were fewer and fewer of them, one could be a Trotskyist, one could be Maoist, one could be a Castroist, etc., but not being a Marxist was a very weird. Being a Christian Democrat did not exist, well it practically did not exist. So I became an extreme left activist because of the Vietnam War but also because it was almost in the order of things, because my comrades were, because I admired the works, yet not so considerable, from Althusser. Because I had also inherited from my family a kind of sense of injustice, I had not been taught - the little I told you about my father and my mother, about my mother's family - I was not taught. hadn't learned that you always had to accept everything. On the contrary, I was told that there were injustices against which we had to fight, to revolt, that was part of family history. But I mean all the same, there was a part too, it seems weird, but there was also a part of conformism once again in this choice, that is to say we were against the established order. , but a lot of people of that generation were. If I had become a Catholic militant, I would have found myself quite alone but there was also an element of conformity once again in that choice, that is to say, we were against the established order, but many people of that generation were. If I had become a Catholic militant, I would have found myself quite alone but there was also an element of conformity once again in that choice, that is to say, we were against the established order, but many people of that generation were. If I had become a Catholic militant, I would have found myself quite alone

RG: Mainly at the École Normale Supérieure

OR: Especially at the École Normale Supérieure, that's it

RG: Which was held by the Maoists

OR: That's it, by the Marxist-Leninists as we said at the time who then became Maoists

RG: UJC (ml)

OR: There you go

RG: And you were part of it

OR: I joined UJC (ml) before '68, but I tell you for all these reasons that I tell you, but in good part also because the circle of Ulm, as it was called, where there was Benny Lévy, there was Robert Linhart, etc. And then I admired these people and that they were Marxist-Leninists, who were Maoists

RG: Who were a little older than you?

OR: Yes, they are five years older than me, at the time it seemed considerable

RG: Five years already, so they weren't at school anymore?

OR: No, they were no longer at the School, they were in Ulm precisely, it was called the circle of Ulm. I joined UJC (ml) in '65 or '66

RG: And you were still in high school

OR: I was in hypokhagne

RG: Which high school was it?

OR: Lycée Louis-le-Grand. So it was the antechamber of the École Normale Supérieure

RG: To come back to this question of conformity and the relationship with your parents, we often talk about generational conflict, children who rebelled against their parents, don't you see it like that?

OR: No, not against my parents. Once again I tell you I got on well with them, I really have no complaints. They did not try to influence my political choices, they did not dissuade me from doing that. After that it's different opinions, my mother was not very happy, but they never put pressure on me, and on the other hand I had no contempt, no hatred for them. On the other hand, that this engagement was a way of revolting against the generations which had preceded us, that I believe it, yes. We weren't, we were born very soon after the war. We didn't really realize it at the time that it was that close, I was born two years after the end of the war, and obviously my parents' generation was the generation of Vichy, of collaboration, etc. Especially us, the Maoists, in our theater, in our rhetoric, there was all the time this opposition between collaboration and resistance. There you have it, it was all very mythologized, but in any case the hatred was one thing, I even think it was the most thing, it was the strongest political feeling, the truest that we have

RG: And yet Gaullism was based on the cult of resistance

OR: I know, it remains a bit enigmatic for me, because we were so terribly anti-Gaullist, we hated de Gaulle, when in fact, I don't know. Finally if, I know, political action never lacks absurd rationalizations. Of course, in what took the place of thought, in our analysis, the real resistance had been a previous resistance, communist, and Gaullist resistance, external, was a kind of invention of the bourgeoisie to seize the power of 'State when the end of the war would come and to disarm the people. Roughly speaking, that was our vision. And how could we have believed in such bizarre things, anyway ...

RG: So it was a bit to complete the real resistance

OR: Yes, it was to take up again, always in our imagination, to take up the torch of the real resistance which had been disarmed by the Gaullists with the complicity of the Communists at the liberation. This was our fantasy

RG: Can you tell me a bit about your '68?

OR: Yes, but it won't be very interesting because I don't have very precise memories of it and what I just remember is that I was in this organization, the UJC (ml). I was at the time a small cadre, let's say, of this organization, I was very brawler, and the castagne, the fights with sticks already held a very important place because we fought a lot with the people of extreme right, with the West, etc. So I took care of that a lot, and I liked it. So here I was, I was a small executive, and when he arrived, I was not in the direction of the UJC (ml), unlike Tiennot Grumbach for example. And when '68 arrived, the supreme leader of the UJC (ml) who was Robert Linhart disowned this movement, considered that there were, you know Linhart's story - so he considered it a petty bourgeois revolt, that it was to distract students from factory work. Finally, the line of the UJC (ml) was that it was necessary to be established, to be hired in factories, and that the intellectuals had to become workers. So Linhart considered that '68 turned intellectuals away from factories, so in principle we were banned from going to demonstrations. And of course we went there anyway, the memory I have is that I went there with the rather curious feeling of being. I had a double fear, I was afraid on the one hand of the police, but I was also afraid of my bosses, I told myself that if I got caught I would be yelled at, I was going to have to do my own self-criticism for disobeying management's orders. The rest, I have memories of a fight, I have memories of being beaten with poop on the head in the gardens of the Observatory, I remember cars on fire, things like that, of great exaltation, and all that is known what. I have more precise memories - but that I told it in the Paper Tiger, but I have more precise memories of the end, well of June '68, of Flins, of the fights around Flins a great exaltation, and all that is known what. I have more precise memories - but that I told it in the Paper Tiger, but I have



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RG: Why Flins?

OR: Because Flins was a very large factory, because it was one of the last to be occupied, factories gradually resumed work, one of the last very large factories to be occupied was Flins. There was Flins, there was Sochaux, the Peugeot factories in Sochaux, but it was near Paris, it was a large factory, it was the very image at the time, Renault was the workers' fortress as you know, so there you go, for these reasons

RG: So it was a bit to recover from the mistakes of May that the Maoists intervened in Flins?

OR: Yes, but not only that, for once we were on what we thought our land was, since it was a factory. As much as the fights between young students and CRS seemed to us - once again, appeared to our management, not to us - to be outside the revolutionary subject, the defense of an occupied factory against the police seemed to us to be in the middle of the cannon. revolutionary law, so we were on our ground

RG: So the workers were occupying the factory, and the students were inside too?

OR: They came to help them fend off the police

RG: And how long did it last?

OR: There was fighting for about two days. The occupation lasted a long time, but the fight with the police lasted two days

RG: Because what fascinates me is that you were a group of normaliens, young intellectuals, and the whole problem, for the Maoists, as for the other Marxists, was to build bridges towards the working class or even towards the peasants, and that always seems very difficult to me. Did you have strategies to do it?

OR: You have to have some, but frankly the strategy we had was to hire ourselves, to go to work in a factory, to dress up as a worker if you want.

RG: Is that what you did yourself?

OR: No, because like me I was immediately involved, when the Proletarian Left was created, that is to say at the start of the '68 school year, I immediately took care of the part in military quotation marks. , that is to say from the part of violent actions, illegal actions anyway. There, it was me responsible for that, and so this specialty made that I did not go to me, I was not asked to go and hire myself. But our strategy in any case was to get us hired in factories and to create structures of struggle, of workers' organizations outside the unions. But above all, to say that, it may seem strange, obviously the bridges in question were quite fragile, but in any case our thinking, our doctrine is was that intellectuals had to give up absolutely everything that made them intellectuals, and in this we were extremely anti-Leninist, consciously anti-Leninist. Because Lenin was in What to do? and in other books, had theorized the role of the revolutionary intellectual who had to import revolutionary theory into the proletariat, but this idea that revolutionary intellectuals had to import revolutionary theory into the proletariat struck us as absolutely shocking. We thought that the proletariat had latent all thought, all revolutionary theory, and that it was up to us to go to their school, to learn at their school and all that, we had very sides, in some respects we were closer to some form of

RG: It was the masses who held

OR: It was the masses who held the truth, which in parenthesis has us - we will come back to this perhaps - it is the only answer, the main answer, why did we not do what we did. was done in Germany, Italy, etc., i.e. start killing people? I think because of that, because we had absolutely not, we thought that we did not have that pride to think that it was us who were going to mark the direction to follow, etc. We thought that this thing, killing, starting to kill, it was the masses who were going to do it, and that at that time we would be there to help them. We were preparing for it, but it was not for us to make such a serious decision

RG: I understand. And the masses that you discovered were young workers, were they immigrants, who was it that you found in the factories?

OR: Yes, it was above all what you just said, that is to say young workers, the OS, often from the countryside, and on the other hand immigrants, our main breeding grounds. We didn't have a lot of them, there weren't a lot of workers back home, but all the same there were times when we had a certain power in the factories, very momentary power, and it was essentially these two categories- the. There was a third category, but much less numerous, but which had a lot of symbolic importance for us; on the contrary, it was the old workers who had participated in the Resistance. There was one at home, there was one who became a cop, but hey ... From a sociological point of view, it

RG: And later, it was in '70, Flins once again became the center of militant movements with the Base Ouvrière, was it you or was it the others at the Base Ouvrière in Flins?

OR: No, the Flins Workers Base was others, I think Bleskine must have been there. No, no, we also had militants in Flins, yes, but it was not, well it was one of the important factories where we did important work, but let's say that where we did the most work, that it was rather in Boulogne-Billancourt, at the parent factory, the Île Seguin factory. Finally, that means there were militants, a lot of factories. There were some in Flins of course, but there were some in all the Renault factories, I think, there were some in Peugeot, in Sochaux, there were some in the mines, there were some in the shipbuilding industry in Saint-Nazaire and Dunkirk, there were many places that were pompously baptized workers' base

RG: And you, where have you seen conflicts, essentially?

OR: I am not, precisely I did not intervene. I intervened very marginally, if you want my role was not to militate in the factory, nor even to militate at the doors of the factories, my role to me, in the division of the tasks, it was, once again to leave from the moment, after '68, when the Proletarian Left existed, my role was to be a kind of, well - I am obliged to make a comeback, a point of doctrine if I may say so - the Proletarian Left was a species, was given for task a kind of pedagogy of illegality Once again we thought that the springs of illegality, the springs of war, guerrilla, etc., were within the masses, but these springs were rusty

RG: In the unconscious

OR: There were things that were latent in the minds of the masses and that we had to wake up. So we deviate in particular to awaken courage, the audacity to put an end to bourgeois law. Illegalism, more than violence. We weren't violent by nature, but illegalism was part of our - was the core of our strategy. And I was the one who was more particularly responsible - everyone was responsible for illegalism, but let's say that for illegalism of a certain level, I was the specialist, there you have it. Well, me, with the people I worked with. So I intervened for, for example, I went to the North region, to the north of France, because the comrades who were there were not very good in that area. So to help them set the coal mining offices on fire, it was I who went, I was their military instructor in short, a politico-military instructor. Likewise, in Marseilles, people were not very good, not very strong in urban guerrilla warfare. So I was going there to, and with them we set fire to a police station, in any case the police cars that were in front of the police station, a very large police station, moreover, at the Porte d'Aix. There, I was the guy who did that. Which means, there was an increase in public transport, and well I was going, once again, I was not alone, but my job was to go and steal a thousand metro tickets from a station. to then distribute them to the workers who left for work. That was my role,

RG: And who were your co-activists at that time?

OR: It was people like me a bit, young intellectuals

RG: Your brother?

OR: No, no, my brother not at all. My brother was in the same organization as me a lot more, he was a lot less fanatic than me. At the time I did not see him, but if I believe what was told in the organization, well no I know. He was much more libertarian than me, he was also a grassroots activist and he was in Saint-Nazaire, he was in the shipyard, he worked in a factory, in a workshop, and we had practically no contact. at the time

RG: And in your book, you talk about a long walk in Brittany near Guingamp, you describe that, you talk about evangelizing the countryside, it's not exactly the same as illegalism

OR: No, but I didn't do any long walk

RG: Ah yes, but that's the story you tell

OR: But on the other hand it did exist, every summer there were indeed young students who went to work in the countryside for, the countryside did not seem very, much less important to us than the factories, but all the same the countryside had a role. to play. It was necessary that, in addition as you probably know, in French political history the campaigns were often the things which made it possible to suffocate the Commune, etc., that is to say the right-wing powers of s " support campaigns ...

RG: Bonaparte's 18th Brumaire

OR: ... to crush revolutionary Paris for example

RG: While in China it was something else

OR: In China it was something else, that's it. So we didn't do systematic work in the countryside, but we went all the same from time to time, usually in the summer, to try to spread revolutionary ideas in the countryside. But, once again, I didn't ...

RG: If we can approach the question of sexual liberation or cultural liberation a little, you tell in your books about relationships between men, women, and camaraderie. Le Dantec qualified the Proletarian Left as puritanical, where do you stand, do you consider yourself to be puritanic or rather liberated at the time?

OR: No, at the time we were extremely Puritan, yes, of course. I have no recollection at all, unfortunately I want to say now, of a great, a life of debauchery or debauchery, no, no, not

at all. We were as far-left movements have almost always been, we naturally had rights, we were even strongly encouraged to have a partner. You had to have one, period, and then if possible even get married. Anyway, it was a bit from that point of view like in the Communist Party at the time of Thorez, etc., but the things of sex we did not talk about, it was completely censored

RG: Because what was important was the cause

OR: What was important was the cause, that's it, if not nothing else

RG: And have your tactics changed?

OR: Pardon, excuse me, I'm telling you that for the, it's true of the proletarian Left, it's not at all true of Vive la Révolution, etc.

RG: Yes, that's the impression I have

OR: And that's why we had a total contempt, among other things, for Vive la Révolution which seemed to me a small group of partousers, that's all

RG: So among the revolutionaries, you were the elite what

OR: We saw ourselves as such, yes, even though our thinking was against it, as long as we were true to our thinking, we didn't see ourselves as the elite, but pretty much all the time this thing came up.

RG: But vis-à-vis other revolutionaries

OR: Vis-à-vis other revolutionaries, we were better than the others, that's for sure

RG: And better than the Trotskyites?

OR: Yes, of course

RG: I never quite understood the line of the Trotskyites

OR: It's not me who could

RG: You neither

OR: In any case, what we despised supremely among the Trotskyists, among other things, is the fact that they considered themselves as an avant-garde, and this seemed to us unbearable of pretension and petty bourgeois vanity.

RG: Has there been an evolution of strategy or tactics in the two, three, four years that followed '68 with the Proletarian Left?

OR: Yes, that is to say, well, the heart of our policy was, once again, the constitution of workers' bases, of struggle committees in the workshops. So the heart of our policy was that the militants hire each other and recruit revolutionary workers around them, etc. But around that, we have gradually, we have always tried in our somewhat phantasmal thinking, to bring other layers of the population to unite in the supposed struggle of the proletariat. For example, at one point, it was the beginning of the, there were years of revolt by small traders, it was the beginning of supermarkets, for example we supported small traders, who were in truth mostly right-wing people, but hey, we tried to bring them to revolutionary positions. The main turning point, and it was not a great success, to say the least, it was what we called the truth and justice committees, which was to try to seize the - beyond the factories of business where there was a situation of injustice and to gather

around that the population without class characteristic, that is to say the intellectuals. Here it is, and it is among other things this thing that brought us, really the only thing of which we should be truly ashamed, in my opinion, and which is the story of Bruay-en-Artois that you undoubtedly know which was to try to seize beyond the factories of business where there was a situation of injustice and to regroup around it the population without class characteristic, that is to say the intellectuals. Here it is, and it is among other things this thing that brought us, really the only thing of which we should be truly ashamed, in my opinion, and which is the story of Bruay-en-Artois that you undoubtedly know which was to try to seize beyond the factories of business where there was a situation of injustice and to regroup around it the population without class characteristic, that is to say the intellectuals. Here it is, and it is among other things this thing that brought us, really the only thing of which we should be truly ashamed, in my opinion, and which is the story of Bruay-en-Artois that you probably know

RG: Yes

OR: And so if you like, the evolutions of our policy, there were not so many, but after all it was to take an interest in more and more social layers other than the proletariat. And on the other hand, another development was to gradually harden this kind of pedagogy of illegality, which for example led me, me, to go into, to go underground, to have false papers, a false name, because we were doing things, without being at all as serious as what happened in Germany or Italy, were still punishable by quite a few years in prison, so kidnappings, things like it. Here it was, it was not a shocking development

RG: To come back to the question of illegalism and violence, it is true that we should explain a little why you did not descend to the level of violence that we have seen in Italy and West Germany. , the reason for you, which would it be?

OR: I allow myself to say, formerly I wrote an article on this, even more, a hundred pages, at the request of François Furet and the book, which must be difficult to find now, finally at the National Library you will find, which is called Illegalism and War, no wait, I'm saying bullshit, it's not called Illegalism and War, here it is called Terrorism and Democracy and I was writing there under a pseudonym which is Antoine Liniers. So I tried to answer this question quite completely at that point, but to tell the truth there is no answer which is satisfactory, there is no reason which is

RG: No, but your answer



OR: My answer is a lot of things, it is above all, and I tell you our thoughts to the extent that when we thought, well we did not see ourselves as an avant-garde, but we conceived ourselves as a simple tool at the service of popular revolts. So this did not give us any rights, it required us to follow this pedagogy that I said, but it absolutely did not give us the right to set the main stages of the forward march towards the revolution. So in our madness there was still an element of reason, if instead of being, if we had had another theory, maybe, I think we would have done as in Italy or in Germany. But we didn't have that thought. On the other hand, it has often been said, the role of intellectuals, etc., I don't really believe in it, because intellectuals do not always act as moderates, Foucault for example was not a type who moderated us, but perhaps the fact of having maintained with large sections of society a contact precisely through the great intellectuals who supported us, we have never been isolated, we have never been like the Germans were, we have never been a sort of island lost in a hostile ocean, we have always had connections with the university. So maybe this has kept us from going crazy. Another thing that I said and that I believe, I know that for me anyway it was important, it can be a little complicated in, in those years, inevitably, if you want the center of seriousness of the armed action, in the years before '60 it had been Cuba or the guerrilla of Latin America, etc., henceforth it had become Palestine. However, we were absolutely, we had become, as I said earlier, revolutionary militants, for many of us, out of shame of collaboration, therefore anti-Semitism for us, all that could come close. anti-Semitism was for us an absolutely abominable thing, therefore we felt no sympathy, I tell you frankly, well me anyway, for the small Palestinian groups

RG: Oh no?

OR: No, not at all. We had proposals

RG: In Palestine or France?

OR: Palestinian groups but who contacted us in France. We had, I know that the FNLP had offered us collaborations, etc., and we had refused. So we were the only extreme left group, I think in Europe itself, to condemn the Munich attack, the Munich Olympic Games. So if you want to go into guerrilla warfare, to take that step of armed action, it was inevitably to be more or less in that world, that orbit, and that was something we didn't want. But fundamentally it is above all that our political thought, insofar as we had a political thought, prohibited us from putting ourselves forward.

RG: But you speak of a refusal of violence on your part

OR: No, I am not saying refusal of violence, I am saying that we had great humility, that may seem extraordinary to you, but when we were true to ourselves, we really considered ourselves as the type who will wash the feet of the poor, that was the basis of our passion. So this is not at all the same as a Bolshevik, or the Trotskyists who were heirs to the Bolsheviks, thought that they had everything to teach the masses, which is why he ridiculed us by calling us spontaneists, spontaneous, etc. But since we, on the contrary, had everything to learn from the masses, it was not up to us to take decisions as serious as that of switching to armed struggle. All this now I find it hard to say, because anyway all this, it seems to me pure logomachy, but if I

RG: But in Hamon and Rotman's book the death of Pierre Overney was very important in the evolution of the Proletarian Left, do you think the same thing?

OR: Yes, yes, of course. This is precisely the moment when we saw, whether we like it or not, we were going to be forced to be drawn into a kind of private war, a small war, with the police, with the police, etc., and then since this was not what we wanted, this death made us think, where we were going, is our policy to increase like that, homeopathically the degree of violence, it was, weren't we doing, in Mao-Tse-Tung's comic phrase, weren't we lifting a big stone to drop it on our feet?

RG: And what did you yourself think at that time, regarding the evolution of the group?

The one who had a resolute thought, I would not say anarchist, because he was the opposite of the anarchist, but in any case, against groupuscular pride, against militant pride, against avant-garde, c was him. It was he who at that time prevented this development that maybe I would have liked. But at the same time I felt in agreement with him, I felt that there was more reflection, more intelligence in his thinking than in my instincts. would have liked. But at the same time I felt in agreement with him, I felt that there was more reflection, more intelligence in his thinking than in my instincts. would have liked. But at the same time I felt in agreement with him, I felt that there was more reflection, more intelligence in his thinking than in my instincts.

RG: And there were others like Goldman who were more ready for violence?

OR: Of course, yes, of course. But Goldman I didn't know him, I know he saw Benny then, I think, but in any case I know that he would have been ready to start shooting at the police, etc., but I can't talk about him, because I don't have him. But in any case I know that among my men, if I may say so, well the people with whom I worked, so we had formed a small armed wing between inverted commas of the Proletarian Left, for which I was responsible, therefore among those there were many who were to pass to the armed struggle

RG: Famous names?

OR: No, no

RG: So what was your development after '72? Overney's death was in '72

OR: Yes, after we decided to disperse, to dissolve, at the end of '73 I believe. My evolution, that was, one of the important things, one of the already important elements of this evolution, first of all it must be said that all this was not done in the joy, it was not done in the ease, it was very painful, even if I agreed with the idea of dissolving us, it was very painful, we stayed anyway, in any case most of us did not want to find the petty bourgeois life. So we were very confused. A very important milestone was the history of Lip, the fact that the biggest, the most inventive strike, the one that clung most to a kind of workers' self-management, was led by workers who were unionized. not to the CGT,

RG: Because it was the working class waking up but not like you

OR: Not as we had thought, not under our direction, etc. So we were very, Lip is something that has a lot to us, well me who impressed me a lot. After it was years when I no longer had any political action at all, the first occasion, the first time when I started to do some form of politics again, it was, and moreover there is had a lot of leftism, it was support for Solidarity in Poland. So I was several times with former Maoist comrades and it was funny, in the

convoys that were being organized, there were a lot of them in France, Solidarity is something that struck a lot here.

RG: Was it in the early eighties?

OR: I never know the dates, yes, probably. No, I'm telling you, it was a long time later, but it was my first, the first time that I mobilized again for something, that was it

RG: And have you met Polish activists?

OR: Yes, of course, I went there twice with trucks to bring back, not to bring back weapons! To bring back medicines, things to Solidarnosc. So yes, of course, I met Polish activists, parish priests, things that were obviously not in our habit of discussing with parish priests. And I even remember an extremely good priest who argued with his colleagues because he found that Hochhuth's play, The Vicar, was a play that roughly told the truth about the role of the Vatican during the war. And these convoys, it was a pretty weird thing, because it was as if we had put ourselves, well I'm exaggerating, but there were a lot of former leftist militants, and a lot of people from the CFDT, well which had had something to do with Christianity before. But before that, it was years that I didn't do anything anymore, it was pretty sad years

(Pause 53:18)

I don't know what question you were asking me exactly, what was my political development in the years that followed?

RG: Yes, but also

OR: I think that the fact of having lived, that we have experienced all the censorship, sectarianism, trials, which characterized the much larger life of communist movements, we have experienced it on a smaller scale. But even though we had the cult of the chief, we

even had the cult of the foreign chief, Mao-Tse-Tung, I never wanted to wear the little badges, but most of them had their little Mao badge, etc. Like the others, I had my little red booklet and I pretended to find solutions in the little red booklet, we did all that, a bit of a joke indeed, but still. We had sessions of criticism and self-criticism, we forced people to do their self-criticism while they were doing what they could, well here it is. So that was our education and I absolutely don't regret it, I think that to a certain extent it gave us, it allowed us perhaps to understand better than people who did not have that education, also the great horrors of communism. I have a point of view to say that, I will never say that communism is the same as Nazism of course, but I also know that the Soviet camps, etc., it is an absolutely abominable thing. . So in the years that followed, we may have been more, we may have been understood a little before younger people or older people who had the cult of the Soviet Union, we still had more or less , our political evolution was to understand what Stalinism was, to understand what gulag was, we were not hostile to Solzhenitsyn as people of the bourgeois left in France were. Quite quickly we said to ourselves that without doubt China, I speak for myself in any case, China there must be, it must not be if, such a paradise on earth, the end of the Vietnam war, Was it really the people of the rice fields who had risen up against the Americans or was it not a little bit the army of North Vietnam? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt, but also of questioning a number of our is said that all the same without doubt China, I speak for myself in any case, China there must have been, it must not be if, so much the paradise on earth, the end of the Vietnam war, is it? Were the people of the rice fields really who rose up against the Americans or was it not a little bit like the North Vietnamese army? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt, but also of questioning a number of our is said that all the same without doubt China, I speak for myself in any case, China there must have been, it must not be if, so much the paradise on earth, the end of the Vietnam war, is it? Were the people of the rice fields really who rose up against the Americans or was it not a little bit like the North Vietnamese army? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt, but also of questioning a number of our so much paradise on earth, the end of the Vietnam war, was it really the people of the rice paddies who had risen up against the Americans or was it not a little bit after all? North Vietnam army? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt, but also of questioning a number of our so much paradise on earth, the end of the Vietnam war, was it really the people of the rice paddies who had risen up against the Americans or was it not a little bit after all? North Vietnam army? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt,

but also of questioning a number of our North Vietnam army? All these questions that were not always welcome in the traditional left-wing press or in the traditional left-wing circles, it seems to me that they struck us more, because we had this experience on a small scale. So it's been years of doubt, but also of questioning a number of our

RG: Did you welcome Solzhenitsyn like Glucksmann for example?

OR: No, not like him, but in any case I didn't think he was a CIA agent. I thought what he was saying had to be said and was true, and I didn't write any books at that time like Glucksmann, but I welcomed Solzhenitsin as a man who spoke the truth

RG: And have you returned to professional life, family life?

OR: Yes, I integrated professional life, because I had never had a franc, it happened in the late 1970s. I first did, I'm telling you that because it's pretty funny, I first did a job that was a bit picturesque for a while, I still knew a lot of Latin and Greek, I was employed through a French historian, I was employed by the Menil Foundation. Finally, I was not an employee, I had freelancers, that's all, very precise, but to look for everything concerning Africa in the works of the Fathers of the Church

RG: What foundation you say?

OR: Menil Foundation, which is a family of French origin, Protestant and who was one of the oil magnates, I don't know what, who is in Houston and they are great patrons, and it was people who were committed in the fight for American civil rights, etc., and so they were interested in the relationship between the West and blacks, well anyway, that's anecdotal, it was never a job, but I still earned my living for a few months doing that. Otherwise the beginning of my professional life, it was I believe in '79, where I became, always thanks to the same historian besides, reader, that is to say nothing what, at the Editions du Seuil, so I read history or politics manuscripts, and then gradually, as I was making fairly good reading notes,

RG: This historian who helped you ...?

OR: He's a guy, he's a friend of my parents, I have no idea what happened to him, I don't even know if he's still alive, his name was Jean Devisse, he was at medievalist origin and then he was passionate about decolonization, he had become a specialist in African history, being a medievalist originally

RG: What about family life?

OR: Strictly speaking, I never had a great family life, since I never got married. I lived, I lived first with a young woman that I had known, who was in my ranks, in my troops

RG: Is that Chloé (laughs from RG)?

OR: It's Chloe, exactly. Wait, is this Chloe? Yes. And then I got to know another one, etc., I didn't have a family life in the sense that I didn't get married. I never considered that I had a proper house, a home, I had no children, I continued to lead a somewhat old student life

RG: A little wild?

OR: Yes, not feeling attached by any deep bond. I don't think I was right, but that's how it is

RG: And if we can come back to this book a little, is it the first time that you have written about these events or have you written something else?

OR: I wrote my first novel oddly, which is called Future Phenomenon, which is a rather complicated book in my opinion, it takes place in a time that is not good, it is in an imaginary country, c he is in an era which is both the future and the past. But it's about a bunch of people who tried to revolutionize and didn't succeed, and what happens next. So my first book I wrote it anyway to talk about that but in a much more indirect, much more

roundabout way and I would also say much more obscure, and I wrote it for that. I came to literature because it is the way I found to reflect on our experience. This book appeared in '83, ten years after the dissolution, finally our separation, but I spent a lot of time in the late seventies thinking about all this obviously, and the way I thought about it, the way I found to think about it, was to write this first novels. So I can't say that Paper Tiger is my first time writing about it, but it's my first time writing so obviously. Finally, it is so obviously a question of that, we can recognize that it is the Proletarian Left, we can recognize that Gédéon is Benny Lévy, we can recognize others is my first time writing about it, but this is my first time writing so obviously. Finally, it is so obviously a question of that, we can recognize that it is the Proletarian Left, we can recognize that Gédéon is Benny Lévy, we can recognize others is my first time writing about it, but this is my first time writing so obviously. Finally, it is so obviously a question of that, we can recognize that it is the Proletarian Left, we can recognize that Gédéon is Benny Lévy, we can recognize others

RG: And why did you choose the form of the story told to a daughter of a former comrade?

OR: Partly by chance, because indeed the daughter of a friend who is long dead, who was an old friend of this organization, who died accidentally, not like

RG: Thirteen?

OR: Yes, well, Thirteen is a completely imaginary character but where I gathered the traits of at least two friends of the time who died, one died of an overdose and the other of a common accident. In any case, the daughter of one of them came to see me to ask me to tell her about that time and to tell her about her father, whom she had known very little, because he had died when she was very young. . So this put me on the track, but it could not have inspired anything, but I adopted this form first because I wanted it to be very oral, for there to be a kind of tension that is the order of the one who takes someone from the backhands and says to him: "Wait, you will listen to me, I will tell you", there you are, I wanted it to be so nervous, as tense as that. And then on the other hand, it makes me think suddenly, it's the Mariner, someone who, Coleridge's poem, he catches someone going to a wedding

RG: Ah, The Ancient Mariner, yes that's right



OR: And the guy is going to tell him a story first, well so I wasn't the Ancient Mariner story I was telling, but that's it: "You are going to listen to me!" ". And then there is also the fact that it highlights the fact that despite everything it is more for people younger than me, I did not do this book so much for the intention, well we never do a book for a particular category, but I wanted it to be more of people younger than us reading this, I wanted it to be a bit of a transmission, so it's addressed to people younger than my generation

RG: And why is it on the ring road?

OR: So that I don't know, frankly I don't know. I've been asked that a lot, I don't know, it seemed a good thing to me, there is none, so I was told: "It's because the car makes revolutions around Paris, and that therefore there is a pun on revolutions like a satellite ... ", maybe, but frankly there is no very deep reason, or in any case it escapes me

RG: At one point you say that the ring road was built to prevent the suburbs from exploding, to separate them from quiet Paris

OR: Yes, that's true. At the time, we didn't think at all to prevent the suburbs from coming to Paris, but we thought, it was even more paranoid than that, we thought that Paris, we were still living, once again, all our mythology was like this. was the Paris of the nineteenth century, the Paris of revolutions, Paris of 1830, 1848, etc., the Commune above all, etc. For us peripherals, it was a kind of wall that the bourgeoisie put up around Paris for crush the next revolution which would not fail to be born in Paris, so we could circulate tanks on the ring road (Rives de RG), it was to prevent Paris from being revolutionary. Anyway, it's madness, but then maybe I also chose this place for that, I don't know, but when you write a novel,

RG: 93 (Laughs from RG)?

OR: I was told that, but it's not because of that, no, or in any case it's not consciously because of that

RG: I noted with regard to your characters, there are quite a few who, well you speak of someone who works in a hardware store, there is Pompe Pierre who runs a bistro, there is Winter, lost in the north of France, teaching Letters and doing translations. Because it is often said that the sixty-eighters, many, have finished, they control publishing houses, they control the press, they are in the ministerial offices, but many more undoubtedly ended badly, they are a little on the pavement. Are these characters that ended up more or less badly a characterization of this sort of trajectory?

OR: Yes, of course, yes. It's a legend the story of the sixty-eight who are everywhere, so inevitably, as they were often almost always young intellectuals, inevitably forty years later or thirty years later, there are some who have become important people, let's put the prototype, it is Serge July: Serge July has become the director of a major newspaper, between parenthesis, it is a newspaper that we have created. The only person, he is no longer now, but the only person who held his power from the Proletarian Left was Serge July, since it was the Proletarian Left who put him in charge of Liberation. So there are a few cases like that, but it is rather the opposite that seems true and surprising to me, among all my old comrades I know of none - yes, there's only one, it's Geismar - I don't know of anybody who even had an early political career, who tried to get into a cabinet, things like that. No, there is another, who was not even a comrade, well I see two, but let's say the only one really is Geismar, that is not much. No, most of them, there are some who have finished very badly, there are some who have finished overdosing, who have died, there are some who, especially the majority, have become teachers, there is one that I know very well, who is a guy that I really like, who is indeed, he has a kind of, it's not even a hardware store, but anyway it's a kind of store where we sell a bit of everything, there are some who are translators. Running publishing houses (inaudible 1:10:05), I don't I've never wanted to even manage a collection, on the contrary, in the publishing house where I work, I've always worked part-time, well in short. I know all the publishing houses in Paris well, I don't know any former leftist who runs one. So, no, it's all a legend, but there were fairly normal trajectories, and sometimes a little more, well enough normal, that is to say they remained in anonymity, and some even times that were a little tragic

RG: So when you, of course you wrote this book, but from now on, when you think about that moment, what are your main thoughts?

OR: I have both sympathy for a number of features of what we were, I cannot deny that. Besides, I would not like, I cannot speak of it with contempt or with estrangement, well estrangement if, the remoteness that time gives. But there were still mostly people who were in any case completely disinterested, who were altruistic, who had a form of idealism, who had a form of generosity, often courage. So a part of me has sympathy, but more for the moral sides of who we were, but another part of me obviously feels a very great estrangement and irony for the political thought that we had, politically we were. weirdos,

even if we had been weird we would have been funny, we weren't even funny, we were idiots what, we were little idiots who followed. Finally, there you have it, of course I no longer have any admiration for political ideas, I no longer believe for a moment that China has at any time been the laboratory of human freedom. I experience even now, if there is a regime, well there are a lot of regimes that I don't like in the world, but really this mixture of capitalist cynicism and communist dictatorship, there you go. So I think with a great distance, I have completely moved away from our political ideas and our political mores, the way we had to force people for example to make self-criticism, things like that, sectarianism that 'we had, it all seems disgusting to me, ridiculous anyway. But on the other hand I know that I

RG: There is a Freemasonry of the Sixty-eighters, a bit?

OR: There is a bit of that, but there is not a Freemasonry, no, precisely, because Freemasonry would mean that we help each other, it is the phantasm, no, that is not true, but there was a kind of mutual recognition, we have memories. Besides now that it is so far away, obviously between a former Trotskyist or a former Maoist there is no longer a big difference: when I wrote this book, I received lots of letters from former Trotskyists. , etc., who had the impression that I was telling a little about their life to them, that's it. So there is a kind of attenuated fraternity between the former sixty-eighters, it's true, not a freemasonry, but a fraternity yes

RG: Okay, I think we can end there, thank you for your testimony