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Books

‘Chilling’ arrest of French publisher by UK counter-terrorism police condemned

Friday 21 April 2023, by [SHAFFI Sarah](#), [WEAVER Matthew](#) (Date first published: 20 April 2023).

Éditions la Fabrique says foreign rights manager Ernest Moret was held for several hours and asked ‘disturbing questions’ about his political opinions.

The French publishing house whose employee was arrested on terror charges on his way to London book fair has said it is “chilling” that he was asked by British detectives about the authors published by his company.

Ernest Moret was approached by two plainclothes officers at St Pancras station on Monday evening, after arriving by train from Paris. He was arrested, after six hours of questioning, for alleged obstruction in refusing to disclose the passcodes to his phone and computer.

In a joint statement [\[1\]](#) his employer Éditions la Fabrique, based in Paris, and the London-based publisher Verso – whose senior editor Sebastian Budgen’s house Moret was to stay at – confirmed that Moret had been released on bail but expressed concern about the questions he was asked by police.

The foreign rights manager was “interrogated for several hours and asked some very disturbing questions”, said the publishers, including about his view on pension reform in France, as well as his opinion on the French government and president Emmanuel Macron.

Macron has faced protests over the use of his constitutional executive powers to push through an unpopular increase in the pension age.

“Perhaps most seriously, during his interrogation he was asked to name the ‘anti-government’ authors in the catalogue of the publishing house La Fabrique, for which he works,” said the statement from the publishers.

“None of these questions should be relevant to a British police officer.”

Éditions la Fabrique and Verso said that to “ask the representative of a publishing house questions, in a counter-terrorism framework, about the opinions of its authors, is to take the logic of political censorship and repression of dissenting currents of thought even further.

“In a context of the authoritarian escalation of the French government faced by social movements, this element is chilling.”

The Metropolitan police confirmed Moret had been bailed but said they would not discuss or confirm what may have been raised during the police’s interviews.

Moret's phone and computer were seized by police, and remain in their custody, and he will have to return to London in May.

The publishers demanded "no further action be taken against its foreign rights manager, and that his phone and computer be immediately returned".

Following Moret's arrest, writers' association PEN International said it was "deeply concerned" while Pamela Morton, senior books and magazines organiser for the National Union of Journalists, said it seemed "extraordinary that the British police have acted this way".

Budgen earlier said the arrest was "causing a stink at the London book fair".

Karen Sullivan, founder of independent publisher Orenda Books, said there "can be no doubt that international publishers and authors - many of whom use their positions in the media spotlight to highlight societal issues - will think twice about visiting the UK" after Moret's arrest.

The incident, she adds, "must have been absolutely terrifying for Ernest, and that in itself - the possibility that this could happen again - is a grave deterrent to travel here for work".

Sarah Shaffi

• The Guardian. Thu 20 Apr 2023 12.27 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/apr/20/chilling-arrest-of-french-publisher-by-uk-counter-terrorism-police-condemned-ernest-moret>

French publisher arrested in London on terrorism charge

Ernest Moret was stopped at rail station and taken into custody, where he was questioned about his participation in French protests

A French publisher has been arrested on terror charges in London after being questioned by UK police about participating in anti-government protests in France.

Ernest Moret, 28, a foreign rights manager for Éditions la Fabrique, was approached by two plainclothes officers at St Pancras station on Monday evening after arriving by train from Paris to attend the London book fair.

He was questioned for six hours and then arrested for alleged obstruction in refusing to disclose the passcodes to his phone and computer. His treatment was condemned as an attack on the right to demonstrate, amid calls for protests outside the UK embassy in Paris and the French Institute in London.

Moret arrived at St Pancras at 7.15pm with his colleague Stella Magliani-Belkacem, the editorial director at the Paris-based publishing house, to be confronted by the two officers.

Magliani-Belkacem told the Guardian: "When we were on the platform, two people, a woman and a guy, told us they were counter-terrorist police. They showed a paper called section 7 of the Terrorism Act of 2000 and said they had the right to ask him about demonstrations in France."

She added: "I'm still shaking. We are in shock about what happened."

She said French publishers had drafted a joint letter calling for a protest outside the British embassy in France on Tuesday evening about Moret's treatment.

When the officers began questioning Moret, Magliani-Belkacem called her friend Sebastian Budgen, a senior editor at Verso Books in London, at whose home she and Moret had arranged to stay.

Budgen arranged for a lawyer to visit Moret. The lawyer called Budgen at 1am on Tuesday to confirm that Moret had been arrested over his refusal to tell police the passcodes to his confiscated phone and laptop. He was transferred to a police station in Islington, north London, where he remained in custody on Tuesday. He was later released on bail.

Éditions la Fabrique is known for publishing radical left authors. Moret also represents the French science fiction novelist Alain Damasio and had arranged more than 40 appointments at the London book fair.

A joint press release from Verso Books and Éditions la Fabrique condemned Moret's treatment as "scandalous".

It said: "The police officers claimed that Ernest had participated in demonstrations in France as a justification for this act - a quite remarkably inappropriate statement for a British police officer to make, and which seems to clearly indicate complicity between French and British authorities on this matter."

It added: "We consider these actions to be outrageous and unjustifiable infringements of basic principles of the freedom of expression and an example of the abuse of anti-terrorism laws."

The statement said a protest was planned at the French Institute in London and called on France's ambassador to the UK, Hélène Duchêne, to request Moret's immediate release.

Budgen said: "It is causing a stink at the London book fair and there's a big stink in France as well ... there's been an increasingly repressive approach by the French government to the demonstrations, both in terms of police violence, but also in terms of a security clampdown."

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in France last month over Emmanuel Macron's use of constitutional executive powers to push through an unpopular increase in the pension age. The protests caused King Charles's planned visit to France, his first overseas tour as monarch, to be postponed.

The writers' association Pen International said it was "deeply concerned" that Moret was detained on counter-terrorism grounds.

Pamela Morton, senior books and magazines organiser for the National Union of Journalists, also expressed concern.

She said it seemed "extraordinary that the British police have acted this way" in arresting a publisher on the way to the London book fair. "We will be taking this up with the police," she added.

A Metropolitan police spokesperson said: "At around 7.30pm on Monday 17 April, a 28-year-old man was stopped by ports officers as he arrived at St Pancras station, using powers under schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

“On Tuesday 18 April, the man was subsequently arrested on suspicion of wilfully obstructing a schedule 7 examination, contrary to section 18 of the Terrorism Act 2000.”

Matthew Weaver

- The Guardian. Tue 18 Apr 2023 20.37 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/18/french-publisher-arrested-london-counter-terrorism-police-ernest-moret>

P.S.

- Sarah Shaffi’s articles in The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/sarah-shaffi>

- Matthew Weaver’s articles in The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/matthewweaver>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/joint-press-update-by-editions-la-fabrique-paris-and-verso-books-london>