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JOINT PRESS UPDATE

British anti-terrorist police and Fabrique's foreign rights manager arrest

Friday 21 April 2023, by [La Fabrique](#), [Verso Books](#) (Date first published: 19 April 2023).

La Fabrique's foreign rights manager Ernest has been released on bail, but charges unknown and his property remains with police. Our colleague has been summoned to London in four weeks' time by the British anti-terrorist unit.

La Fabrique's foreign rights manager Ernest, has finally been released on bail from police custody, after being arrested and detained by British anti-terrorist police on arrival at London St Pancras station. We are all very relieved that he is now free, but we are also very shocked and worried about what has just happened.

Ernest is not out of the woods. His phone and work computer have been seized and remain in the hands of the British police, who will extract all the data in order to analyse and exploit it. Even more seriously, our colleague has been summoned to London in four weeks' time by the British anti-terrorist unit. The British counter-terrorism system is unique in Europe as far as emergency legislation is concerned: it is the only one that allows, without any investigative leads, suspicious behaviour, prosecution or even official "police custody", to arrest, detain and interrogate individuals who automatically expose themselves to legal proceedings if they refuse to cooperate. It also provides a very permissive legal framework for police officers to extract all data from any computer device or phone of an interrogated person. Despite his release, our colleague's fundamental rights have been violated and his life subjected to a totally opaque state arbitrariness.

Ernest was interrogated for several hours and asked some very disturbing questions: his point of view on the pension reform in France, on the French government, on Emmanuel Macron, his opinion on the Covid crisis, etc. 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. Beyond the scandalous situation of a counterterrorism investigation into the political and philosophical opinions and perspectives of people who are detained, none of these questions should be relevant to a British police officer. Moreover, to ask the representative of a publishing house questions, in a counterterrorism 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.

How are these measures compatible with the fundamental principles that countries like France and Britain pride themselves on, such as freedom of expression and democratic rights? How can we characterize a regime that allows a person going to an international book fair in London to be detained for almost 24 hours without anything concrete being held against him, and then to remain subject to anti-terrorist proceedings for an indefinite period? Why are the British police carrying out

interrogations whose questions seem to have been whispered to them by the French services? Are we to assume that, when travelling between France and the UK, we should now be afraid to take our phones and computer equipment with us and expect them to be seized and searched by anti-terrorist services? Anyone who values democratic principles should be concerned about such a serious manifestation of the evolution of policing today.

This case sets a precedent for anyone who does intellectual work and whose output may be deemed inconvenient by those in power. If any telephone and computer containing confidential manuscripts, journalistic or sociological sources can be stolen, fully analysed and decrypted by a foreign police force with draconian prerogatives due to its exceptional legislation, the freedom of the press, academia, expression and the rights to the protection of personal data are very seriously threatened.

La Fabrique and Verso Books demand that no further action be taken against its foreign rights manager, and that his phone and computer be immediately returned.

Éditions La Fabrique (Paris) and Verso Books (London)

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P.S.

- Blog post. Verso. 19 April 2023:
<https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/joint-press-update-by-editions-la-fabrique-paris-and-verso-books-london>