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# Books and Activism

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*Books and activism. La Cité Editeur 1958-1967*, edited by François Vallotton, texts by Léonard Burnand, Damien Carron and Pierre Jeanneret, afterword by François Maspero, Ed.

### PLACES OF CONTESTATION

From 1958 to 1967, La Cité Editeur published committed texts which made Lausanne a platform for world revolutions, and would have its director Nils Andersson expelled.

In 1958, Lausanne suddenly became the rear base of the Algerian struggle for independence. Activists parade at the Bel-Air Tower. It was there, in his father's former decorator's workshop, that Nils Andersson just launched La Cité Editeur, by publishing a book that immediately propelled the house to the fore: *La Question d'Henri Alleg*, where the militant of the Algerian Communist Party and former director of Republican Algiers recounts the torture suffered during his detention in El-Biar, a suburb of Algiers.

First published in France by Minuit, the book sold 65,000 copies in five weeks and was immediately seized by the French authorities - a censorship that will only amplify its echo. The editor Jérôme Lindon contacts Nils Andersson, distributor for several months of the books of Minuit, Arche and Pauvert in Switzerland, to see if it is possible to reissue the book in the French-speaking region. Born in 1933 in Lausanne to a Swedish father and a French mother, Nils Andersson was then a young man passionate about the theater, "traveling companion" of communism and founder of the short-lived magazine *Clartés*, "who wanted to link political renovation and cultural1".

### Founding act

Andersson does not hesitate. Fourteen days after his ban in France, he published *The Question* supplemented by the text "A victory" by Jean-Paul Sartre. The book will be distributed in some 150,000 copies and will help to reveal the phenomenon of torture in Algeria. It is the founding act of a publishing house whose catalog, rich in only 35 titles, will have an international influence and an important impact on political and intellectual history. Because Nils Andersson therefore began a militant editorial activity. "His goal was not to build a career, but to publish texts that could not be elsewhere," said François Vallotton, history professor at the University of Lausanne, who edited the book *Livre et activism. La Cité Editeur 1958-1967*. His first period focused on the Algerian war - he notably published

La Gangrène, a collection of testimonies on the torture of Algerians in France (30,000 copies). Between 1958 and 1962, the offices of La Cité saw anti-colonial activists pass by, members of the Jeanson or Curiel networks - these famous "suitcase carriers" who collect and transport funds and false documents for agents of the National Liberation Front - and a good number of Algerians present in Switzerland,

#### Political awareness

Nils Andersson will then launch the magazine *Africa, Asia, Latin America: Revolution*, printed in 30,000 copies, which brings him closer to Chinese theses more open to the question of liberation struggles than is the Soviet Communist Party. He will be the first to publish Mao's works and a series of pro-Chinese publications in French, some funded by the Chinese Embassy. In the context of the Sino-Soviet schism of the 1960s, hidden by the European Communist Parties, these works are boycotted everywhere else. Andersson founded in parallel the Lenin Center, one of the first Marxist organizations-Leninists in French-speaking Switzerland.

The third part of its activities concerns theatrical publishing. Andersson defended the idea of a theater oriented towards the challenges of the city and had created in Switzerland an Association of friends of the NPT of Jean Vilar. He edits the authors of the *Théâtre populaire romand* and publishes Bernard Liègme, Henri Debluë, Franck Jotterand or Walter Weideli, who helped spread Brecht in French and whose *Le Banquier sans visage* had caused scandal in Geneva.

The City "participates in a movement of political awareness", analyzes François Vallotton. "In Switzerland, its activity contributes to developing certain progressive ideas, particularly around the problem of torture and decolonization, and to creating a movement of sympathy for the pro-Chinese question. It reaches a wider audience than just activists." The review will play an important role in the question of the Vietnam War.

#### Deported without trial

After being watched by the French police, Nils Andersson is on file with the federal police as soon as his militant activity intensifies. In the autumn of 1966, he received a decision to expel Swiss territory for "endangering the internal and external security of Switzerland". An article of the Constitution then makes it possible to expel a foreigner likely to disturb public order without possible remedy, "that is to say without trial during which he could have expressed himself, which suited the authorities well" Analyzes Mr. Vallotton. "It is difficult to know exactly what was the trigger for the eviction. It was undoubtedly the accumulation of grievances and tensions that ended up deciding the Federal Council."

The pressures from abroad were increasing, Andersson having made enemies in both the American and Soviet camps, in Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal or apartheid South Africa ... The fact remains that this exceptional procedure shocks intellectuals of all political stripes, who are mobilizing. A group is formed in Switzerland to push back the authorities, with the support of French intellectuals - among them Sartre, de Beauvoir, the companions of struggle of the Algerian period like François Maspero, Jérôme Lindon and Pierre Vidal-Naquet.

The publisher Bertil Galland leads the slingshot. "I was indignant," he says. I do not share the political opinions of Nils Andersson at all, but we were two young intellectuals from the same city, he was one of us. As a publisher, he was very daring. There was a shortage in the

political and literary fields. He was a pioneer in this regard and started publishing French-speaking literature before me. ”

In the fiercely anti-communist climate of the time, these voices were in vain. "There were many fantasies about Andersson's activity," adds François Vallotton. He was suspected of acting with foreign powers, in complete ignorance of his activities. ” The publisher and his wife had to leave the country in 1967. The Editions de L'Age d'Homme took over the dissemination activities of La Cité and since then have occupied its premises in the Bel Air Tower.

#### Delamuraz's intervention

The couple first went to Albania, where Nils Andersson worked as an editor, then joined Sweden where he opened a bookstore specializing in the distribution of French-speaking books. Bertil Galland, who shares Swedish origins with him, contacted him during one of his trips. “He was amazed that the support did not come from a brother in politics. We became good friends, the love of literature and our homeland was stronger than our differences. I asked him if it bothered him that I use my contacts marked on the right to plead his cause. I made my links work, in particular with Jean-Jacques Rupin, colonel and director of the Conservatoire, and I acted with Federal Councilor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, whom I knew a little as a journalist. ” In 1986,

He moved to Paris with his family, where he continued his militant engagement by writing for magazines on defense issues, on war, international diplomacy, decolonization, etc., and by engaging in parallel within various associations fighting for international humanitarian law.