

# SAINT-RAVACHOL LIBRARY



## *We could agree...*

The following letter was supposedly addressed by Ravachol to Mr. Carnot. We cannot guarantee its absolute authenticity, but the public will judge whether it is devoid of all plausibility:

**To M. Sadi-Carnot**

*President of the French Republic*

Mazas, March 31, 1892.

Monsieur President,

My name is Ravachol and I am an anarchist. As such, I was seized by police officers and thrown into the prison from which I am writing to you, to the applause of the concierges of the capital and of the capital of concierges.

To whom, if not to the chief magistrate of the Republic, shall I express the profound surprise into which I am plunged, on the one hand, by the treatment to which I find myself the object; on the other, by the delirious cheers that greeted my incarceration?

Let us proceed in order, if you will, and not stick at trifles.

I am, I have told you, an anarchist. What is an anarchist? An anarchist is one who scorns the social order, an enemy of religion, of the family, of property, of everything that constitutes, in a word, an organized society.

Is there really something in this that would signal me to the animadversion of the government of the Republic? You will doubtless not think so.

For, in order to pose with some seriousness, some authority and some justice, as the defender of religion, of property, of the family, — and other seesaws, as one of the most distinguished members of your magistracy once said, — it would be necessary for the government of the Republic to have given pledges to these different institutions which it refuses them with the most energetic perseverance.

Religion, first, Mr. President! Let us talk about religion! Please tell me what your ministers, assisted by your deputies, have done and are still doing for the free development and free exercise of religion. Just this week, they closed churches because a handful of revolutionaries and anarchists, my brothers, was pleased to enter the buildings, to disturb the ceremonies of worship, to jostle the faithful and to insult the preachers.

The family! Let us also talk about it. Explain to me how republican policy, all sect and division, contributes to the strengthening of the family bond, and in what way, perpetually insulting the rights and freedoms of fathers, you claim to teach respect to children.

As for property, still very recent laws which reestablish confiscation to the detriment of certain categories of citizens, men and women, allow me to think that your parliamentarians conceive it exactly as I do.

Between my theories and yours, there are therefore, I have the right to note, only differences too insignificant to justify the horror that I seem to inspire in you. All the divergence lies in practice, in implementation. It is a nuance, I agree. But, what the devil! Mr. President, you do not guillotine a man for nuances!

I believe, however, that I can guess your objection. If I had the honor of discussing with you, man to man, in the intimacy of a familiar chat, you would say to me:

“Ravachol, what the government of the Republic disapproves of are not doctrines to which it has given full latitude to develop and which, in essence, correspond to its own. Opportunism, radicalism, Jacobinism, anarchism, are, in the end, adequate conceptions, if I dare express myself thus. What you are accused of is the use of certain means incompatible with the gentleness of our characters and the refined politeness of contemporary morals.”

I understand, Monsieur President. French society has two kinds of enemies: opportuno-radical politicians who upset it with legislation; anarchists, like me, who upset it with explosions. The first become ministers; the others go to Mazas for having implemented hasty and noisy procedures which exert a harmful influence on the digestion of the voters. Such is my case.

Well! There is still a way to reconcile everything. Entrust me with a portfolio. The experiment, I assure you, is worth trying. And my presence in the business will surprise no one, while former communards share public functions, elective mandates and diplomatic posts.

As a minister, I will continue my work; I will pursue, with zeal and intelligence, the application of my plan. Only, I will pursue it gently: because, having at my disposal a good majority ready to vote for all the antisocial laws, to ratify all the dissolving measures that constitute the basis of the republican doctrine, I will very willingly dispense with resorting to dynamite and other indiscreet devices.

Slowly, surely: such will be my motto, which is, if I am not mistaken, that of opportunism itself.

Come on! my Mr. President, a good movement and not an inexorable one. What am I? A victim of destiny. If circumstances had made me a statesman, like Ferry, Brisson or Floquet, I would have applied our common ideas in the manner of Floquet, Brisson and Ferry. I would possess the confidence of the concierges and the esteem of the bourgeoisie.

These are the goods to which I aspire.

With which, I have the honor to be, Monsieur President, your very humble servant.

RAVACHOL.

*Journal du Cher* 87 no. 80 (5 avril 1892): 1. — Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.



This strikes me as likely to be a friendly bit of social commentary, rather than an actual letter from Ravachol. But false letters are an important part of the Ravachol myth. When he was first making news in 1891, for example, the *Mémorial de la Loire et de la Haute-Loire* received two letters, both signed “Ravachol,” in a single day. “C’est trop de Ravachols,” the editor said, “en un jour.”