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# From the Archive: José Bové, the Robin Hood of Roquefort, takes centre stage

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French anti-globalization campaigner José Bové during a demonstration in June 2001 in the West Bank town of Al-Khader, south of Bethlehem. PHOTO BY EMMANUEL PAIN /AFP

*This story was published June 29, 2000. It was written by Tamara Thiessen in Paris.*

In a tiny town in the south of France, Jose Bove, the Robin Hood of Roquefort, is preparing for centre stage again in his fight against McDonald's, genetically engineered produce, globalization of the food trade and of the "gout."

After bringing his cheeses and pipe to fame in Seattle last November, the 46 -year-old mustachioed farmer from Millau near Toulouse, will grab international headlines again this week as he and his agricultural vigilante colleagues face trial for their attack on a McDonald's building site in August last year.

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Up to 50,000 protesters from all over the world are expected to flood into Millau to support their hero-symbol of the battle of the "Bon bouffe" against the "malbouffe," of health versus profit, of small against big, and local producers against multinationals.

**TRE**

His supporters have organized what is being tipped as a "grande fete anti-mondialization" – a big bash against globalization – to coincide with the proceedings.

**1**

Bove and 9 other militants will add another dramatic chapter to the Seattle protests, when their heavy handed efforts to show that "the world is not a market" comes before the Correctional Tribunal of Millau today and tomorrow.

**2**

On Aug. 12 last year a group of 300 farmers from the radical Confederation paysanne and the national union of goat milk producers ripped down a McDonald's restaurant under construction in the town, using crowbars and other implements.

The attack came on the heels of import penalties placed on Roquefort by American authorities, after the European Union itself had banned the importation of meat containing hormones from the U.S.

**3**

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With Millau tipped to draw as-big-as-Seattle crowds, a local magazine has slugged its latest issue "Welcome to Seattle-sur-Tarn," and CNN set up cameras in several apartment buildings facing on to the tribunal building.

Bove, who has spent the past two weeks in prison, is expected to receive the toughest penalties, as spokesman and chef of the Confederation paysanne.

"His penal responsibility appears far greater than those of the others put under examination, who were not much more than the executors of the orders from their leader," says a court order, issued for his reappearance before the correctional tribunal.

Bove is also facing an additional 8 months imprisonment over the destruction of a crop of transgenetical corn in Lot-et-Garonne last year.

Yesterday, he announced that he would "plaider la relaxe," ask for all the charges to be dropped with no further mention of the affair.

In his view the destruction of the McDonald's site was a "legitimate" protest against the customs penalties imposed by the U.S. on French produce.

"We have absolutely no judicial recourse faced with this decision of the OMC (Organization Mondiale du Commerce, or World Trade Organization) and the United States, to over-tax Roquefort.

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"We were simply taken as hostages by those whose interests it is to put hormones in beef," he declared on the evening television news of France-2.

Bove proposed the creation of an "international court of commerce to sort out this kind of conflict" in the future.

He also used the prime-time interview to send a strong message to French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and President Jacques Chirac, on the eve of the French Presidency of the European Union: "We say to the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic 'watch out.'

"The people are in the streets today protesting because we don't want just anything at all to be done with Europe. We do not want the economy to be uniquely at the service of multinationals, and therefore we will be vigilant throughout this entire presidency on the decisions which you take."

Far from being perceived as an arrogant defender of French culture, Bove's actions in taking crowbars to McDonald's have earned him brothers-in-arms all over the world.

As to whether his tactics on his home soil are deemed that of terrorist or hero of the cherished produce of the "terroir francais" will soon be clear.



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