Between September 1971 and the end of 1972, for the very first time in French history, prison inmates collectively initiated revolts that led to a takeover of their prisons, to the occupying of prison roof tops, and to the direct communication of their demands to the public.

Now, forty years later, filmmaker Nicolas Drolc explores this forgotten page of social struggle. Through a mixture of archival footage and recordings and extensive interviews with the leaders of the revolt at Nancy, a prison warden from Toul, lawyer Henri Leclerc, sociologist and GIP co-founder Daniel Defert, as well as the ex-convict, writer, and political activist, Serge Livrozet, Sur les toits (On the roofs) paints a portrait of a time and a struggle whose legacy challenges us to confront in our own day the questions of imprisonment, punishment, and the diffusion of the carceral practices of control, surveillance, and normalization.