

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4772>



France

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV502 - November 2016 -
Publication date: Thursday 17 November 2016

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights
reserved**

“Our uprising has nothing to do with the collar-and-tie pantomime artistes who govern us. It was the visible expression of an invisible force. It was the public manifestation of a drive for life. It came from gut feeling and from the heart. You do not subject gut feeling to balance sheets. You do not lock up the heart in accounting columns.”

Manuel Cervera Marzal [1]

On September 15, 2016, between 100,000 and 150,000 demonstrators participated in every major city in the fourteenth national day of action. This participation, even reduced, shows that the rejection of the labour law and its world remains intact, even after the adoption of the law on July 21, and can still mobilize in the streets teams of combative activists, against the government and the whole political system. Neither the terrorist attacks of the summer, nor the media coverage of the beginning of the presidential campaign have succeeded in preventing this resurgence after the holiday months. It appears today to be the end of the wave of mobilization that started in February by signing the online petition against the law, which registered a million signatures in two weeks. But let us not be in such a hurry to inter such a wave, which can reappear in other forms, given the magnitude of the social and political crisis. Because the radicalization is a response to the deepening of the neoliberal and authoritarian counter-reform, and to the inability of mainstream parties to offer perspectives to those below. [2]

The stakes of the labour law for the bourgeoisie

The mobilization against the labour law came up against a major project for the government and the bourgeoisie, who want to destroy most of the social advances that are still present in the labour code, acquired primarily during the half-century from 1936 to 1986. The objective is to align French labour law with that of the other European countries, something that the mobilizations of the last 30 years, although they did not lead to great victories, have prevented for the moment. They now want to impose a deregulation of the labour market similar to that which exists in the other major European countries.

So, much more than a bill, it is a central confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. To win, you need a massive and determined, one that can go all the way and establish a relationship of forces mobilization and fixed up to the end, be a balance of power such that they have no other solution than to yield, or lose much more.

Breaks with the PS

The mobilization marked a break of a part of the popular classes with the Socialist Party (PS) and its government, and the power of the movement shook the routine and the apparatuses of the trade unions.

While the leaderships of the unions (CGT, Solidaires, FSU) that were opposed to the law, which had been marginally reformulated to obtain the support of the CFDT, the CGC and UNSA, did not prepare any real response, the first reaction came from some critical oppositionists on the left of the PS [3], via an internet petition. The speed with which the million signatures were obtained showed the spontaneous reaction of opposition to the project. This opposition would continue to reflect majority opinion in French society for the duration of the mobilization; according to all the polls, around 70 per cent were opposed to the law and 55 per cent supported the demonstrations and strikes; for the

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

first time since 1981 at this level, the social base that had voted for Holland frontally opposed the Socialist Party government.

The initiative for the first day of action on March 9 started out from a group of young people who had made a video entitled "We're worth more than that", on the harassment and attacks on human dignity, to which thousands of people reacted. Youth organizations took it up, drawing strength from the beginning of mobilizations in the universities, and they were followed by the trade union confederations. Overtaken by events at the first demonstration, the inter-union coordination took the initiative for the subsequent mobilizations. The succession of fourteen days of action fuelled a massive, sustained, persevering, determined mobilization of broad sections of the proletariat. The repeated mass demonstrations, although they did not equal the numbers for 2010 [4], brought together forces far in excess of the usual teams of activists: between 200,000 and a million demonstrators.

There are various reasons for the drop in numbers compared to 2010: the absence of teachers and the weak mobilization among civil servants, the lack of trade union unity (in 2010 the CFDT did not support the government's project), and the anti-Sarkozy factor. Unlike in the great movements of the past twenty years, workers in the private sector played a central role in these mobilizations. We saw the expression of the capacity to mobilize in various parts of the private sector, in small enterprises, among shop workers, social workers and health workers, with local strikes that were victorious. This was an important rehabilitation of collective action, clearly understood by the government, as shown by the formal climb-down before the lorry drivers at the crucial moment.

The strikes were minority actions, apart from a few sectors: refineries, some railway sectors... and they were not extended to all workers.

The more radical groups, essentially made up of trade-unionists, although they did not take on a mass character, remained mobilized permanently for between four and six months around blockades, various spectacular operations, occupations of town halls, the marriage between the PS and the MEDEF, blocking of motorways, filtered or complete blockades, always well accepted by the population.

A radical militant fringe organized in very different forms, in "Nuit Debout" starting from the big demonstration on March 31, and it conducted debates over a period of for months, sometimes together with these more radical groups of trade unionists.

These last two groups regrouped the most radicalized activists, who constituted the layer of the exploited and oppressed who were the most aware of the dangerous character of the project and the society it represented, of the importance of winning this time, and who became politicized in this fight.

But these groups were a minority and their determination alone, although it was a ferment of radicalization for a number of them, was not sufficient to create the relationship of forces capable of making the government and the bourgeoisie give way.

The central question with which anti-capitalist activists were confronted is: how could these most combative sectors, in the vanguard, be a factor to lead, to set in motion, to influence wider masses opposed to the labour law, in a perspective of confrontation with the government. How to be a step ahead of the masses, but not ten steps ahead, because in that case, we are not showing the path to follow, we are alone, and the masses follow their own path.

The need for a united front approach

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

Because the main challenge was to set in movement in a sustainable way the 70 per cent who were opposed to the law, and the 50 to 60 per cent who were in favour of strikes, to try and make this majority opinion continue to be so, and to encourage hundreds of thousands, millions of young people and workers to move into action.

Working to convince workers who vote for the CFDT (one in four) and for the CGC/UNSA (14 per cent) is essential in order to isolate the leaderships of these confederations. We cannot forget that they represent between 35 and 40 per cent of workers [5], which is the expression (admittedly imperfect, but nevertheless) of a certain consciousness of an important part of the proletariat. This obviously has consequences in workplaces and in different sectors for mass mobilization... and the work that has made it possible during the mobilization to get the position of the CGC, and then much of the UNSA, to evolve, is essential: it is because the rank and file of these organizations no longer allowed their leaderships to maintain their position that these leaderships were more and more timid in supporting the law.

The confederations who actively opposed the projected law – the CGT, Solidaires, and more platonically, the FSU - did not unleash this mobilization: you only have to look at the limits of their criticisms of the project in the beginning, at the end of 2015 and the lack of mobilization from on high. The first big initiative on March 9 existed outside of the trade unions, even the combative sectors.

The speed with which the mobilization took off shows that it is the expression of a deep social crisis that affects all segments of society, a crisis that expresses all the resentment against the brutal acceleration of the neoliberal offensive, in the framework of the strategy of shock initiated by the government following the November terrorist attacks. It is the refusal of this offensive that explains the depth of the process. The union leadership of the CGT and FO understood this, and very rapidly oriented themselves towards the organization of this movement.

They did this all the more so as they are faced with a full-scale attack against themselves, something that is well understood by part of their leading bodies. Because the government is implementing a policy aimed at marginalizing and breaking unions that refuse to sign up to the neoliberal counter-reform. The message is clear: the trade unions must be cogs in the system or they will be attacked frontally. The PS government has refused any discussion, before, during and now, with the majority trade unions: it is leaving no way out for the CGT and FO. It is their future too that is at stake in this confrontation.

The attitude of FO is one of the markers that shows the depth of the rupture by part of the working class that voted for Hollande in the last presidential election.

The overtures of the CGT to the government have hit a brick wall. Some sectors of the leadership have not chosen confrontation with the government, as shown by the sabotage of the struggle at the SNCF by the CGT federation.

But there is a real vitality in the CGT: the confederation is no longer a bloc, there are wide-ranging debates in the federations and the local and departmental unions. There is not on one side the central bureaucracy and on the other the rank and file: there are profound debates at all levels of the confederation, involving many middle-ranking leaders, including some quite high up.

For example the chemical industry federation, led by critical currents of the Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party (PG) has opted for a political confrontation with the government. And the balance sheet of the failure of the generalization of the strike in the oil refineries is different from the one drawn in 2010. They made a political choice that they consider appropriate, and they remain convinced that they were right to try, but that it was impossible to hold on without generalization of the strike in other sectors; but especially, that they can do it again.

The effects of all this, like the pressure of activists at the CGT congress in April, after the big demonstration on March

31, led the new secretary general of the CGT, Philippe Martinez to call for "a generalization of strikes across France, in all sectors" - a novelty. In the same way Solidaires and FO served notice of renewable strikes and called on the maximum number of workers to harden the movement as much as possible by stopping work for long periods. The union leaderships, although they left it to the rank and file to decide on methods of action through general assemblies, at least did not oppose frontally this generalization.

Although these confederations have not organized an increase in the pressure of the mobilization, towards a confrontation with the government, they have generally stuck to the line of the withdrawal of the project and maintained the mobilization; and even, in many cities, their most combative sectors have organized blockades and other more radical actions.

They have sometimes been in opposition to some combative sectors who were seeking to outflank them, to organize democratically outside their control, but most often they came to an accommodation without major confrontation.

All these elements show that the discrediting of political organizations does not affect these union confederations to the same degree: they still have a living, confrontational, critical link with the exploited and oppressed.

Criticism of the leaderships of these confederations should therefore be positive, proposing practical perspectives for the extension and reinforcement of the mobilizations, and not be a denunciation of those who hinder the fight against the law.

The question of the general strike

One of the points of debate among all the activists involved was the question of the preparation of the central confrontation through the general strike. For the more active fringes in this mobilization, it was clear that successive 24-hour strikes and weekly demonstrations were not enough to win, hence the appearance of blockades and other actions of the same type, as has happened since 1995.

Why has this debate not produced a general strike?

How is a general strike possible, and on what points do we need to work to get there?

To try to be effective in agitating for a general strike, going beyond leaflets and slogans in the demonstrations, it is necessary to reconsider the place of the general strike in our outlook.

The general strike is a strike in which all workers take part, which defines goals that are general and where the proletariat is engaged as a class against the exploiting classes, with methods and means of combat which are its own and which correspond to its place in social production and political relations. The strike is at the centre of the means of struggle, even if it is not the only one, and the evolution of struggles today demonstrates it. Trotsky wrote of the general strike of June 1936: "These are not craft strikes that have taken place. These are not just strikes. This is a strike. This is the open rallying of the oppressed against the oppressors to light the oppressed against the oppressors. This is the classic beginning of revolution." [\[6\]](#)

In France the two real mass general strikes of 1936 and 1968 broke out spontaneously, whereas the general strikes

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

in waves of 1920 and again in 1938 were failures.

Furthermore, many of the factors that played a role in 1936 and 1968 have changed, such as trade-union unity, large concentrations of workers entering into movement and the existence of a political workers' movement unifying the actions and providing in fact a political perspective.

We are in very different social, economic and political circumstances, which partly explains the absence of a spontaneous outbreak of the general strike - and the lack of extension of the strikes, starting from those at the oil refineries.

Nevertheless, agitation around this slogan remains relevant because it shows the way to win, to make the government retreat, by creating a relationship of forces such that the situation becomes unbearable for it, because its own social and political base pushes it to give in or face the risk of losing more.

The united front approach towards all workers aims to remove a supplementary obstacle to the general strike. Although there is never 100 per cent of workers who go on strike –that has never existed and it never will - it is easier to stop work en masse when we are united than when we go out on strike in part against others.

But more substantially, workers do not go on strike in order to... be on general strike, but when they are united around what they no longer want, what they want and when they are convinced that they can win it in this way, as a class opposed to the bourgeois class. This is a confrontation that is in itself objectively political, whatever might be the capacity for conscious expression of those who are engaged in it at a given moment.

What creates the conditions for a general strike, involving all sectors, paralyzing the economy, transport and government institutions, which comes about by itself, is that the atmosphere that exists in the country is an atmosphere of global confrontation between the classes, that is to say that it is not a clash between a sector of employers and a sector of the proletariat, but that all classes of society feel that this is a clash between the bourgeoisie as a whole and the proletariat as a whole. Rosa Luxemburg defined remarkably the content of the general strike in 1906: "The mass strike is merely the form of the revolutionary struggle (...). In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us in the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, but the method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution.. " [\[7\]](#)

In 1936 it was: we won the elections, our lives are going to change and the bosses are not going to continue to exploit us and dominate us as they do!

In 1968, after 10 years of Gaullist power since 1958, it was: we do not want any more of this government and its world, we want to change our life!

Today it is clear that what crystallizes the mobilization is the labour law, but that the motor force of this mobilization, the profound motivations of hundreds of thousands of the exploited and oppressed, are: the refusal the deregulated, neoliberal, police-ridden world that the bourgeoisie and the government want to impose by a forced march, hatred of Macron, Valls, Hollande and the PS.

There were, in the past four months, several days at the end of May where this atmosphere began to dawn, because of the shortage of fuel [\[8\]](#), the strike of lorry drivers blocking certain depots, the beginnings of a strike on the railways - a moment when the ingredients of the political crisis began to come together, against a background of economic

blockade.

This shows both what the union leaderships did not do and what the combative sectors tried to do, and that progress towards a major political confrontation is not automatic, while remaining an achievable goal.

After the utilization of article 49.3 [9] on May 10, the rejection of the motion of censure on May 12, faced with the violent repression of demonstrations to isolate "the rioters" break up the "Nuit Debout" gatherings and put end to the mobilization, strikes, roadblocks and blockades organized by dozens of local inter-union committees involving activists of the CGT, FO, Solidaires and "Nuit Debout" from all sectors represented a political turning point. That was when the government guaranteed the lorry drivers that their wage increases would not be put in question. This was a second tactical retreat after the commitments made a few weeks earlier to casual workers in the music and theatrical industries [10].

A step forward was taken in the political crisis. The attack on the CGT, with the prime target being Martinez as a representative of the political opposition to the government, failed to get the FO leadership to dissociate itself from the CGT. The spirit and combativeness of the activists of the movement became stronger and the mobilization for the 24-hour strike on Thursday, May 26 was much higher than on the previous days. The government and the PS began to waver. Only the leader of the CFDT, Laurent Berger, rose to their defence to demand that the projected law be maintained integrally.

Several additional factors would have had to come into play in order to cross a threshold and motivate many private sector enterprises to join the movement, precisely because the climate would have changed and given confidence to activists in small workplaces.

We need for example to take into account that the violence of the repression did not provoke a mass reaction like that after the Night of the Barricades in May 1968.

From the political point of view, in the demonstrations, the question of the resignation of Valls was omnipresent, alongside the demand for the withdrawal of the law, but the question that was posed was obviously: what alternative? We must trace a political perspective that goes beyond the rejection of the labour law, which unifies forces beyond the sectors that are mobilized and opens a perspective against the neoliberal world that is imposing its labour law. There is no ready-made answer, because there is no political alternative. However, it is by working with the most mobilized sectors, those who are most conscious of the need to destabilize the government, that we will move forward along this road.

Because in order to be effective we must try to solve the problems that are actually facing us, with the aim of creating this atmosphere of a central confrontation between the classes, starting from the central role of action as the source of consciousness.

It is not the work of convincing individual workers, to help them reach a certain level of consciousness, that is the key to such developments. Experience shows that it is through experiences of working together, of mass actions, that a layer of workers, who cannot develop class consciousness by the individual path of education and propaganda, wakes up, or wakes up again, to this class consciousness, and when it does so it becomes extremely combative.

For the moment, in this mobilization, only very limited sections of "unorganized" workers have taken part in the actions. There are among these layers experiences that are important for the future, a spectacular politicization, because in the forms of action taken we can see the embryos of what could happen during mass mobilizations ... but a victory is important for them to be positive and productive.

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

Hence the importance of the link between the action of these militant sectors and the building of the global relationship of forces, of a perspective of victory.

Self-organization

From the point of view of self-organization, the present experiences are also very limited.

It was the inter-union coordinating committee, along with the youth organizations, that organized the days of action at national level, and most of the time also the various initiatives of blockades and mobilizations.

But the general conjuncture, as well as previous defeats, affect the unions. Often the structures, in particular in small and medium-sized towns, have been weakened; FO and the CGT are no longer in a logic of controlling everything, because they no longer have the means. The FSU was almost absent from the field of battle and Solidaires is not very strong in very many places.

To have the objective of building another authority in the movement than that of the CGT and FO union leaderships that are the effective leadership, for the mobilization to be able to discuss and decide itself its perspectives, there must exist a more solid movement than we have seen up to now. We are not at that point, for all the reasons stated earlier.

But in day-to-day practice, the question of self-organization is a central issue for those of us who want to build an emancipated society run by all its members.

Because in capitalist society, the exploited and oppressed are dominated in all the acts of their lives, at work, in the city, and also by the media, which fabricate a life centred around the needs of capitalist consumption. How to become everything, starting from nothing? [\[11\]](#)

Although a revolutionary situation is essential for these processes to develop on a mass scale, we must, in our daily activity, do everything to encourage discussion and for workers themselves to take charge of their own problems. This kind of fundamental preparatory work is essential, in a world where it is natural to delegate responsibilities, to leave decisions to the boss, the union leader; sometimes, more rarely, this leader can be a woman...

Everywhere, in everyday life, we have to work so that workers do more than trust us, call on us for help, but think and decide for themselves, organize themselves and act collectively. This also means that we activists must understand and encourage the fact that the final decision on what will actually be done will not necessarily be our proposal, which of course we believe to be better, but the one that is developed and accepted by the group of activists, on which then we can subsequently draw together collective balance sheets, which will produce a raising of consciousness that is superior to all the speeches, even the best ones. The experience of collective thought and action, within a capitalist society that seeks to format everything, including the conception of work, with neoliberalism, is essential.

Here again, where are we really at? In the workplaces, forms of self-organization concerned only certain sectors engaged in sufficiently active strikes, when the workers were not at home and could meet, decide and organize together.

We must reflect on the articulation between the occupation of workplaces which makes possible a dynamic self-organization, and a situation where workers who are employed in dispersed locations come together to meet. The big enterprises capable of playing by themselves a political role of centralization of movements are more and more rare. How can we avoid the struggles in the workplace becoming turned into a fight against the boss, becoming distant from the centralized struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie as a class? There are no miracle solutions that we can pull out of our hat, but asking ourselves the right questions gives more chance of finding, along

with those taking part in the struggle, the right answers.

"Nuit Debout"

The slightly broader novelty, without taking on a mass character, is the appearance of "Nuit Debout" as a new kind of practice, chaotic, very promising for the long term. The immediate repression prevented the occupying of squares taking place in a massive way: the police prohibited any permanent camp and organized in many cities and in Paris a guerrilla campaign against "Nuit Debout". Despite this, the process that got underway, breaking with the traditional rhythms of mobilizations, is rich in lessons for the future.

The situations were very different, very uneven from one city to another. They all started out from the rejection of a society where nothing makes sense any more, where we no longer have any control over our future, in a movement born both from the defeats of the left for more than thirty years, and the present political context, in which the crisis goes on and on, without indignation finding a solution or an expression.

The rhythms were highly variable during three months of daily activity in most major cities, with a particular dimension in Paris, with weekly meetings elsewhere. The public which came together was very varied, ranging from young graduates to victims of social exclusion, along with young workers employed in small enterprises who found a means of expression through the movement. Although intellectuals and experienced activists were able to play an important role, "Nuit Debout" was for some an opportunity to organize, discuss, and act together. An experience in which the choice of being free was for many of those involved an end in itself. A concrete democracy was being established through the organization of debates and exchanges through which were expressed aspirations to which the activists were not accustomed: we are not fighting to build a world in which we do not have to fight, we are fighting in order to live. Since "Nuit Debout" was engaged in action for itself, it did not pose the problem of representation: people acted by themselves responsibly, without delegation, in a framework of direct democracy; so it was difficult to make decisions that engaged those who voted.

Despite these limitations, "Nuit Debout" in some places served as a link between the demonstrations, as a meeting place, which intensified the energy of the activists. This passage from indignation to collective action sometimes made it possible to organize actions outside of the inter-union calendar: blockades, specific actions (in Grenoble, on people dying in the street; in Rouen a health and social services "Nuit Debout" around a collective of trade-unionists; in Pantin an action on schools...).

"Nuit Debout" in 2016 was the beginning of a cycle: nothing like this had existed in France. It is impossible today to predict the forms that this occupation of squares will take in the future, but it has already had an effect on people's attitudes: political action can also take this form.

The "lead contingent"

Another new form of action appeared at in the demonstrations, the phenomenon of "lead contingent of demonstrators", in front of the official bloc of union leaders, involving thousands of protesters in Paris, hundreds in a number of cities. There were present, in an apparently not very organized contingent ordinary demonstrators, trade-union members, alone or in groups, who wanted to get out of the routine of the demonstration, and also organized groups of different currents of the "anarcho-autonomous movement", most of the time younger than the rest of the demonstration. These "leading contingents" were very dynamic, even though some union contingents, of the CGT and Solidaires, were also dynamic within the trade-union contingent, which remained the centre of gravity of the demonstrators. In many places, there started from these leading contingents actions which broke out of the

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

normal framework, such as attacks on PS headquarters and on banks, as well as other attacks, and they were very often the flashpoint for clashes with the police.

The question of violence was very important, given the level of repression and the authoritarianism of neoliberalism. It is clear that social and police violence was the source of highly publicized clashes, with the aim of presenting the movement as the work of a minority. The government made the choice of a systematic confrontation, with an aggressive police presence, the intervention of groups of police in the demonstrations, filtering access to demonstrations, the use of tear-gas grenades, encircling of demonstrators, etc.

Concerning this violence, we must differentiate between groups that make a policy of it and demonstrators who needed to express their rage and their rejection of the violence of the system, as well as young people who wanted revenge for the police violence they had suffered.

In these contingents, which are apparently loosely organized, an important role is played by small groups that are organized with political project. They are different from one city to another, but the most organized of them are advocates of the theory of liberating chaos, creative disorder, and as a result they suddenly attack the police to show an example and create a spark. This conception is in contradiction with a democratic organization of the masses that organizes a collective consciousness. It is clear that the "autonomous" groups which defend this orientation, highly organized while hating all structures that are organized democratically and publicly (they must be differentiated from activists who simply reject the political party form) are manipulated by the government and the repressive apparatus. They are not a help to the movement: they have helped in fact to create a climate where to demonstrate becomes problematic, especially in Paris. In the present political context, minority violence does not take the mobilization forward. It contributes to legitimizing the reinforced deployment of police and facilitates all the means that the government is looking for to divert attention from the substance of its policies. It also helps to reduce the participation of certain sectors of the population in these demonstrations.

At the same time, the question of violent confrontation has become posed at a mass level, although it does not concern all demonstrators. Some actions such as spraying graffiti on banks or actions against PS offices are perceived rather positively by many demonstrators. Tolerance and even acceptance of what the leading contingents do, including the charges against the police, are widespread and have even become more so with the increasing escalation of police violence and the government's political attacks, and also with the rejection provoked by the government and the arrogance of the employers. While criticizing the policy of the "autonomous", we need to think about how this potential radicalism can find political expression in action, while maintaining the objective of developing the mass character of the movement.

It is unquestionable that the demonstrations through the streets of towns and cities do not scare the government and the wealthy; they have a symbolic character. But the attacks on banks or on the police are also purely symbolic. They do not scare the holders of power and money either. What is taking place is actually a competition as to whose actions will become the most talked about: the classic trade-union demonstrators or those who "attack". No one has proven their effectiveness.

We must therefore once again pose the question of violence not as a means in itself, but as an unavoidable stage when the mass movement wants to impose its views. But to hope that confrontation with the state apparatus in the unfavourable relationship of forces that we have, without mobilization of the masses in this direction, without a situation that deconstructs from within the repressive apparatus and weakens the state, is an illusion that keeps us in the position of being a minority.

We must work to combine radicalism in action with clear political objectives, which can be defended and which we defend publicly, as do the environmentalists who occupy a mine in Germany for 24 hours, or the comrades of "There is no arrangement" in Toulouse.

The need for open and plural exchanges

Although it was not able to bring about the defeat of the government project, this prolonged mobilization was the crucible of very different forms of radicalization, in addition to other ongoing processes in France, with actions against big projects that are unnecessary and are imposed on us, environmental actions, actions against the state of emergency, against racism and Islamophobia, those in solidarity with migrants, etc..., which do not find a place in a central political debate, given the weakness of the role of political parties in the present situation. The parties to the left of the PS, stuck in their electoral projects, were present without playing a role in the confrontation with the government. The parties of the far left, the anti-capitalist forces, the revolutionary groups, are too small to play a leading role in politicizing these activists around perspectives that they can relate to.

The challenge of the coming months is to organize processes of meetings between combative activists from different sectors. Through open and pluralist exchanges, coupled with radical actions, it is possible that this mobilization can be fruitful for all social actors. For this it is essential that these processes are constantly centred on the perspective of mass activity, aimed at the majority of those below, in order to win. Then we will be able to see the outlines of a new form of mass political expression that starts from the reality of the class struggle.

September 30, 2016

[1] 1. See: Manuel Cervera Marzal, "Nuit debout, l'instant après. Pour un bilan qui n'en soit pas un", published on the website of the review [Contretemps](#).

[2] This contribution to the debate is based on a report given in a workshop at the 2016 the Summer University of the NPA, entitled "General strike, united front and self-organization - the central issues in the movement against the labour law."

[3] In particular Caroline De Hass, feminist activist of the association "Osez le féminisme". She is a former secretary of the student union UNEF and was a member of the PS, serving in a ministerial cabinet from 2012 to 2013. She left the PS in 2014 and initiated the debate on a primary on the left. Later she became a member of the presidential team of the, Cécile Duflot, who failed to be adopted as the EELV candidate.

[4] In 2010 we had up to seven days of action, mobilizing between 1.5 and 3 million demonstrators nationwide.

[5] The following data gives an idea of the representativeness of the different unions, based on recent union elections (2012-2013): CGT, 26.77 per cent, CFDT 26.00 per cent, FO 15.94 per cent, CFE-CGC 9.43 per cent, CFTC 9.30 per cent, UNSA 4.26 per cent, Solidaires 3.47 per cent. Total of other lists (<1 per cent) 4.40 per cent.

[6] Leon Trotsky, *Whither France*, "The French revolution has begun" (9 June 1936). [Available on internet](#).

[7] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions". Available on [internet](#).

[8] The refineries on strike and the blocking oil depots led to a temporary shortage of fuel in 4,000 of the 12,000 service stations in France. The situation became normal after the lifting of the blockades of depots by the police and the use of strategic reserves.

[9] This is a procedure making it possible to have the whole of a text adopted unless a motion of censure forcing the government to resign is tabled within twenty-four hours. This legislative weapon was used for the final adoption of the text. The left critics of the government failed to reach the number of MPs necessary to table a motion of censure from the left that could have been voted by the right, and they refused to vote the motion of censure motion tabled by the right.

Mobilizations against the labour law: New forms and political problems of a long-lasting mobilization

[10] These “intermittents du spectacle” - artists, musicians, workers and technicians working for the theatre, cinema and audiovisual - were fighting to maintain their status, which the employers have been attempting to liquidate for years and which has already been “chipped away”. Their jobs are by definition of short duration and they have a special status of unemployed, enabling them to preserve their average income of the previous year provided they have been employed for at least 507 hours during the previous 12 months. In 2015 the employment centre registered in the whole of France 256,000 contributors to the “intermittent du spectacle” system, including 156,000 artistes and 100,000 technicians - but only 40 per cent of them had reached the threshold allowing them to receive unemployment benefits, thus preserving their average income (figures from *Les Echos*, October 2, 2015).

[11] A reference to the French words of the “Internationale”.