

This is no insurrection

Why appending "and its world" doesn't add anything to the current movement
against the labour reform

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1st of June, 2016

I don't intend to demean or turn my nose up at what is happening (or not happening) in the current mobilisation "against the labour law". Sometimes, words are used precisely for that. Ultimately, it's true that talking and writing are very limited uses of bodily and mental capacities. There are others which are just as important: arms that move, legs that run, hearts that beat. The former are all too easily removed from the latter, and run the risk of drifting into a separate world. One runs that risk every time one opens one's mouth or starts wiggling one's fingers to write. Still...

While I rejoice, alongside many others, over a few fully lived moments during the movement, some people's enthusiasm perplexes me. I hear it be said that "there are some interesting things at Place de la République", because ultimately, it's a place to meet people. I hear that "our numbers are growing", because ever more people are joining the "autonomous" or "unaffiliated" marches. I hear that the unions are becoming "radicalised" because some of their members mask up during demonstrations. I also hear that we are "more combative" because swimming goggles and masks have become indispensable at demos, thanks to the cops' generosity when it comes to dishing out tear gas. What's more, ever more people hate the police, because of how nasty it proved it was. And, for some, it can all be boiled down to the notion that "everything's going to blow up", yelled by hooligans having traded the football field for the "social field".

I do not refute any of these descriptive and optimistic observations. As for the description of the State, I don't confound anyone. However, as far as the enthusiasts are concerned, I challenge their enthusiasm.

Because, just as with speech and writing, a lot of what is gained in form is also lost in content, and it would be a mistake to think that one can replace the other. Today, for instance, a large part of the discussion (still) revolves around the question of property destruction. And I'm not referring to *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Russia Today*, *Le Figaro* and other all too famous enemies. I'm referring to "activist" sources, often devoted to justifying so-called radical practices. Anything goes: the youth are smashing stuff and confronting the cops, because they've had enough, or because they're just young, you don't understand, or they weren't like that before the police revealed its true colours, or they hate the miserable future being promised to them, or... One looks for short and economic phrases to justify the things people do for their own reasons, as if

those reasons were made clear by the tactics themselves. Reasons which are often not short, nor necessarily economic. Their motives are complex, sometimes evasive. How can one, no matter one's point of view, explain such actions in a manner so close to that of sociologists? The latter at least look for arbitrary correspondances which statistically suit them, whereas to those who desperately want to justify a method of struggle, everything is already clearly defined.

But why look for these curt justifications? To convince us that difficult times require proportionally difficult measures? Do we not end up back in the same tired old debate over "violence" and "non-violence", albeit in a slightly updated vocabulary adapted to our era?

Let's not tire ourselves. But since we've started with property destruction, let's talk about it, but not to justify it. In the beginning of April this year, following a blockade which was part of the movement against the labour law, a few teenagers from the Léonard de Vinci high school in Levallois-Perret set fire to some bins. The fire damaged that awful cage. Nearly two months later, 47 high-schoolers are summoned to the Sûreté Territoriale, several are arrested. There are initiatives to support them, find lawyers, give them advice, support the accused, etc. which is obviously all important. But why did the high-schoolers do what they did in the first place?

Some explain it as the high-schoolers being very, very angry because the institutionalised stultification authorities didn't give them permission to go demonstrate. But really, while I won't question the "true" motives of the authors, hopefully unknown, of what billions of children everywhere dream to see come true, I will emit this very probable hypothesis: the act of setting fire to a school has more to do with the school than with the labour law. More precisely, it has something to do with school being a concrete manifestation of this authoritarian and mercantile world, which the children and teenagers have to suffer through daily. Some of them just took advantage of favourable conditions and expressed their disgust.

While the ongoing movement is often presented as not just "against the labour law", but also against "the world that goes with it", few aspects of the latter are mentioned. And this to the point that some even took it upon themselves to protect premises of the Emmaüs charity, which collaborates with the deportation machine and has already been attacked in and of itself, from its assailants, as was the case during the demonstration of May 26th. But even if some may ignore what Emmaüs really is, everyone knows what school is. It's an institution possibly more essential to the "world of the labour law" than the accursed law itself.

And yet, those standing with the high-schoolers defend them only as accused parties, not as schoolchildren who hate school beyond any judiciary considerations of "guilt" or "innocence". Sure, the technicalities are important. But if it's to be as part of the movement against the labour law and its world that we stand with the high-schoolers, how is possible that the issue of school itself, an aspect of that world, isn't raised, focus going instead to the debate over guilt?

Whence my languor. Despite these very (although sometimes less) beautiful acts, and despite the increasingly mask-wearing demonstrations, the movement's "and the world that goes with it" seems to get blurrier and fainter. Because when one looks around—in the cafés, in the streets, in the public transports, at work—, despite a few noteworthy exceptions, conversations revolve around the property destruction, the demos, the 'nuit debout', sometimes the "police brutality"... In short, technical issues, as if they were the be all and end all. Some are against, some are for, most couldn't care less. Very few seem to grasp the very reason and essence of why we go take to the streets, alone or in groups, during the day or the night, demo or no demo, to give a little coherence to our disgust of this mercantile and authoritarian society: the incompatibility of the life which is forced upon us with the one we wish to live, one which might be worth its name.

Never mind that people are sympathetic to the actions, even the most "radical" ones. Whether we are more numerous or not in the "autonomous" marches, or more masked up than ever, minority acts of revolt do not seek to convert. They seek to contribute to social tensions, in order to polarise this world on the one hand, and to make life less shit on the other. If we get "angry", if we "lash out", if we simply destroy, it isn't because this law will prevent us from succeeding in this society; it's because the slightest chance of succeeding runs up against everything which makes life worth living: beauty, passion, happiness, freedom —let's not measure such things.

However, some breaches are opening in the broader context of this movement. There are some moments of fracture. They all existed before and will keep on existing. So let's continue to seek them out and contribute to them. But let's do so in such a way that when the movement dies down —as it certainly will do— these breaches don't stop opening and cracks continue to show up where no one expects them to. If one day we manage to link them all together, perhaps we will at last have some real chance of subverting this insufferable society.

J.L. , 1st of June, 2016

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