

French pseudo-lefts attempt to strangle “los indignados” solidarity movement

Our reporters
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Rallies in support of the M-15 mass youth protest movement in Spain “los indignados” (angry ones) have been held daily since May 20 in several French cities. The Spanish movement, which began the occupation of the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid on May 15, began in protest against a youth unemployment rate of over 40 percent and an overall jobless rate of 23 percent.

The protesters have directed their anger in particular against the “social pact” between the trade unions and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government of Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero. This includes a pledge by the unions to prevent mobilisations against the massive austerity measures, including a 20 percent cut in pensions, which have been imposed in order to reduce the national budget deficit at the behest of the banks.

The French “indignés” M-15 solidarity movement began on May 20 at the initiative of Spanish students resident in France and was centred on the steps of the Opera in Paris’s Place de la Bastille. It has not become a mass movement in the various cities throughout France where such assemblies have been set up, but rather has largely been made up of members of pseudo left groups masquerading as non-political, spontaneous protesters.

The movement was immediately seized upon by the anti-globalisation, protectionist, pro-capitalist organisation ATTAC (France) set up and led by members or sympathisers of the Socialist Party (PS), the Communist Party (PCF), the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), the Left Party (PG) split off from the PS and their university academic hangers on. In a sort of pre-emptive strike against any mass movement breaking free of the bourgeois left and its ex-radical satellites and the trade unions, ATTAC took over the May 22 rally of some 200 people in the place de la Bastille and proposed a declaration which was, according to ATTAC, “unanimously approved”. It proposed vague constitutional and social reforms: “the calling of a Constituent Assembly to remind our rulers that only the people is sovereign” and “a redivision of wealth.” It consisted of not a call for the removal of “our rulers”, but rather begging for their

indulgence.

The resolution defines the movement as “a true citizens’ mobilisation totally independent and self-run” and calls for the organisation everywhere in France of peaceful occupations of public squares.

These organizations’ perspective of reforming capitalism and the political establishment is laid out in their leaflets. Under the title, “Propositions for the democratic regeneration of the political system,” they call for “democratization: we want really democratic States that serve citizens and not big financial powers.”

Such appeals for greater support for the welfare state are cynical and empty. Over the past 30 years, the political and economic situation has been vastly transformed. With globalization, the international bourgeoisie can transfer its capital and wealth anywhere in the world and make workers compete with one another internationally, forcing deep cuts in wages and social benefits. This accelerating process ultimately led to the outbreak of the world financial crisis in 2008, during which the ruling classes handed out trillions of euros to the banks while demanding further social cuts to benefit the financial aristocracy. This can be fought successfully only by means of an international struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the entire capitalist system.

Taking advantage of the youth’s entirely healthy contempt and hatred for the bourgeois parties, both left and right, and for the unions, the organisers of the Bastille assembly have attempted to push through a ban on all party politics. At last Sunday’s Bastille rally, attended by somewhat less than 1,000 protestors, stewards tried unsuccessfully to prevent WSWs supporters from distributing to those sitting on the Opera steps, the statement “What way forward for Spain’s “angry ones”?, because it came from a political organisation.

In the event, this bureaucratic censorship was ignored by all but a tiny minority, and the leaflets were eagerly taken and read.

A steward, asked if he was in a political organisation, just repeated that he was for “self organisation”, and that the rule

was for people not to declare their political affiliations. This also applies to anyone addressing meetings. They must only give their names. Under pressure, he did admit he was in a political organisation but refused to divulge which one.

A young man, who reluctantly admitted that he was an NPA member, justified the denial of political identification by saying that perhaps later they could reveal their identity. An NPA press statement on the Spanish M-15, dated May 24, encourages an uncritical approach to the political organisations coming round the movement, even giving support to nationalist movements which divide the working class: “The general assemblies put forward democratic demands, national in Catalonia and social, concerning jobs, the renationalisation of public services.... They are self-organised democratically in such a way as to involve all willing young people, whatever their political or organisational affiliations.”

The banning of any identification of political affiliation by the Bastille assembly is designed to prevent a discussion of the rôle of the political parties and the unions in the imposition of austerity policies. The Spanish “social pact” has its equivalent in France, as was demonstrated in the course of last year's mass protest movement against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension cuts.

The conditions and the prospects for youth in France are not far from those in Spain. Some 44 percent of those under 25 are estimated to be either unemployed, on worthless training programmes or on temporary contracts. If there has not been an immediate mass response to the pseudo-left organised imitation of the Spanish M-15, it is not because the youth in France are not angry, but that they are somewhat wary of protest actions which seek to peddle the illusion that the ruling elites can be pressured into giving up their worldwide assault on the living standards and rights of the masses.

Protest actions throughout 2010 in France, organised by the unions and supported by a coalition of pseudo-left parties including the Greens, the PS, the PCF, the PG and the NPA, brought some 3 million workers and youth out on strike and onto the streets in sporadic one day actions spaced out over several months. Meanwhile, the unions were in constant discussions with the government to find formulae which would enable them to sell the reform. The death blow to the movement was administered on October 22 by the PCF-led CGT (General Confederation of Labour), when it collaborated with the police to force striking oil refinery and oil terminal workers back to work at the point when their strike was seriously affecting the economy. Opinion polls were showing 71 percent in favour of a general strike to prevent the reform.

None of the unions or the pseudo-left parties called for the removal of the Sarkozy government by the action of the working class, nor do they now.

At last Wednesday's rally a student told the WSWs, “The situations in Spain and France are not the same. In Spain, it is well known that the trade unions collaborated openly with the government to impose austerity measures. In France, this is not the case. The unions did not participate as in Spain with the government in social cuts. There was a movement against pension cuts but it dissolved.”

He added that eventually “a situation like in Spain will come about in France,” but that it would not “be right away.”

He then admitted that he was a member of the NPA and said that there were many members of the NPA, PG (Left Party), and the Greens, and trade unions attending the rally.

A Moroccan student, Mohammed, spoke at the Friday assembly saying that the movement in France was a continuation of the Arab revolutions and that it would continue worldwide: “We have to start for a world revolution, not just Spain and France or even Europe.” He was applauded, but the organisers quickly attacked his speech, saying “We are fighting for democracy, not for revolution”, and insisted that discussion be about France and Spain—the rest of the world could be discussed later.

The WSWs asked one of the organisers who had opposed Mohammed if he was against world revolution. He replied: “No, but we have lot of organisations and people participating in this assembly who are against it.”

Speaking to the WSWs afterwards Mohammed said: “I don't care about the NPA or any other of these radical organisations. Worldwide people should take power into their own hands; we have to fight for that.”



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