

#NightOnOurFeet: A petty-bourgeois trap for opposition to French labor reform

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After more than a million French workers and youth mobilized last week in strikes and protest against the labor reform of Socialist Party (PS) labor minister Myriam El Khomri, the media are heavily promoting the #NightOnOurFeet movement.

It began as few hundred people set up tents on Republic Square in Paris over the weekend. They included members of parties long allied to the PS, like the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Front; Christian self-help groups; and the Right to Housing (DAL) group of ex-Maoist activist Jean-Baptiste Eyraud. Besides Eyraud, speakers included nationalist economist Frédéric Lordon, a supporter of Popular Unity, a split-off from the ruling Syriza party in Greece. #NightOnOurFeet camps have since been set up in other cities, including Toulouse, Lyon, and Nantes.

The media and the protest organizers declare that #NightOnOurFeet models itself on the *indignados* protests of 2011 in Spain, when thousands of Spanish youth occupied Puerta del Sol square in Madrid and public squares in cities across Spain. The #NightOnOurFeet movement organized a visit to Republic Square by Miguel Urban, a leading member of the Podemos party in Spain that emerged from the *indignados* protest.

These protests reflect the lifestyle politics and postmodernist and anti-Marxist conceptions popular in the affluent middle class that came to predominate also among the *indignados*, and in similar protests in 2011: the *Aganaktismeni* in Greece and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Decisions are taken by consensus, with hand signs. #NightOnOurFeet members also take the name Camille, a gender-neutral name given to both girls and boys in France, when speaking the press.

The experience of the *indignados* and the enthusiasm in pro-PS sections of the media for the protest are political warnings for workers and youth fighting the El Khomri

Law. The #NightOnOurFeet movement is a dead end and a political trap. Its purpose is to keep youth radicalized by the struggle against El Khomri Law from turning to the working class and seeking to mobilize it in struggle against the PS and the austerity agenda of the EU.

Instead of such a turn, #NightOnOurFeet uncritically promotes social protests of a diffuse class character, which in Spain and Greece not only failed to halt the European Union's (EU's) austerity drive, but reinforced bourgeois parties deeply hostile to the working class.

To the extent that their moral appeals to ruling circles for a shift in policy had any oppositional content, it was to push for a change favorable to the social interests of the upper-middle-class layers in the top 10 percent of the population that dominated parties like Podemos and Syriza. These parties proved deeply hostile to the working class.

While significant layers of Spanish urban youth participated in the *indignados* protests, there was no political perspective, no struggle for socialist consciousness, and no struggle to mobilize support among workers. As a result, no significant strike movement or workers struggles developed in the context of this movement. The political forces that dominated—like the Anticapitalist Left (IA), the Spanish affiliate of the NPA—were able to rapidly wear down the movement and wind it up in a matter of a few months.

Working with a cabal of Stalinist professors and media commentators drawn largely from Madrid's Complutense University and led by media pundit Pablo Iglesias, they ultimately set up the Podemos party in 2014. This proved to be a reactionary, anti-working class party leaning closely on support in the armed forces and the business community. It is now in negotiations to support a pro-austerity coalition government between the Socialist Party and the right-wing Citizens party in Spain.

As for the *Aganaktismeni* protests on Syntagma Square

in Athens, they paved the way for Syriza's record performance in the 2012 Greek elections that established it as the main opposition to New Democracy (ND) and set it on track to win the January 2015 elections and come to power. This proved to be an even more searing experience in the reactionary role of these petty-bourgeois, pseudo-left parties.

Once in power, Syriza betrayed its election promises to end austerity. Instead, it extended the EU austerity Memorandum only a few weeks after coming to power, then trampled an overwhelming "no" vote in a referendum on austerity to impose a savage new austerity package. Syriza is now working out plans to cut billions of euros in pensions, as well as supporting the mass deportation of Middle East refugees to Turkey by the EU.

While newspapers are full of comparisons of #NightOnOurFeet with the *indignados*, no one is discussing the event that pushed tens of thousands of Spanish youth to begin protesting at the Puerta del Sol on May 15, 2011. That was the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo that launched mass revolutionary struggles of the working class and brought down hated, imperialist-backed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

The reasons for the silence of the press and petty-bourgeois groups like the NPA and DAL about Tahrir Square are not so hard to understand. First of all, the role of the NPA in Egypt is a stark exposure of its counterrevolutionary, anti-working class role: it first supported the right-wing Islamist candidate Mohamed Mursi in a presidential election, then the Tamarod ("Rebel") movement through which the army prepared a coup that toppled Mursi.

They were thus complicit in the coming to power of the military dictatorship of General Abdelfattah al-Sisi that emerged from Mursi's ouster.

Above all, however, they are silent on the events in Egypt because of the escalating fear of the working class in Europe. While the NPA and similar pseudo-left organizations in France would be eager to participate in some type of reactionary petty-bourgeois regroupment to create a French Syriza or a French Podemos, they are terrified of opposition in the working class at home.

There is explosive discontent among workers with the PS policies of austerity, police repression, and war, and the evident fraudulence and bankruptcy of its claims to be a "socialist" party. PS president François Hollande could easily go the way of Mubarak, were there an organization with significant support in the working class calling for a struggle against him.

As a result, the media and the pseudo-left allies of the PS like the NPA seek to promote the tattered banner of yet another petty-bourgeois movement, without any perspective. They are happy to promote an occupation of the squares by middle-class youth, because they are desperate to avoid the occupation of the factories by the workers.

The forces promoting the movement are aware of opposition and mistrust among more politically aware sections of youth to an empty protest movement and to the political satellites of the PS. Even enthusiastic supporters of #NightOnOurFeet like the daily *Libération* are forced to acknowledge from the outset the political incoherence of the movement's demands, none of which are addressed to the basic social interests of the working class.

It wrote, "#NightOnOurFeet occupies Republic Square like the indignados did the Puerta del Sol. It's 'possible,' says Lordon, the surprise Iglesias of 2016, 'that we are doing something.' Obviously it's possible also that no, the movement will just become a kitsch version of 1968, that barely born it will immediately succumb to its obvious paradoxes (we don't protest, but we meet on the street pavement, we want no leaders but the dynamic of the movement pushes me to take center stage, demand nothing but fight for our rights, etc.). But where we are, why not try 'it,' right?"

The working class does not need a "kitsch version of 1968" or another reactionary pseudo-left party like Syriza to continue the offensive against the social and democratic rights of the workers. Youth seeking to oppose social austerity and the PS in France must reject the #NightOnOurFeet movement as a political diversion and trap set by cynical maneuverers tied to the PS. The way forward is a fight to mobilize the working class on a socialist program in struggle against this entire swamp of reactionary pseudo-left defenders of the PS government.



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