

How #UpAllNight seeks to block opposition to French labour law

Francis Dubois
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Since it was launched at the beginning of April, the #UpAllNight movement is emerging ever more clearly as a political operation of sections of the petty bourgeoisie linked to the pseudo left and the union bureaucracy. It aims to channel opposition of youth entering into struggle against the French labour law, and turn it into reactionary organisations that have orbited around the ruling Socialist Party (PS) for decades. The PS thus hopes to block the development of politically conscious opposition to the PS government and a broader mobilisation of the working class against austerity.

Far from being a spontaneous expression of opposition to the labour reform, the practice of occupying city squares, starting with the Place de la République in Paris, was the result of a conscious initiative that received massive media attention and promotion. It was initiated by a group around the satirical newspaper *Fakir*, led by its editor, the media personality François Ruffin, after the largest demonstration against the labour law on March 31. From the beginning, the movement was based on publicising the ideas of the nationalist economist Frédéric Lordon.

Behind a fraudulent façade of political neutrality opposing parties and leaders, various operatives from the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), the Left Front, the Greens, NGOs, and the trade unions were going into action. The leaderships of these parties all hailed the creation of the movement and its related Twitter hash-tag, #UpAllNight.

Aiming to exploit the hostility of large sections of the population towards the attacks on democratic rights by the ruling elite, the movement promoted the myth of “direct democracy” existing outside of the class struggle, consisting of open “General assemblies” allowing the “street” to express itself.

#UpAllNight activists organised commissions in which various issues were discussed—the formation of new bourgeois institutions (the “constitutive processes”), political economy (“*souverainisme*,” that is to say economic nationalism), ecology, and feminism.

The movement was from the outset hostile to mobilising the working class against the labour law. Ruffin and Lordon stated that they were indifferent to the outcome of the struggle against the law. Discussing the law at Tolbiac University, Lordon said, “We do not in any way demand that it be modified or rewritten, we do not demand rights, we do not demand anything at all in fact.”

This amounts to politically criminal complacency about a law that would have a devastating impact on workers’ jobs, wages,

and conditions—lengthening working times, undermining job security for young workers, and allowing the trade unions to negotiate contracts violating the Labour Code.

Ruffin makes clear his contempt for the working class in *Fakir*, in which he defends the interests of the petty bourgeoisie. He says the petty bourgeoisie should use the working class to defend its specific interests under capitalism.

A few weeks before launching #UpAllNight, he explained: “As long as we march separately, we risk being screwed. One of the lessons of my film [*Merçi Patron!*, or Thank you, boss!] is to say that if the petty bourgeoisie I represent does not come together with the popular layers represented in the film by the Klurs, one cannot disturb the [oligarch] Bernard Arnault.”

Lordon, who was widely applauded in #UpAllNight assemblies, defends economic nationalism and insists on the central role of the bourgeois state which he wants to reinforce. *Le Monde* listed his proposals: “a state default on its debts, exit from the euro currency, state takeovers of bankrupt banks and the regulation of foreign trade,” a policy that under capitalism can only be applied through dictatorial measures. These positions align Lordon with nationalist economist Jacques Sapir, who has proposed an alliance between the neo-fascist National Front and the *souverainiste* (explicitly economic-nationalist) forces around the PS, such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Left Front.

It is no accident if one sees occasional visits at #UpAllNight rallies of members and even banners of far-right groups.

One of the main tendencies is that of the “constituent citizens,” who have their own commission. They discuss essentially about a reform of capitalist institutions. Speaking to *Le Monde diplomatique*, Xavi Lespinet, a defender of “constituent citizenship” who works at the Barcelona paper *El Critic*, said: “We consider that the current institutional system is outmoded, that no real transformation of the context can be produced in it, that it must be totally redone, to re-democratise it, and to make possible within it significant political differences.”

These proposals have nothing to do with a defense of democratic rights within the context of a struggle against capitalism. They simply amount to proposals to the financial aristocracy to make some concessions to the layers of the affluent middle class that consider that they do not profit enough from the exploitation of the working class. By creating a new “context,” they aim essentially to organise a “better” distribution of the profits—that is, one more favourable to themselves.

This is the common denominator of all the similar projects, from the calls for a Sixth Republic from Mélenchon or the theories of Etienne Chouard, whose links with the far right are well known. Chouard recently applauded Lordon's positions on the issue of launching a constituent assembly."

The issue of a "general strike" has also been made the topic of a commission at the #UpAllNight meeting on Republic Square in Paris.

The organisation that first raised this issue is the Morenoite faction of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) that publishes the misnamed "Révolution permanente" web site. This group, whose former Latin American leader Nahuel Moreno sent it in the 1960s into the international Pabloite tendency whose French representative was the Revolutionary Communist League, the NPA's predecessor, defends the petty-bourgeois nationalist Castro regime in Cuba. It has long functioned in Argentina as a wing of a nationalist and populist movement built around the late President Juan Perón.

The forces that supposedly aim to organise this "general strike" are unions that are all, including the Stalinist General Confederation of Labour (CGT), publicly on record as supporting modifications to the labour reform negotiated with the PS. They have all refused to mobilise the working class against the brutal repression of the youth by police.

They are calling for a "renewable" strike instead of an unlimited one, which would rapidly produce a confrontation between the working class and the PS government. A "renewable" strike is a one-day strike that must be re-approved each day and at each workplace, during which time the government stays in power. It does not unify but atomises the working class. It guarantees that no long-term strategy against President François Hollande's government will be discussed.

It is conceived as a way for the union bureaucracies to call for minor modifications to the law, without changing the essentials. This is why CGT leader Philippe Martinez enthusiastically backed it when he spoke at an #UpAllNight meeting on April 28.

It aims to give a false veneer of working class radicalism to pro-business trade unions, and of internationalism to nationalist petty bourgeois groups, to try to demoralise workers who strike.

Révolution permanente also specifically defends Lordon, claiming that the ruling class is seeking to discredit him. One article on its web site argues for economic nationalism and the nation-state as the context inside which opposition "of the oppressed and the poor" develops.

For the Hollande government, it is clear not only that #UpAllNight poses no danger to the PS, but that it helps create a media buzz that creates enthusiasm among sections of the youth. It blocks a fundamental political and historical discussion on the necessity of socialism, the mobilisation of the working class through a mass political strike, and the issue of state power.

On April 14, Hollande declared, "I think it is legitimate that the youth, today, given the world as it is, politics as it is, wants to express itself, have its say ... I will not complain that a section of the youth wants to invent the world of tomorrow."

On April 29, Bernard Cazeneuve, the interior minister directly responsible for police brutality against youth protesters, defended

the movement against demands from the FN and the right-wing The Republicans that the movement be banned.

While #UpAllNight square occupations have been set up in other cities across France, attempts to set them up in working class suburbs of the major cities have failed in the face of the distrust and even overt hostility of the population. *Le Monde* repeatedly reported how union and pseudo left activists, materially supported by Stalinist and other municipalities, tried to attract workers and youth in these areas. "The #UpAllNight movement struggles to move into the suburbs," it wrote on April 14, observing on April 24 that "In Marseille, #UpAllNight is colliding with the harsh reality of the northern districts."

News magazine *Le Point* indicated on May 1 something of the relationship that exists between #UpAllNight and the population: "Thursday, Philippe Martinez spoke there the first time to propose "a convergence of struggles," though at the time 63 percent of the population considers that neither #UpAllNight, nor the trade unions, nor the parties are "aligned with the workers," according to an Odoxa poll Friday. On the other hand, seven Frenchmen in ten consider that "the class struggle is a reality in France today."

It is the international class struggle, and not the political received ideas of the petty bourgeoisie promoted by #UpAllNight, that is driving millions of youth and workers in France and worldwide into struggle. Their struggles against the discredited social order defended by the European Union and in France by the PS government and its political satellites has only begun. They are moving inevitably towards a confrontation between the working class and the capitalist oligarchy, posing the question of power, and of building workers' states through international socialist revolution.

These struggles can only advance, however, by taking the struggle out of the hands of the trade unions and opposing to the reactionary protectionism of the *souverainistes*, the internationalist perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe, breaking decisively with the nationalist and petty bourgeois perspectives of the groups linked to #UpAllNight.



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