

Nuit debout

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The Nuit debout movement emerged in France in spring 2016 from mobilizations against a labor reforms proposal (*loi travail*), known as the El Khomri law after then-French socialist Minister of Labor. In the wake of the introduction of the El Khomri bill to parliament on February 17, 2016 activists had discussed the idea of using public spaces to bring together different mobilizations. On March 31, at the end of a day of general strike, daytime occupations of public squares, authorized mass demonstrations and small unauthorized ones, activists called for a *nuit debout* to occupy the highly symbolic Place de la Republique, in Paris. Previously latent and fragmented groups and new activists joined in the protest with substantial involvement from students, workers, teachers, unions, housing rights, anti-development and alter-global activists. The movement's call for action resonated widely (Cukier and Lassere 2016) and an estimated 390,000 participants joined demonstrations across France on that day. In the following months, the movement involved also citizens with no activist background and a network of about 400 *Nuit debout* groups was established, mostly in France but also abroad. When the El Khomri bill was approved by parliament in August, the movement declined in visibility (see Pickard and Bessant 2018). However, some of its grievances and repertoire reemerged in Yellow Vests movement, sprung in 2018 (see Lane 2020).

Nuit debout can be considered as a late manifestation of the wave of so-called 'movements of the squares' or 'movements of the crisis', which since 2008 financial crisis run across several European countries and the US. The movement takes its name from the *nuit debout* practice (literally, 'up all night' or 'standing night'). The *nuit debout* became the common and publicly visible form of participation of all local mobilizations joined in the movement. The practice involved the occupation of open public spaces as an appropriation of the commons, engaging in direct democracy, to regulate some aspects of groups' activities and coordinating actions with among activists. Nuit debout also engaged in discursive and direct forms of democratic participation with local groups hosting meetings, open assemblies and thematic working groups (*commissions*) as well as popular education workshops (Felicetti and Della Porta 2018). This practice shares similar features with the *acampadas* of the Indignados movement in Spain in 2011 and represents an evolution of Global Justice Movements' social forums (Guichoux 2016). The protest repertoire of Nuit debout included also a variety of other practices from major demonstrations (at least 10 of national relevance were held between March and June 2016) to the sabotage of highway tollbooths.

Since its inception the movement linked the contestation of the labor reforms proposal to a broader criticism of the system. This is best exemplified by one of the movement's main slogans "Nuit debout against the labour law and its world" ("*Nuit debout contre la loi travail et son monde*"). Among the main targets of Nuit Debout were neoliberalism, state violence and racism, ecological destruction and discrimination. The movement also contested the political system and its main parties. Activists were critical of social democratic party then in government, accused of having given up on its promises and

adopted a neo-liberal agenda instead, as well as the conservative and far-right opposition parties (Birešev 2018). *Nuit debout* characterized itself as a space for “convergence of struggles” with the French expression “*convergence des luttes*” being used as a metonym for the movement on social media. The constellation of activists joined in the movement included, among others, feminist, syndicalist and ecologist groups. Some longstanding campaigns also were seen as integral to *Nuit debout* such as the one against the construction of an airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes and the one against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). On top of its struggle against the El Khomri law and austerity measures, *Nuit debout* called for greater protection of workers’ rights, improved welfare, constitutional reform as well as for solidarity with migrants and refugees (Harsin 2018). SEE ALSO: Contentious Politics, Democracy and Social Movements, Direct Democracy, Global Austerity Movements, Meetings, Protest, Yellow Vests.

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