

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2108>



Egypt

Egypt 2011: a historic revolutionary process

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV435 - April 2011 -

Publication date: Saturday 23 April 2011

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

On February 11 2011 Hosni Mubarak, in power since 1981, left power following eighteen days of mass demonstrations. A simple protest by young people had been transformed into a powerful wave of mobilisation which shook the whole of Egyptian society. A revolution is underway, but clearly nothing has yet been resolved.

Power has been transferred into the hands of the Higher Council of the Armed Forces to manage the transition. what has taken place has come as a surprise to everyone: the Egyptians themselves, the peoples of the Maghreb and the Middle East, journalists and other experts, and not forgetting the imperialist powers. Following the victorious uprising in Tunisia, the Egyptian people overthrew a previously immovable dictatorship. Rather than merely being the result of a domino effect, what has happened can be explained by the particularities of the Egyptian situation itself.

The Origins of the Conflict

The revolutionary process is the consequence of the spark lit by the Tunisian revolution, of a new mood of audacity. Nevertheless, there has been for some years in Egypt an atmosphere of protest that has been fuelled by solidarity with the people of Palestine and also by the opposition to the war in Iraq, in addition to the effects of the generation of Facebookers and the Kefaya (Enough!) movement as well as the large numbers of young people entering the terrain of domestic politics. Numerous demonstrations were organised to protest against the regime, bringing together at most 2,000 to 3,000 people. The post-Mubarak era brings with it serious political obstacles amid a rise in corruption.

Large workers demonstrations continued. Workers did not benefit from representation or autonomous organisations. Faced with the series of strikes, the authorities preferred to grant concessions, which in turn led to a growing confidence. The appeal for a general strike on April 6 2008 in solidarity with the workers led to the creation of the Youth Movement of April 6. This group focussed on campaigning and brought together various political tendencies and independents.

Democratic Protest, Generator of Mass Revolt

The first January 25 initiative [1] brought together around 15,000 people: something was happening. For a number of years there was more freedom of speech. People criticised those in power more and more openly.

A question mark existed as to who would succeed Mubarak, as well as a sense of resentment at the hoarding of power in the hands of businessmen and at increasing corruption. The economic opening-up had led to the development of consumerism but also that of infrastructure. Society was changing. Certain sectors of the population were suffering from increasing impoverishment. The number of grievances and the level of discontent were accumulating, particularly in relation to police abuse but also in relation to increasing daily economic hardship and high unemployment. The situation with regard to housing was also becoming more difficult. Some took to repeating the self-immolating gesture of the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi.

The level of participation in the demonstrations was a significant factor right from the start, rather different from the

traditional type of demonstrations which the police were able to disperse easily and brutally. The strategy employed by the protestors was particularly effective: the organisers opted to assemble at different points before converging on the agreed site of the demonstration.

The echo in the provinces of the Tahrir Square demonstrations would prove not merely important but decisive. In Alexandria, the attacks by the police did not serve to prevent anything: the crowd counter-attacked! Suez was witness to a near-insurrection. Police stations and the local headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) were destroyed. In Alexandria, the Governorate (headquarters of the regional Government) was captured, and the huge amount of files kept by Mubarak's regime were mostly burnt in public. The densely-populated Nile Delta region saw powerful demonstrations in al-Malhalla al-Kobra, al-Mansoura, Tanta, Damanshour...

Confronted with such power and determination, the regime could do nothing but back down. On February 1, Mubarak committed himself to not standing in the next presidential elections. This first victory did nothing to appease the demonstrators. Very soon after, the bell tolled for 'tawrih' (the proposal that power would simply pass to Mubarak's son Gamal). Then the regime turned to the mercenaries, the 'Baltagya', who brutally attacked those gathered in Tahrir Square. But the retreat of the Government was remarkable. The regime even agreed to dialogue with the forces of the opposition, among whom the Muslim Brotherhood remained banned. The movement did not give up and maintained its demand for Mubarak to stand down. Denunciation of the PND, the parliament and the media kept on growing.

The leadership of the united opposition, which consisted of eighty or ninety MPs, assembled a kind of 'counter-parliament' which brought together several opposition parties. They tried more or less to coordinate the initiatives. Young people debated together what they should do next. The Muslim Brotherhood withheld their support at the start of the demonstrations but allowed their members to participate on an individual basis.

Popular support for the demonstrations was increasing, and Tahrir Square had become a physical symbol of protest. It is also there that can be found the headquarters of the Arab League, the massive administrative complex known as the Mogamma' [2], the American University, the Omar Makram Mosque [3], a luxury hotel and the Egyptian Museum. This space had become the symbol of protest that the mercenaries on horses and camels tried to crush using force and terror.

Just next to the Egyptian Museum, the headquarters of the PND was burnt. This was an expression of the square's huge rejection of the regime embodied in the person of the president. It included people from all generations, backgrounds and very different political orientations. Sectors of society who would usually ignore each other or at least avoid each other, rubbed shoulders, talked and collaborated. The unity between Christians and Muslims embodied that new spirit. The sentiment of the Revolution of 1919 was in the square [4], as a new kind of social life saw the light of day. A mini-society materialised in the form of food, blankets, health care, rest areas and security (guard towers, searches). A new Egypt appeared, one that overcame traditional divisions.

This revolutionary process has experienced moments of hesitation. Thus, part of the opposition called for the appointment of the head of the Constitutional Court as interim President to organise elections to a Constituent Assembly. Others called for the establishment of a national committee with representatives of the opposition to take charge during the transitional period. The young people gathered in al-Tahrir held firm and kept up their fight for the departure of the President.

Aspects of a revolutionary process

Radicalized youth has been the engine of this powerful movement, able to coalesce around itself a wide variety of social forces. Despite a fragile structure and a very general leadership, it maintained the right course until the departure of the President. We must also mention the important work of women - on the web, in groups and on the street.

The Egyptian revolution is above all democratic. It demands the repeal of the state of emergency and judicial exceptions, the release of political prisoners, the dissolution of the People's Assembly, Consultative Council [5], and local councils, not to mention recognition of the freedom of the press and liberty of organization and association. The revision of the constitution is a particularly important issue which should be ratified by referendum. Hence the importance of the call for a democratically elected Constituent Assembly. The development of an independent judiciary, the establishment of a civil state and independent religious authorities, all show signs of progress despite the hostility of large numbers of clerics, both conservative Islam (Al-Azhar Sheikh, Grand Mufti, Salafi circles, etc) and the Coptic Church.

Role of the Army

With the departure of Mubarak the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been presented as a credible guarantor of transition to elected civilian power. The protesters remain very suspicious. The AFSC is made up of a score of senior army officers with their Head Marshal Tantawi. The Head of State has departed, the Constitution annulled, and parliament dissolved but we can not talk about regime change.

The army is in control and it remains an important institution with social enterprises, farms, clubs, hospitals and its academies. Many officers or former holders of military positions remain important in economic life, Administration and the media. The officers constitute a specific elite corps. The army, a key element of the security apparatus which includes between 350,000 and 500,000 men, came out of the shadows and took things in hand in order to avoid a shipwreck. The situation is more dangerous than in 1986, when the military had to intervene to restore order against an uprising of conscripts. Huge illusions exist, with many expressing sympathy with the military. The army enjoys great prestige because of the country's history, the wars against the State of Israel and the importance of patriotism. People say it is an army of the people. This may be true at the grassroots level, it is not true of the officers. The army has cleverly refused to enter in the spiral of repression.

Until then, it stayed behind the scenes. Now, it is projected onto the centre stage. So what will happen now? It is difficult to predict. Now, after the departure of Mubarak the debates begin: Are we heading for Portugal 1975 when the army gave the power to civilians? Will the regime close ranks? Will it lead to the scenario of Turkey in the 1980s with a strong army but in a formal democratic framework? What of the constitution? What kind of elections will take place? We can still only speculate about what will follow.

A wacky conspiracy theory has been circulating in certain media and intellectual circles including in Europe. The fall of the ra'is not a coup. There was a showdown with the United States, but this was not itself the source of the powerful mobilisations.

The Religious Question and the Role of the Muslim Brotherhood

The revolutionary process has undermined religious authorities, Muslim as much as Christian because of their

support for the regime. This applies to the Al-Azhar, a university and mosque which as much a foundation of official religious authority as the Coptic Church. Islamism in Egypt is plural. We can distinguish between Salafism, radical Islam which supports the use of arms, and finally the Muslim Brotherhood. There are also independent forms of Islamism, nationalists influenced by Islamic currents as well as religious conservatives who are not concerned with politics ..

The Salafists, ultra-fundamentalists, supported the regime. They denounced the demonstrations and the revolution which they regarded as a mutiny. The regime even allowed them access to state television and private channels to denounce the absence of patriotism (sic) of the protestors who they condemned as part of an American-Zionist or Iranian conspiracy!

The radicals, al-Jama'at al-Islamiya and al- Gihad, broken by repression, are committed to a violent strategy. Only two historical figures supported the Revolution: Abud and Tariq Al-Zomor [6]. Al-Al-Gama'at Islamiya called for an end to the process, refused to demand the resignation of Mubarak and offered to participate in political dialogue

The Muslim Brotherhood, regularly repressed and weakened, reappeared as Mubarak fell. Their role in the mobilisations was important but discreet. They joined the movement after its onset. They proved very effective during the baltagya attacks on the demonstrators through their organisational skills, but their attempts to negotiate with the regime were frowned upon and they soon ceased.

The Muslim Brotherhood has always had an important place in Egyptian politics. Founded in 1928, the Brotherhood has been a force since the late 1930s. During the Nasser period, they suffered a great deal of repression. From the 1970s, they were able to reconstruct and play a leading role. Nowadays they are structured, modern, and non-traditionalist, although they hold to some very conservative beliefs, for example, the refusal to accept a woman or Coptic head of state. A Muslim Brotherhood leader even suggested that Coptics should again be made to pay a capitation (guezia), or tax for non-muslims in an Islamic state. However, they are in favor of a parliament and they defend human rights.

They no longer prominently demand the implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) and assume a stance in favour of protest and democracy. Neither fascist nor anti-imperialist, they have not yet become the Turkish AKP. Nothing is impossible but what happens will depend on political and social dynamics and processes.

The Muslim Brotherhood always cultivated an ambiguous relationship with the regime. When, in 2005, under pressure from the United States, they were allowed to take part in Parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood - under the label 'autonomous' - gained 88 seats. In 2010, the regime's policy changed and they retained only one seat! Their strategy has always been characterized by a logic of voluntary restraint. They do not want direct confrontation, and their relations with the state are conditioned by their quest for legal recognition. This has led to very uncritical positions vis-a-vis the regime. For example, during certain events a few years ago they were able to ban anti-Mubarak slogans. Their supreme leader once declared himself willing to support the tawra'ath (hereditary succession). Several times the Muslim Brotherhood refrained from participating in demonstrations.

Their relations with the opposition are therefore complex. They do not want to surrender their room for manoeuvre. For some time, the regime made them a number of concessions in social and cultural areas, on such issues as the censorship of culture, giving way easily to campaigns from fundamentalists on movies or books so as not to appear timid in matters of religion and morality.

The Muslim Brotherhood has also made some false moves. Other elements have also played a role including the

new generations and new politicized. The game is not yet over for them and they are also not free of tensions and divisions.

They frequently seem to be attached to the military; thus, they were involved in discussions with Vice-President Omar Suleiman before Mubarak quit. One sign of the role that the army seems to award them is that the current president of the Constitutional Review Board belongs to the Islamist movement and the Vice-President is part of the Brotherhood. This committee comprises a range of political and religious tendencies. The Army gives them space and visibility with the aim of restoring calm. The episode of the Friday prayer with Youssef al-Qaradawi, also attests to this. In addition, part of the elites of dominant countries would not object to a Army-Brothers axis of power to ensure social peace and regional stability.

Options of the Dominant Classes

The army is trying to reassert its authority, to "modernize" in a different sense the result of this explosive crisis. It is constrained to make concessions including opening up to elements of the opposition. It is a question of redefining the terms of its control (the control of information, the role of the police, the legitimacy of the army, the political structure). The position of the army at the head of state has always had the political and financial support of the US and EU.

It seems to be moving toward the establishment of a conservative pluralism which would allow it to maintain its power and to achieve popular legitimacy and international credibility. "Democratisation" would not only be formal. Some heads will roll and some practices will be abandoned. But it will be limited because the central objective remains to preserve its interests and to ensure a new social calm. The counter-revolution is well underway!

It is too early to predict the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition force, the nature of whose recent evolution is unclear. Will they accept a compromise a la the Turkish secular state or will they follow the example of Pakistan with Islam playing a very increased role in the State and society? Will they see themselves forced to opt for a middle path? None of these formulas is inconsistent with the pursuit of current economic policies and with close partnership with Israel and the United States. The main sections of the opposition, Islamists as much as liberal democrats, are not hostile to neoliberalism.

The Labour Question

As the demonstrations mounted the social issue rapidly became prominent with a wave of strikes and workers' protests on an enormous scale. The advent of workers' struggle provided fuel for the anti-government movement. Their involvement first took the form of street demonstrations.

Three days before the departure of Mubarak a wave of strikes broke out [Joel Beinin has written a number of excellent articles on this subject in English] which then spread and affected many sectors throughout the territory. The Suez Canal was affected but without the navigation of vessels being affected [Provoking fears among the imperialist powers and the Gulf elites: 8% of the world's trade passes through the Suez Canal]. These strikes involved hundreds of thousands of workers in sectors as diverse as textiles, military production, transportation, gas and petroleum, cement, steel, hospitals, universities, telecommunications, without forgetting the Suez Canal region. Even the police demonstrated for higher salaries, probably to rebuild their image, tarnished by repression and deep resentment among the people.

The realities of the working world are complex and difficult: Wages in a context of skyrocketing prices, working conditions, the attitudes of certain companies, the absence of active union branches, union assets; a lot of thorny issues. Unemployment is high: officially 12%, it is in reality more than 20% at least. The rising prices are not just for food but also transportation, and fuel.

This wave has older roots, some would say over the last ten years which saw the rise and affirmation of workers' struggle despite severe repression: 2 million workers have taken part in 3000 strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations since 1998. These joined together economic demands (salaries, bonuses), social demands (right to employment, unemployment benefits, pensions, housing, medical care, free education) but also union demands. Their impact was such that the regime chose to make concessions.

One important indication of this is that the name of the Youth Movement of April 6 came from solidarity with the textile strikes of al-Mahalla al-Kobra in 2008. This emblematic struggle began in December 2006, and was not limited to specific demands but also involved directly confronting the official trade unionis. Another important case is the five-months strike in Tanta flax mill in 2009. Previously, forms of self-organization had grown with events such as demonstrations of support to the Palestinian people and against the war in Iraq. The struggles of textile workers, in the property taxes sector and transportation also charted the course.

The intervention of workers has led to the creation of a more organised, collective, and specifically social form of self-organisation. On February 9, transport workers went on strike and announced that they wanted to create their own independent union. They were demanding the lifting of the emergency law, the dissolution of the NDP, a new constitution, a government of national unity, the prosecution of corrupt officials, a minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds (about 130 euros). This last demand has been included in many conflicts.

The mobilizations of workers and the anti-regime movement were confronting the official trade unions, veritable conveyor belts of power. The Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) was formed in 1957 by military leaders, and union officials were often also members of the PND. The law prohibited even the existence of non-unions not affiliated to the EFTU. The attitude of union official was favourable to the regime, and this served to increase popular discontent. Many workers wanted to start expressing their demands. The echo of the wave was so powerful that the EFTU was forced to express support following the uprising in Tunisia, demanding price controls, wage increases and supplies to the subsidized food stores providing staple foods such as bread.

The range of demands is wide and includes many economic issues: wages and bonuses but also respect for the terms of contracts, denunciation of mass redundancies and demands for a change in the behaviour of the bosses. The shift from economic to political claims seemed very complicated in an authoritarian context. The desire for independent trade unionism is long-standing. It emanates from hitherto small active networks which aspire to break with the formal structure connected to the regime and which encourage the creation of autonomous unions and an independent trade union federation. [7].

The old demand for a pluralistic union (al-al-ta'adudya niqabya) of the left trade unionists has been reinvigorated by the demand for the freedom to establish independent trade unions. With great difficulties, two independent unions managed to obtain legal recognition: in 2008, the Tax Collectors' Union and in 2010, the health technicians. In the wake of protests and social policies, on January 30, the existing independent union leaderships and representatives of a dozen companies made public their plans for the founding of an autonomous confederation.

The military leadership wants to turn back the wave of working class struggle. It has announced plans to prohibit meetings and strikes, and multiplied appeals for calm. It has not been able to arrest the growth of the movement even when major strikes (al-Mahalla al-Kobra ...) have ended. It could not even bring itself to intervene directly because it would be interpreted as a confrontation with the revolutionary process. How long can this go on? The

pressures for a return to calm and economic recovery are high. They emanate primarily from the bourgeoisie, especially that of Egypt and the Gulf, which has much to lose. Part of Egyptian society may also be tempted by such an option.

Might the army encourage reforms on a social scale? Nothing is less certain, especially since the Egyptian elites are too marked by a spirit of authoritarianism that could almost be described as "feudal", especially in terms of social relationships, especially in business. Especially since the regime has not changed. The prospect of workers setting up trade unions or autonomous political structures, autonomous and combative, is not a pleasant one for the authorities.

The actions of workers weighed heavily on events and on the departure of Mubarak. Anger at the bottom of society remains strong. The range of sectors in turmoil attests to the vitality of the movement. Demands, both economic and democratic, raise the question of trade unionism, its status and its reality. The profound grievance towards the official trade union movement have been accentuated by the revolution. A real space for the demand for independent and representative trade unionism, has opened up.

Political Earthquake and Open Future

The political scene is experiencing an earthquake. All the political forces have been shaken by what happened, whether the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wafd, the Nasserites, or the left. Many political persuasions exist without necessarily being organised. More importantly, a new generation has taken its place in the public arena: Facebookers, that is to say young people in their thirties, who have studied and are in tune with globalization and connected via new media. A new period of politicisation has begun. Discussions concern a thousand and one subjects: the constitution, elections, citizenship, corruption, the role of the police, the relationship between Copts and muslims, the role of the army, the fight against corruption, social issues...Egyptian society is seething. Cultural expression demonstrates this with songs, poems and rap, highlighting this vitality.

Could the personality of Mohamed El-Baradei unify the opposition? Nothing is less certain. El-Baradei is respected but better known abroad. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for opposing Bush's plans for war in Iraq, but he has spent a long time away from Egypt and is out of the loop in terms of the political situation. Certainly he has been the object of a lot of expectation and hope but he has also disappointed his supporters by missing the start of the movement and by his approximation to the Muslim Brotherhood. Will he be able to take advantage of the credit he has earned? Other important figures could emerge, such as Amr Mussa, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary General of the Arab League.

The legal forces of opposition have demonstrated themselves to be rather distant from the movement, which has not sought to engage with them. They have been considerably discredited, especially when they sought to negotiate with Omar Souleyman after the departure of Mubarak. The Egyptian opposition has a wide range of legal parties such as the Wafd, the Tagammu', and the Nasserite party, not to mention the Muslim Brotherhood, banned since 1954, but tolerated by the regime.

There are also political movements from "civil society" such as Kefaya ("Enough!"), or the Egyptian Movement for Change, a coalition of activists from several opposition forces born in 2000 at a time of immense solidarity with the Second Palestinian intifada. This movement then was involved in opposition to the invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration before becoming a small but dynamic movement of democratic opposition to the Mubarak regime.

A Historic Opportunity for the Egyptian Left

The Egyptian Left has existed for a hundred years and consists of a range of very different persuasions; in fact it would be better to talk about the Egyptian lefts. The revolutionary process has opened up tremendous opportunities for them.

The most important is the Tagammu' (Gathering) Party (known in English as the National Progressive Unionist Party), which has legal status and holds several seats in Parliament. It was formed in the 1970s with the introduction by Sadat of a multi-party system. It was the only party which emerged from popular debate. A key figure was Khaled Mohieddin, one of the Free officers who represented several tendencies: Marxists, socialists, nationalists and enlightened religious groups. It also included many former communists after the dissolution of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1965.

The Tagammu' has a newspaper (Al Ahali) and sites around the country. It soon found itself in conflict with Sadat in particular when it opposed the signing of Camp David and was repressed. The Tagammu' continues to exist for better or worse, presenting candidates for elections with some success. It is basically a left reform party that did not constitute a threat to the regime because it was very accommodating to it. Its president has even said that Mubarak's departure would be negative, which led to a heated debate inside the party.

The Communist Party of Egypt, reconstituted underground in the mid- 1970s [8], was heavily involved in Tagammu' while trying to exist independently, although not without difficulties. The CPE has a split in the late 1980s and early 1990s around figures such as Michel Kamel because of problems with orientation and operation. This small organization is now in great difficulty because of its aging base and the recent loss of its two principal officers (Nabil al-Hilali and Youssef Darwiche).

With the rise in fundamentalism and of conservatism in the 1980s, the left went into retreat and suffered a number of serious internal crises. The fall of the USSR accentuated this. Some left groups which had been fairly radical and very prominent in the 1970s such as the small Revolutionary Communist League, even ceased to exist around the late 1980s and early 1990s [9]

Many left activists became involved in the establishment of NGOs and took up the cause of human rights. Furthermore, many elements of the left are no longer part of any organized framework. Trade unionists and leaders of associations are still present here and there throughout the country.

Students at Cairo University, 'Ayn Shams and the American University (AUC) created a group called Socialist Revolutionaries. Trotskyist in orientation, it is associated with the British SWP, known for its militant activism and its analysis of the USSR as State Capitalism. The group puts forward an special analysis of Islamism and argues for an alliance. It regards the Muslim Brothers as a reformist movement. This current also recently had a small split: there is therefore also now a Socialist Renewal current which expresses criticism of its methods of building the organization and supports the idea of a broad party of the left.

From the 2000s, a new wave of social protest has shaken Egypt. In the middle of the decade, strikes and workers' struggles erupted, especially with the iconic textile strike in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kobra in the Nile Delta which called into question the official union. We have witnessed a revival of social protest and activism in different professional categories. Attempts at building union networks resumed. Some NGOs did considerable work with meetings, trainings, reports, and magazines. We include the Dar al Khadamat al Niqabya [10] in Helwan lead by Kamal Abbas, a former steel worker arrested after the great strike of 1989, or the Coordinating Trade Union Committee which includes several dozen unionists from Cairo and the provinces of different persuasions and which seeks to develop an independent and combative voice.

The various left forces were involved in the protests of 2011. Note that the overwhelming majority of people who took to the streets had no membership or political affiliation. These citizens were expressing their discontentment and profound rejection of the regime and its embodiment in the form of authoritarian abuse, economic difficulties, enrichment on the back of huge corruption.

A huge phenomenon of politicisation is underway. The revolution has also led to a profound process of political regroupment. In this situation, political initiatives are increasing. The Muslim Brotherhood have set up a legal party called Justice and Freedom. Al-Wasat, composed of former members expelled from the Muslim Brotherhood for developing more moderate positions, has been granted legal status.

There have also been two left initiatives inspired by the revolution of January 25, by the demand for a civil state and by the call for social justice on a massive scale.

At the beginning of the revolution, independents and former members of Tagammu' established the Union of Forces of the Left. Then a call for the creation of a legal broad left party and legal was launched. Its signatories represent a wide range of political backgrounds: former Tagammu' members, members of the Socialist Renewal Current, former militants of groups from the 1970s union members, intellectuals, people from a social-democrat background, and others. At a meeting on Saturday 26 January, they founded the legal Popular Alliance [11], which wants to bring together people of different tendencies and generations to promote freedom and social justice.

On Friday, February 25, a network of militant workers around Kamal Khalil, a leading figure on the radical Left in the 1970s, who is now one of the leaders of the current Socialist Revolutionary current, began the process of legally establishing the Democratic Labour Party [12]. Open to employees (manual workers, farmers, etc) it seeks to express the voice of workers, support their demands and defend their interests. Their founding statement declares that while the political elites and business owners have had their own organizations, workers have not had that right.

Both initiatives are collecting together signatures and preparing their next congress. In the spirit of the revolution they aim to break with the regime, to establish a democratic and civil state as well as promoting a politics that fights capitalism and defends the rights and interests of the working class. Their aims can be summed up as freedom, civil status and social justice. Similarly, the objective is to give birth to a new party which is truly democratic ... Both programmes also include both social and economic demands (a minimum wage, an end to privatisation, policies which serve the masses, etc.)

Regional Impact

The Palestinian question has not had a significant role or been a significant issue in the popular movement. The deep causes of the revolt are essentially linked to internal democratic and social issues. Since the signing of the peace agreements with Israel, Egypt has established relationships with the State of Israel. During the second intifada, with the border question and the tunnels, the official policy led to disappointment and discontent. Pro-Palestinian sentiment is very strong: the occupation and oppression which has lasted sixty years has deep resonances. Typically, Egyptian followers are more in favour of a "cold peace", without trade or links with the Zionist state. Obama's election provoked a great deal of hope but anti-American sentiment in relation to the Palestinian issue, is again strong. A challenge to agreements with Israel under the current regime is not on the agenda. Some political forces (Left, nationalists, Islamists) will demand it nevertheless.

The Egyptian revolution has implications at regional and global levels. It is important not to speak of a mechanical domino effect but the Arab world is in full fervour: Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Sudan, Bahrain, Libya today, maybe

Morocco, Syria maybe tomorrow. And even Iran! The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and Maghreb fear what might happen. A real "Springtime of the people" is in prospect. This wave of protest resembles that which shook the countries of Eastern Europe in 1989.

Only the beginning...

In Egypt, the dictator has fallen and the process of revolution is far from complete. It is only just beginning. Given the support of imperialist countries for the regime, including the United States without underestimating the EU and France, pressure on the authorities and the battle to support the revolution is important for the struggle that is being played out in Egypt. Awareness of the realities and current dynamics will also challenge existing stereotypes and fears of this region and will have an impact on people from the Arab region living in Europe.

The commitment of young radicalized connected by social networks has initiated this process. Street demonstrations have caused this historic change. This revolution means the end of the generalised apathy and depoliticisation which often exist in an authoritarian context.

This popular wave is struggling for more democracy in countries where economic liberalisation has weakened the social situation of large segments of the population without providing any form of freedom in return. The victory of the revolutionary process is not yet certain. The democratic transition implies many pitfalls; it is not simply a matter of a simple normalisation process in a formal parliamentary framework of the parliamentary with the army in the background.

This victory has given the Egyptian people pride and represents a victory against the wall of fear. It serves as an example to the peoples of the Middle East and the Maghreb. A series of impressive advances have been achieved even if nothing is settled yet. Everything will depend on mobilization and the balance of power. Historical transformations are underway!

Paris March 8 2011

This text owes much to the many contributions published during the revolution. This includes texts from Kamal Abbas, Gamal Wa'el, Fatma Ramadan Hossam al Hamalawi, Shukrallah Alaa, Amr Abdel Rahman, Omar Chafe'Ã©, Yassine Temlali, Gilbert Achcar, Ahmed Shawky, Joel Beinin, statements from Left currents, NGOs, trade union networks, without forgetting exchanges with those involved in the movement of solidarity. The ideas expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers.

[1] This day is also National Police Day, which commemorates the day in 1951 when the British army attacked and killed 50 Egyptian police officers

[2] An enormous administrative building built before the revolution of 1952 in a Prussian style, which became the symbol of bureaucratism and which was immortalised in the film comedy with Adel Imam 'al irhaw wa al kebab'

[3] Mosque which is the resting place of a number of important figures

[4] British colonialism used the Christian minority as a tool with which to divide the anticolonial movement. In 1919, the powerful demonstrations for

independence affirmed the unity of both religions. The image of Father Serguios intervening at the al-Azhar Mosque reminds a powerful symbol

[5] Name of the chamber of deputies and of the senate

[6] Implicated in the assassination of Sadat in 1981

[7] See the article by the same author also on this site on the subject of independent trade unionism

[8] In 1965 the CPE (with two branches) chose to dissolve itself in order to join forces with the Nasserian socialists on the basis of the Soviet-derived theory of the 'non-capitalist road' towards socialism

[9] At the beginning of the 1990s the United Labour Party was launched. It brought together what was left of the left from the 1970s (Communist Worker's Party, Communist Party of January 8, Communist Congress Party and the al-Matraqa). The project soon ran aground.

[10] See their site at <http://www.ctuws.com>

[11] Al tahalluf al cha'bi. See «*Al i'laḥn ta'sisi «*hezb...*»***», Cairo, 26.02.2011, «*Al ta'sisi hezb al tahāḥluf al cha'bi*», Cairo, 28.02.2011.

[12] Hezb al 'ummāḥl al dimoqrati. See Hezb al â€˜ummāḥl al dimoqrati – taht al ta'sis, «*Al â€˜Ummāḥl masr al qalb al nāḥbid lil-thawra*», 02.03.2011 ; «*Al machrou' bernamig*» Hezb al â€˜ummāḥl al dimoqrati – taht al ta'sis», 25.02.2011