

# *The Arab World is on Fire...!*

**A Collection of texts on the great  
revolts shaking Egypt & Tunisia**



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9. We should not simply react in a populist fashion. We need to point out that the situations in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere represent the failure of capitalism and neo-liberalism.

The popular demands are based on underlying class interests. We need to understand their class content in order to pursue our anti-capitalist struggle at all levels, and to support these popular struggles from an anti-imperialist/anti-capitalist perspective.

In the days to come, the relations of power will be crucial to what is achieved by the struggle of the masses. The more the struggle is constrained, the more the outcome will favour the interests of the bourgeoisie as a block and imperialism. Even if the bureaucratic bourgeoisie is shaken by the manoeuvrings of the imperialists, the probability for the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the block of the dominant classes to regain control is far greater than the likelihood of victory by any autonomous popular alternatives.

We need to develop and offer analysis of these situations, and avoid potential negative impacts of blind support flowing from the low level of class-consciousness and struggle in the United States.

These are some initial thoughts to consider in the context of our general support of the uprisings in Egypt.

4 February 2011

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As we analyse these struggles, we should consider several points:

1. There is a constant struggle among the dominant classes to restructure bourgeois democracy, especially if it is being managed autocratically by one fraction and all power is concentrated in the hands of one individual.
2. In most cases within this type of social formation, the social base of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie is the army or sectors of the army, and/or the general repressive apparatus structure. Sadat and Mubarak were army generals. In most cases, the army or particular sections of the army act as the political organisations of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie fraction. One sector of the army could be under the leadership of this sector of the bourgeoisie and in service to imperialism, or it could serve feudal landlords — this is not cut and dried. We need to analyse these conditions further to understand the army’s role.
3. The sectors of the bourgeoisie acting against the bureaucratic bourgeoisie (which has been headed by Mubarak) are not progressive and should not be considered allies of the masses. The contradictions between these sectors are secondary contradictions, presently being resolved antagonistically. The bourgeoisie as a block is utterly pro-imperialist. Soon after Nasser, the imperialist political line within the Egyptian social formation made substantial gains. For example, aid from imperialists favoured the formation of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, undermined Nasser’s petit bourgeois nationalism, and greatly impaired the national bourgeoisie. More in-depth analysis is needed to understand the full internal impact of that political line.
4. Egypt’s role in assisting imperialism in the Middle East is significant, especially in relation to Israel. This also facilitates the development of a particular ultra-reactionary feudalist Islamic tendency, as we have seen in other social formations in the Middle East.
5. The struggle among the dominant classes is solely in the interests of those classes, even if the masses receive a few concessions. Genuine liberation depends upon the autonomous capacity of the masses, and their independence from and resistance to the bourgeoisie.
6. Sectors of the dominant classes against the hegemony of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie generally tend to lean on the petit bourgeoisie to influence the masses, to limit and prevent any deepening of the social contradictions that would allow a transition from an uprising to a revolutionary struggle. The petit bourgeoisie usually presents their class demands as the demands of the fundamental masses (those of the working class in particular); thus drowning the struggle in populism, opportunism and class collaboration.
7. The popular struggle will advance based on its capacity to resist cooptation by sectors of the dominant classes and imperialists who present themselves as in opposition to the bureaucratic bourgeoisie.
8. Imperialist politics have matured greatly in the past forty years. The practice of unilateral support for autocrats is over; now imperialists will lean on both camps and adjust their position as a situation develops. Imperialism must be unequivocally denounced.

ing class, will determine a) how far the demands could be pushed, and b) the continuation of these struggles to actually defeat the dominant classes and imperialism.

It will be important for us, non-dogmatically and from a non-ultra-leftist position, to avoid conflating these struggles with revolutions or concluding that they are victories, and thus deflating their actual effect.

Dictatorship is the capacity of a class to reproduce its dominance within a specific social formation. The dominant classes use the state apparatus as their political tools to administer, manage and regulate their dominance.

The anti-dictatorship struggle should not focus itself against one person, but against the dominant classes. So, it is important not to confuse the state apparatus with the government. The state apparatus is the machine of repression, and the government is the centre pole of that machinery. Elections tend to allow the dominant classes the possibility of rejuvenating the state apparatus by changing the government, favouring this alteration for the purpose of retaining their power.

In a sense they are constantly regulating bourgeois democracy. Of course, this is relative depending on the strength of the bourgeois dominant structure and the nature of their internal struggle, as well as their ability to maintain power in the face of popular struggle and imperialist interference.

In some instances of bourgeois democracy we encounter periods of particularly extreme forms such as autocracy and fascism. Even in these cases, we should not confuse the trees with the forest. The forest is always the dominant classes. The trees are these particular forms that power takes, or individual figureheads.

If we do confuse them, we are bound to make any number of the following errors:

- 1) To label these struggles revolutions and conclude that they are victories.
- 2) To call for a united front.
- 3) To limit our support to government change, allowing the restructuring of the relations among the dominant classes, even if they do concede some rights to the masses.
- 4) Be completely overtaken by reformism.
- 5) Go against the objective interests of the working class.

Since Nasser, a problem faced by the National Liberation Movement (but not only related to the NLM), is that a bureaucratic bourgeoisie has been consolidated within these social formations. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie has a tendency to be autocratic. In most of the social formations in question, it is this fraction of the bourgeoisie that, in its own interests and in the interests of all the dominant classes, possesses hegemonic political power.

Two types of struggle are presently occurring in Egypt, as well as in many other social formations (each of course with their own particularities): the struggle between the popular masses and the dominant classes, and the struggle among the different factions within the dominant classes for political control and preferential relation with imperialism.



## Interview with an Anarcho-Communist Activist in Freedom Square, Cairo

by the North-Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC)

**Can you please tell me your name and what movement you are from?**

I'm Nidal Tahrir, from Black Flag, a small group of Anarcho-Communists in Egypt.

**The world is watching Egypt, and even moving in solidarity. However, due to the internet being cut, information was difficult to find. Can you tell me about what has happened in Egypt in the past week? What did it look like from your perspective?**

The situation in Egypt is so crucial right now. It began with an invitation to the day of rage against the Mubarak regime on January 25th. No-one expected that an invitation to a day of rage from a loose group, a Facebook page, not really organised, called "We are all Khalid Said" (Khalid Said is a young Egyptian who was killed by Mubarak's police in Alexandria last summer), it was that Tuesday that began everything, it was the spark for the whole fire. On Tuesday there were big demonstrations in the streets in every Egyptian town, on Wednesday the massacre began. It began with trying to finish the sit-in in Tahrir Square late on Tuesday night, and continued into the following days, especially in Suez town. Suez has a special value in every Egyptian heart. It was the centre for resistance against the Zionists in 1956 and

1967, in the same district. It fought Sharon's troops back in the Egyptian-Israeli wars. Mubarak's police carried out a massacre - at least 4 people killed, 100 injured, gas bombs, rubber bullets, flame throwers, a strange yellow substance thrown above people, maybe mustard gas. Friday was called the Jumu'ah of Rage - Jumu'ah is Arabic for Friday, it's the national weekend in Egypt, in many Islamic countries also. It's a sacred day in Islam because of the big prayers on this day, called Jumu'ah prayer. It was planned for demonstrations to go on after prayers, at noon, but the police tried to prevent the marches with all of its power and violence. There were many clashes in Cairo, (downtown, in Mattareyah, east of Cairo), all over Egypt, especially in Suez, Alexandria, Mahalla (in the delta, one of the centres of the working class). From noon to sunset, people marched in Cairo to Downtown, for a sit-in in Tahrir, till Mubarak's regime was removed, chanting one slogan: "The people demand the removal of the regime". At sunset, 5pm CLT, Mubarak declared a curfew and brought the army into Egyptian towns. This curfew was followed by a police-planned breakout, letting out the criminals and thugs called Baltagayyah. The police planned a widescale breakout of criminals in many Egyptian prisons to scare people in Egypt. No police, many army troops couldn't control the street, people were scared. It was followed by a news jam on Egyptian TV channels, radios, newspaper about luddites in many towns, about thieves firing at people. People organised "popular committees" to secure every street. This was welcomed by the regime to make people more scared about instability in the country, but it is also a point we could start from to build workers councils.

**As of Wednesday, there are clashes between pro- and anti-Mubarak people. Is that the correct way to describe it? Who are the "Mubarak supporters?" How are these clashes affecting the attitudes of average working-class Egyptians?**

It's absolutely wrong to call it clashes between anti- and pro-Mubarak. The pro-Mubarak demonstration consisted mostly of Baltagayyah and secret police, to attack the protesters in Tahrir. It only began after Mubarak's speech yesterday, after Obama's speech too. Personally I think Mubarak feels like a slaughtered ox who is trying to throw his blood over his killers. He feels like Nero and wants to burn Egypt before his removal, trying to make people believe he's a synonym for stability, safety and security. In this way he's really made some progress - a holy national alliance has now been formed against the Tahrirites (Tahrir protesters) and the "Tahrir Commune". Many people, especially the middle class, are saying that the demonstrations must end because Egypt has been burned, famine has begun, but it's not true at all - it's only an exaggeration. Every revolution has its difficulties and Mubarak is using fear and terror to stay longer. Personally, I'm saying that even if the protesters were responsible for this situation, even IF, Mubarak must leave, he MUST go because of his inability to deal with the situation right now.



## Initial Thoughts on Egypt

by Jan Makandal

All too often, we on the Left attempt to prematurely analyse objective reality based on what we see as the expression of an internal contradiction, without thoroughly investigating, understanding or appropriating the internal factors, even at the level of perceptual knowledge.

Theory should not be reduced to the act of commenting or reaching verdicts on events (even if that includes analysis), but should instead be the process of understanding an objective reality. In this way, the production of theory should serve the proletarian struggle.

The struggles in Tunisia and Egypt, just to cite a couple of the recent ones, are not revolutions, or more precisely, they have not reached the stage of revolutionary struggles, though they may be on that path. The struggles are still on the level of demanding popular democratic reforms. A very thin line separates these from being reformist struggles. Therefore, these struggles should be seen as popular democratic uprisings, rather than revolutions. This clarifies the content and nature of these struggles, as well as their limitations. Their purpose is to enlarge bourgeois democracy.

The limitations are determined by the fact that these struggles are being waged under the leadership of sectors of the bourgeoisie, and most importantly the petit bourgeoisie, which the bourgeoisie is heavily leaning on to guarantee their control of the popular masses, and prevent any development of these struggles into revolution.

These struggles, even with their limitations, are an objective advancement over the previous order, and require our support. We need to support them in unity with the objective interests of the Egyptian proletariat and the international proletariat.

However, the risk is present for these struggles to be co-opted by the dominant classes. Only the autonomous presence of the popular masses, particularly the work-

The revolution is not over, because none of the substantial issues have been resolved: poverty, mass unemployment, corruption, cronyism, inequality, and so on. In addition to that of setting up a democratic system, the social question remains the central concern of Tunisians. The problems facing the country can only be solved by an active policy of redistributing wealth, breaking with the dictatorship of the markets.

Our organisations affirm their full solidarity with the struggle of the Tunisian people for freedom and social justice and our support for militant anti-capitalist Tunisians. We condemn the attitude of the Western States and more generally their political classes, both right-wing and social democratic, who have always actively supported the authoritarian power of Ben Ali.

**19 January 2011**

### Signed by:

<b>Alternative Libertaire (France)</b>	<a href="http://www.alternativelibertaire.org/">www.alternativelibertaire.org/</a>
<b>Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (Italy)</b>	<a href="http://www.fdca.it/">www.fdca.it/</a>
<b>Organisation Socialiste Libertaire (Switzerland)</b>	<a href="http://www.rebellion.ch/">www.rebellion.ch/</a>
<b>Union Communiste Libertaire (Québec, Canada)</b>	<a href="http://www.causecommune.net/">www.causecommune.net/</a>
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<b>Hombre y Sociedad (Chile)</b>	
<b>Colectivo Socialista Libertaria (Uruguay)</b>	<a href="http://periodicorojoynegro.blogspot.com/">periodicorojoynegro.blogspot.com/</a>

### **What do you see happening in the next week? How much is the position taken by the US government affecting the situation there?**

Nobody can figure out what will happen tomorrow or next week. Mubarak is a stubborn idiot and the Egyptian media is making the biggest media campaign in its history to detain the protests planned for next Friday, 4th February. There are calls for another million-person march to Tahrir, called the "Jumu'ah of salvation". The position taken by the US government affects us more than the demonstrations. Mubarak is such a traitor, capable of killing the whole people, but he couldn't say no to his masters.

### **What has the participation of class-struggle anarchists been? Who are their allies?**

Anarchism in Egypt is not a big trend. You can find some anarchists but it's not a big trend yet. Anarchists in Egypt have joined both the protests and the popular committees to defend the streets from the thugs. Anarchists in Egypt put some hope in these councils. The anarchists' allies in Egypt are the Marxists, of course. We are not now at a time of ideological debate - the whole left is calling for unity and then argue about anything. The anarchists in Egypt are a part of the Egyptian left.

### **What forms of solidarity can be built between revolutionaries in Egypt and revolutionaries in the "West"? What can be done immediately and what should we do in the long term?**

The most difficult obstacle Egyptian revolutionaries face is the cutting of communications. Western revolutionaries must put pressure on their governments to prevent the Egyptian regime from doing this. That's for now, but no-one can say what will happen in the long term. If the revolution is successful, then Western revolutionaries must build solidarity with their Egyptian comrades against the expected aggression from the USA and Israel. If the revolution is defeated, then it will be a massacre for all Egyptian revolutionaries.

### **What will the main tasks be, once Mubarak leaves? Has there been much planning about this on the street level? What have anti-capitalist revolutionaries proposed?**

The main task now, speaking about the street demands, is new constitution and provisional government, and then new elections. There's much planning about this issue by many political trends here, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Anti-capitalist revolutionaries are not very numerous in Cairo - the communists, democratic left and Trotskyites are calling for the same demands about the constitution and new elections, but for us as anarchists - anti-capital, anti-State too - we will try to



ensure that the committees that have been formed protect and secure the streets, make them stronger and try to turn them into real councils.

### What do you want to say to revolutionaries abroad?

Dear Comrades all over the world, we need solidarity, a large solidarity campaign and the Egyptian Revolution will win!



### - International Anarchist Communist Statement -

## Tunisia: the Revolution is not over

After a month of popular insurrection, the tyrant has fallen. Ben Ali and his gang have chosen the road to exile. It's a huge victory for the Tunisian people, and one that cannot but be welcomed by every freedom-loving person. It is also an example and a great hope for all the peoples of the region living in police States.

But the revolution is not over, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) still holds power with 161 out of 214 seats in parliament, and interim president Fouad Mebazaa and prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi are pillars of the dictatorship. Rather than real change, the first steps taken in the emergency mostly show the desire of those in power to calm the streets. There will be elections in sixty days but they will be held according to the rules of the current constitution, tailored by the RCD. Consultations for the establishment of a government of national unity have begun, but the RCD is choosing which parties can participate. The aim of the operation is clear: to nullify the victory by the people by channelling the revolt into the political ground. There is a serious risk that the ruling party will co-opt the servile opposition and introduce a sham democracy once the fires of rebellion have died down. Neither can we rule out the possibility of the rise of a new dictator who, like Ben Ali, will have the backing of the Élysée Palace and the White House.

Ordinary Tunisians are aware of the pitfalls that endanger the freedom they have just snatched at the cost of dozens of deaths. Across the country, they are organising themselves into self-defence committees in order to fight against the militias of the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan that continue to ravage the country. They are not fooled by the manoeuvres to keep the RCD in power. Defying the state of emergency which is still in force, protesters were again on the streets on 16th January demanding real change, shouting: "We did not revolt so that a new government of unity could be formed with the cardboard opposition parties".

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Audio Interview: [http://electricrnb.podomatic.com/entry/2011-02-03T00\\_56\\_54-08\\_00?x](http://electricrnb.podomatic.com/entry/2011-02-03T00_56_54-08_00?x)

Interview edited by Anarkismo.net



**To summarize, what's your view on the current events? What do you think they symbolize?**

This is the start of a new era, the masses are rising, and their freedom is at stake, the tyrannies are shaken, it is for sure the start of a new world.



## **The Arab World is on Fire: Dialogue with a Syrian Anarchist**

**by José Antonio Gutiérrez Danton**

*The great revolts shaking the Arab world in Yemen, Algeria, Tunisia and now Egypt have caught everyone by surprise. They are, without a doubt, one of the most significant events of our time sending clearly out there the message that no place on this world is doomed to be some imperialist-backed-dictator's playground. Extraordinarily authoritarian regimes like that of Ben Ali were shown completely powerless in the face of a united and determined people on struggle. The people carrying these rebellions are youth, workers, unemployed, the poor, who are right now shaping the face of the region; sending cold shivers to the cliques sitting in Washington and Tel Aviv. Not all the weapons amassed by the Mubarak regime, not all the US military aid have had the power to stop the protest from growing. They are showing the might of the people and the working class when they come together, they are showing the political capacity of ordinary people to build organisms of dual power with a clear libertarian instinct and they are proving the world that we are in an era of revolutionary change. We have had a quick dialogue with our comrade and friend **Mazen Kamalmaz** in Syria, editor of the Arabic anarchist blog [<http://www.ahewar.org/m.asp?i=1385>] who talks about the importance of this splendid political development.*

**It seems that all of a sudden massive waves of protests are shaking the foundations of long standing oppressive regimes in the Arab world... were there any signs that these protests could happen?**

That is one of the interesting things about this revolutionary wave spreading in the Arab world; it struck exactly when almost no one was expecting it. Few days only before the mass demonstrations in Egypt, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, declared the Egyptian government to be stable, and now nothing is stable in the area: the masses are on revolt and everywhere the repressive regimes are expecting the worst. There are things in common to these big incidents, which went unnoticed to the regimes, the statesmen and even the intellectuals, such as the anger which was there, hidden, silenced by the repression of the States, the poverty and unemployment that were on the rise everywhere... but the governments, local and western alike, thought that this anger could be kept under control... we now know how wrong they were.

**What's the significance of the flight of Ben Ali in Tunisia?**

It is only the first step of the cascade to follow. It meant that people, revolting people, can defy the repression and win. It is very early to talk about the final solution yet, it is still all too complex now, but the people got to know their real power and are still in the streets, so the struggle is still open to many possibilities.

**Where is the revolt spreading to? What countries are now facing massive rebellions?**

Now we can say with confidence that anywhere could be next. Maybe Algeria, Yemen and Jordan are hot spots for revolt, but we have to keep in mind that an Egyptian revolution would have a great impact everywhere, beyond the worst expectations of all the dictators and their supporters anywhere.

**What's the actual implication of a revolution in Egypt, the second largest recipient of US military aid in the world?**

Egypt is the biggest country in the Middle East and its strategic role is very important. It is one of the main pillars of the US Middle East policy. Even if the old regime could survive for some time or even if the new regime would be pro-American, the pressure of the masses will be always there from now on. In a word, the US, the main supporter of the current regime, will suffer badly due to the revolt of the Egyptian masses.

**What's been the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in these protests? What's been the role of the old guard of the left?**

One thing that is very important about these demonstrations and rebellions is that they were totally spontaneous and initiated by the masses. It is true that different political parties joined later, but the whole struggle was to a great extent a manifestation of the autonomous action of the masses. That is true also for the Islamist political groups. Maybe these groups think now that any election could bring them to power, but with revolting masses in the streets this is difficult, I think that the masses will actively refuse to submit again to any repressive power, but even if this could happen, people will not accept this time to be just subjects, most of all with fresh euphoric memories of the peak of freedom they won by their own struggle. No power could that easily force them to submit again to any kind of repressive regime.

Another thing you have to keep in mind is that with revolutions people will be more open to libertarian and anarchist ideas, and liberty will be the hegemonic idea of the time, not authoritarianism. Some of the Stalinist groups just represent the ugly face of authoritarian socialism... for example, the ex-Tunisian Communist Party participated alongside the ruling party of Ben Ali in the government that was formed after the overthrow of Ben Ali himself! Another authoritarian group, the Tunisian Workers Communist Party, participated actively in the demonstrations, but could only expose its contradictions: it called at the very moment of Ben Ali's escape to form local councils or committees to defend the revolt, just to retract very soon and call for a new assembly and government. In Egypt it is almost the same happening, there are reformist left groups, such as the National Progressive Unionist Party (or *Tagammu*), and some other groups of revolutionary authoritarian leftists.

I cannot tell exactly about the role of anarchists and other libertarians - there is a growing council communist tendency beside our anarchist one - due to lack of communication with our comrades there, but I have to stress what I've said before: that these revolutions were made mainly by the masses themselves. In Tunisia, the strong local trade unions played a big role in the late stages of the revolt.

I want to talk in more detail about the local committees formed by the masses, which are one of the most interesting manifestations of its revolutionary action. In the face of the looting started mostly by the ex-secret police, people formed these committees as really democratic institutions, a real competition to the power of the ruling elite and its authoritarian institutions... in Egypt now there are two governments; the local committees and the Mubarak government that is hidden behind the tanks and the rifles of its soldiers. This is happening in a region that is used to dictatorships and authoritarianism... that is the great thing about revolutions, that they transform the world so fast. That doesn't mean that the struggle has been won; on the contrary, this means that the real struggle has just started.