

Intakes: The Arab Spring in the Autumn of capital



AUFHEBEN'S INTRODUCTION

'The Arab Spring in the autumn of capital' was written at the end of November 2011 by 'Friends of the Classless Society', based in Berlin. Originally in German and translated into English, the text was then updated at *Aufheben's* request with the addition of a postscript that was written at the end of June 2012.

We have published this text because we think that it provides an insightful and at times incisive analysis of what has become known as the Arab Spring. Certainly its analysis serves to puncture the enthusiastic accounts put forward by both mainstream liberals, who have seen the Arab Spring as a series of democratic bourgeois revolutions that will usher in parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and economic property, and the autonomists and left who see the uprisings in the Arab world as a manifestation of an emerging amorphous global anti-capitalist movement.

However, it perhaps goes without saying of course, that we have some quibbles. We will mention a few examples.

First, at the risk of 'mentioning the war', what is striking to a reader of the text outside Germany is the deference the authors pay to the 'anti-German German left'. This seems to oblige them to take a pro-Israeli stance, presumably for fear of being denounced as being anti-Semitic. Thus, in passing, we are given the picture of a plucky little Israel repeatedly taking on and defeating goliath in the form of the mighty Arab states. Their attempt to distinguish a 'communist critique' of Zionism as simply a national liberation ideology from the 'necessarily anti-Semitic' critique put forward by the left seems to us to be too simple if not a little feeble. Yet the question of Israel and

Zionism is rather tangential to the main argument of the text. It certainly does not serve to obscure the important point they make that – to the surprise and consternation of much of the left – the question of Palestine has not been much of an issue raised by the movements of the Arab Spring.

Second, their analysis of the class composition of the Arab world seems to us to gloss over the importance of the petit-bourgeoisie particularly as organised within the bazaar. We would suggest that the Middle Eastern petit-bourgeoisie, and in particular its relation to the proletarianised surplus population, has been vitally important in the history of the Middle East – for example in the triumph of Islamism in the Iranian revolution of 1979 and in the Baathist revolutions in the 1950s. It is also likely to be a major determinant in the development of the Arab Spring.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, is the notion of the decline of capitalism (or the capitalist relation as they would have it) that serves to frame the text. This is most evident in the very title 'The Arab Spring in the autumn of capital' and in the conclusion of the postscript, but it is a notion that is implicit throughout the text. This would seem to be based on the fact of the large scale proletarianisation, and the creation of a surplus-population, in both the Middle East and across the world. For the Friends of the Classless Society this, it would seem, has created the conditions for world communism. This is not the place for an extended argument over this issue – and we must admit that we are not familiar with the theory upon which they base this notion of decline – but we would point out that even if such proletarianisation, and the creation of a surplus-population, is a necessary

condition for the end of the 'capital relation' it certainly is not a sufficient one.

Indeed it must be said we are not interested in scholastic 'proofs' concerning the existence of God or the abstract possibility of communism that has come to bedevil what now passes for the ultra-left - particularly at a time when a universal caliphate would seem a far more likely prospect than world communism. Indeed, what attracted us to this text is that despite any theoretical shortcomings it might or might not have, it is a serious attempt to analyse the concrete situation in the Middle East that has given rise to the phenomena of the Arab Spring. It is certainly a good starting point for debate.

Aufheben
Brighton, July 2012

1

The uprisings in the Arab world are directed against dictatorial conditions, against the historical backwardness of those countries' regimes. For a long time, military dictatorships all over the third world gave reason to believe capitalism and worldwide democracy to be incompatible. But now, Arab societies are actually late-comers in a global tendency of democratization which has put an end to both Latin American military dictatorships and state capitalist regimes in the east. This tendency is neither inescapable nor irreversible. But it would appear that precisely as the western left has taken to railing against "eurocentrism", mass movements have emerged in the Arab world, heading for nothing short of parliamentarianism, separation of powers, freedom of press and assembly, human rights, free labour unions, and so forth, all those things that were attained in a long history of bourgeois revolutions and proletarian class struggles in Europe and the United States. In all likelihood, Islam will play a role in the new constitutions being drawn up in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and, certainly, there is something to western governments' worries that there could be jihadists among the Libyan rebels these governments helped in their victory over Gaddafi. There is, however, little suggesting that this will, like in 1979 in Iran, lead to a clerical regime of terror. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the winners of the Tunisian parliamentary elections, the Ennahdha Party, insist that they want to emulate the successful model of the Turkish AKP, westernized capitulants in the eyes of true-blooded fundamentalists, and even the shady Transitional Council in Libya is dutifully reciting sentences about democracy and human rights. The youth, having set the pace for the movements, is less

interested in Islamic morals than in freedom and prosperity; they are not drawn to the Afghan mountains but to cities in Europe, where they are neither needed nor wanted.

The current state of the world economy gives one every reason to doubt the story will turn out for the good, especially considering that the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt could not even be saved by the fact that they could point to decent growth rates even during the recent global economic crisis. Rather, the tumbling price of human labour power is what is turning the Arab world into a social crisis zone and what has led to the recent eruptions. Their target, at first, could not be anything but the authoritarian governments that had managed this misery for a long time with sheer repression. As the authoritarian grip weakened, the class character of the uprisings came to light, having been easily overlooked as the autocrats were being toppled.

As the global economic crisis reveals both economic liberals and Keynesians to be at their wits' end, the primary interpretations of the Arab uprisings will probably be shown to be wishful thinking, even if they both grasp parts of the truth: it is fairly indicative that the uprisings are said to be inspired by a yearning for liberalization by some, and rejection of neoliberalism by others, with both sides being equally partially right. For example, the German conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* cheered the prospect of a "market economy for Arabia", because "countries like Egypt and Tunisia can only attain prosperity and create jobs for their youth, if the current system of 'crony capitalism' is replaced". Only this can lead to the emergence of a "broad *Mittelstand*",¹ which, so far, could find no space "between the numerous mom and pop stores and the few fat cats at the top" because of the "interlacing of state and economy". The liberal dream of thriving market economies on the southern shore of the Mediterranean finally putting the "youth's talent, their greatest untapped resource" to use is somewhat absurd in times when the countries on its northern shore are on the verge of bankruptcy and have no idea what to do with this allegedly precious resource.

The left's hope that, liberated from the autocrats, the lower classes can now restore the "social justice" lost in decades of neoliberal reform appears to be equally strange. The *New Left Review's* dreams of a "generous Arab internationalism (...) envisaging (...) the equitable distribution of oil wealth in proportion to population across the Arab world" are a prime

¹ The German term *Mittelstand* is more specific than the English middle class and refers to small and medium sized companies that are often family-owned and are said to be particularly "innovative".

example of this delusion.² Seen through the eyes of both market liberals and the statist left, the Arab kleptocracies appear as accidents of history, in one case as self-anointed “fat cats” preventing free competition, in the other as regimes backed by imperialism and preventing mass prosperity, which could otherwise be easily attained. Things look differently if one conceives these regimes as the peculiar form in which capital relations have asserted themselves in this region, not as a historic necessity, but not an accident either and certainly the result of a history of class struggles.

2

At first, workers' struggles in the Arab world were all subordinated to the anti-colonial liberation struggle, which was in part directed against the domestic elites backed by the colonial powers. Though few in numbers, workers repeatedly played a significant role in attaining national independence through strikes and protests, be it in Algeria, Egypt or Iraq. With their help, new figures, most of them hailing from the *petit bourgeoisie* and dressed in military uniforms, came into power and, being upstanding patriots, got to work on the modernization of their respective countries. These countries' backwardness had been revealed, much to the embarrassment of every Arab nationalist, when the tiny Jewish state had held its ground militarily against the assault of the Arab states in 1948. The 1952 *coup d'état* of the Egyptian Free Officers around Gamal Abdel Nasser, that of their counterparts of the same name in Iraq in 1958, the Front de la Libération Nationale's (FLN) victory in the Algerian civil war in 1962, and a bewildering series of coups in Syria spawned populist regimes in every populous Arab country; in 1969, the Free Officers around Colonel Gaddafi took power in Libya as latecomers onto the scene.

Though the old large-scale landowners and commercial capitalists were then pushed aside for their lack of productivity and political powerlessness, a bourgeoisie capable of kick-starting industrialization still did not emerge. So, the regimes soon discovered the state as the appropriate lever for national development; in a sense, they became socialists against their own will and thus gravitated towards the Soviet Union. Land reforms differing in their extent were followed by nationalizations not just of foreign but also of domestic companies and by the attempt to develop a national industry through tariff walls and national planning, otherwise known as “import substitution industrialization” in the

economists' lingo. All of this was dubbed “Arab socialism” and could very well have been conceived by the theorists of totalitarianism. Nasser's ideology, for example, though he signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1955, “is part of a tradition of a *völkisch* Germanophile Arab nationalism” and is “certainly informed by German National Socialism”.³ It decidedly distanced itself from Marxism by defending the family and Islam, by distinguishing between exploitative and non-exploitative capital, and by advocating class harmony within the people; based on the myth of the Arab nation, its virulent enmity against Israel was a matter of course and served as a kind of social glue.

For workers, Arab socialism had a dual character. Though politically disenfranchised, the workers were recognized as a productive part of the nation: “the workers don't demand; we give” (Nasser). Whenever they violated these rules, they faced ruthless repression. In their first year in power, the Egyptian Free Officers crushed a strike by textile workers and hung two of its leaders; unions were subjected to direct state control in every one of these countries. In addition to their anti-imperialism – Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 triggered a storm of enthusiasm, with the Arab union federation calling on the oil proletariat to embargo France and Britain – the regimes drew their support from their ability to improve the working class's material conditions, despite all of the repression workers faced. For example, the Egyptian government subsidized food staples and housing, shortened the working day, doubled the minimum wage, guaranteed every college graduate a job and created new jobs in the rapidly expanding public sector; from 1960 to 1964, real wages in Egypt supposedly doubled.

The state socialist option was so enticing for post-colonial regimes that even the pro-western Habib Bourgiba, who had ruled Tunisia in an authoritarian manner from its independence, opted for it. Under the leadership of a high-ranking union official, agricultural cooperatives emerged, companies were nationalized, and a ten-year plan for the economy was drawn up. As far as the details go, there were differences between the regimes – the state socialist Algeria had elements of economic self-management that even fooled the Situationists⁴ – but their general features and social results were mostly the same. With its ideology of a “non-capitalist path of development” the Arab left remained captive to this history:

² Rainer Hermann, ‘Marktwirtschaft für Arabien’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21st May 2011; Perry Anderson, ‘On the concatenation in the Arab world’, *New Left Review* 68 (2011), p. 14.

³ Bassam Tibi, *Militär und sozialismus in der dritten welt*, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 200.

⁴ Situationist International, ‘Address to the revolutionaries of Algeria and of all countries’, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/10.address.htm>

Most Arab Marxists embraced a strategy of stages: first the nationalist, anti-imperialist struggle, then the struggle for social progress and socialism. When it turned out that army officers were more effective than workers and peasants in overthrowing British and French imperialism and their local allies and that the Soviet Union accepted the military regimes as allies despite their refusal to adopt 'scientific socialism', the Marxists reluctantly embraced them. The regimes accepted this embrace only if the Marxists abandoned their independent outlook or submerged it far beneath the surface. The strategy of stages provided a rationale for the deferral of class struggle and allowed the Marxists to continue to imagine that they spoke in the name of workers and peasants.⁵

Sometimes the military regimes even went further than the left's state socialist ideas: after the Iraqi Communist Party – the country's most important political force in the 1940s and 1950s – had called for a national-democratic revolution under the auspices of the industrial bourgeoisie, the Baathists summarily eliminated the weak bourgeois class through nationalizations. The Arab left's statist strategy is not the result of their subjective incompetence, but rather expresses the objective limits the labour movement faced at the time: in a sea of peasants, the workers were but a small minority absorbed by the struggle against monarchs, colonial powers, and pre-modern conditions; there was no basis for a socialism amounting to more than state capitalist modernization: it is no coincidence that the communists in the Arab world took the Soviet Union as a role model as it had shown how an agrarian country with a few industrial centres can be beaten into the industrial age with ruthless state power.

As early as the late 1960s the long decline of Arab socialism started. Like in other post-colonial countries, the attempt to jump-start an autonomous national economy from the state command centre reached its limits: the massive migration from the countryside to the cities overtaxed the state's ability to create jobs despite a massive inflation of the public sector; the importation of machinery from developed countries led to a shortage in foreign currency; social spending cut into the budget for governmental investments. And, just as the defeat in the Israeli-Arab war of 1948 had sounded the death knell for the old colonial elites and paved

the way for the nationalist officers' coups, it was now the debacle in the 1967 Six Day War against Israel that revealed the resounding weaknesses of Arab socialism. Without weakening the state's grip on society, economic reforms, generally termed neoliberal, were launched, though their starting dates and pace varied from country to country: state enterprises were privatized, land reforms rolled back, thereby further speeding up migration to the cities, social spending and food subsidies cut and the focus was shifted from "import substitution" to export orientation. Workers' struggles, mostly against privatization, as well as food riots by the urban poor against cuts in food subsidies, slowed these developments down and even partially reversed them in some cases, but were unable to stop them in the end.

Meanwhile, the fundamentalist oil sheiks in the Gulf states, who had always felt threatened by Arab socialism, saw their power increase greatly when they were able to deflect a further debacle for the Arab states in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when their oil embargo on Israel's western allies caused the oil price to soar. The decline of nationalism in a progressive-socialist disguise and the rise of the Gulf states' Wahhabist rulers coincided temporarily with, and caused a profound transformation of, the whole region: the labour migration to the Gulf monarchies on the one hand and the circulation of the oil rent through a network of Islamic banks and investment funds on the other signaled the end of the national development framework. This is the backdrop against which the rise of Islamism took place. Not only did it inherit the role of Arab socialism as the dominant anti-imperialist ideology, but it found its followers in the growing mass of the surplus population and in the "devout bourgeoisie" doing business with the Gulf states or working there occasionally. In the sense that the fundamentalist oil sheiks supported it with all their might by building mosques everywhere and distributing religious literature, one might very well label this "Petro-Islam": "the Wahhabization it implemented had tended to fluctuate with the price of a barrel of oil".⁶ Among the unpropertied classes, the slum inhabitants who have no access to regular wage labour are mainly the ones to whom religious promises of salvation and the Islamists' soup kitchens appealed as a result of their miserable material situation. The working class in a narrower sense going face to face with the class enemy on a daily basis, on the other hand, was less susceptible to the class harmony – garnished with a little charity – that the Islamists preached. In this sense, the rise of Islamism

⁵ Joel Beinin, *Workers and peasants in the modern Middle East*, Cambridge 2001, p.141.

⁶ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: the trail of political Islam*, London 2002, p.73.

indicates a shift in the composition of the Arab proletariat.

Thus, the promise of material welfare, always coupled with repression, for the majority of the population, a population much more proletarianized than it was in the post-world war two years, has been fading away since the early 1970s. Of state socialism, only the authoritarian state remains and neoliberalism emerged without cultural or political liberties. The result of this history is both a gigantic army of unemployed or underemployed proletarians and a peculiar amalgamation of a clientelist state economy and neoliberalism. Starting with colonialism, the region was integrated into the world system without ever sparking an independent accumulation; the development stopped halfway, as it liquidated the old land gentry and drove the masses into the cities without turning them into productive wage workers. A bourgeois class able to rule did not emerge anywhere and thus power is left to the military or, in the Gulf states, to oil dynasties. Therefore, state and economy have a tendency to melt, political rulers and economic profiteers tend to be identical and have a life independent of society in general.

As far as the last point is concerned, Colonel Gaddafi's Libya is the most extreme example. In a narrower sense of the word, in Libya there is no society separate from the state, in that the economy consists only of the distribution of the oil rent and all relations between individuals are mediated by the ubiquitous state apparatus which also instrumentalizes the old tribal structures. Although the Free Officers under Gaddafi who took power in 1969 tried to develop an independent economy like the other Arab socialist states, the country remains totally dependent on the export of oil and gas despite all changes in course; in the 1970s, the time of total nationalization of the economy and close ties to the Soviet Union, as much as in the 1980s when privatization started and foreign investors were sought and in the post-September 11 era when Gaddafi was intent on losing his image of the *enfant terrible* of international politics and on becoming a reliable partner of the 'free west'. Since the 1969 coup, the population has grown six-fold and mostly lives in the cities and unemployment is at 30%, though this entails far fewer hardships than elsewhere in Africa due to the alimentation with the money gained from the export of fuel. Because of its abundant oil deposits, the country was able to preserve the paternalist-welfare aspects of Arab socialism to a greater degree, despite certain cuts in the last decades. There is no history of class struggle in this country and, because social cohesion is created exclusively by the leader Colonel Gaddafi's unlimited power, merely deposing the

hated head of state in order to steal the uprising's thunder was not an option. Though it is true that the uprising was started in an unruly manner by youths who decided to assault barracks in order to arm themselves and were then commanded into military order by a leadership of defectors from Gaddafi's regime, this process cannot be characterized as the recuperation of a social revolt because civil war was inevitable from the very start; also, no discord between the youth and the military leaders has been reported so far. In Egypt, the official end of Arab socialism can be dated precisely to the year 1974, when Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, was facing a state budget crisis and announced the *infitah*, economic opening, and developed closer ties to the United States, leading to a peace treaty with Israel in 1977.

The way he went about doing this is reminiscent of the way a demolisher operates: under the IMF's close supervision, the state retreated from its role as a public capitalist and social carer and hawked off public companies to deserving party and military officials. Much like the Aswan dam, built with Soviet help, symbolizes the era of governmental economic construction, Special Economic Zones and office towers built out of steel and glass in the middle of nowhere stand for the neoliberal turn.⁷ A new thrust of development, pulling the population with it, did not, however, take place. The population has doubled since 1980 and about half of it lives in the cities. At least half of 15 to 29-year-olds are unemployed. There are about five to six million slum inhabitants in Greater Cairo alone. With its dependence on tourism, revenue from the Suez Canal, money transfers from Egyptian expats, and, last but not least, foreign aid from the United States, Egypt, too, has many characteristics of a rentier economy:

The rent structure of the Egyptian economy is, in effect, no longer based on the exploitation of a local labour force, which is available in numbers exceeding the needs of tourism, the industry processing local resources (cotton, oil, agro-industry) or imported semi-manufactured goods for the auto or electromechanical industry and those of commercial services. The result is a proliferation of artificial service jobs and a saturation of the administration, along with corruption and disguised panhandling which are ubiquitous and block the economic and social machine,

⁷ Cf. Marc Lavergne, 'Egypte, le développement au défi du néo-libéralisme économique' (2010), <http://marclavergne.unblog.fr/files/2011/02/egyptedvtdurab/leetnoliberalisme.pdf>

but also allow for the survival of millions of 'surplus' mouths.⁸

The great majority of the population is unable to get a job in the public or the industrial sector, but ekes out a living in the economy of squalor, euphemistically termed the "informal sector". Having been a minority in a sea of peasants half a century ago, the working class is now a minority in a sea of the superfluous. The fact that workers' wages can hardly guarantee their survival amid this surplus proletariat is hardly surprising.

Compared with the poorhouse Egypt, the situation in Tunisia appears a little better, but is fundamentally very similar. After the short state socialist interlude in the 1960s, an all-encompassing authoritarian state remained here as well, mercilessly pushing through economic reforms at the expense of the proletarianized in the 1980s; hundreds died in strike waves and riots fighting this trend. Ben Ali's highest priority after his coup was the implementation of measures dictated by the IMF in exchange for relief in the state budget crisis: privatizations as well as cuts in social spending and food subsidies.⁹ The historical tendency of the dissolution of the peasantry was even stronger here and the percentage of those working in agriculture fell to 16 per cent, without those released from agriculture ever being able to be absorbed by a dynamic capitalism: the relatively developed cores are marked by service jobs with miserable pay, in tourism but also in call centres outsourced from France; industry is limited to sweatshop suppliers for European companies providing unskilled jobs that pay a fraction of the wages in Europe; the interior is marked by extreme poverty: in the mine region Gafsa, the site of repeated unrest, for example, unemployment is at 40 percent; and particularly in the cities, the population, above all the youth, is shown clearly that its labour power is not needed. In Tunisia, much like in Egypt, the historical backdrop of the struggles in 2011 is marked by the fact that the peasants that dominated the era of anti-colonialism have been replaced by a population that is proletarianized, urbanized and well-educated, but excluded from prosperity and ruled by a state that makes the population feel the decline in value of its labour power through harassment and police violence.

3

The revolt in Tunisia was the starting point for all of the revolts that followed it, the single spark that lit a prairie fire. The rebels in the other countries were swept along by the Tunisian

uprising that eventually led to Ben Ali's fall. Many, mostly young, people, who had no prospects of a better life despite many of them having a good education, saw their own situations reflected in Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who was harassed because he was unable to pay the bribes the police demanded of him. The uprising was inspired by the hope of escaping the confines of coercion, humiliation, and force. It was hardly a coincidence that 25th January, the day the country normally celebrates the Egyptian police, was chosen as the starting day of the protests in Egypt. All of the movements are united in their rebellion against authoritarianism and excessive police violence that anyone can become a victim of. They are supported by a large part of the population, probably even the majority, uniting under the slogan "Away with the Dictator" across class divisions. In that sense, those who see the uprisings as the result of the desire to depose a dictatorship are right rather than the proponents of an over-simplified materialism claiming them to be the direct result of economic misery – the rising price of bread with its dramatic impact on the poorer strata of the proletariat, for example.

The cross-class character of the uprising manifests itself in the ubiquity of national flags. This new patriotism was not at first of a chauvinist character – the national flags of the other countries in revolt were also waved and cheered; it was directed against the domestic ruling caste. Therefore, it appears to be the kind of revolutionary republicanism that would make the hearts of Hannah Arendt's adherents leap. But as such, it expresses the, for the moment necessary, illusion of a community of free and equal citizens without class distinctions that had to be disappointed soon thereafter. Whereas the toppling of the dictatorship united the rebels, leading those in Egypt to even view the military as an ally, soon after the beheading of the king, the contradictory class interests come to the fore.

Even some capitalists who somehow managed to be successful without any close ties to the regime sided with the uprising, because they considered themselves to be at a disadvantage in the nepotistic system, because they do not hold the necessary reins and long for legally binding regulations that everyone has to abide by, thereby guaranteeing fair capitalist competition. For example, an Egyptian textile capitalist expressed his sympathy for a strike in a state-owned textile factory. He certainly did not have the well-being of the workers on his mind, but rather the unfair public sector competition not being required to pay its workers the same minimum wage he himself was required to pay.¹⁰ Bribing government

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cf. Beinlin, *Workers and Peasants*, p. 154-156.

¹⁰ Rainer Hermann, 'Ägypten: vorgeschichte und

officials and paying protection money to corrupt police officers is part of everyday life for many businessmen. Also, they fail to see why the government offices making important political and economic decisions are held by the incompetent nephews, cousins, and friends of the governing few, while those who have been educated to do this kind of thing are selling oranges on street markets. Therefore, the regimes had opponents even within the ranks of the propertied class and western liberals' hopes that the market economy would really take off after the end of "crony capitalism" were based in part on them. They were, however, rather irrelevant for the despots' toppling, not least because of their weakness in numbers, and attempts to make cracks between the different ruling factions – those with a more statist orientation and with close ties to the military, and those more oriented towards neoliberalism close to Mubarak's son – responsible for the upheavals in Egypt ignore the fact that their power was drawn from the streets that were not populated by masses of frustrated small businessmen and fat cat capitalists.

The unruly youth was often named as the central, almost the sole, agent in the uprisings; not surprisingly, as the spectacle would rather talk about generational than about class conflicts; two Middle East experts from Germany simply called the unrest in the Arab world a "rebellion of the young *Mittelstand*".¹¹ The wishful thinking of western liberals only contains a grain of truth to the extent that educated, urban, secular, internet-savvy youths made up a large part of the early protests. They organized these protests themselves without any leaders or political parties; they have had it with Islamist promises of salvation and also care little for anti-imperialist ideologies – anti-Americanism and hatred of Israel did not play a role during the protests and because of this it is hardly surprising that the uprising struck more fear in Hamas honchos than in Israeli school kids. They were, however, soon joined by people from the suburbs who did not have an internet connection and, in many cases, could not even read or write. They, in turn, soon mixed with the rural poor, workers and middle-class people of all ages. In Tunis, youths from the under-developed parts of the country camped in the city and contributed to the regime's fall. In Egypt, the military did not oust Mubarak until workers' strikes flared up and even threatened to bring the Suez Canal to a standstill.

Until the dictators were toppled, workers' struggles and demands for freedom, democracy, and human rights went hand in hand, since the

victims of repression were to a great degree workers who went on strike; economic struggle has always had a political dimension in the demand for free trade unions. In both Tunisia and Egypt, workers' struggles preceded the uprisings: in Tunisia, the military had to intervene in the mine region surrounding Gafsa in 2008 in order to stifle unrest going on for months; Egypt saw a strike wave that started in textile factories in Mahalla and soon seized the whole country.¹² This strike was the namesake of the pro-democratic "April 6 Youth Movement", the strongest youth group other than the 450,000-member Facebook group "We are all Khaled Said", whose name refers to a blogger who was beaten to death by the police. Meanwhile, youth activists are now denouncing strikes as merely being particularistic matters. Just like it is generally impossible to tell whether student movements consist of tomorrow's wage slaves who happen to be a little more educated or whether they're the future elite, the rebellious Arab youth, too, is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is part of the surplus population and in many cases hit by unemployment at an above-average rate, but on the other, it is certainly more likely to dream of a place in the sun than an illiterate rural worker in the Nile Delta; this ambiguity results in the movement oscillating between its libertarian side – self-organization, confronting state power – and its liberal ambitions. Many of the youths, having just camped on Tahrir Square with lumpenproletarians, factory workers, and falafel vendors, are now vying for political power, as demonstrated by their wheeling and dealing with the ruling military council and the political parties they are founding. The *Economist* reported that "a group called the Coalition of Revolutionary Youth, formed by Tahrir Square demonstrators, has a market-oriented economic policy to which all the main parties—including the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood—has [sic!] signed up."¹³

This is exactly what is now on the agenda. While many young protesters are committed to the liberalization of the economy, for workers who had spent their whole lives under the control of the police state and the state-controlled unions, the point of the uprising was to gain the legal freedoms for their economic struggles and to allay their material misery. These tendencies were united in the uprising but now point in opposite directions. Despite the military council's anti-strike decree, post-Mubarak Egypt has been hit

nachwirkungen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20th February 2011.

¹¹ Frank Nordhausen/Thomas Schmid (ed.), *Die Arabische revolution*, Berlin 2011, p.10.

¹² More on labour struggles in the run up to and during the uprising: Friends of the Classless Society (ed.), 'Revolution in Egypt: interview with an Egyptian anarcho-syndicalist', Berlin 2011.

¹³ 'Light, dark and muddle: the shakiness of Egypt's economy could undermine progress towards democracy', *Economist*, 23rd June 2011.

by a wave of strikes and workers' unrest that destabilize the situation and scare off both domestic and foreign investors.¹⁴ These struggles are by no means the result of revolutionary exuberance: they are a struggle for independent unions, minimum wages, and fixed contracts. With their calls for a maximum wage for managers and for governmental investments, these struggles have a genuinely social democratic touch to them, striving for "social justice", and workers often emphasize that they only want to make their contribution in building Egypt. But this is a throwback to an era that ended decades ago in which national development and workers' prosperity went hand in hand.

Now, wages are so pitiful that they are hardly enough to live off of; but every rise in wages could bankrupt the mostly labour-intensive businesses – be they Tunisian suppliers for the European auto industry or Egyptian textile factories. So, the military council had to almost double minimum wages because of the pressure exerted by these struggles, but in reality workers often do not even receive the old minimum wage. And while the Egyptian Minister of Finance openly declared the workers' demands to be "legitimate", because their wages are not enough to live off, but added that higher wages are not affordable, this is only the start for the workers. Tunisia has also been hit by an uncontrolled strike wave, street blockades by the unemployed, and social unrest. The transitional government that came out of the uprising was forced to raise wages and introduce minimal unemployment benefits. Like in Egypt, reining in the unrest after the despot's overthrow will require expanding social spending that weigh on the state's budget and tarnish liberal hopes of a radical free-market new start. Rating agencies have already downgraded the country's ratings and economic experts have scaled back their growth forecasts.¹⁵

Though the situation is not as critical as in Egypt, future governments in both countries will face the challenge of reining in a huge surplus population and masses of workers whose reason for risking their lives in the uprising was hardly just wanting the chance to take part in real elections. Particularly in Egypt, this instability could even derail the announced transition to democracy. The military council has plotted to instigate riots against the Coptic minority, in

order to be able to appear as a guarantor of law and order, well knowing that they are sitting on a social time bomb. The conflict with Israel to which the rebels did not really pay attention to at first could now enter centre stage as a welcome kind of lightning rod to distract from the real issues. In the summer of 2011, Perry Anderson, the grey eminence of the British New Left, contritely remarked that the recent Arab mass movements had "not produced a single anti-American or even anti-Israeli demonstration" – a bitter disappointment for someone who would like to see Nasserism and Baathism revived as the "higher idea of an Arab nation". But now, the tide appears to have turned: when it is not the Muslim Brothers, but the opponents of the Egyptian military council rioting in front of the Israeli embassy and the newly founded independent trade union federation proudly declaring "hostility towards Israel and Zionism, and refusal to deal with any entity or person that normalizes relations with Israel"¹⁶ as one of its central tenets, the step forward the rebels took by not taking their discontent out on the Great or the Little Satan, but rather locating the main enemy at home, appears to be in the process of being reversed.

At the very latest, the moment that the Israeli flag on the embassy was burned to be replaced by the Egyptian flag with the crowd cheering, the movement's patriotism lost its apparent revolutionary-republican innocence and was transformed into sheer chauvinism. The difference between a communist critique of Zionism that takes it as the Jewish national liberation movement on the one hand and plain old anti-Zionism which has always served rulers in the Arab world and had anti-Semitic undertones, could not be made any clearer. And thus the social protests in Israel that took up the impulse of the Arab Spring, though in a completely different social situation and thus with some degree of ideological delusion, were met mostly with indifference or even unabashed rejection.

4

In Tunisia, one month after Ben Ali fled, many youths celebrated Valentine's Day in a way that was unusual for them. Where it had only been celebrated privately before, students now decided to mark the day publicly in front of the Municipal Theatre as a "Festival of Love and Revolution". They held hands while chanting "Equality, Equality, Love". On Cairo's Tahrir Square, too, gender segregation was suspended for the moment of the uprising and the harassment of

¹⁴ Cf. 'Restive Egypt workers pose economic, political threats', Reuters, 7th October 2011.

¹⁵ Helmut Dietrich, 'Das doppelte Tunesien' (September 2011), materialien.org. Dietrich's excellent report does, however, ignore the dark side of the class situation: The fact that there were recently confrontations about the allocation of jobs between various "tribes" in the Gafsa mine region that killed eleven people is not mentioned at all. Cf. 'Eleven killed, more than 100 injured in mine town clashes over jobs', AFP, 6th June 2011.

¹⁶ 'The road to trade union independence', Al Ahram Online, 20th September 2011.

women, normally an everyday occurrence, appears to have stopped completely during the occupation. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring has hardly been a revolution of everyday life. This is made clear by the fact that religion's role in society went untouched and the gender question only played and continues to play a minor role in the struggles against dictatorship. The sentence, usually attributed to Fourier, claiming that the state of women in society is an index of general social progress, is particularly true in the countries of north Africa and the Middle East, and the fact that the intermittent suspension of the usual gender roles warranted explicit mentioning indicates where the starting point of such struggles lies.

The most extreme form the suppression of women takes on is female genital mutilation – which about 90% of Egypt's women are a victim of, despite it having been illegal since 2008. The patriarchal gender roles are also revealed in the much higher illiteracy rate among women and in the everyday harassment they face along with legal discrimination – in many countries in the region, sharia is still the primary source of law. Tunisia appears to be the only Arab country where there is legal gender equality. Disadvantages in inheritance and divorce law along with sexualized violence within marriage and without are the biggest problems. Though one often hears that women fight back against harassment more confidently since the revolts, the extent to which this everyday threat is abated in the middle term will be a decisive index for the revolt's success.

In the Arab world, men are generally considered the breadwinners, while women are financial burdens, though religion is not as much the cause of this suppression as it merely serves as a legitimization for it. Women's role is that of a breeding machine, producing boys at best, girls at worst. Because these roles are equally established in all classes, a class struggle-oriented critique of feminism that is, above all, centred on the fact that feminism forges a coalition with the liberal segments of the bourgeoisie and thereby waters down class lines, is too simple, though most female proletarians could obviously care less whether women in the upper strata are able to become judges or even president.

Radical left-wing feminists' critique of the traditional socialist idea that the expansion of women's employment is the path to emancipation and their insistence that “slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink”,¹⁷ and that a revolutionary movement must

rather abolish both wage and domestic labour simultaneously, is valid to this day, though it is still true that the conditions for women's struggles improve through their socialization at the place of production. Their financial dependence on the man is diminished and cooperation opens new spaces for the development of social power, as we have recently seen in Egypt. Without wanting to replace the myth of the muscular, hammer-wielding worker with the proposition that the new worker subject is female, it is clear that women were often on the frontlines of the strike movement in Egypt's textile factories from 2006 to 2008, thereby unsettling gender relations: their equal participation in struggles sometimes had to be defended against their male colleagues and husbands; the fact that striking workers of both genders sometimes spent the night in occupied factories together was particularly outrageous to adherents of Islamic morals; often, this led to divorces.¹⁸

Particularly in this respect the Arab world is an anomaly: the employment rate for women is at just over 30 per cent in the Arab countries of north Africa, the lowest rate worldwide.¹⁹ Since the 1960s, urbanization has caused the birth rate to plummet to nearly European levels. According to the World Bank's 2009 figures, an Egyptian woman has an average of 2.8 children, one in Morocco has about 2.3, and in Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates the rate is even at 2.0 and 1.8 respectively. Accordingly, the educational attainment level of women has risen significantly, as they make up two fifths of university students in Egypt and over half in Tunisia. Therefore, it is not surprising that liberal economists often point to the comparatively low employment rate of women as an important index for those countries' lack of competitiveness in the global market: the fact that well-educated female manpower is banished to the household to take care of children or to wash the dishes is an almost unnatural waste of productive resources for them.²⁰ However, the real background to this situation is the previously mentioned tumbling price of human labour power – the enormous surplus population resulting from capital's inability to absorb the existing labour power. For one thing,

¹⁸ More on this as well: 'Revolution in Egypt: interview with an Egyptian anarcho-syndicalist'.

¹⁹ The situation does, however, vary greatly from country to country: in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco the rate is highest. In the fundamentalist Gulf states there is only one working woman for six to seven male workers. Libya is an exception among the rentier states. Under Gaddafi's rule women's path to the labour market was made easier – protected by a squad of female bodyguards, he attained the reputation of being sympathetic to women that reached far beyond north Africa.

²⁰ 'Women and the Arab awakening: now is the time', *Economist*, 15th October 2011.

¹⁷ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 'Women and the subversion of the community' in Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James (ed.), *The power of women and the subversion of the community*, Bristol 1972, pp.21-56.

domestic reproduction labour, almost exclusively done by women, becomes more significant for securing an ever more precarious survival. Secondly, it is highly doubtful that male proletarians will support the level of competition on the labour market being intensified even more through the intake of female workers. The regressive tendencies in gender relations have to be viewed in this context and the hope that the gender question will be automatically solved in the course of capitalist modernization processes has to be given up for good. In the end, it will all depend on whether women (and men who side with them) are able to transform the hopes and expectations that arose in the uprisings into a movement against the existing gender relations. The space for an emancipation within the framework of capitalist modernization appears to be limited – whether women, empowered by the spirit of the revolt, will (have to) give up their desk and classroom for the stove and kitchen will be decided by the shift in power between men and women. The Islamists' electoral victories in Tunisia and discussions of strengthening sharia in Libya show that religion as a stabilizing force could gain momentum in face of the precarious social state of affairs; Islam, even if it is devoid of fundamentalist excesses and tuned to good relations with the west, will stand in the way of the long overdue revolution in gender relations.

5

The Arab unrest could almost lead one to an ideology of development, the core of the stage model of national-democratic and proletarian-socialist revolutions at the centre of twentieth century Marxism: struggling for things that the bourgeois state grants its subjects in the developed countries, like the right not to be thrown into a torture chamber for remarks unfavourable to the government or to organize trade unions with one's colleagues, but do not come close to touching upon the existing mode of production. However, first of all, this stage model was nothing short of the Bolshevik alternative to the world revolution from the early twentieth century on;²¹ secondly, the national-democratic

revolutions already took place decades ago (and were about as democratic as the state capitalist people's democracies in the east, enormous frauds in other words); and, thirdly, even though the Arab world lagged far behind Europe and North America in this respect, the conditions for a global revolution against the capital relation have already been created under the auspices of the regimes that gained power through these revolutions.

Paradoxically, this global non-simultaneity showed itself in the Arab uprisings' resonance in crisis-ridden Europe: in Spain, the demand for "real democracy" was just plain silly and the movement there was only able to move on to the real questions once it had rid itself of its ridiculous cloak of democracy fetishism. Though square occupations modeled on the Egyptian rebellions in Madrid, Athens, and elsewhere have turned out to be a practicable means for a scattered proletariat that is powerless in production, recent class struggles in Europe bear witness not to the Arab struggles' potential for generalization, but to their limitations which are not the result of participants' incompetence but of the conditions they have to deal with. Spilled over in the wake of the European colonial powers, capitalism only asserted itself in the Arab world through the mediation of authoritarian states; to this day, it is marked by kleptocracy and raw police repression. If the Arab unrest was to send these regimes to the dustbin of history, this would undoubtedly be a step forward, but, in light of the current status quo, it would hardly lead to the kind of prosperity that most of the rebels envision. They look towards a Europe whose golden years have passed and which is unmistakably in decline. Considering the fact that there were as many youths in Greece and Spain facing the problem of being condemned to wage labour but not being able to find any as in Tunisia and Egypt, this can hardly be the result of state corruption and ossification, but rather appears to be caused by the historical dynamic of the existing mode of production itself. It appears that the Arab Spring is taking place in the autumn of capital making its outcome all the more unpredictable.

Just as, even in the most profound of crises, individual companies can continue to make large profits, capital's inability to integrate all of humanity into its machinery is not expressed in uniform decline in all parts of the world. Even in the last decades as the existence of an enormous surplus population came to the fore, factories and office towers sprung up out of nothing in a few countries. Because of the rapid advances in transportation and communication technologies, the world market is increasingly becoming a gigantic wheel of fortune: it appears that the

²¹ The council communists, in their clear-sighted 1934 text, called Bolshevik internationalism the "peasant internationalism of a bourgeois revolution" ('Theses on Bolshevism', *International Council Correspondence* 3 (1934), pp.1-18.). Insisting on the exclusive revolutionary role of the developed proletariat, as the council communists did, basically amounted to admitting that the prospects of a world revolution, which the council communists envisioned a little differently than we do now, are rather poor, if one considers the relation in numbers worldwide at the time. On the historical transformation of revolution and communism cf. 'Thesen zur Agrarfrage', the two texts on "communization" as well as the essay 'Proletarische bewegung und produktivkraftkritik' in *Kosmoprolet* 3, Berlin 2011.

destination of investments that both state leaders and wage-earners so desire is becoming ever more random. It is not impossible that Tunis or Alexandria will have this doubtful privilege. On the other hand, hoping for a free market take-off that provides the impoverished masses of north Africa with employment is, under the circumstances, almost utopian. Considering this, the unpropertied classes' struggles in the Arab world hardly have any chances of partial lasting victories. If the struggles are to continue, they will exacerbate the global quagmire capital has gotten itself in and thereby contribute to putting the abolition of the status quo on the agenda, but this can only be the joint cause of the proletarianized of all nations.

*Friends of the Classless Society
Berlin, November 2011*

POSTSCRIPT

Whereas for a long time western observers mainly viewed Arabs as savages to be reined in, an incredible euphoria has spread ever since Mubarak was toppled: the young student, fighting for freedom and democracy, replaced the image of the hate-filled Islamist. But just for a while; a justifiable fear of chaos has taken over since. The Islamists' electoral victories in Egypt and Tunisia are the least of the west's worries; it could come to terms with them – after all, they do follow a stringent pro-market course and have promised to maintain law and order with a little welfare and lots of religious this and that. As long as the new rulers do not go too far with their discrimination of women, thereby getting European human rights commissions in a pickle, or choke off tourism with oppressive religious laws such as the prohibition of alcohol, the west is totally fine with democratically elected Islamists. Stability is still the top priority, but it appears unreachable ever since the dictators were toppled: the superfluous are just too numerous, workers' hunger for a better life is just too great. The *Economist's* concerns about strikes getting out of hand, which it lists as one of the reasons for the economic collapse in Tunisia and Egypt, already contain some nostalgia for the times when these countries were ruled with the iron fist: “workers feel able at last to vent their frustration after years during which they feared repression. Owners report that in many places employees demand more pay and the replacement of managers who have supposed ties to the old regime. ‘When a strike takes place they have no united leadership, so you’re dealing with 60 people tugging at your jacket asking for this and that. And when you’ve made concessions and you think you’ve resolved it, it all begins again after a couple of months,’ says one owner.”

Tunisia's economy is in decline. Tourism is in shambles, the mining of phosphate for export in the Gafsa region is suffering from endless strikes and unrest, foreign investors are leaving the country. The poor regions in the interior are seeing general strikes, in Tunis there are sit-ins in front of the constitutional assembly. The demand for jobs is always a key issue; the unemployed academic proletariat is organizing around it as the ‘Union des diplômés chômeurs’ (UDC) and picking quarrels with the state at demonstrations; the ‘Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail’ (UGTT), tolerated under the old regime, has renewed itself and is now the Islamist-dominated government's number one enemy, although social struggles generally take place beyond the confines of fixed organizations.

Strikes in the private sector generally face the problem of mass unemployment on the one hand and the threat of offshoring on the other. The case of a German subcontractor in the auto industry summarily closing down a factory in the Spring because wildcat strikes got out of hand is exemplary of this; the workers' ringleader was fired and production continued. The proletarianized have had greater success in putting pressure on the state. The fact that the Tunisian government promised to create 25,000 public sector jobs this year even though it is already headed for a budget crisis as a result of its growing deficit – and even though the public sector is already considered “bloated” – is perceived as an alarm signal.

Against this backdrop conflicts between workers and rulers are escalating. President Morcef Marzouki, who used to be a human rights activist, called the endless strikes “national suicide” accusing workers of “stabbing the country in the back”; an Ennahda lawmaker recently illustrated the class character of Islamism with a call for striking workers to be nailed to the cross. After attacks on union offices in April during a strike by municipal sanitation workers, the UGTT called for the government's removal, as it suspected the governing Islamists of being behind these attacks. Generally, the union has been the most important bastion of secularism as its defenders have been able to do little on a political level.

Nevertheless, the ongoing culture war between Islamists and secularists does not run entirely along class lines. It is stoked mainly by Salafists who, like in Egypt, crept out of their holes in numbers that exceeded expectations once the dictator was overthrown: they have gone on the offensive with militant attempts to enforce the wearing of the niqab and gender segregation at Manouba University, the proclamation of a “Caliphate” in Sedjenane, appearances by Egyptian and Saudi preachers calling for female

genital mutilation, and attacks on theatre festivals, art exhibitions, and shops that sell alcohol. Sometimes, the government fights back, using the Islamists' actions as a welcome pretext for general repression (for example, the government banned all demonstrations on Avenue Bourgiba, the symbol of the Tunisian uprising, after Salafist riots, but rebellious youths ignored this ban with aplomb) much like the old regime used to. In June, the most severe confrontations between Salafists and the government since Ben-Ali's fall took place and led to both union offices and police stations being burnt down; further conflict appears inevitable. On the other hand, parts of the state apparatus are also contributing to the Islamization. Two atheist bloggers being sentenced to seven years in prison for publishing images of the prophet is just the most drastic example of this.

We still do not believe that north Africa is heading for conditions like those in Iran and that the Turkish AKP is the more likely role model for the Islamists in power; for example, Ennahda decided not to inscribe sharia as a source of law in the constitution. It has become clear, however, that the Tunisian state Islamists, much like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, are split into a modern, moderate and a rabidly fundamentalist faction and that there could certainly be setbacks, for women's rights for example. This culture war will hardly be decided by the secular middle class; the question will be whether the issues at stake in this war will be raised in class struggles or whether the most desperate parts of the proletariat will play their role in this attempt to hold together a class society in transition to chaos through an authoritarian regime that alleviates unemployment by pushing women out of public life, causes class contradictions to vanish in an imagined community of the faithful and sanctifies the earthly squalor of a proletarian existence with surahs from the Quran.

The situation in Egypt is similar. It does, however, differ in that parts of the old regime, namely the military council, are still in power, sometimes allying with the Muslim Brotherhood, sometimes locking horns with it and suspending democratization at will. The election spectacle has thus become an obvious farce the populace is increasingly disinterested in. The regime cunningly implemented a strategy of tension, hoping that the fear of instability will trump the desire for freedom and for the end of despotic rule. The best example for this is the massacring of the fans of the Cairo football club Al-Ahly in the stadium of Port Said that cost at least 74 people their lives in February and injured thousands more. It stands to reason that the attack was at the very least tolerated by the military in order to be able step in as the party of order and it is

highly doubtful that the ordeal was merely the result of an escalation of a conflict between football fans. The massacre took place exactly one year after the horse and camel-mounted attack on the occupied Tahrir Square during which Al-Ahly's ultras – like in many other quarrels with the state – played a significant role; therefore, it may very well have been an act of revenge.

Nevertheless, an end of social conflict is not in sight. In November, a demonstration in Cairo against repression culminated in an uprising against the military council that lasted for several weeks and involved, above all, the urban poor. Every day there are reports of classic strikes, demonstrations, hunger strikes, blockades of ports and highways directed against awful working conditions and social misery. As numerous and diverse the protagonists may be – they range from steel workers, women factory workers in the textile industry, and farm workers to teachers and physicians – the struggles still lack social explosivity. The call by over fifty oppositional groups for a general strike in February went mostly unheard. Except for a few small actions, it only really reached the universities; in workplaces, it was not widely received, perhaps, partly, for fear of it being used by groups calling for the strike that had previously opposed strikes out of “concern for Egypt's well-being”.

The social eruptions coincide with the economic situation becoming increasingly dire with no recovery in sight. Budget funds are running out and the last currency reserves are starting to vanish. The country is still receiving foreign aid and credit for the development of its infrastructure, including new power plants and rail lines. As capital's situation has become even more autumnal, with one national economy after another on the other Mediterranean shore going to pieces, it appears doubtful that these programmes along with land sales to Egyptian expats, which are currently being planned, will stimulate the economy in a sustainable fashion. In all likelihood, only an IMF loan will save Egypt from economic collapse this year, but it will come with the usual medicine that will further destabilize the social situation.

Meanwhile, Libya is succumbing to a chaos of armed rackets, tribal leaders and other separatists. The NATO forces' intervention might have saved the rebels and civilians from massacres by the regime's troops and the civil war might otherwise have cost far more than 30,000 people their lives. It is certain, however, that the transformation of a rebellion into a military conflict has never served social emancipation very well. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were mostly driven by an unruly youth with back up from massive strikes in ports, mines, and

factories. The Libyan youth, just barely armed and with unarmored vehicles, showed an incredible willingness to make sacrifices and take risks as well, but, unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, they were led by old men, including tribal lords and clan chiefs opposed to Gaddafi as well as armed Islamist gangs. Although there are reports of activities by Benghazi's youth - for example, in grassroots assemblies, though certainly with limited influence, as well as in the fiercely contested cultural domain - power relations were impacted to a smaller extent than it appears to have been the case in Tunisia and in Egypt.

Western governments' military operations aimed for little more than securing the oil and gas reserves, keeping the shield against the sub-Saharan superfluous masses in place, and maintaining a presence in an unstable region. An open struggle between the various Libyan groups for the distribution of the oil rent has now erupted. For decades, the national government has only been held together by a combination of vicious repression and nepotism; it seems unlikely that the re-balancing of power between the various clans will succeed, particularly since the oil-rich region of Cyrenaica in the eastern part of the country proclaimed itself an autonomous region and the country splitting up is no longer out of the question. Libya's economic future will depend on the new rulers' ability to avert the country's collapse and to invest the oil rent in the development of new economic sectors. The chances of this succeeding look bleak, not just because of the global economic crisis. The new government will find it hard to force the country's working class, which is used to being given handouts with benefits from the oil rent, to take up less attractive jobs without it fighting back; especially as late-comers onto the global market usually have to depend on offering extremely cheap labour power.

In the original text we were unable to make sense of the Syrian civil war: it is dominated by the interests of rivaling regional and world powers to such an extent that analyzing it would not have been possible in that text. Here, we will leave it at a short remark: the recent history of Syria, from the state socialist ambitions of the Baath Party from 1963 on up to the economic reforms of the past decade, has given rise to the same peculiar kind of amalgamation of an authoritarian state and "neoliberalism" that we have come to know from Tunisia and Egypt, and this has led to the oppositional forces being rather incongruous: they unite Islamists and minorities as well as the left, "which is highly critical of the deep inequalities in Syrian society as well as the steps taken by Bashar Al-Assad to gradually open the market", and "secular-capitalists, largely composed of western-educated individuals, who view the

socialist elements in Assad's regime as the reasons behind Syria's current societal problems. They strongly believe in increased economic liberalization." (Majid Rafizadeh, 'Assad's future and Syria's opposition groups', *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, March/April 2012, pp.113-114) Syria has been hit by the same social crisis as north Africa. Almost half of the population is under the age of 15; every year, 250,000 to 300,000 people enter the labour market, but the traditionally important public sector has frozen hiring for years.

Even a couple of years ago a German thinktank remarked that "the politically most dangerous" problem in Syria was the "growth of the poverty belts around the major Syrian cities. [...] Syrian families arrive there on a daily basis unable to sustain their livelihood in the countryside." (Germany Trade and Invest) Cuts to state subsidies for food, electricity, and gasoline have done their part to make proletarian life increasingly unbearable. The fact that the uprising was started by teenagers in Daraa, one of the country's poorest regions, is symptomatic. Even bourgeois analyses recognize that "the majority of people protesting in the streets today [...] come from the Syrian working classes and suffer from widespread unemployment, poverty, and corruption". (Rafizadeh, p.113) For now, the almost unfulfillable proletarian demands have been pushed aside by the militarization of the conflict; due to the fragmentation of the class along ethnic and religious lines deepened by the civil war, it may even be too optimistic to expect that they will come back to the fore later.

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