

The Arab revolution is underway: after Tunisia, Egypt in turn ignites...

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"The memory of oppressed people is one thing that cannot be taken away, and for such people, with such memories, revolt was always an inch below the surface." [1]

This text is dedicated to numerous Egyptians who, in these days of January, have paid with their lives to see their country free from this dictatorial and corrupt regime. The revolutionary process, which started December 17th 2010 at Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, and which led to the fall of the dictator Ben Ali, is the same process which has ignited Egypt since the historic day of Friday 28th January. This movement which, despite a savage repression, has already caused more than 100 deaths with thousands more injured, is expanding to all the towns and all the villages of Egypt, focused on a single slogan: 'the people want the fall of the regime'. The historic day of Friday 28th January 2011 balanced itself out with 20 dead and 1000 injured.

After Tunisia, Egypt

Friday 28th January 2011, on the fourth day of protests [2], the country ignited: the protests spread throughout all the country, to Cairo, to Alexandria as to Suez to demand the depart of the dictator Mubarak in power for 30 years. Following the path opened by the masses and the youth of Tunisia, no longer could anything stop the insurrectionary process in motion. Carried away by the revolutionary tidal wave underway in Tunisia, the very same that came to drive Ben Ali from power, on the 14th January, swept through the Egyptian streets. Aged 82, the closest Arab ally of the United States, after some moments of hesitation, ordered his police to severely repress the protests hoping as such to nip the bud of the revolution which threatened to bring down the corrupt regime. At the same time the internet was completely censored, and telephone communications via the mobile phone network was extremely limited; the British telecom giant Vodafone confirmed that mobile phone companies were under an order to cut all communications. It is striking to see how, when they act in the service of the revolution, the new technologies of communication, such as the internet or a mobile phone, can be totally and immediately cut at the scale of an entire nation.

The streets ignite

In the capital, the metro is closed, two police stations and the head quarters for the National Democratic Party (NDP) were burnt. According to the Associated Press, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was attacked by protestors. In Alexandria, it's the head quarters of the Governate, a symbol of the regime, which has been burnt. The repression also affects many members of the foreign press, including a journalist from Al Jazeera who was beaten by the civil police. While the army is being called to assist the police force, a curfew is decreed in the main towns - Cairo, Alexandria and Suez - before being extended in the evening to all towns. Scheduled to come into force this Friday at 6pm and remain until at least 7am the next day, this is not respected and people remain in the streets. In the total confusion, the crowd was moving in the middle of columns of armoured tanks, certain police and tank drivers came to terms with protesters who were dancing on the tanks!

The real reasons for the revolt

Certainly the internet has helped to amplify the movement by diffusing the people's exacerbated rage, notably with the national call for the protest launched by the April 6 Movement on Facebook, but this would have finished by erupting either way. The media tells us of a Facebook or Twitter Revolution, but doesn't turn our attention to the real reason for this insurrection: the desire to end a despotic regime under imperialistic domination to finally meet the basic needs of the population. This country is rich. It is therefore intolerable that 28.1 million people live in a state of poverty and that around 2.6 million people can't even feed themselves [3]. Egypt has important energy resources (oil and gas) and an historic agricultural potential. The authorities sell off the resources to powerful foreigners to pay a debt which has no benefit to the population even the opposite it was used to maintain a repressive system during the 30 years of dictatorship. The creditors who knew that the new loans were in a large part diverted share the responsibility along with the corrupt elite of the country. The assets of Mubarak, as well as those of Ben Ali on the run, are made up of ill-gotten gain and should be returned to the people. Since Mubarak became president in 1981, after his predecessor Anouar el-Sadete was assassinated, the Egyptian people have paid the equivalent of 68.5 billion dollars towards the foreign debt. Yet, at the same time it has steadily increased from 22 to 33 billion dollars. It acts as an odious debt which, in international law, is null and void. It should be purely and simply repudiated. How to conceive that this doctrine [4] that was used by the United States in demanding Iraqi odious debt cancellation in 2003 is not being applied elsewhere? Admittedly, in the Iraqi case, this allowed the United States and the multinationals to take possession of the oil at the cheapest price, whereas in Egypt, the United States had no need to start a war for this, Hosni Mubarak was completely loyal to them.

Imperialist Hypocrisy

After decades of silence and military and commercial cooperation, the leaders of this world, present at the World Economic Forum of Davos or at Washington, have suddenly called to respect fundamental human rights. The secretary general of the United Nation, Ban Ki-Moon, has called on the Egyptian leaders to avoid renewed violence and to respect the freedom of assembly and of information in Egypt, while the US secretary of state Hilary Clinton, after having proclaimed the stability of the regime, became concerned three days later at the turn of events: "We are very concerned about the events in Egypt. The fundamental rights should be respected, the violence curbed, and the freedom of communication re-established." She said [5]. Fine words which the Egyptian people would no doubt have appreciated hearing earlier, while the people were suppressed, the media on orders or gagged, and the opposition imprisoned during the 30 years of the authoritarian and dictatorial regime of Mubarak. The chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry, has meanwhile, dared to call the Egyptians to protest 'peacefully', evoking the non-violent precedents of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr completely forgetting to mention that the Egyptian army, financed by American grants (1.3 billion dollars in 2010), maintained for three decades the ruling oligarchy by oppression. It also must be remembered that the United States supported the dictatorship and sent 2.2 billion dollars each year of economic 'aid'.

On certain aspects, the United States has lots more to fear from the destabilisation in Egypt than in Tunisia. As well as being a faithful ally, Egypt is an important pillar of the established Arab order and is the guarantee of regional stability concerning Israel. The American vice-president Joseph Biden does not think that the Egyptian leader should leave and stated: "Mubarak has been our ally in normalising the relations with Israel; I would not refer to him as a dictator" [6]. All these declarations barely hide the will to protect the economic and strategic interest in the region. In reaction to the events the New York stock market increased its losses while the price of oil jumped...

Solidarity is in full swing

The ongoing Tunisian Revolution has not yet finished making people talk, the protests in Egypt are

an echo of solidarity in full swing. Fifty odd people assembled 28th January outside the Egyptian embassy in Tunisia to demand the departure of the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, in a sign of solidarity with Egypt. After “Ben Ali Out”, the placards “Mubarak Out” were branded as a sign of solidarity. “We express our solidarity with the Egyptian people as with all the oppressed people of the world.” says Mohammed Khaldi, a young engineer. The Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) on Friday expressed its “solidarity with the great Egyptian people”, in calling “to the end of the injustice and of the dictatorship”. In the big European capitals like Paris and Madrid protests in front the embassies were expected.

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Footnotes

[1] A People’s History of the United States, Howard Zinn, Harper Perennial Modern Classics 2002, page 443.

[2] The larger protests started Tuesday 25th January.

[3] <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/21/4...>

[4] <http://www.cadtm.org/IMG/pdf...>

[5] <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/mo...>

[6] From an interview on public broadcast television channel PBS : “Mubarak ha sido nuestro aliado para normalizar las relaciones con Israel, no le calificaría de dictador”, Público, 29 janvier 2011.