

Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu

Bulletin n°1

16 February 2011

First strong points on the last revolts in Arab countries

First point

The first non-organised riots in central and west of Tunisia (Sidi Bouzid - 40,000 inhabitants; Kasserine - 76,000 inhabitants), Algeria, Jordan and Egypt were the work of the proletariat and the most impoverished layers of the traditional petty bourgeoisie. The rise in food prices and unemployment, particularly among the young were at the origin of these explosions. In these countries, household expenditure on food makes up around 40% of total expenditures. By comparison, in France, it's 11% of the family budget and in Czech Republic 16%. In 2010, the price of wheat in Egypt, which the world's biggest importer, went up by 73% and maize jumped by 88%. Meat, fruit and vegetables became unaffordable for a large number of Egyptians.

In Tunisia, the trigger for the riots was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young educated street seller who had his fruits and vegetables confiscated by the police because he was selling them without a license. The two small Tunisian towns which sparked everything off have the highest unemployment rate in the country. A third element which we must not forget is the attempt by several states in the region, particularly Algeria and Tunisia, to stamp out the flourishing informal economy with the aim of increasing tax revenues in a period where the theme of public deficits occupies the front of the international stage. At the same time these governments carried out the reduction or abolition of state subsidies on the prices of basic necessities. Thus, despite their violent form, the first riots had an eminently defensive character.

It(s) worth remembering that the exercise of violence by the proletariat is in no way a synonym for an offensive, and even less worker's autonomy.

In absence of these two crucial factors, dynamics of permanent revolution leading to the dictatorship of proletariat has no chance of imposing itself. A movement which reacts is always defensive. The reaction is always subordinate, even if justified. The whole problem for the proletarian camp is to move from reaction to the offensive. This is a matter of consciousness and organisation. In these two countries, there's not much consciousness and autonomous organisation, only violence and class hatred. It's a good place to start but only on condition that the movement passes from the moment of reaction and asserts its own content, its pace and its organized will in the long term. From what we know at this stage, this has not happened.

Second point

Aspirations for freedom are strongly anchored in this wave of popular revolts. For good reason. Proletarians know very well that any protest, even the most peaceful, will be violently crushed by the state. For the first time, the exploited have satisfied the essential need to practice the freedoms to which they aspire in and through their own strug-

gles. In the independent fight, speech frees itself, autonomous organisation can blossom and individuals can develop all their capacity for socialisation. It is only on this terrain that the class struggle can absorb and resolve in the fire of struggle the most far-reaching libertarian aspirations of civil society. This type of approach is the only one appropriate to drawing a line of demarcation with democratic bourgeois demands.

No formalisation of individual and collective freedoms in the framework of the state is satisfactory.

On one hand and worse, all formalisations of this nature in the end favour the stabilisation of the capitalist mode of production and the reinforcement of state domination of the subordinate classes. On the other hand, it would be stupid to brush aside the opportunity offered right now by the loosening of the dictatorship of capital and its state including when it is crystallised in a bourgeois democratic foundation. The rejection of an indifferent attitude towards constitutional and institutional democratic changes must not however go so far as directly or indirectly supporting the process of restructuration of the state. This is true even when the process starts out from an action by the proletariat and takes place "in the heat of the moment", in a framework of acute crisis of the state.

Third point

The entry of whole cross-sections of civil society into the movement on the side of the insurgent proletariat, notably in Tunisia and Egypt, undermined the purely working class character of the initial revolts. This is not because the proletariat must in all circumstances wrap itself in a splendid isolation to affirm its interests. The capacity for the working class in movement to draw towards itself sectors and individuals coming from other layers of civil society remains, in our view, a vital condition for its victory over the dominant classes. The problem is that at this stage the proletarian cause is masked by classic democratic demands and the power games within the dominant classes in Tunisia as well as in Egypt. Rapidly, the insurgents have shown themselves incapable of considering themselves as an expression of a social class which is independent and without a country. This is the case, in spite of some exceptions close to the parts of Tunisia where it all began and the factories, offices and other places of work in Egypt where wage conflicts and other struggles carry on after the removal of the old leader.

A class which aspires not only to the overthrow of authoritarian and corrupt regimes but also the destruction of the state, of all states, and, above all, the revolutionary constitution of a centralised cooperative society, without classes, without money, without exploitation and without oppression.

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The incapacity of the rioters to align their thoughts with their insurrectionary actions manifests itself above all in the blatant absence of any attempt at autonomous organisation capable of putting the attack on capitalist production at the centre of the fight. Most of the factories continued to work in Tunisia. In Egypt, agitation for workers' demands has not (yet?) spread. In Tunisia we even saw initiatives to defend the tools of production carried out jointly by workers and managers.

In Egypt, even if strikes burst up three days before Mubarak departure (and precipitated this), some sectors like industrial tourism or les army owned factories are spared. In Algeria and Jordan they seemed to play the same tune. As in Iran in the summer and autumn of 2009, the main limit of the movement remains the under-utilisation by workers of the essential weapon at their disposal: the strike. In this way they deprive themselves of the only really solid anchorage of their fight and at the same time of a form of struggle which is the most effective against the state and the bosses, whether "native" or "foreign". The heart of the system of domination in any country in the world is production. It is there that we need to strike.

Fourth point

Sclerotic clientelistic regimes, where rentiers play the biggest role, quickly faltered facing street assaults. Confronted with growing difficulties in accessing world capital markets, in a bad way after the global financial crisis began in the US in August 2007, these executives showed themselves unfit to strengthen and enlarge their political and social base. But it would be wrong to think that these regimes are dying on their feet. Despite the smokescreen put up by the dominant information organs, the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia and Egypt were not built on thin air and held in place for such a long time purely by brute force and the ferocious will of the dictators.

In Tunisia, the most developed capitalist country in North Africa, the party previously in power counted on around 2 million members and could be sure of the services provided by the only union federation, the UGTT. The same UGTT manages the crisis from start to finish thanks to its deep roots within the proletariat. This union confederation now appears as a real alternative by way of its long-standing internal dialectic tolerated within certain limits by the Ben Ali regime. The UGTT has channelled the discontent of proletarians over many years. It has demonstrated that it is the best, and sometimes the only, guarantor of productive and social order. This is a role which it has filled rather effectively up until now. From now on the UGTT is in control in Tunis and is condemned to manage the tensions in person, above all in the centre and in the poor south, where the class struggle expresses itself with more force. Within the UGTT, there is a very controlled dialectic between the fractions more or less linked to the old RCD. To preserve at the same time its credibility and its function, the UGTT allowed a certain expression of left currents within itself. It did not prevent rank-and-file trade unionists, the bearers of the reformist aspirations of the workers, be-

ing able to be present within it, as they still are. In the past, when they went beyond the set boundaries they found themselves locked up and expelled from the UGTT. Today, with the repressive apparatus of the state in great difficulty, it is probable that they will try to make themselves heard and to impose themselves, particularly where the proletarian struggle is still burning brightly. Finally, left trade unionists and workers' reformists may be tempted by the CGTT, a small trade union set up a few years ago which is now out in the open.

In Egypt, the party in power also had two million card-carrying members. Here the pillar of the state is without any contest the army, with a million men. Provided with its own industries, occupying almost all the higher levels of the state administration, it is the guardian and the foremost beneficiary of the lucrative rent from the Suez Canal (\$US 3.5 billion in duty collected per year out of a GDP of less than \$220 billion) and international financial aid, America's first and foremost (around \$2 billion per year). Joshua Stacher, an American specialist on the country, estimates that the military control between 33% and 45% of the Egyptian economy. The army which made Hosni Mubarak and which is now behind Omar Suleiman is the uncontested political protagonist, with the Muslim Brotherhood (five to six million paying members), of the present events in Cairo. The degeneration of the class struggle into street battles between two bourgeois camps, one "conservative", the other "restructurist" does not hold out the promise of anything good.

Already well underway in Tunisia, the restructuration and the restoration of the state is happening in Egypt too.

Fifth point

If the restructuring and restoration of the Egyptian state ended up in a "historic" compromise between the army and the Muslim Brotherhood as seems to be the case, this is going to cause a long-lasting upset to the geopolitics of the region. The wave of intensified nationalism which erupted in the streets in Tunisia and Egypt could reopen a phase of war with the Zionist state. In some circumstances of crisis, there is nothing more effective for reconsolidating a nation than identifying and declaring war on an external or internal enemy. The former internal enemy in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, has organic links with the Islamist party in Jordan and with Hamas in Palestine. The latter is very close to Syria and Iran which, in Hezbollah in the Lebanon, possesses a powerful regional connection to the corridors of power in Beirut. Hezbollah is in its turn closely linked to Damascus. This scenario is something we have to take account of, even if we can't be sure it will happen, particularly when it is a question of addressing ourselves to the proletarians who will be the cannon fodder in the eventual wars to come.

More than ever, only a politics which is rigorously anti-state and defeatist can represent both the immediate and historic interests of the working class.

There, as everywhere else.

Bratislava, Brussels, London, Paris, Prague