

# OF THE PEOPLES']

the capital of the country, and other cities, demand the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh, in power for 33 years. That is the first in a series of mobilizations that have continued, in spite of harsh repression from the regime. The driving forces of the struggle against the Yemeni dictatorship are profound. Saleh became President of then North Yemen in 1978, and, in 1990, continued in the presidency of the Republic of Yemen, after the capitalist reunification of the country in the same year. This ally of the US and of the Saudi monarchy has, for years, been conducting a dirty war against the Shiite population of northern Yemen and against a separatist movement in the south. He is President of the most impoverished country in the Arab world, in which almost half the population lives in destitution, and unemployment reaches 35% of the population. However, this small country has a strategic importance for the United States, that is carrying out covert military actions on Yemeni territory, allegedly in pursuit of Al Qaeda combatants and is trying to organize a change of government with opposition leaders linked to US interests.

Libya, February 15: Repression against an anti-government mobilization in the city of Benghazi, in the east of the country, unleashed a local insurrectional uprising against Gaddafi's regime. The security forces went over to the side of the demonstrators, who not only took possession of weapons, but also control of the city. But when the mobilizations reached Tripoli, the capital and Gaddafi's seat of power, the response was brutal. Planes bombed neighbourhoods and shot at demonstrators. In only a few days, the repression had already left hundreds, if not thousands, dead and disappeared. Gaddafi, an allegedly 'Third World' colonel who became neo-liberal, a friend of Bush, Blair and Berlusconi, who has stayed in power since 1969, using for himself and his family clan a large part of the considerable petroleum income, decided to hold out in power by bullets.

Undoubtedly, because of the degree of repression from the regime and the radical nature of the uprising, it is the most severe process, with strong elements of state decomposition, which opens up the perspective of a civil war with an uncertain outcome, or even a chaotic situation with confrontations between tribes, in a country that is the twelfth-largest exporter of petroleum in the world. The imperialist powers, that have in the last decade made good deals with Gaddafi, went over to opposing the dictator – unlike Italy, with strong,

crucial interests in its former colony – hoping that maybe his downfall will open other opportunities for their interests, provided that the scenario of disintegration and chaos is avoided, although it cannot be ruled out either that, if this possible outcome takes place, it will be used as an excuse to deploy some force linked to NATO. For their part, the Egyptian military, that are supposed to manage their own 'transition', are worried that the break-up of the Libyan army will lead to a situation out of control in northern Africa. For that reason, they would continue supporting Gaddafi. The uprising in Libya has exposed the governments that have lined up in defence of the dictator, as Daniel Ortega did, or that up to now have been silent about the massacre, as in the case of Chávez. Even Fidel Castro justified what Gaddafi did, in the name of an alleged 'resistance against imperialism'.

Bahrain, February 16: The security forces open fire on a mobilization that, inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, was asking for better living conditions, claiming the lives of two demonstrators. This small country, with a 70% Shiite population and 30% Sunni, has been governed since the end of the eighteenth century by a Sunni monarchic dynasty, linked to Saudi Arabia. The engine of the rebellion is the marginalization of the Shiite majority – that makes up the bulk of the country's working class – from the structures of political power. Although its demographic and political weight is less, the crisis in Bahrain could have unpredictable consequences for imperialism and the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. Bahrain is the headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, indispensable for the operations of the occupation forces in Iraq. Moreover, it could be a source of inspiration for the Shiite population of Saudi Arabia, concentrated in the eastern oil provinces.

In just a few weeks, this explosive intervention by the mass movement of northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, driven by the consequences of the economic crisis – especially the rise in food prices – and hatred for the dictatorial, pro-imperialist regimes, appears to have encouraged resistance beyond the borders of this region.

## Mass mobilisations start spreading to other parts in the world

In Oaxaca, Mexico, memories of the 2006 Commune are being revived. Teachers returned to the streets to protest

against a measure enacted by President Calderón that favours private education. On February 15, teachers and other workers confronted police for seven hours. The following day, they went on strike and held a mass demonstration to condemn the repression and demand the resignation of government officials.

On February 18, in Bolivia, there was a mass protest called by the Bolivian Trade Union Confederation – the COB – against the inflationary effects of Evo Morales' failed 'gasolinazo' and for wage increases. Although the normal role of the COB leadership is to defuse workers' struggles, the fact that they called a demonstration is confirmation of the widespread discontent with the MAS government's unpopular measures.

Even in the United States, where the political scene has been dominated by the emergence of the extreme right-wing Tea Party movement, the offensive launched by Wisconsin's Republican governor, Scott Walker, which aims to remove the collective bargaining rights from public sector unions, has provoked a powerful response from workers, teachers and students, who mobilised in their tens of thousands and organised solidarity actions in several states on February 23. Although the leadership of the unions and the Democratic Party play a role in controlling the movement, the response to the attack is an important symptom that might foretell the awakening of the American working class, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis and has steadily lost political ground since the 1980s.

As we write these lines, workers and youth in Greece have resumed the struggle against the EU and IMF adjustment plans, confronting riot police on the streets of Athens.

It is a long time since there have been so many developments in the class struggle taking place simultaneously. These events are already exerting influence on the economy. The political process in the Arab and Muslim world is leading to a rise in the price of oil and other basic commodities such as wheat. The uncertain fate of Libya, a major oil supplier to several European Union powers, is spreading fears in the international markets that uncontrolled oil price rises may result in a worsening of the international economic crisis. Furthermore, given the geopolitical importance of the region for the United States, the loss of key allies like Mubarak may deepen the crisis of imperialist hegemony.

### **At the beginning of a new period**

After 30 years of bourgeois restoration, we are witnessing the early stages of a new historical period in which the masses are returning to the fore, although the scope and the outcome are not yet clear.

Historical analogies, however imperfect, are very useful

for analysing new processes. In this regard, we have used the analogy of the Bourbon restoration in order to understand the deeper meaning of the neoliberal counterrevolution. Although no historical process can be repeated, the current wave of struggles can be compared with the 'Springtime of the Peoples' – the revolutionary wave that began in France in February 1848 and that quickly spread to Prussia and many other parts of Germany, the Austrian Empire and Hungary, which was under the latter's control, Poland, Italy, and other peoples of central Europe, against the background of the economic crisis that had erupted in 1846. This uneven wave of revolts started to be contained as Europe emerged from economic crisis in the middle of 1850, and was completed with the end of the German process the same year and the coup by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in France on December 2nd, 1851.

The limit of this historical analogy is that in contrast to the nineteenth century, this new 'Springtime of the Peoples' occurs in the imperialist epoch of crisis, wars and revolutions. Today's working class is not making its first revolutionary appearance (as was the working class in the June 1848 insurrection in France), but has gone through the experience of revolution and counterrevolution in the twentieth century.

However, we prefer the analogy with this period, which saw the end of the European restoration that opened with the fall of Napoleon in 1815, than with the period of the uprising that started in 1968 when the masses were not emerging from a long period of defeat and which had a major proletarian component from the outset. Current events are marked by the consequences of three decades of bourgeois restoration and it is necessary to realise that the coming cycle of class struggles will be tortuous, but at the same time difficult to contain because they take place in the context of a global capitalist crisis. In 1968 the youth were also protagonists, although with the presence of a significant radical vanguard which had been steeled in the fight against the Vietnam War in several countries. The events of 1968 took place while the post-war boom was still underway – the crisis would only erupt with force in 1973 – whereas today, despite the fact that the capitalists have managed to avoid a depression, albeit at the cost of creating a colossal debt, the crisis is deeper than that which occurred in the mid-70s.

### **The fight to build a revolutionary leadership**

The imperialist powers were taken by surprise by the events that hit their most strategically important allies and agents – Ben Ali was as important to France as Mubarak was to the USA. Western hypocrisy has been clearly exposed - in particular its rhetoric in defence of 'human rights' has been discredited. For more than 30 years, the USA, France, Italy and Great Britain, among others, have been sustaining brutal dictatorships, from Mubarak to the Saudi monarchy.

Once the initial confusion was over, the policy of Obama and the EU was to try to preserve as much as possible of the old regimes – which were challenged by the masses on the streets – while appearing to be on the same side as the masses. Their support for ‘transition agreements’ is an attempt to maintain existing geopolitical relationships and protect western business interests in the region. As far as Egypt is concerned, this implies, in the first place, maintaining the agreements with the state of Israel and remaining subordinate to American requirements. The coming weeks and months will determine whether the workers and exploited masses of the Arab world manage to impose their demands and free themselves from the dominance of imperialism and its local partners, or whether the ruling powers manage to contain the discontent and replace the dictatorships with regimes that are more or less democratic in form, but that do not question the fundamentals of imperialist order, as was the case with the end of the Latin America dictatorships in the 1980s. However, the situation in the Arab world is different in so far as there has not been a series of historical defeats similar to the counterrevolutionary coups that put an end to the 1970s uprisings in Latin America.

The factor weighing against the restoration of the old order, albeit in a democratic form, is the presence of the world capitalist crisis, which makes it difficult to grant the substantial concessions that would be necessary to demobilise the mass movement. Moreover, the autocratic character of the majority of the regimes means that political institutions that are favourable to imperialism are very weak.

From a working class perspective, the main weakness, as we have pointed out, is the low level of revolutionary consciousness with which the class enters the struggle after 30 years of bourgeois restoration. The masses, in particular the most advanced sections, do not have a clear strategy to defeat the power of the bourgeoisie and create their own state, and this prevents the struggle from developing to its full potential. It seems that a clear anti-imperialist consciousness hasn’t developed yet, although the regimes and governments against which these uprisings are taking place are openly pro-imperialist and in the past the masses have expressed their anger against them because of their support for the Iraq war and their complicity with Zionist attacks on Palestine. With this in mind, the imperialist countries and the local ruling classes are seeking to contain the uprisings in their first stages in order to derail them.

Everything will depend on the fact that in the course of this period the new workers’ vanguard and the youth manage to set up revolutionary organisations that enable the workers, poor peasants and the whole of the exploited masses to take power.

In the region which is today the epicentre of the uprisings, with the exception of Algeria the revolutionary Marxist

forces historically have been weak, although the workers’ and mass movement has an important anti-imperialist tradition. However, the uprisings will have repercussions around the world. The return to the scene of independent action by the masses favours the building of revolutionary workers’ parties, particularly in those countries where the working class is organised, has maintained high levels of militancy over recent years and has a strong Trotskyist tradition, as in France, where our comrades are promoting the Collective for a Revolutionary Tendency (Platform 4) within the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), and in Argentina, where the PTS has taken important steps in the organisation of the workers’ and youth vanguard. The events we are witnessing are reinforcing our commitment to the struggle to set up revolutionary parties rooted in the working class and to rebuild the IV International, the World Party of the Social Revolution.

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