

Middle East Solidarity

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STRIKING BACK

The workers' movement between revolt and repression

Eyewitness

Bil'in's creative resistance

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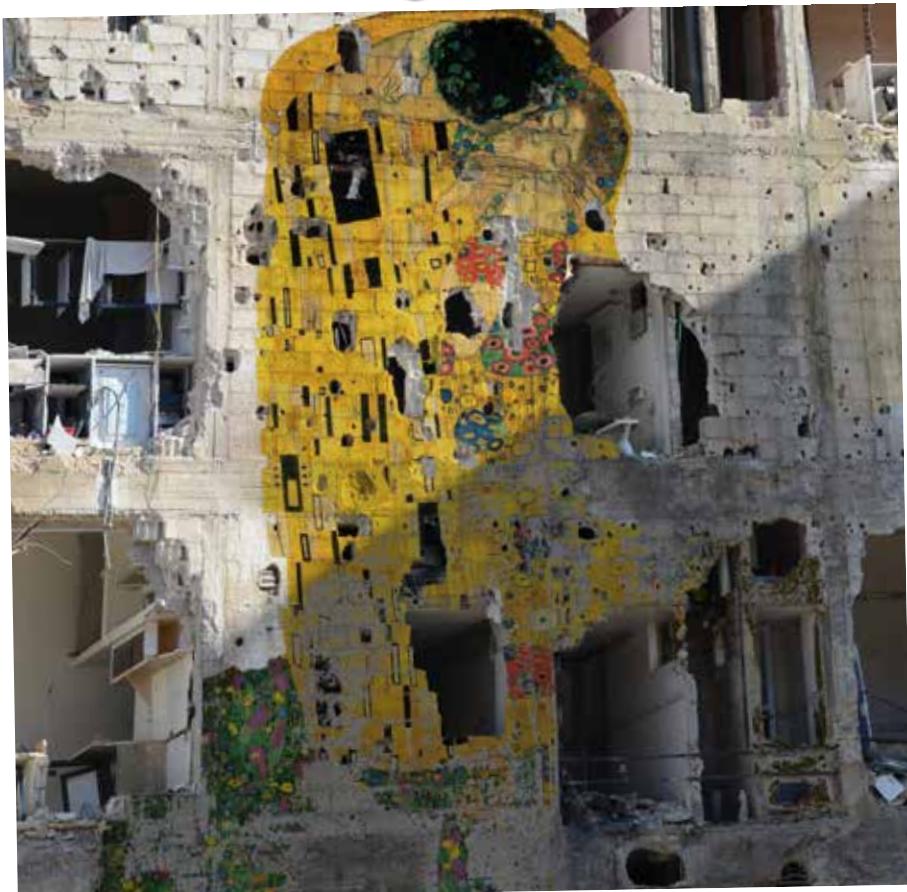
How a popular uprising became a bloody conflict backed by foreign powers

Mahalla defies the generals

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Algeria's coming storm?

Gianni Del Panta analyses the recent wave of strikes and social protests



Syrian Museum - Klimt, Freedom Graffiti by Tammam Azzam

Born in Damascus, Tammam Azzam originally trained in fine art. He turned to digital media and graphic art following the outbreak of violence in Syria to create visual composites of the conflict that would resonate with an international audience.

Azzam's work is featured in Saqi publishers' new book *Don't Panic I'm Islamic*, a hilarious and profound assortment of 'words and pictures on how to stop worrying and learn to love the alien next door.'

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About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but it is war, sectarian violence and western military intervention which grab the headlines.

Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences.

Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

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Find out more here:
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Bil'in's creative resistance to injustice

Since 2004, the Palestinian village of Bil'in has been a locus of non-violent popular resistance to the Israeli occupation. **Saeb Kasm** spoke to **Emad** and **Iyad Burnat** about their struggle for justice.

Situated strategically between Jerusalem and Jaffa, Bil'in has a predominantly Muslim population of around 1,800. Like many Palestinian towns, the people of Bil'in have been subjected to almost daily humiliations and gross violations of human rights by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). Arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment of detainees, beatings of children, night raids and the use of internationally banned weapons against a defenceless population are the norm in Bil'in. Despite this, Bil'in's non-violent methods of resistance have reverberated across Palestine inspiring others to confront injustice with dignity.

At the center of this non-violent resistance is Iyad Burnat, a leading figure in the community and head of the Bil'in Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlements. A key moment in Iyad's life was when, at the age of 14 he joined the popular uprising which erupted in 1987, the First Intifada. He was driven by a deep conviction that confronting the occupation non-violently would provide the impetus for not only challenging structures of oppression but also overcoming internal fears.

As his determination strengthened over the years, Iyad refined his philosophy and emancipatory activism around the traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. In talking with Iyad, you can sense that he is intimately connected with the suffering on the ground that he witnesses on a daily basis and is deeply mindful of the psychological trauma that continues to be inflicted on the Palestinian people.

Power of imagination

He has personally suffered extended physical as well as mental abuse during imprisonment by the IOF. His

spirit, however, remains firmly rooted in a steadfast faith that injustice can be overcome by wielding the power of imagination to create ripples of non-violent resistance: "The belief in one's rights is more important than anything else. If I am confident about my rights, nothing will make me despair...When you resist an Israeli soldier by peaceful means, their weapons become irrelevant." Iyad's repertoire of experiences have enabled him to gaze deeply into the eyes of the enemy and disarm most forms of 'direct assaults' with a range of creative strategies built around the ethos of resisting violent power through peaceful engagement.

The IOF's direct assaults on the people of Bil'in escalated in 2004 with the uprooting of olive trees and confiscation of farmlands. The desecration and removal of olive trees that were five hundred to a thousand years old (some rumored to be two or three thousand) created an uproar throughout Bil'in. In addition to the destruction of olive orchards, the encroachment of Israel's towering separation wall as well as the annexation of over 60 percent of Bil'in's land for the expansion of settlements imposed unspeakable hardships on the local population. In response, the village formed the Bil'in Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlements. Here, Iyad's capacity to forge new alliances began garnering support from solidarity groups across the globe. Israeli human rights lawyer, Michael Sfard, became a reliable proponent as he petitioned the Israeli court on behalf of the people of Bil'in to challenge the ongoing encroachment and confiscation policy.

Weekly protests

Even though the International Court of Justice ruled unequivocally on July 9, 2004 that Israel's separation wall was a violation of international law and should be dismantled with reparations paid to the Palestinian people, the unjust Israeli policy of building the wall under the guise of 'security' continues unabated. The Bil'in community began weekly protests and marches after Friday prayers to apply international pressure on Israel with the support of other Palestinian villages, Israeli and Arab groups, American and European church groups and a range of international civil rights activists.

The demonstrations employ an array of creative non-violent resistance strategies. For example, during the so-called "Flag March", demonstrators carried numerous Palestinian flags which were elevated at high altitudes with a flying kite flag floating 50 metres (160 feet) in the sky. Children were also involved in many marches hoisting both Palestinian flags and colourful balloons during times of increased assaults, especially night raids. The "Children's Marches" served as forms of empowerment enabling children to express themselves openly with signs and chants such as "We Want to Sleep!" in defiance of an IOF that frequently disturbed their sleep patterns.

One particularly imaginative protest tactic called the "Avatar March" derives inspiration from the Hollywood movie Avatar about the fictional Na'vi blue skinned indigenous species living on Pandora. Dressed in blue outfits with painted faces and wigs, large groups of Bi'lin residents appropriated the Na'vi narrative as part of their demonstrations to portray a peaceful people overcoming an assault from an unjust militarily superior nation. The innovative use of theatrics was gradually incorporated into protests as activists gained more experience. As Iyad Burnat explains: "None of us had studied media or art. The style came from a need to be original. It's the fruit of necessity. Or as you might say, necessity is the mother of all invention."

Tear gas

For Iyad and many village residents, the non-violent struggle in Bil'in feels like it is never-ending. Yet there have been some victories along the way. In September 2007, years after the initial protests started, the Israeli Supreme Court finally ordered the government to change the route of the wall near Bi'lin. Despite this, the IOF continue uprooting olive trees, using high velocity tear gas cannisters as bullets to shoot directly at protestors and using sound bombs to terrorize an entire population. Iyad remains fiercely determined to see justice, "Even getting back one inch is an accomplishment ... But the wall is still being built on our land, and even the new route will cut down more of our trees. We are going to continue our fight against the wall until we move it all the way back to the 1967 line."

As Israel continues its incremental "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians through brute coercion and a deliberate campaign to weaken civil society institutions, a new oppositional framework has also emerged in Bi'lin: cultural resistance. Emad Burnat, Iyad's brother, is now at the forefront of a struggle that uses the power of the visual image as a political weapon to expose state crime. His Academy Award nominated documentary, 5 Broken Cameras, exposes the unrelenting violence by the IOF. In the film, Emad's child Gibreel serves as a conduit for our collective experience. Through his innocent eyes, we are able to better understand the extreme repression experienced by the people in Bi'lin.

Culture of resistance

Emad explains that creating a culture of resistance from 'below' and using the power of the lens as part of a broader ideological struggle is a necessity: "The camera



Scaling the Occupation Wall

is our gun...Our popular struggle in Bil'in has always been non-violent. But, you don't see that in the media. The media tends to focus largely on violence and there is a lot of media manipulation. We are not armed people... we don't have a military or a navy, we don't even have a state." Challenging existing narratives as part of this 'long and uneven' resistance is one part of the strategy. The other, is the awakening of a critical consciousness in all people who are receptive to empathizing with the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people.

Emad reminds us that "Our problem in Palestine started from the United Kingdom ... it's your responsibility to put pressure on your government and to elect decent, enlightened leaders who can bring us closer to a just peace." Iyad implores us to continue our solidarity with the people of Palestine, while emphasizing his unyielding commitment to seeking a just, peaceful resolution to the conflict: "We are a simple people, and more than anything we want to see peace. But before there is peace, there must be justice, and we must have our freedom, and our land. We are not against Jews or Israelis, but we are against the occupation. We need the support of the international community, and words are not enough. We need people to take direct action, both here in Palestine, and in their own countries against the governments who support this occupation."

Iyad and Emad are exemplary pioneers within the sphere of civil society, directing our focus to the growing importance of non-violent resistance in Palestine and steering our collective human conscience towards a just and sustainable peace.

Saeb Kasm is a PhD student at Queen Mary, University of London

MOROCCO

Prisoners launch hunger strike

Anne Alexander

Leaders of the popular movement, the Hirak, in Morocco's Rif region and a well-known journalist whose reports on the protest movement have earned him the enmity of the authorities began a hunger strike in jail, family members told the media in September. Over thirty other political prisoners from the Rif are also on hunger strike according to Moroccan activists.

Nasser Zefzafi and Mohamed Jelloul, two prominent figures from the Rif who have played a key role in leading the movement for social justice which erupted in October last year, were among those reported to be on hunger strike.

On 2 October, visitors to Mohamed Jelloul in



Moroccan activists are mobilising solidarity for the hunger strike online
Photo: Al Mounadila

Oukacha Prison found him too weak to stand, after more than a month on hunger strike, according to Nasser Zefzafi's official Facebook page.

Journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui, editor of

independent news website Badil.info, also launched a hunger strike in mid-September, protesting at the decision of the appeal court to increase his prison sentence for "incitement to protest" from 3 months to

12 months. El Mahdaoui was arrested following mass demonstrations in Al Hoceima on 20 July, and accused by prosecutors of encouraging people to join the protest.

Media rights watchdog, Reporters without Borders said it was "appalled" at the sentence. "The appeal court's decision is incomprehensible," the organisation said.

"We call on the Moroccan judicial system to abandon all the proceedings against Hamid El Mahdaoui and to free him at once. He just did his job as a journalist who found himself at the centre of events."

Hundreds of other activists remain in jail, with courts increasing handing down harsh sentences.

International human rights organisations have condemned the Moroccan security forces and courts for torturing detainees and relying on coerced confessions to convict them.

Human Rights Watch documented 32 men convicted after being forced to 'confess' to planning attacks on the police.

'Zefzafi set the whole country on fire'

More than 400 activists from the Rif have been arrested, Soraya El Kahlaoui, Coordinator of the Committee in Solidarity with Hirak political prisoners in Casablanca told a packed meeting organised by War on Want at SOAS on 29 September.

"The jailed leaders of the movement have been moved to Casablanca. They are charged with jeopardising state security and receiving foreign funding," she said. "These charges carry serious penalties, up to life in prison or even the death penalty."

One of those jailed is Nasser Zefzafi, whose arrest in May sparked nation-wide protests.

"Zefzafi set the whole country on fire", said Soraya. "The political prisoners' lives are in danger. They need our solidarity."

Turn to page 22 for more details on the solidarity campaign for the Rif political prisoners



Protest for the Rif prisoners
Photo: Al Mounadila



EGYPT

Mass arrests target LGBT Egyptians

Egypt Solidarity

A vicious homophobic campaign is underway in Egypt following the arrest of seven people alleged to have raised the rainbow flag during a concert in Cairo by Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila on 22 September.

According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) the crackdown has led to over 50 arrests of people across the country based on their sexuality or perceived sexuality.

An orchestrated campaign in the media condemning LGBT people as 'criminals' and 'deviants' has accompanied the security forces' raids.

In a statement on 4 October, EIPR said that it had documented at least 57 arrests, with most of the detainees facing charges of "habitual debauchery," or



Mass arrests followed the concert
Photo: via Twitter

"promoting debauchery," in accordance with articles 9 and 10 of Egypt's 1961 anti-prostitution and debauchery law. As is common in Egypt, detainees are reported to have been abused while in custody, denied access to lawyers and refused time to prepare an adequate defence. Some have already been handed down jail sentences of between 1 and 6 years.

"We are sure that the scale of the crackdown is much larger than we know. Every single time lawyers have been to the prosecution, or to court, they have discovered more arrests than they expected. They also noticed that all of those arrested, either through

online entrapment, or from LGBTQI friendly spaces, were being interrogated in separate cases," said EIPR executive director Gasser Abdel-Razek.

According to lawyers, there is a strong likelihood that detainees are being subjected to forced anal examinations after arrest, as well as other forms of abuse.

The latest crackdown is part of a wider pattern. EIPR previously documented the arrest of 232 people who are LGBT or presumed to be, between September 2013 and March 2017. The media has often played a key role in incitement and promoting homophobia.

In one notorious case

in December 2014, TV journalist Mona al-Iraqi led a security raid on a bathhouse in Cairo, filming men who were arrested and publishing their identities. The police are known to use dating apps such as Grindr and Growlr and social media sites to entrap people.

Activists who have spoken up against the recent crackdown, such as Sarah Hegazy, have also been detained. Her lawyer says that police had incited other inmates to beat and harass her client in detention.

Sarah has been remanded in custody for fifteen days and is facing questioning from prosecutors who deal with terrorism cases.

EGYPT

Trade union leaders seized in dawn raids

Egypt Solidarity

The Egyptian authorities have arrested eleven leading activists in the independent unions over the past week, stepping up pressure on the workers' movement following the victimisation of textile workers in Mahalla after a

major strike in August.

Eight independent trade unionists were seized in a series of nation-wide raids on their homes on 16 September, in a bid by the authorities to stop a protest rally planned for 19 September outside the General Tax Workers' Union headquarters.

Leaders of the independent property tax collectors' union, the independent general tax workers' union and the electricity workers' union are among those reported to have been arrested.

The president of the Property Tax Collectors' union, Tareq Kaeb, has also been arrested. He was



Tareq Kaeb

reported to have been taken by the security services from outside Kafr Shukr hospital as he arrived for a medical appointment. A further two leading activists from the independent tax collectors' unions were arrested in late September.

Reports on social media suggest that the arrested

trade unionists are facing charges of "incitement to protest" and have been remanded in custody for further interrogation by prosecutors.

Their detention was renewed for fifteen days on 3 October, according to the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services.

Public Services International (PSI) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) protested to the Egyptian authorities demanding the release of the jailed trade unionists.

Turn to page 22 for more campaigns in solidarity with Egyptian workers.

BAHRAIN

Activist's family charged after five minutes in court

Luke Bhatia

Members of a Bahraini human rights activist's family have been arrested, tortured and now face sentencing on terrorism charges after a trial lasting five minutes. Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei is Director of Advocacy for the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) based in London.

Whilst living in Bahrain he was arrested, tried by a military court, and imprisoned and tortured because of his activism. There is a scar on his forehead that bears testimony to his treatment at the hands of the Bahraini authorities.

He now lives in exile in the UK where he has claimed asylum and continues to highlight the human rights abuses that take place within Bahrain from the relative safety of the UK.

In his role at BIRD, Sayed has been successful in raising awareness about the human rights situation in Bahrain and has brought the Bahraini human rights record to venues such as the UK parliament and the UN Human Rights Council.

Unable to silence him in the UK, the Bahraini government has targeted Sayed's family repeatedly in Bahrain. In October 2016, the King of Bahrain, Hamad al-Khalifa, visited UK Prime Minister Theresa May in Downing Street. As the King's motorcade passed



Above - Sayed Alwadaei speaks at the UN. Right - Hajar Mansoor (I)
Photos: BIRD



by Sayed protested in the street. The next day the Bahraini authorities arrested his wife and 18-month old son at the airport in Bahrain as they attempted to return to the UK after visiting family in the country. During the 7-hour detention her interrogator asked her, 'Where shall I go first? Shall I go to his family or your family?'

After Sayed protested at the Windsor Horse Show in London, where the Queen was hosting the King of Bahrain, back home his sister was summoned for questioning. In March 2017, Sayed's mother-in-law Hajar Mansoor Hasan (49), brother-in-law Sayed Nazar Alwadaei (18), and maternal cousin Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor (29) were arrested and interrogated about his human rights activities in the UK.

All were allegedly subject to mistreatment, with Hajar reportedly interrogated on 3 occasions for 11 hours, forced to stand for prolonged periods and verbally abused, resulting in her collapsing and being hospitalised.

Ties between the repressive Bahraini monarchy and Western governments are very close.

Nazar allegedly had bruises on his back, knee and elbow, and Mahmood had redness on his back. The authorities also allegedly threatened the arrest of Hajar's daughter, son-in-law, and youngest son, and to suspend her husband's pension payments.

After days of

interrogation the three were presented with terrorism charges based on coerced confessions and 'confidential sources,' a practice that has become common in Bahrain. On 18 September 2017, after a hearing that lasted five minutes, their trial was postponed until 30 October for sentencing. They have been charged with planting bombs in the country.

The persecution of Sayed alWadaei's family comes at a time when ties between Bahrain's repressive monarchy and Western governments are close.

Trump approved the sale of F-16 fighter planes to Bahrain at a cost of \$3 billion. While in January of this year, the UK government provided the Bahraini government with £2 million of aid from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

WOMEN AT WORK

Fighting for liberation and social justice in Morocco



Women are active in the streets and the workplaces
Photo: Al-Mounadila via Facebook

Women lead many social and political struggles in Morocco despite unfair laws and a patriarchal culture, [Souad Jellal](#) argues.

In this article I am going to give a snapshot of the role of working women within Morocco from the perspective of my experience as a trade unionist.

Working women are doubly exploited in Morocco, facing discrimination in both the economic and social arenas. They earn up to 30 percent less than their male colleagues. There is a very high percentage of unemployment nationally, but women's unemployment is more than double the rate for men, standing at 23 percent rather than 10 percent.

There is also a gap in literacy levels, between men and women. We find that there is an illiteracy rate of 64 percent of girls under 15, whereas it is 38 percent in boys in the same age category. Among girls and young women between 15 and 24 years of age,

42 percent are illiterate, while in the same age category for boys and young men it is only 24 percent.

Then there's also the level of social security and paid maternity leave: 79 percent of women do not receive this. There is also a prevalence of precarious forms of work. So 38 percent of women agricultural workers working in agriculture have no contracts, while 73 percent of them are below 15 years of age and they work for more than 12 hours for wages of about £2.

There's also the phenomenon of increasing violence against women that leads them to react in tragic ways. For example, the National Commission to Monitor Violence against Women recorded that nine women burned themselves, or self-immolated in 2015 and 244 women hanged themselves.

This is in reaction to their life

situations and discrimination and violence against them. Women also face legal discrimination. Moroccan law does not recognise rape as a crime of discrimination against women, and according to law, the perpetrator, the criminal or the rapist will be spared a prison sentence which is usually 5-15 years in jail, if he consents to marry his victim.

In a famous case from 2012, Amina Felal, who was forced by the judge to marry her rapist and then killed herself. Women also face discrimination in cases of marital infidelity. The man committing the crime of infidelity would be spared any detention or prison sentence if the case is dropped by his wife. But his partner in infidelity, the woman, will get a prison sentence whatever happens, whether she's being pursued by her husband or not. And also the law allows the judge to give permission for a minor girl under the age of 15 to get married.

Through their struggles, women have won the right to education and the right to work.

If we turn to the achievements of the women's struggle, we find that women have won a number of rights, among them the right to education and the right to work. In Morocco, 50 percent of university students are women and 35 percent of the labour force is made up of women.

Through campaigning women were able in 1995 to annul the patriarchal law that used to make the formalisation of an employment contract for women conditional on getting the husband's permission. There has been some changes in divorce laws which have benefitted women. Since 2004 women are now allowed to initiate divorce whereas previously this was the exclusive right of the husband.

There is wide participation by women in all the social and political struggles taking place in Morocco against austerity and against privatisation. Yet this is not represented in the higher committees or apparatus of the trade unions because of the prevalence of patriarchal culture, meaning that the woman also has to carry the burden of work at home. This factor is reflected in the small number of women in the membership of trade unions. Only



Above: Cleaners hold a sit-in, December 2016
 Below: Women are playing a leading role in the mass movement in the Rif
 Photos: Al-Mounadila via Facebook

15 percent of members of unions are women and even worse, there is only one single woman in the ruling bodies of the trade unions. In Morocco there are two large union federations, the Moroccan Workers' Federation and the Confederation of Labour.

The women's movement is dominated by middle class parties, which work to reduce the struggle and restrict it only to the legal side, ignoring the economic and social aspects of the struggle such as the exploitation of poor women and their oppression. This leads essentially to a reduction in the mass base of the movement and the absence of links between women in their workplaces and universities and the movement for unemployed women.

I believe that all emancipatory forces which believe in the equality of men and women should encourage women to take on responsibility and offices in public organisations particularly in trade unions. They must also combat reactionary ideas that restrict women's role in society to taking care of the husband and children. The essential and main task we face now is how to build a wide front that can unite the special demands of women with the general demands of movements opposing neoliberalism.

Souad Jellal is a trade unionist from Morocco. She was speaking at an event organised by Middle East Solidarity Maghreb at SOAS on 11 July

LIBYA: REVOLUTION TO CIVIL WAR



Mass protest in Bayda, July 2011
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

After three years of fighting, the guns finally fell silent in Benghazi this summer, as the tanks of Khalifa Haftar bulldozed their way through the last pockets of resistance to his authority. **Richard Donnelly** explores how a popular revolution turned into a bloody civil war stoked by regional and global powers.

Benghazi was one of the strongholds of the 2011 Libyan uprising. Huge demonstrations led to the freeing of the city from the grip of the regime and the handing of power to revolutionary councils. Massive crowds celebrated on the streets of Benghazi on 20 October 2011, as news reached them of the death of Muammar Gaddafi. The end of his 42 years of despotic and vain rule seemed to be the signal for a new chapter in Libyan history.

The driving force behind Libya's revolt was the urban masses

But six years on, many of these hopes have been buried under the pain of a civil war driven by foreign intervention and the militarisation of Libyan politics. And from this has come the marginalisation of the very forces that ignited the 2011 revolution – the mass of ordinary people in cities like Benghazi and Tripoli.

As with its neighbours, Tunisia and Egypt, the driving force behind Libya's revolt was the urban masses. Students, workers and the poor took

to the streets to end four decades of brutal dictatorship. In the cities where the revolution was most advanced, the running of daily life was taken over by revolutionary councils.

But the response of the regime was to militarise the struggle. Gaddafi used his army to lay siege to towns that rose against him, turning the revolution into a civil war. For this reason, groups of armed revolutionary fighters assumed an importance in Libya that they didn't in Tunisia or Egypt.

Moreover, the military nature of the conflict opened it up to intervention from the Western powers. Three weeks into the uprising, the revolutionaries suffered a serious reverse on the battlefield after being ambushed by Gaddafi's forces near his stronghold of Sirte. With the regime suddenly going on the front foot to launch an offensive on Benghazi, the leadership body of the revolution, the National Transitional Council (NTC), appealed to NATO to implement a no-fly zone and launch airstrikes against Gaddafi.

As British, French and American forces took control of the skies over Libya, NATO hoped to win political influence inside the revolution. The

NTC was forced to guarantee that the rights of European oil companies operating in Libya would be respected, and pro-Western figures from the Gaddafi regime gained top positions in the newly emerging national administration.

When Gaddafi finally fell, the revolution divided into two main camps.

The first formed around the new National Forces Alliance (NFA) party, led by Mahmoud Jibril. Jibril was a senior official in the old regime and a close friend of Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, who was responsible for the neo-liberalisation of the Libyan economy in the 2000s. The NFA represented officials and businessmen from the Gaddafi-era who wanted to keep their power in the new Libya, while using the opportunity thrown up by the overthrow of the dictatorship to develop even closer relations with America and the European powers.

The second camp was dominated by people who had been exiled, imprisoned or politically marginalised under Gaddafi and now wanted to take power from those who had been complicit in the regime. The most important force amongst them was the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, which envisioned a Libya transformed into a moderate Islamist state like Turkey.

From the start, the key struggle in the new Libya was over the extent to which figures from the Gaddafi regime should be excluded from public life. But instead of the masses which had launched the revolution moving to push out the old elite, the lead was taken by the armed militias thrown up by the transformation of the revolution into an armed struggle.

The revolution had not only toppled Gaddafi, but also opened the doors to his huge stockpiles of arms. Guns now flooded the country, just as the new government tried to construct a new state by offering to pay the revolutionary armed groups that had fought in 2011 to act as their security services. With the militias becoming one of the few sources of steady employment in an economy shattered by civil war, their size and power grew immeasurably.

These armed groups flexed their muscle in 2013 as a Political Isolation Bill, designed to lock former Gaddafi loyalists out of public office, seemed to be on the verge of being defeated in



Map: via Wikimedia Commons

Parliament by Mahmoud Jibril's NFA. The militias blocked ministries and surrounded the Parliament building, bringing Tripoli to a standstill and demanding the Bill be passed.

The result was an uneasy stalemate. The Bill passed but was very watered down. But soon the tensions within post-Gaddafi Libya would burst into an even more dramatic confrontation.

Militias became one of the few sources of steady employment in an economy shattered by civil war

In 2014, the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party was heavily defeated in the elections to a new Parliament, the House of Representatives. But with only 18 percent of Libyans participating in the vote, and with the continued loyalty of many of the powerful militias, the Brotherhood and its allies decided to suspend the authority of the newly elected MPs.

The bulk of the House of Representatives escaped Tripoli and

set up as a Parliament-in-exile in Tobruk. Their lack of effective power was symbolised by having to take refuge on a Greek cruise liner docked in the tiny eastern town, which they were subsequently forced to leave after failing to pay the cost of renting it.

The alliance of Islamist politicians and armed militias around the Muslim Brotherhood seemed to have triumphed. But three years on, the fate of the rival Tripoli and Tobruk-based governments has been completely reversed by the emergence of General Khalifa Haftar.

Allied with the government in Tobruk, Haftar has grafted together shattered pieces of the old Gaddafi-era armed forces with the support of the Egyptian military. Borrowing the language of the West's War on Terror and the al-Sisi regime in Cairo, he has branded his enemies as Islamist terrorists and directed his Libyan National Army to crush all forces aligned with Tripoli.

This anti-terror rhetoric has been made easier by the emergence of Islamic State. IS began to make their presence



felt in 2014, putting down roots in the cities of Derna and Sirte. But while major offensives led by the Tripoli government and its militia allies, backed by US airstrikes, have now decimated the group, Haftar has continued to conflate IS with other Islamist groups in Libya to legitimise his war on Tripoli.

This has handed an important alibi to the Egyptian military for their interventions in support of Haftar, such as when they 'retaliated' to a terrorist atrocity against Christians in Egypt earlier this year by bombing Islamist-held Derna, despite IS being driven out of the city in 2015.

Haftar's offensives have centred around a series of bitter sieges of eastern cities that had been key centres of the 2011 revolution, and had since been dominated by revolutionary councils and Islamist militias. While Benghazi fell this year, Haftar's battle to conquer the neighbouring city of Derna still faces resistance from the armed Islamist groups there.

Haftar's goal is to impose a military regime which will bury his rivals in Tripoli and re-establish a dictatorship in Libya. To this end, he has suspended the democratically elected municipal councils in much of eastern Libya and installed military governors. But after six years of political turmoil and civil war, it is possible that many ordinary Libyans may be willing to accept the curtailment of democracy if it offers the 'stability' that Haftar claims to offer.

While Haftar's army has swept into the huge desert tracts of Southern Libya and conquered most of the country, the government in Tripoli has been exposed as weak and divided. Prime Minister Fayed al-Sarraj's own offices were even taken out of his control by an attempted coup by rival Islamists in 2016.

Al-Sisi's regime in Cairo isn't the only regional power backing General Haftar, who is also aided by UAE and other Gulf states. And when three French soldiers died after their helicopter was shot down by Benghazi militiamen in 2016, President François Hollande was forced to reveal that the French army was active in Libya. More recently, Emmanuel Macron pressured Tripoli's Sarraj to meet with Haftar in Paris and agree that the general should be included in any new government after the war ends.

France is desperate for a stable government in Libya that can guarantee the flow of profits from the oilfields



Khalifa Haftar (centre) meets Russian officials
Photo: Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

in eastern Libya exploited by French energy giant, Total. But it also backs Haftar's crusade against Islamism and believes that elements allied to the Tripoli government may be supporting groups fighting French forces in Mali.

However, Sarraj's government also has powerful foreign backers. Qatari support for Tripoli has been an issue in the blockade against it by the other Gulf powers.

Italy too is a key international ally of Sarraj. As well as defending the huge Libyan holdings of ENI, Italy's biggest oil company, Sarraj has handed Italian consortia big infrastructure contracts, such as the reconstruction of Tripoli Airport. But most importantly, he has cut deals with the Italian government to limit the number of refugees and migrants entering Italy from western Libya.

The Italian government has been under enormous pressure from right wing parties to stop African refugees using Tripoli as a transit point for entering Italy. Italy previously paid Gaddafi billions of dollars to detain and imprison refugees headed for Europe, but the arrangement collapsed after the revolution. Hundreds of thousands of

people from Niger, Chad, Eritrea and other poor African states have made the grim journey across the desert to jump in hazardous smugglers' boats, often run as a lucrative sideline by the main armed groups on the coast around Tripoli.

As well as allowing an Italian warship to enter Libyan waters to block refugees, Sarraj has reactivated the network of detention centres built under Gaddafi. Thousands of migrants are now detained in dangerously cramped conditions, funded with cash from European governments.

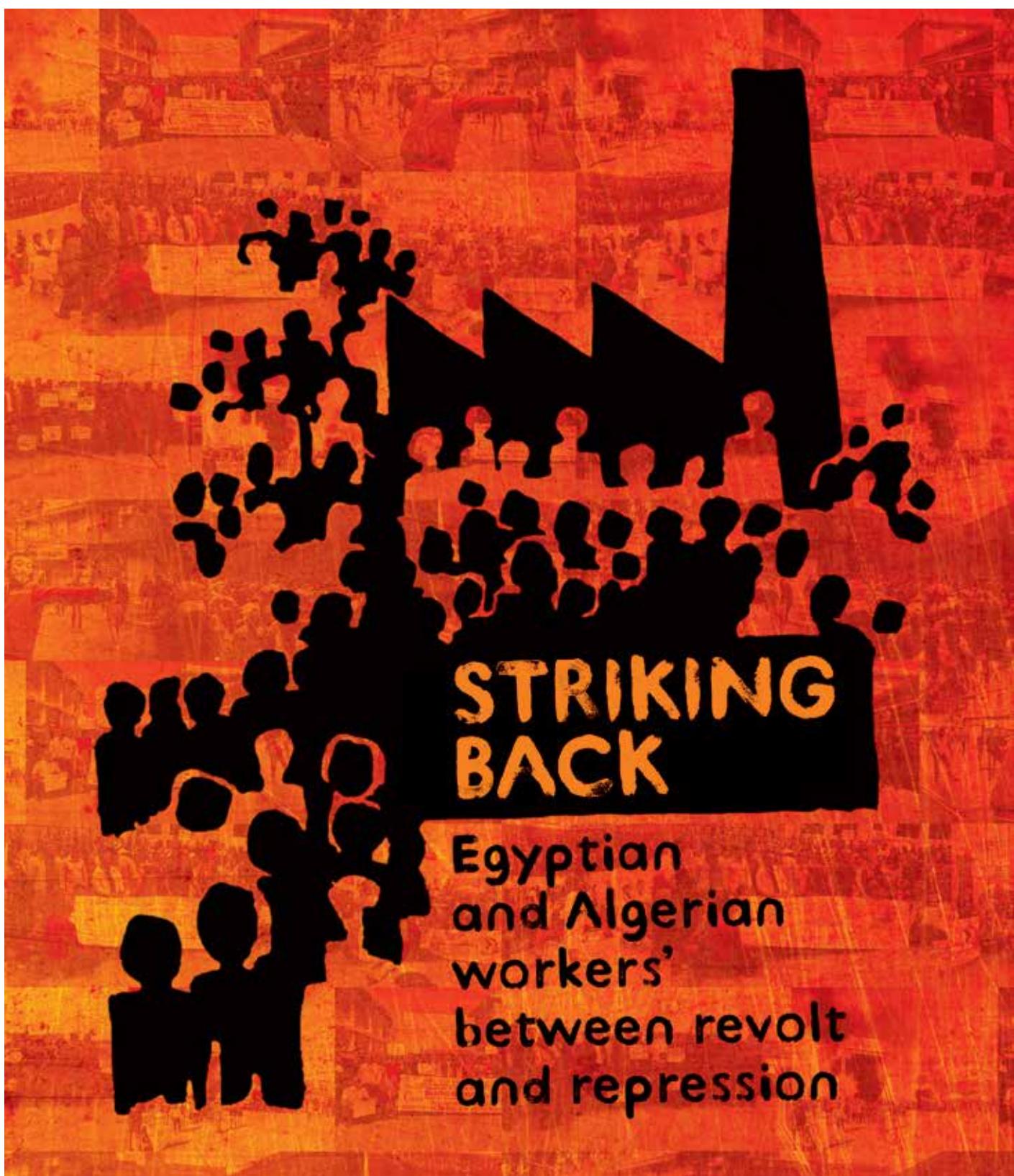
The brutal civil war that has unfolded in Libya has pushed back the mass political participation that drove the 2011 revolution. Power has been transferred from the people to armed groups financed by outside forces. Along with this collapse of civil society has come a collapse in civility. Besides the bombings and shooting, there have been reports of Central African refugees being sold into slavery.

In this context, the heroism of ordinary people who do continue to stand up for the dignity and freedom promised by the revolution is incredible. Last year, tanker drivers took strike action against beatings they had received from soldiers guarding oil terminals. Sanitation workers in Tripoli have also taken strike action, along with pilots and ground crew at Benghazi Airport.

Libya continues to be wracked by the most extreme social and political problems, but beneath the wreckage of the civil war, a careful observer can still see glimpses of the desire for a different society that sparked the revolution.



Libya's oil is the target of foreign companies
Photo: via Wikimedia Commons



Despite harsh repression, the organised working class remains a key driver of social protest across the Middle East. In this special report, **Anne Alexander** and **Tom Kay** analyse

the roots of a mass strike by textile workers in the Misr Spinning company in Egypt. Meanwhile **Gianni Del Panta** argues that a major walkout in October 2016 by workers in Algeria's

state-owned car industry in Rouiba has to be understood in the context of a wider social rebellion mobilising teachers, the unemployed and local people opposed to fracking.



Mahalla defies Egypt's generals to demand a pay rise

The textile town of Mahalla al-Kubra in the Nile Delta has a rich history of class struggle, write Anne Alexander and Tom Kay. Just over ten years ago, in December 2006, workers at the giant Misr Spinning and Weaving factory walked out in a strike which sparked a wave of industrial action across the country. It was in Mahalla in April 2008 that an attempted strike by Misr Spinning workers touched off localised uprising which saw the police lose control of the streets and crowds tear down and trample portraits of dictator Hosni Mubarak: a dress rehearsal for the revolution of 2011.

This August, workers at Misr Spinning once again walked out on strike demanding the payment of overdue bonuses. The two-week strike was an impressive display of workers' organization and resilience in the face of a military regime which has acted ruthlessly to crush all forms of dissent. Yet this time, management did not quickly concede workers' main demands. Instead, the company struck back by suspending or transferring eight workers and reporting them to the police for 'incitement to strike'.

On August 7, 6,000 Misr Spinning workers stopped work and demanded the payment of a bonus worth ten percent of their annual salaries, an increased share of company profits, increased food allowances, and the replacement of the company's Commissioner-General with a board of directors. Within days the strike had spread, with 10,000 more workers joining the dispute from Misr Spinning and Weaving, and a solidarity strike of 3,000 workers breaking out at the Al-Nasr Processing and Dyeing plant.

There were also reports of slowdown strikes at a handful of other plants.

This made the regime and local bosses uncomfortable. The management at Al-Nasr quickly sought to stop the strike, making an offer to workers to pay the delayed bonus within three hours of the strike beginning. Meanwhile, the regime tried to intimidate the workers by erecting security checkpoints on all the major routes out of the city.

Thousands of workers and Mahalla residents marched behind a coffin bearing the company chairman's name through the town towards the main square.

These threats escalated further when Chairman of the Textile Holding Company, Ahmed Mustafa, threatened a lockout at the factory. The response from workers was fantastic. Thousands of workers and Mahalla residents marched behind a coffin bearing Mustafa's name through the town towards the main square. This show of defiance led to a group of local MPs promising to attempt to resolve the strikers demands within seven days, provided they returned to work. Distrustful of the politicians, workers continued their strike.

In response to this show of defiance, the regime ramped up its rhetoric, accusing the strikers of being "led by terrorists" – a reference to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, whose members have been subject to severe repression. In the face of these threats – often a

precursor to violent state intervention in workers disputes since the coup – and after the circulation of a leaflet signed by company management and local politicians restating their offer to consider the demands, workers suspended their action.

The company went onto the offensive on 9 September, suspending two women (Wala'a Mohamed Abd-al-Ra'uf and Nagwa Sa'ad Abd-al-Qadir) and four men (Mohamed Al-Sayyed Misbah, Amru Rifa'at Salama, Amir Gamal Hassan and Karim Hossam Isma'il) from work and reporting them to the police on charges of "incitement to strike", and "obstructing work". Another worker, Yasser Fahmi has been forcibly transferred to Alexandria, while administrator Tala'at al-Umari has had his pay docked. The company has also delayed payment of workers' September pay packets. Meanwhile, riot police deployed across the town in a bid to pre-empt further protests.

However, there were also signs that the strike had put management under severe pressure: a new company chairman was appointed on 11 September, along with a new team of managers heading the different sections of the company.

The explosion of a new major strike in Mahalla is a clear sign of the regime's difficulties in containing rising anger at the intense economic pressure on Egyptian workers following the imposition of a raft of austerity measures by the regime since last November in order to meet the conditions for a loan from the International Monetary Fund. This programme of reforms has led to cuts in vital subsidies for the poor, a new value

added tax and the floatation of the Egyptian Pound on international stock markets.

The loan, agreed in November 2016, is reliant on El-Sisi's government imposing sweeping 'structural reforms' across Egypt. Fuel subsidies have been slashed, electricity prices have been hiked by 40 percent, and the rates for residential water usage have increased between ten and 70 percent depending on consumption levels.

Whilst this has led to increased growth in the Egyptian economy, and a spike in foreign investment, austerity and spiraling inflation – currently hovering at 30 percent – have plunged millions of Egyptians further into poverty. This in turn has fuelled popular anger against the regime, which has been more than happy to attack the conditions of workers and the poor.

In March, when the regime announced it was cutting the number of state-funded loaves per bakery from 4,000 to 500, protests of hundreds of people – led by women – sprung up in Alexandria and Giza. Protesters chanted, "we want bread" and "everything but a loaf". The next day, Supply Minister Ali Meselhy announced that the cut in state-

funded loaves would be less harsh. In Alexandria, where the protests had been largest, the local governor announced further funding.

Workers have also struck back, demanding higher pay to cope with the spiralling cost of living. A 3,000-strong strike at Misr Spinning in February demanded higher wages and the payment of bonuses. There have been walkouts by workers in the food industry in Suez, wildcat strikes by rail workers over safety and strikes over pay and conditions in the 10th of Ramadan industrial zone.

The regime's response has been increasingly repressive. Security forces swooped in dawn raids to pre-emptively arrest bus workers' leaders, and seized shipyard workers and put on them on trial in front of a military court.

The Mahalla strike in February this year was broken by security forces, and key organisers were moved to sections of the factory where they could have less influence.

Key activists in the independent trade unions were arrested in a series of nation-wide raids on their homes on 16 September, in a bid by the authorities to stop a protest rally planned for 19

September outside the General Tax Workers' Union headquarters. Leaders of the independent property tax collectors' union, the independent general tax workers' union and the electricity workers' union are among those reported to have been seized.

The president of the Property Tax Collectors' union, Tareq Kaeb, has also been arrested. He was reported to have been taken by the security services from outside Kafr Shukr hospital as he arrived for a medical appointment. A further two leading activists from the independent tax collectors' unions were arrested in late September bringing the total to eleven.

This dual context of continuing workers' protests on the one hand, and increasingly targeted repression of worker activists on the other, is crucial to understanding the significance of the strike in Mahalla. In circumstances such as these, the ability of Misr Spinning workers to organise a two-week long strike and several mass protests shows the potential for resistance to grow and for the movement in the workplaces to rebuild its strength for the battles to come.

Does Rouïba's revolt herald Algeria's coming storm?

On 31 October 2016 workers began an open-ended strike at the huge state-owned factory in Rouïba that produces industrial vehicles, writes Giann Del Panta. The SNVI plant (known by its French acronym) is located just a few dozen kilometres away from the capital, Algiers, and remains one of the few important manufacturing sites in a country that has lost much of its industry in the last few decades.

Although the incredible concentration of workers in this area during the 1970s and 1980s is gradually fading from memory, today more than 75 productive units still employ around 32,000 workers. The SNVI with its 7,000 employees is the crucial element in this industrial environment. Several of these enterprises are its suppliers, dependent on the fortunes of the state-owned company. The relevance of Rouïba, however, goes far beyond these mere numbers.

The strike which paralysed Rouïba in

October 2016 follows a long history of revolt. In October 1988, for instance, it was in the factories in Rouïba that a radical protest movement took off, leading thousands into the streets before being eventually repressed by the armed forces, which more than 500 people dead.

On 7 January 2010, Rouïba's workers were once again at the forefront of demonstrations against dire working conditions and meagre salaries, when 500 of them blocked one of the main roads to the capital and confronted lines of riot police.

The October 2016 strike went on for a whole week, attracting solidarity and participation by workers well beyond the SNVI, as well as great attention from the Algerian press. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the previous strike in 2010, which was an isolated protest at the end of a decade characterized by economic growth – or, to be more precise, high hydrocarbon prices –

and apparent social peace, the 2016 strike followed the development of an increasingly powerful opposition movement, and thus has been followed by further and more radical protests by workers in the hydrocarbon sector.

As is often the case, the strike was born out of a complex set of social and economic grievances. The general framework was provided by the austerity measures that the Algerian government has been forced to implement due to a sharp decline in oil and gas prices and the rapid decline of the country's hard currency reserves.

In particular, a new law passed last year that raising the retirement age from 55 to 60 years (making no exception for hard manual labour) has become the focal point of anger and resentment for many blue-collar workers in Algeria.

SNVI employees also showed specific concerns about the state of their factory, which has been

completely abandoned by the state and mismanaged by a corrupt and inefficient bureau directly appointed by the government. This has led to sharp falls in production. By the end of October 2016 only 554 lorries and buses – that is, barely upon one-fourth of the expected total output of over 2000 vehicles – had been produced. Workers' worst fear remains that the government's gradual disengagement from SNVI is an attempt to close down the factory step by step, avoiding therefore any direct confrontation with its militant workforce.

Many commentators have tried to draw parallels between the protest in Rouiba and what happened in Mahalla al-Kubra in December 2006, when the Egyptian labour movement launched a strike that played a transformative role in the decade-long process that led to the outbreak of a mass-based revolutionary uprising some years later on.

To be sure, there are several and significant similarities between the two cases. Both protests were strikes that erupted in the cities that have symbolized the main productive branch of the two countries – that is, textile in Mahalla al-Kubra and heavy industry in Rouiba. Although the concentration of workforce was more than three times greater in the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company than in the SNVI, the two factories represented gigantic wrecks of a period in which state-owned companies were the main actors in fostering an accelerated process of industrialization. Moreover, whilst both the two protests started as reactions to unfulfilled promises, they rapidly went up to the point of asking for the resignation of the executive bureau of the factory.

But analogies should not be overstressed. In Mahalla al-Kubra, workers were not even able to use the lowest level of the trade union structure and were forced to establish ad hoc strike committees to carry out their mobilization. In Rouiba, on the contrary, the situation for worker activists resembles more closely the history of the labour movement in Tunisia than in Egypt.

As in Tunisia, the main trade union federation in Algeria, the UGTA (Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens), is a complex and two-headed apparatus. It is completely co-opted by the regime at its apex as well as in many regional and local sections throughout the



Trainee teachers on the march for social justice
Photo: via Facebook

country, however under pressure from mid-ranking trade unionists and rank-and-file militants, the UGTA has swung between being a powerful instrument of the regime's control over workers and a mobilizing channel for their protests.

This pressure from below over the course of ten days from mid-October 2016 eventually propelled a direct confrontation between the industrial proletariat in Rouiba and the Algerian state, breaking down the rigid hierarchical structure within the UGTA.

There is, however, another element that differentiates markedly the Algerian context from Ben Ali's Tunisia. Whilst for about twenty-five years, the UGTA was the only trade union allowed to operate in the country, in the aftermath of the October 1988 mass street protests which led to the collapse of the old one-party system it has been joined by a set of independent sector-based trade unions.

The economic and social protests that anticipated the October 2016 strike in Rouiba were championed and supported by this amalgam of independent trade unions, often sharply discriminated against and repressed by the regime.

As is well known, Algeria missed the Arab uprisings bandwagon. Although there were protests and riots for nearly a week in the first days of January 2011, the regime was never seriously threatened and was able to weather the storm quite easily. Whilst for other countries in North Africa, the mass-based uprisings that broke out in late 2010 and early 2011 were the product of the reciprocal fertilization between 'political' struggles and 'economic' strikes that had gone on throughout the previous decade, the extraordinary social and political ferment of the whole Middle East became the starting point of a new cycle of protests in Algeria,

which have followed, nevertheless, a specific and peculiar trajectory.

The first sign of new workers' activism was actually marked, as already seen, by the strike in Rouiba in January 2010. This marked the end of a long-lasting period in which workers' protests had become rare, plummeting from an astonishing 2,290 episodes in 1989 to just 23 in 2003 and remaining at a such low level for the whole 2000s. The new cycle of protest that has speeded up markedly since 2013 has mainly been the product of two new actors, both of whom were not traditional blue-collar workers.

First and foremost, there are public sector workers employed in the educational and health sectors, organised through independent trade unions. The number of protests, sit-ins, petitions, and even strikes in Algerian schools, universities, hospitals, and clinics is simply uncountable.

Up to now, however, the most significant event has been by far what has become known as the 'March of Dignity' – that is, a 250 kilometre-long protest by temporary teachers, who were demonstrating against their precarious working conditions, the lack of new hiring in the public sector, and the chronic under-financing of schools and state-provided services.

The march from Béjaïa to Algiers lasted eight days, attracting great media coverage and fostering visceral solidarity among participants and between these, on the one hand, and people living in the numerous villages and towns that were touched by the long journey, on the other. Food, water, blankets, and even medical assistance were provided by trade unionists, political militants, and 'ordinary' citizens as



well to teachers who had transformed themselves into marathon runners.

The second new actor that has appeared on the Algerian political scene has been the lower classes of the south. Two main factors are worth nothing here. The geographical location is probably the most striking one. Traditionally, the south of the country has been regarded as politically docile and culturally backward.

Despite its huge oil and gas reserves providing the source for the bulk of Algeria's national wealth, the region has received extremely limited political attention and economic investment from elites based in the capital, Algiers. This stereotyped image started vanishing in 2013, when the unemployed movement CNDDC (the French acronym for the National Committee for the Defence of the Unemployed) was officially formed in the southern province of Ouargla.

The eruption of an anti-fracking uprising, following the government's decision to allow oil and gas companies drilling the soil in Salah and in the Ahnet Basin, confirmed the south's new pattern of activism. The anti-fracking protests lasted four months, touching several towns of the south. The social composition of this new social movement also needs to be taken into consideration. The engine of the protests were the ever-growing informal workers, students, and the unemployed. It was, however, their inability to attract other social classes – first and foremost, blue- and white-collar workers, as well as middle class elements – and groups – trade unions and professional categories – that limited the spread of the uprising after its initial dynamic development.

The October 2016 strike in Rouiba has to be located in this long wave of protests, strikes and political engagement. The strike ended under pressure from the UGTA central bureau after management agreed to consider workers' demands, although tension remained high in the workplace for weeks.

Then, on May 2017, a new march organized by trade unionists brought more than 500 workers onto the streets in the industrial area of Rouiba. What is more, the October 2016 strike seems to have been the springboard for a new cycle of mobilization in the crucial hydrocarbon sector. This sector accounts for about 97 percent of the country's exports, two-thirds of

government spending, and one-third of Algeria's GDP.

Only a tiny percentage of the Algerian working class – less than 2 percent of the total once managers and high-ranking foreign workers are excluded – works in this sector, producing such astonishing wealth that the regime has granted relatively better social and economic conditions to buy off hydrocarbon workers.

This has produced a kind of aristocracy of labour, which has often shown lack of solidarity with the other workers, perceiving that its own interests are better served by supporting the government rather than challenging it.

The austerity measures recently implemented by the regime, however, have not spared workers in the hydrocarbon sector, whose living conditions and real salaries have been seriously affected. Protests in this sector have been challenged by unusually high levels – even by Algerian standards – of state violence.

On January 3, 2017, for instance, Raouf Mellal, president of the independent trade union in the electrical and gas sector (SNATEG) was sentenced to six months in prison, whilst at the end of March, nine prominent figures in the same union were arrested in Tizi Ouzou, decapitating therefore the organization. In spite of this ruthless wave of repression, SNATEG militants staged a new strike on July 2017. Not less than 40 workers were arrested by the Algerian police in a seemingly endless cycle of mobilization, repression, and new mobilization.

The sharp increase in the number of workers' strikes and protests is taking place during a period of acute economic and political crisis. On the one hand, the country has been led by president Abdelaziz Bouteflika since 1999. After having changed the Constitution, which posited a two-term limit on the office of the president, he has been re-elected in flawed and illiberal elections other two times.

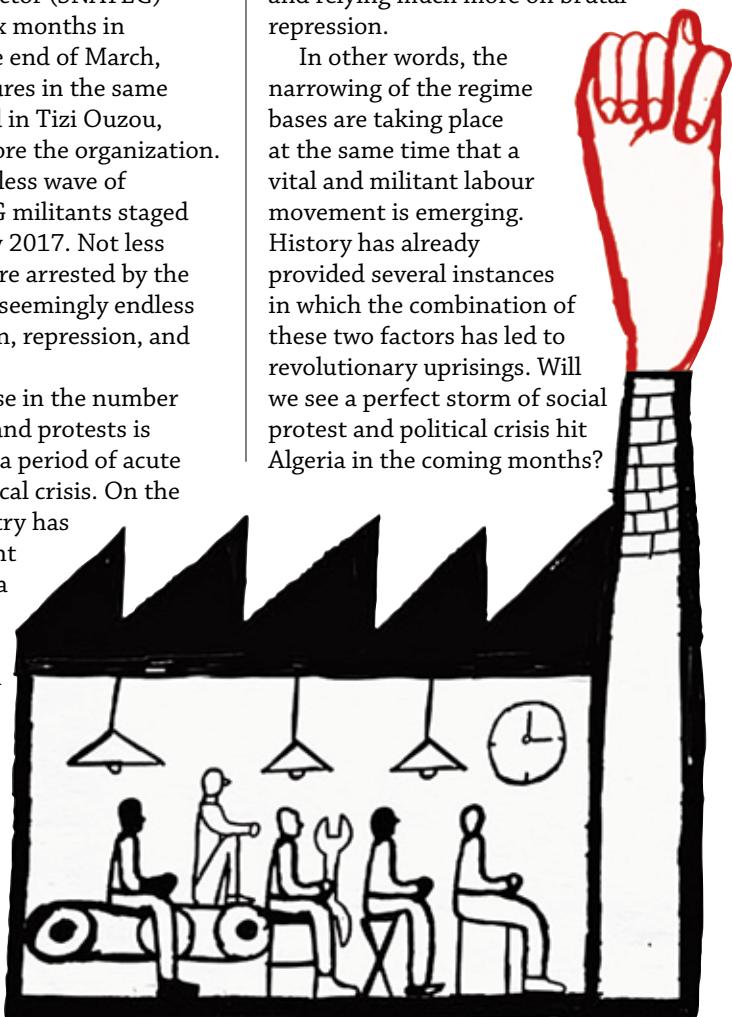
However, after a stroke in May 2012, Bouteflika has

been scarcely seen in public, being forced to use a wheelchair and to travel frequently to Europe for medical reasons. Algeria is therefore ruled from behind the scenes by an implicit alliance between the armed forces and a parasitic bourgeoisie, concentrated in unproductive and speculative activities.

Moreover, the country is affected by a never-ending intra-elite power struggle, which recently culminated in the fall of the once powerful chief of the military intelligence agency (DRS), Mohamed Mediène, better known as General Toufik.

On the other, the wealth of the country is strongly dependent, as already seen, on the hydrocarbon sector, which remains mismanaged and highly corrupt. This problematic aspect has been exacerbated by the sudden and violent collapse of oil prices, which began in the second half of 2014. Having lost half of its industrial capacity since the late 1980s, the Algerian regime has introduced austerity measures and cut important subsidies in several sectors, diminishing therefore its capacity to co-opt key constituencies of the population and relying much more on brutal repression.

In other words, the narrowing of the regime bases are taking place at the same time that a vital and militant labour movement is emerging. History has already provided several instances in which the combination of these two factors has led to revolutionary uprisings. Will we see a perfect storm of social protest and political crisis hit Algeria in the coming months?



EGYPT

Cairo islanders defend their homes

Tom Kay

Residents of Warraq Island, Cairo are remaining vigilant after forcing Kamel Al-Wazir, head of the Armed Forces Engineering Authority, to involve them in discussions regarding the future development of the island.

Egypt's rulers have considered redeveloping Warraq Island for years. In 2010, then-president Hosni Mubarak asked architects to draw up plans for the island as part of his Egypt 2050 project. Four years later, the Ministry for Housing and Urban Development returned to the idea, enlisting Dubai-based architects RSP to consider its options.

The island has been the site of multiple protests after regime forces demolished 30 homes in mid-July. When outraged residents challenged the security services, clashes led to the killing of local resident Sayed Tafshan by security forces, the charging of ten residents for illegal assembly, and nineteen others being injured.

The regime claims that the residents of Warraq Island, where up to 90,000 people live in informal housing, are occupying the land illegally. However, many of the residents have lived and worked on the island for decades and are furious that demolitions took place without consultation.

The resistance of local residents to the initial demolition attempts and during subsequent



Dahab Islanders march in solidarity with Warraq
Photo: Revsocme



Destruction of residents' homes on Warraq Island
Photo: Revsocme

negotiations with the Army has clearly surprised the regime. Initially, Alaa Al-Haras, the Deputy Governor of Giza told state media that "the government will not be intimidated to stop its plans" by resident protest. He went on to label the claims of brutality as "an attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood group to ignite the conflict."

Repeated mass protests have forced the regime to negotiate with the residents

But attempts to intimidate the islanders with force, and isolate them with a media campaign have backfired. Firstly, the island movement has shown signs of spreading. One week after the attempted demolition,

hundreds of residents of Dahab Island, another Nile island in Cairo Governorate, protested in solidarity with Warraq Island. There are rumours Dahab would be next if the regime succeeds on Warraq.

Secondly, repeated mass protests have forced the regime to negotiate with the residents. Egyptian president Al-Sisi addressed residents by phone at a mass meeting in the aftermath of the protests, and at a further meeting Kamel al-Wazir, head of the AFEA, felt the need to "reaffirm [the presidents'] commitment to protecting the interests of residents".

Locals are understandably mistrusting of the regime and have set up a ten-person committee to assert their demands in negotiations with the regime. Tehia al-Maghribi, a local

resident and committee member, told Al-Masry Al-Youm that the committee would act as "the island's spokespersons." Their demands are as follows: the release of all those detained in clashes on Sunday 16 July, full compensation and rehousing on Warraq Island for those whose houses were demolished in the clashes, and full compensation for the family of Sayed Tafshan. The regime is offering houses in government projects, and LE4.8m per acre to any island residents who forfeit their homes.

The land dispute is the latest in Al-Sisi's land reclamation project. Last February he declared: "it is no longer acceptable for people to take lands that belong to the state. We are all for new investment projects and for facilitating the work of investors."

Residents are angry at the claim that the land reclamation plan will bring development. One resident told independent news source Mada Masr, "we have been asking for development for 100 years and the state ignored us. We welcome development if it doesn't come near one metre of our land, but if development means confiscating even one meter of our land then we are happy with our lives as they are."

Driven by the latest attempts by the Egyptian regime to 'liberalise' the economy, direct foreign investment in Egypt has jumped by 25.7 percent over the last year. Key to maintaining that increase will be convincing investors that their profits won't be threatened by the struggles of Egypt's poor. The residents of Warraq Island have shown that even in the heart of the capital, it is possible to resist the regime, and force Al-Sisi's thugs to listen.



Embassy protest keeps spotlight on Giulio Regeni murder

Egypt Solidarity

Campaigners from Amnesty International and UCU gathered at the Egyptian embassy in London on 23 September to highlight the lack of progress in finding the perpetrators of the January 2016 murder and torture of Cambridge University graduate student Giulio Regeni amid continuing attacks on human rights activists in Egypt.

The protest follows a national postcard campaign organised by UCU and Amnesty activists across the country calling for truth for Giulio and justice for the hundreds of Egyptian citizens who have been 'disappeared' by the security forces, often facing torture, followed by sham trials and unjust jail sentences.

A nation-wide series of public meetings was also organised to mark the anniversary of Giulio's murder, where students and academics heard from Amnesty campaigners, journalists and academics about the on-going threats to academic freedom and freedom of expression in Egypt.

Dr Sarah Brown from UCU's national executive committee spoke outside the embassy,

"This appalling murder represented a blow to academic freedom," she said. "Egypt continues to tighten restrictions on its universities. The state is interfering in academics' ability to travel abroad, increasing control over the appointment of university leaders, and expelling students because of their political activism. UCU, together with Amnesty International and Egypt Solidarity, will continue to campaign for justice for Giulio Regeni, and for all of Egypt's Disappeared, and call for an end to the torture in Egypt."

In a statement read out at the embassy, Dr Waseem Yaqoob of Cambridge UCU branch highlighted the large numbers of Giulio's colleagues who have been involved in the battle for justice:



Campaigners en route to the Egyptian embassy | Photo: Anne Alexander

"We have signed an Open Letter demanding a full investigation, joined a delegation to this Embassy to press our concerns, and worked with the city branch of Amnesty International to run rallies, stalls and public meetings in Cambridge. Awareness has been spread not only of Giulio's case, but of the threat to academic freedom in Egypt and the plight of



Sarah Brown (r) from UCU's national executive outside the Egyptian embassy | Photo: Simone Theiss

thousands of other victims of enforced disappearance"

Even those campaigning against enforced disappearances are not safe in Egypt today, he noted, commenting on the news that the Ibrahim Metwally, a human rights lawyer investigating Giulio Regeni's case and many other similar cases, was arrested by the Egyptian authorities recently while en route to an international conference on the role of the state in enforced disappearances.

Dr Glen Rangwala from the Department of Politics and International Studies also paid tribute to Giulio in a statement.

"Ten minutes with Giulio, in any context under the sun, would leave you with two abiding impressions. The first was that Giulio loved having fun. Singing, dancing, joking around - if it wasn't happening already, Giulio would start doing it.

The second was that his commitment to social justice was so deeply ingrained in everything he did that it made the very possibility of doing something unjust, cruel or inconsiderate around him seem not just wrong, but absurd.

He engaged with everyone on the basis that they deserved respect, that they had interesting stories to share, that they too loved having fun. There is perhaps no better defence of human rights than that attitude, which Giulio carried with him wherever he went."

The Egyptian embassy protest was part of a broader campaign organised by Amnesty to highlight threats to human rights defenders.

In addition to Giulio's case, the protest at the Egyptian embassy focused on the persecution of Azza Soliman, a well-known lawyer and women's rights activist by the Egyptian authorities. Activists also visited the embassies of Chile, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Finland and Bahrain to condemn attacks on human rights defenders in those countries.



Protest brings weapons delivery trucks to a standstill

Alice Finden

On the week of 4 September activists, artists and singers congregated in East London to protest at the international arms fair, DSEI. The fair prides itself on being the biggest global arms fair, selling the largest number of weapons to the most corrupt governments and individuals. Arms from DSEI fuel human rights abuses in countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel while their Western allies look on.

This year's protests brought together people from all political backgrounds, generations and beliefs. Stop Arming Israel activists came together to protest the arms fair's dedication of space to Israeli weaponry companies which



Activists blockaded the arms fair
Photo: Alice Finden

'field-test' their weapons systems by devastating Palestinian families and destroying their communities. There were congregations of faith groups, no to nuclear groups, and a day dedicated to free movement of people, not weapons.

At the big day of action on Saturday 8 September, activists brought trucks carrying weaponry to a standstill while military helicopters hovered conspicuously overhead.

Middle East Solidarity talked to Joe Odell, press officer for the International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates (ICFUAE) who explained to us why they were there protesting:

"We joined the action in opposition to the DSEI arms fair on Saturday to issue a call on the UK government to end arms sales to the United Arab Emirates in light of its record on human rights. In recent years, the British government has negotiated trade deals to sell the UAE cyber surveillance technology which the Emirati regime has used to spy on its citizens, and weaponry that has been used to commit war crimes in Yemen."

It was fantastic that so many different organisations came together in solidarity to voice their opposition to this horrendous event taking place this week. The arms fair itself represents the immorality of British foreign policy, and its complicity in human rights violations worldwide."

Ibrahim Halawa acquitted after four years awaiting trial

Irish political prisoner Ibrahim Halawa was acquitted by an Egyptian court in September after spending four years in terrible conditions following his arrest in August 2013. Like thousands of others, Ibrahim's case was part of a mass trial which stalled for years as the judges repeatedly postponed hearings.

Ibrahim's sisters led a tireless campaign for his release, mobilising support in parliament and holding countless protests and vigils. They were also arrested with Ibrahim during the brutal crackdown by the security forces following the military coup in 2013, but were allowed to leave Egypt and return home.

The campaign in solidarity with Ibrahim involved a wide range of organisations and individuals, from Sinn Fein MEP Lynn Boylan, to Richard Boyd Barrett and Brid Smith of People Not Profit, to Ibrahim's primary and secondary schools, Amnesty International and Reprieve.

Academics under attack: Egypt and Turkey

**Tuesday 7 November - 12.30pm - 2pm
Old Library, Pembroke College, Cambridge**

Academics, students and university campuses have recently become major targets for repression by authoritarian governments in Egypt and Turkey. This public meeting brings together academics from Egypt and Turkey with campaigners to discuss what we can do here in the UK to mobilise solidarity for our colleagues who are under threat and defend academic freedoms.

Organised by:
Egypt Solidarity Initiative
Academics for Peace in Turkey - UK
Cambridge UCU
Pembroke Middle East Series





BACK THESE CAMPAIGNS

Solidarity with Egyptian workers

Activists in the Egyptian workers' movement are facing more pressure than ever from the security forces. Thousands of workers in the state-owned spinning mills and garment factories which make up the Misr Spinning complex went into occupation in protest at delayed payment of bonuses and other grievances related to pay. After two weeks on strike, workers decided to suspend their action, in order to give local MPs who promised to work towards the implementation of their demands the chance to negotiate with management.

On 9 September, Misr Spinning management suspended two women



(Wala'a Mohamed Abd-al-Ra'uf and Nagwa Sa'ad Abd-al-Qadir) and four men (Mohamed Al-Sayyed Misbah, Amru Rifa'at Salama, Amir Gamal Hassan and Karim Hossam Isma'il) from work and reported them to the police on charges of "incitement to strike", and "obstructing work". The company has also delayed payment of workers' September pay packets.

Meanwhile, leading activists from

the Tax Collectors and Electricity Workers' unions were also seized in dawn raids around two weeks later in an attempt by the authorities to stop a planned protest.

The struggle of workers in Mahalla touched a chord with trade unionists around the world. Within hours of the launch of our solidarity statement, messages of support had come in from trade unionist activists and leaders in New Zealand, the UK, the USA and Canada and many other countries, along with support from Petros Constantinou, elected councillor from Athens municipality in Greece and solidarity from academics in the USA and UK.

What you can do:

- Go to www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org for more information about solidarity campaigns for arrested trade unionists.



Support Arms Fair protesters

Stop the Arms Fair had huge success this September, with hundreds of people taking action to block the set up to the DSEI arms fair outside the Excel Centre in East London. Over 100 activists were arrested at the arms fair. It is crucial to give them support, and show the international community that it is the arms traders who are the criminals, not us.

What you can do:

- Show solidarity by heading down to the Thames Magistrates Court near Mile End during defendants' plea hearings.
- Send in a statement if you witnessed an arrest at the demonstration. Find more information here: <https://www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/court-solidarity-stop-arms-fair-defendants/>

Trade unionists back campaign for Rif prisoners

Hundreds of trade unionists and activists from the UK have signed a petition demanding the release of the Rif movement prisoners in Morocco. Sally Hunt, general secretary of the UCU union has also backed the solidarity campaign, and sent a letter of solidarity to Morocco's largest trade union federation, the UMT which has seen four of its activists in the Rif's regional capital Al Hoceima arrested in the recent crackdown.

"UCU supports the demand for the immediate release of the Rif prisoners and calls on the Moroccan authorities to end the repression of this peaceful protest movement and instead meet its demands for social and political reforms," the letter said.

What you can do:

- Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com/rifsolidarity to sign the petition and find out more about the campaign
- Send a letter of protest to the Moroccan embassy condemning the crackdown



Stand with Egyptian activists

Well-known Egyptian activists are facing new court cases, which could either increase their sentences or send them back to jail. Alaa Abdelfattah, who was sentenced to five years for breaking the repressive anti-protest laws in 2013 is facing a new trial on charges of 'insulting the judiciary'.

Meanwhile Mahienour el-Massry, a human rights lawyer and activist from Alexandria is also included in a new case related to protests against the sell-off of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands which was due to come to court on 19 October.

What you can do:

- Follow the campaign pages on Facebook for the latest news: www.facebook.com/freealaa2013 and www.facebook.com/freemahienour



Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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MENA Solidarity

menasolidaritynetwork.com
MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NUT unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.

BAHRAIN WATCH

Bahrain Watch

bahrainwatch.org
Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.



Egypt Solidarity

egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.

OCCUPATION BY ALGORITHM

Israeli cyber-policing techniques make every Palestinian a suspect simply by exercising their freedom of expression online, explain **Nadim Nashif** and **Marwa Fatafta**

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) arrest of West Bank human rights defender Issa Amro for a Facebook post last month is the latest in the PA's recent crackdown on online dissent among Palestinians. Yet it's a tactic long used by Israel, which has been monitoring social media activity and arresting Palestinians for their speech for years – and has recently created a computer algorithm to aid in such oppression.

Since 2015, Israel has detained around 800 Palestinians because of content they wrote or shared online, mainly posts that are critical of Israel's repressive policies or share the reality of Israeli violence against Palestinians. In the majority of these cases, those detained did not commit any attack; mere suspicion was enough for their arrest.

The poet Daren Tatour, for instance, was arrested on October 2015 for publishing a poem about resistance to Israel's 50-year-old military rule on her Facebook page. She spent time in jail and has been under house arrest for over a year and a half. Civil rights groups and individuals in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and abroad have criticized Israel's detention of Tatour and other Palestinian internet users as violations of civil and human rights.

Israeli officials have accused social media companies of hosting and facilitating what they claim is Palestinian incitement. The government has pressured these companies, most notably Facebook, to remove such content. Yet the Israeli government is mining this content. Israeli intelligence has developed a predictive policing system – a computer algorithm – that analyzes social media posts to identify Palestinian "suspects."

Predictive policing, which uses data analytics and algorithms to forecast where and when a crime might occur, is nothing new. Fifty police departments in the US already use one form of predictive policing: area mapping of so-called hotspots on which police then focus their efforts. In contrast, Israel uses predictive policing to identify likely attackers.

The algorithm-based program monitors

tens of thousands of young Palestinians' Facebook accounts. It searches for such elements as photos of Palestinians killed or jailed by Israel to identify individuals it deems suspicious. The Israeli army also monitors the activity of relatives, friends, classmates, and co-workers of recent Palestinians killed by Israel to assess their potential risk.

In the US, a coalition of civil rights organizations, including the ACLU and the NAACP, criticizes the use of algorithms because they reinforce existing police bias and discrimination against minorities and other oft-targeted groups. Essentially, predictive policing uses past data related not to actual crimes or attacks, but to the state or police response to it. For example, when researchers applied predictive policing algorithms to drug crime data in Oakland, California, the algorithm recommended police be deployed exclusively to neighborhoods with low-income black residents. Oakland police were already patrolling these areas heavily for drug crime. Thus, such algorithm-based systems only reinforce existing biases.

While systematically targeting Palestinians online, Israel does not punish its Jewish residents for their social media posts, though a significant number of them are racist and violent toward Arabs or Palestinians. A recent report from the Palestinian organization 7amleh reveals that in 2016 almost 60,000 Israeli internet users wrote at least one post containing either racism or hatred towards these groups, mostly on Facebook. This translated into a violent post every 46 seconds.

The difference in how the Israeli government treats Palestinians and Jewish Israelis in regard to their online speech is emblematic of how it treats them in real life. Israel must stop policing the internet to further silence and oppress Palestinians. The detention of Palestinian civilians based on a machine's prediction and no evidence is yet another instance to be added to Israel's long list of violations of Palestinian human rights.

This is an excerpt of an article which first appeared on OpenDemocracy. Read the full article online at www.opendemocracy.net

