Sinan Çiftyürek on the Arab Spring: "the relation politics/streets has been re-forged"

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The following is a dialogue held on April 3rd with comrade Sinan Çiftyürek, spokesman of MESOP (Mesopotamian Socialist Party), a revolutionary Kurdish organisation, in relation to the deep significance of the Arab Spring but also on its impact on the Kurdish people. We discussed the roots of the mass movement but also, its prospects in the medium term.

1. What impact do you think the Arab rebellions will have on the dominant discourse of Arab nationalism?

There is a crisis in Arab nationalism and one may say even of the concept of the post-colonial nation-state. We can observe that the consensus created by Arab nationalism in societies such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya has lost its legitimacy. The idea of "national interest" is no longer as binding and cohesive for society. The national heroes of the past have turned into despots

and symbols of corruption over a short time; those heroes of the past have collaborated with the same imperialism that they themselves had kicked out of their countries; the homelands liberated from the colonialists were turned into private estates in the hands of the rulers and elites in power. Factors like resulted in an end for nationalism as a binding and cohesive element in the Arab world. The case of Libya must be seen as particularly interesting, given that there's an imperialist invasion of Libya in progress!

The experiences of the Arab countries make it clear that those closed-circuit Nation-State dictatorships no longer have room to manoeuvre anymore because of developments in communication technologies, which can expose political and social events in any part of the world via computers and television in no time at all. The two main reasons that made the Arab regimes afraid after the peoples' movements in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen were, on the one hand, that they themselves had the same circumstances making people come out onto the streets against their respective regimes and, on the other hand, that any national, regional problem in the world today crosses its own geographical boundaries and is accessible by all the peoples of the world via the new communication technologies.

2. What was the factor that triggered the loss of legitimacy of the Arab regimes?

There is a deepening food crisis, not only in North Africa but also globally. The destructive effects of the ever-increasing environmental problems, of nature and agriculture, global warming, rapid urbanization primarily in Asia, decreasing water sources, extraordinary increases in the price of petrol and energy which affects food prices, were all accompanied by the speculative movements of financial capital, causing the food crisis to move into top place in the list of "global risks." Here, it is the supply side of the crisis that is worsening. Following the disintegration of the agricultural areas in the India-China route and the increasing population of cities, the demand for food has increased and has led to an in-

and the private property system that should be surpassed, and that is much harder. Surpassing the private property system which is the only cause that underlies all political, social and economic ills, needs of deep internal divisions in society and class conflicts. That will be the subject of future struggles.

The imperialist attack on Libya cannot extinguish the fire lit by the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples. We welcome the uprisings of the Arab peoples! We damn the Imperialists' invasion of Libya!

of economy, trade and politics – in other words from the practice of Sharia that intervenes in every realm of life, and to withdraw to the spiritual realm. Why?

Firstly, political Islam's long quest for democracy and freedom is a barrier against a strict Sharia tendency. In this process, radical political Islam and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, have changed both themselves and the regime through their struggle to exist under dictatorial regimes.

Secondly, the Arab region and Egypt itself is familiar with the Sharia law regime and its implementations. Both in its historical and current forms, Sharia regimes are already in existence in Arab countries in more than one version: the outdated, suffocating implementations, particularly against women and the young... a prime example of this being the Sharia regime in Iran.

Thirdly, Iran's political strengthening vis-à-vis the USA's Middle East project, is developing at the same time as its de-legitimisation. The Iranian regime's control of the government in Lebanon via Hezbollah, should no longer be read as if they were exporting their own regime to the region. Shi'ites are demanding political freedom and equality with Sunnis in countries like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but this does not mean they will support the Iranian Shia regime. The peoples of Iran are conscious of the fact that the Iranian regime can only survive thanks to the threat generated by the regional politics of the "great Satan", the USA. That's why they are seeking to topple their own government without any intervention from the USA. For the peoples of Iran, this target has come even closer to being reached after the Arab peoples' uprisings.

When we look at the Arab region from the perspective of its internal dynamics, it is possible to say that political Islam will eventually go for power sharing. The imperialist Western powers already have experience of working with political Islam, after all.

9. Any final thoughts?

The Arab people are going beyond the sanctity of the State, but there is also the sanctity of property, the capital-oriented society

adequacy of supplies. The effects of the globally-deepening crisis in the balance of supply and demand for food were felt mostly in North Africa and led the people onto the streets – it even led to severe social problems like the suicides of young people screaming "bread" and hanging themselves from electricity pylons. What is happening in North Africa is a reflection of the global problem!

3. What was the role played by the lack of political liberties in the rebellions?

The propaganda of the Arab Regimes, particularly of the Tunisian regime, stating "do not demand freedom, but we will subsidize flour, sugar, tea, health, and education" became ineffective. The idea that "if we give them bread, they will remain quiet and not demand freedom" is not relevant any more, as people want bread and freedom together. And these regimes, in any case, were no longer able to give bread! When the suppression of rights and freedoms by means of talk about "national interest" met the deepening economic crisis, people and particularly the young, who were affected most by unemployment and various other restrictions, rebelled. That's why unemployed university graduates, trade unionists, members of the trade unions, suppressed religious groups and human rights advocates took up positions in the forefront of the rebellions and clashed with police. It means that not only economic factors, but also the demand for political freedoms has been an important factor in the people's rebellion. The cry for freedom is a primary one for people under dictatorial regimes; however, it is also a demand of the "free" individual in Western societies governed by parliamentary systems, where law has replaced the creative reason as a result of the Statification of reason in the capacity of laws. The rebellion of the young approaching the Panzer tanks of the police with the cry "I want freedom" did not and will not only influence the Eastern people suffering under open dictatorships, but also Western peoples and the young in so-called democracies.

4. What is at stake for imperialism and capitalism with the Arab rebellions?

The practical results of the toppling of the dictators one by one has shown that the power emerging from the mass youth rebellion, from the collective political activity of tens of thousands of people, is the greatest power of all. Numerous examples of political change as a result of the power of the masses have been experienced throughout history. What is new today is that it is happening at the beginning of the 21st century when the networks of social media cover the entire Middle East region.

Tahrir Square liberated politics, which had been restricted to the narrow corridors of parliament and the ballot box. The people and particularly the young shoved aside the laws that sanctified the State and its institutions, and gave new wind to politics and revolutionary politics. Of course, the development of politics in the street is nothing new; however, particularly in this region, the relation between the street and politics has been re-forged with new input. This is not something we should overlook.

The global bourgeoisie is not really afraid of the demands and objectives of the North African people's rebellions, but of the fact that the relation between the street and politics has been re-forged and that it has become an epidemic, encouraging and causing reactions in people on a global level. The rebelling people on the streets, standing in squares for days on end, and their attitude of "we will not leave the squares until the dictator leaves," the making of power and politics at street level is what makes them afraid. As a matter of fact, street democracy, the reformation of the street-freedom equation, the concepts of democracy and freedom, the cry for "bread and freedom" from people from all ages, women, people of different religions, of different political ideas, all coming together in the same squares – this makes the bourgeoisie anxious for the future, as it is once again be seen that the people on the street can change the balance of power.

torship? To what extent have the changes in the world and the necessities of Egypt's position in the regional equations made the Muslim Brotherhood ready for real government? How ready are they to administer the regimes that they criticized as positivist and Jacobin? And, how ready are they to enter into relations with imperialism, which backed the regimes that suppressed them for decades?

They seem determined to reform the Sharia goal of political Islam, by adapting it to parliamentary democracy via Tunisia and Egypt. Who is aiming at that? Of course, primarily the USA and its allies, with their talk of "moderate Islam". But it would be wrong to reduce the reform of militant political Islam only to the effect of the USA and the West. In their 80 years of struggle against dictatorial regimes, the Muslim Brotherhood has officially struggled for Sharia law, but actually, they've been struggling for freedom and that "western invention", democracy.

The position of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb on the "Islam-Western Civilization relationship" is actually being questioned these days.

We have not forgotten what was experienced in Iran. Could a similar situation occur in Egypt? We will see, but I can say that Egypt will not be like Iran. Both the country and the international conditions are different. If the Mullahs' dictatorship in Iran has been able to survive that long, it is because the Iranian people channelled their anger against the outside world after the West provoked the 8-year-long Iran-Iraq war, and because of the threat they perceived after the "great Satan", the USA, invaded Iraq. If the internal opposition had not been suppressed through the threat of "external enemies", the Mullahs' regime in Iran would already have been toppled by the freedom and democracy dynamics in Iran. We can say that Iran will be among those countries where the impact of the peoples' uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt will be a deep one.

The developments impose on Islam and its philosophy that it refrains from the position of organising the material world, in terms

ically as well. The East, which has long been considered an "object of research, observation and exploitation" by the Western-centred mentality, is giving signals of claiming its leading role in its own history.

While I am saying this, the USA is trying to control the supporters of Mubarak via the police force, and the opposition movement via the military at the same time... so they have two hands in Egypt. The fact that the military did not attack the rebelling people – as the police did – does not stem from its democratic, populist, or nationalist character, since the same military had suppressed the 1977 "bread riots" against the IMF and World Bank by killing 800 people. In Tunisia, two "bread riots", one on 26th January 1978 and the other on 3rd January 1984, were suppressed by the military. If the military has not shot at the people this time round – and particularly if they have behaved "impartially" in Egypt and propagandized the lie that "we did not shoot the people and we will not" – it is because they want to save the regime and the system with the least possible damage, according to the advice of their Western masters. The declarations of the EU and the USA demanding "free and just elections" and that the "people want democracy" in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria only exposes their hypocrisy.

I have to emphasize that European-centred analysis which claims that "the Eastern peoples cannot rule themselves, they cannot be the actors of their own history" has once again proved to be wrong. The political presence of the Eastern individual suppressed under the yoke of the "holy state", and particularly the presence of educated people and unemployed youth being themselves their own masters, probably surprised the "Orientalists" very much.

8. What will be the role of political Islam in the Arab people's rebellions and their aftermath?

You have to start by asking yourself many questions: how much has the Muslim Brotherhood – who used to say "Allah is our destination, Kur'an our constitution, Mohammad our leader, Jihad our way" – changed through the process of fighting against the dicta-

5. What were the elements, in your opinion, that helped the rebellion to spread all over the region?

There were three elements that made the uprisings effective in a regional and global context.

First of all, people all over the world watched and even experienced and were made to experience the uprising, its scope, the tools and methods it used via social media, internet and television, in their homes, workplaces or even on their way home or to work. The ways people were organised, the way they resisted, the slogans they used, the protection they used from attacks, the way they stood in front of tanks, the merciless attacks of the police and the way the rebels chased the police, were experienced by people from all over the world, minute by minute. Thanks to communication technologies, we all felt as one with the rebellious peoples' demonstrations and resistance – we became a part of it.

Secondly, the international economic, political, and even environmental context provided the appropriate climate for the spread of the uprisings and its absorption by the peoples of the world. In a context where the food crisis triggered also by the ecological crisis has become more serious globally: where the issue of bread is not only relevant in North Africa but is an integral part of the agenda of all the poor people in the world, as a worsening social and economic issue, the uprisings triggered by people in Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria, hanging themselves from electricity pylons and burning themselves, crying for "bread", found a global response like mud sticking to a wet wall.

Thirdly, the economic and social problems that have worsened at a global scale thanks to the West's quest to solve its own economic crisis via the greater East, turned into an effective factor in its spreading impact as well.

6. What is the impact of the Arab Spring among the Kurdish people?

The uprising of the Arab peoples has exposed the cleptocracy conducted under the excuse of "national interests"! This develop-

ment is worrying to people involved in corruption and property theft, primarily among the Arab States, especially in the newer nations like Kurdish Iraq, Palestine and South Sudan, where "national heroes" are still influential over the masses... so the people in power will have to be more cautious when they engage in cleptocratic practices.

What underlies, for instance, the people's demonstrations in Sulaimaniyah, in the Kurdish Federal State (KFD)?

First of all, for 20 years, since 1991, the KDP-YNK parties have been in power without any break. It is natural and positive that there are mass reactions from below to that. Also, the bourgeoisie of every nation steals, engages in corruption and theft... and we are therefore supposed to believe that the Kurdish bourgeoisie in somehow different? Of course they are not! Furthermore, as they have only recently started to grow fat, like any other national bourgeoisie and rulers whose pockets are not jaded yet, the Kurdish bourgeoisie does it as shamelessly as it can! Both in Southern Kurdistan [ie., Iraq-occupied Kurdish territory] and in Northern Kurdistan [ie., Turkey-occupied Kurdish territory] they are doing the same!

It is natural and positive that the Kurdish toiling people are reacting to this. However, if the States in the region, and particularly Iran, are backing the protests with an eye to disempowering the KFD from within, this is a dangerous thing. All of the democratic forces in Southern Kurdistan should be aware of such a danger. We should support the uprising of the workers, labourers and the unemployed of Southern Kurdistan against corruption and injustice, but we should reject the instrumentalisation of national democratic parties and organisations for the sake of the political strategies of the global and regional forces, primarily Iran. In the case of a division of the Kurdish national democratic parties in line with chauvinistic Shiite/Sunni Arab politics and in line with the regional and global relations, it will be the Kurdish people who suffer the most.

The Arab people's surpassing their own form of Kemalism [a reference to the main cult-like figure of Turkish nationalism, Mustafa Kemal] through street politics will influence Kurds and their influence will be particularly felt in Diyarbakır today. Kurdish people are experienced in making politics through serhildans [i.e., Kurdish uprising, equivalent to the Arab concept of Intifada], in the streets. Tunisia and Cairo will encourage the national democratic opposition movements of Kurdistan and Yemen towards civil democratic resistance and uprising.

Following the events in March, the June elections are approaching in the Turkish State and the political process, as generally happens, will be revitalized according to Kurds' authentic demands and objectives. The urgent, vital demands such as a Constitutional assurance for the Kurdish right to exist and be educated in their mother tongue, has strengthened the political struggle. This year's Newroz, on the 21st March, became a historical date for the basic demands of the Kurdish people and civil disobedience was declared to the people and world public opinion from Amed [the Kurdish name for Diyarbakır].

7. What, in your opinion, is the deep significance of last months' events in the Arab world?

The Eastern Peoples are claiming their leading role in their own history. Throughout history, particularly in the contemporary history of the 20th century, Eastern and Southern peoples have proved that they are leading actors in their own history and that they can write it themselves through fighting against Western imperialism. The North African uprising has become yet another inspiration, for it showed that the East can be the creative, dynamic actor of its own history. If there were no intervention from Western imperialism, the East could be stronger and more authentic.

In a context where the East is becoming more economically powerful and when the economic rise of the East is being discussed in Davos under the name of "shared norms for new realities", the East has started to give signals that it is standing up for itself polit-