

What can we learn from the recent protests?

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This year we have witnessed many protests in the UK and other countries from Yellow Vests in France, protests in Iran, Morocco, Sudan, Extinction Rebellion in more than 120 countries, Haiti, Hong Kong, Ecuador, Chile, Greece, and now in Catalonia, Bolivia, Iraq and Lebanon.

All of these protests have been mass movements against widespread corruption, high unemployment, poor public services, increasing taxation, inequality, injustice and tyranny. Some of the protests, like Hong Kong, Catalonia and Bolivia, are a mixture of political and social demands.

In addition to the above, all of these protests share four things between them. First, almost all of them were mass movements that were leaderless and had no political parties or politicians behind them. Second, they all used direct action to achieve their demands. Third, they all shared a common enemy, the government. All of these governments reacted the same way, no matter whether they were a democracy, a dictatorship, a military or civilian power. They all responded in the same way against the protesters. They repressed them brutally, killing them, wounding them, detaining them and abducting them. Fourth, they have more or less succeeded in meeting many of their demands. In Sudan they brought down the military government and had some of their demands met. In Hong Kong they forced the administration to abandon the extradition policy. In France the movement has shaken the government, who have acknowledged that people are very unhappy with the new government and the protests are far from ending. In Catalonia, protests are still going on and the Spanish government currently has a big dilemma regarding them. This was one of the factors in Spain having another election on the 10th of November. In Chile the achievements exceeded the expectations of the people themselves. In Ecuador, protests forced the government to relocate to another city. In Lebanon, protests led to the resignation of the prime minister and a few MP's. It shook the power of Hezbollah while over 1.5 million people of a population of 4 million went to the streets, sending a strong message to the government and Hezbollah that they cannot kill and terrorize the mass movement. In Bolivia, protests forced the president, Evo Morales, to resign over disputed election results.

In Iraq, a big social movement is going on. This is the biggest protest in recent Iraqi history. It is an uprising, it is a revolution. People forced the tribes and religious rulers to agree to all of their demands, except leaving their power completely and surrendering themselves to the people. The protest started on the 1st of October for a week, and then resumed in Baghdad on a larger scale on 25th of October, and quickly spread to twelve more cities. This time the protest is very much different from what happened before. Women have joined the mass movement for the first

time ever. They are doctors and medical students, helping treat the injured. Some of them are also fighting the police and security forces with the men, others are busy providing meals and drinks and many more are helping clean the streets.

The protesters' plans and tactics are different from before. This time they are very well organised on the streets, in Tahrir Square in Baghdad and in other places and neighbourhoods. An old Turkish restaurant of 14 floors that was abandoned a long time ago has been occupied. This building has been used by the Special Forces in previous protests to kill protesters using snipers. The protesters use the building to stay overnight, cooking, distributing food and drink, holding regular meetings and issuing a newsletter. The previous protests have taught the protesters that they need to wear helmets in order to protect themselves against attacks. Over 500 Tuk-Tuks have joined the protesters to help them move the protesters around, and in the absence of ambulances to transfer the wounded and dead.

More importantly, the protesters have been supported by most unions and workers. Some of the oil field workers have went on strike to support them. Each union is represented with their banners and tents in Tahrir Square. More than 10 teams of doctors and nurses equipped with medicine and equipment are at Tahrir Square to treat the wounded. Workplaces, schools and universities have been shut and over sixty major roads in Baghdad have been occupied, preventing the police and security forces from going through.

The protesters have rejected the religious politicians and their parties, burning down their offices and military headquarters. In Karbala, the second most important Shia city, on the 3rd of November, the Iranian Consulate was surrounded, part of it set on fire and they were asked to leave Iraq. In some cities, politicians' empty houses which were guarded by security forces were burned down. Some cities have come under the control of the protesters once the government's forces have left. Recently, the protesters occupied the road between Basra and the main port of Iraq, Umm Qasr. The protesters have radical slogans like, "No to Iran, no to US, no to religion, no to politicians and their power, no to tribal rule, separate religion from the state, no trust and faith in the politicians, sixteen years in power, enough, we do not trust you .. From Iraq to Lebanon is one war. ..Out Out all of you out".

So far 319 protesters have been killed, 15,000 more have been injured, 11,000 arrested and many abducted, including women activists. People have paid a heavy price and do not want to leave and go home. It is very difficult at the moment to predict what will happen in Iraq. There is the probability of the Iranian regime intervening directly. If they do, they will not hesitate to crush the movement brutally to save their own and their agents' interests in Iraq.

It is quite clear that there is no smoke without fire. The system through its main pillar, the state, has created a terrible climate for growing the seeds of demonstrations, protests and riots everywhere. These include destroying the environment, creating war, unemployment, inequality injustice, lack of freedom, deprivation, starvation, discrimination and, finally, racism and fascism.

In fact we should be surprised if we do not see protests, actions and even riots very often.

The protests, whether they are for a single issue or against the state or the entire system, are legitimate; a step forward in developing our struggles. These kinds of struggle are the base and foundation for future revolutions. Certainly those of us who are involved in the protests are more conscious and concerned about our rights and are desperate to change the situation, than the others who are silent.

Standing up for our rights and doing something positive serves our cause and rejects the inaction of the majority who are doing nothing. By protesting, demonstrating and using direct

action as our only and decisive tactic has shown that most of the time we can achieve something, whether it is small or large. But, more importantly, we are making the state and the system aware that the people are angry and anxious for a change for the better.

However, there are weaknesses in most of these protests. We have seen almost no support or solidarity from the workers in industrialised sectors especially in Europe when hit by waves of protest. This attitude is ironic when a century ago it was expected that socialism could be built due to developing industrialisation and consequent polarisation of the working class in some parts of Europe. Alas, that did not happen and, a century later, still we do not see crucial support from them. There are other weaknesses. We can clearly see that there is a lack of self-organisation, before, during and after the protests. In these circumstances, we need to organise ourselves in the streets, workplaces, schools, universities, neighbourhoods and other places, establishing assemblies to plan our actions and next steps and which are inter-connected, facilitating the necessary cooperation to fulfil our goals.

Concentrating on a single issue isolates the movement from other issues and the roots of the problem; the state and the system. This is the weak point in the protests. This is what the system and the state want to see from us; division with each group working only for themselves and failing to connect with one another. These problems are apparent in most of the demonstrations and protests. Unfortunately, the protests can be easily controlled and contained by the state and governments in Europe and by terrorist groups in the Middle East.

Fighting to resolve the problems in society without fighting the system and its major pillar, the state, and changing it has led many to believe that by changing the government all problems can be resolved.

It is either naivety or simply ignorance to believe that the government works in the interests of the community and society. This truth is particularly obvious for those of us who, throughout our lives, have seen many governments come and go whether through elections, or a coup d'états. While the problems may have been resolved temporary but after a while they will come back. I believe the reasons for this mistaken belief is that either people are demoralised and have no confidence in themselves or simply lack knowledge of history and relevant experience. Without this knowledge, people believe that the root of all these problems are not the state, but the government. Environmental issues, homelessness, unemployment and war; all have been caused by governments and states. They are the actual problem rather than the solution.

To learn from the protests we need to consider the above weakness and also to see the current capitalism system with its liberal and neoliberal polices is the roots of all the problems. We should know that in order to get rid of all the problems once and forever we must fight the system as whole.

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