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Summary: Emancipatory popular movements have encountered deep contradictions in Ukraine, Syria, Tunisia, South Africa, and elsewhere. This is especially the case with regard to the vicissitudes of democratic revolutions when faced with, on the one hand, challenges from the right, and on the other, the imperative of anti-capitalism. Based upon a report to the Convention of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization, Chicago - Editors

Popular Movements and Their Contradictions: From the Arab Revolutions to Today

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Today we face two new and shocking acts of militaristic barbarism, the Israeli attacks on Gaza, which have cost over 1000 lives, almost all of them civilians, and the downing by Russian-backed separatists of a civilian airliner over Ukraine that killed 298. Both of these attacks are examples of nationalist fanaticism; both are counterrevolutionary; both are seeking to extinguish the fires of national liberation movements; both will ultimately fail.

Over the past several years, the global impact of Arab revolutions of 2011 has continued. New mass democratic uprisings have emerged recently in Turkey, Bosnia, and most significantly, Ukraine. In the former case the protestors were directly inspired by the Arab uprisings. In the latter, the mass uprising succeeded in toppling an entrenched government, something that none of the other recent global uprisings have been able to do, save in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya in 2011, the latter with direct help from outside imperialist powers. Meanwhile, the Arab world has experienced a series of counter-revolutionary events that have destroyed many of the aspirations of 2011, especially in Egypt and Syria, with the latter conflict now spilling over into oil-rich Iraq, and Israel taking advantage of the new situation to

pound the Gaza mercilessly once again. The tragic setbacks experienced by the Syrian revolution have created a massive refugee crisis in neighboring countries. Similarly, in the Western Hemisphere, a counter-revolutionary coup in 2009 in Honduras and longstanding semi-military rule Guatemala, have helped to create social crises in these U.S.-dominated lands that are now spilling across the U.S. border, with an influx of some 50,000 child refugees requesting asylum. In the Arab world, Tunisia's hard-fought new constitution, with strong protections for women's rights and religious pluralism, is a notable exception to the largely counter-revolutionary wave that has descended on the region. However, even in Tunisia, the liberal democratic framework created by the new constitution does not address social issues like mass youth unemployment or economic inequality. These remain a ticking time bomb. This can also be seen in post-apartheid South Africa, where working class unrest illustrates the challenges created by a revolutionary movement that comes to power and oversees a comprehensive political revolution, but without a corresponding social one to change the class and economic structure of society, let alone place the actual Aufhebung [abolition or transcendence] of capitalism on the agenda.

Ukraine, Turkey, and Bosnia: Continuation of the Revolutionary Wave of 2011?

The 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine was a rarity in that it actually toppled, in a matter of weeks, a seemingly strong government that enjoyed unwavering support from an important imperialist power, Russia. [This section rests upon the more detailed analysis in my 2 recent articles, "Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Interimperialist Rivalry," *New Politics* 15:1 (Summer 2014), pp. 65-70, and "Ukraine: Popular Uprising in the Shadow of Putin's Russia," *International Marxist-Humanist* 4-16-14.]

After a corrupt and increasingly authoritarian Ukrainian government moved to join an economic union with Vladimir Putin's Russia, thousands took to the streets. Occupying the Maidan, the main square of the capital and those of other cities for weeks during bitter winter weather, the demonstrators' determination -- and the mass support they gained -- eventually led to a weakening of the security apparatus itself, which allowed the revolutionaries to sweep away the remnants of the government and to move toward greater democracy and transparency.

Not directly inspired by the Arab revolutions, with their mix of democratic and economic demands as in Tunisia's "Bread, Water, and No Ben Ali," Ukraine's'

Maidan uprising was hemmed in from the beginning, not only by Russian imperialist intervention, but also by its somewhat narrower social vision, one of limiting the revolution to the political issues of democracy and anti-corruption, while its economic program consisted of a naïve embrace of Western neoliberalism, a spurious solution to the problems of mass unemployment and economic collapse that the country faced and that had driven it into a political crisis.

Still, the Maidan uprising was a national revolution that fought to free this long-oppressed land from Russian domination. However, immediate Russian intervention only served to cement the Ukrainian democratic movement's nationalist character, as it caused the grassroots democrats to enter into a coalition with "patriotic" oligarchs to defend the country against Russian land-grabs. Russia sought to dismember Ukraine, first and utterly outrageously by annexing Crimea, and then via orchestrating a separatist movement in southeastern Ukraine. This need to face Russian counter-revolutionary pressure led not only to a failure to deepen the uprising into a social upheaval, but also to a sidelining of its initial anti-corruption demands, now that some of the oligarchs were actually involved in the new government. The nationalist factor also made it harder to curtail at the beginning the influence of the rightwing Ukrainian nationalists, some of whose ideas, although minoritarian, served as a good foil for the Russian propaganda apparatus, with its claims that Ukraine had experienced a "fascist coup" rather than a revolutionary-democratic uprising. Of course, what Russia's Putin feared above all was the possibility of a Maidan-type uprising in Moscow, targeting his own oligarchical form of state-capitalism.

That Russian propaganda apparatus, helped along by compliant leftist intellectuals like Boris Kagarlitsky, expressed a version the Great Russian chauvinism that Lenin had castigated during the 1917 revolution: ""If Finland, Poland or Ukraine secede from Russia, there is nothing bad in that. What is wrong with it? Anyone who says that is a chauvinist" (Speech on the National Question, Seventh All-Russia Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party-Bolshevik, April 29 (May 12), 1917).

A second type of imperialist pressure on Ukraine came from the Western "allies" of the revolution, the U.S. and the EU. While they had encouraged the uprising, they made clear that Ukraine was on its own in terms of dealing with Russia. Even their promised economic aid came with huge strings: massive austerity and layoffs of public employees.

And while the Western powers supported a limited sort of democratization in Ukraine, the last thing they wanted -- here agreeing with Putin -- was a mass movement from the grassroots that would challenge both the state and capital. The seeds of such movement can be found here and there, in towns like Kryvyj Rih, where miners who predominated in the local "Maidan movement" last winter went on to wage a struggle against the largely Russian-owned EVRAZ mining company, recently winning a 20% wage increase with the support of labor activists from around the world (Chris Ford "Ukrainian Miners Struggle Shows Solidarity Wins," *Ukrainian Socialist Solidarity*, 7-1-14)

By July, the post-revolutionary Ukrainian government had been able to legitimate itself through a presidential election and had begun to uproot the Russian-backed separatists in the southeast. (Crimea, however, remained in Russian hands, something even the U.S./EU seemed to accept.) In the southeast, as the separatist bands of neo-Stalinists, neofascists, and assorted gangsters retreated from some areas, they left behind dungeons where they had mistreated not only their political opponents, but also intravenous drug users and former users, LGBT people, and petty thieves, some of whom were summarily executed (Benoît Viktine, "Terreur sur le Donbass," *Le Monde* 7-12-14). The armed separatists still remain a threat, however, especially since Putin has apparently allowed them to acquire the anti-aircraft missile that downed the Malaysian airliner, killing 295. We also need to oppose the killings of civilians by Ukrainian government forces through indiscriminate shelling and bombing, even though the proportionality is quite different.

Like the Maidan revolution, last year's Gezi Park uprising in Turkey formed itself around the occupation of a large public space in Turkey's economic and cultural capital, Istanbul. In a break with the hierarchical republican or Stalinist traditions of the Turkish left, Gezi constituted itself as a horizontal, grassroots rather than top-down movement. Gezi was the largest mass movement in Turkey in decades. Although defeated for now, it brought to the fore a new generation of youth, and it may, like Occupy in the U.S., emerge in other ways in the future. (For an overview, see Onur Kapdan, "Reflections on Turkey's Gezi Park Protests, *International Marxist-Humanist* 8-13-13.) Gezi challenged a semi-authoritarian state led by the semi-Islamist Recep Tayyip Erdogan that was moving toward greater authoritarianism, in this case one based upon a combination of nationalism and moderate Islamism. Gezi also took the sheen off the so-called "Turkish model" of Islam and democracy, which had been proffered by the U.S. to the Arab world in

2011-12, at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies were ascendant in Egypt and elsewhere.

Gezi differed from Ukraine in 3 major ways, however. First, for all its size, persistence and revolutionary creativity, the Gezi movement never succeeded in mobilizing enough of a mass movement to seriously challenge the government. This is due in part to defeats that their allies in the Turkish labor movement have sustained in recent years. Second, Gezi was inspired directly by the Arab revolutions. Third and most important, Gezi targeted not only an authoritarian and corrupt state power, but also the vast accumulation of wealth by Turkish capital and specifically the commodification of urban public space and the concomitant environmental destruction.

The Bosnia protests that began in January 2014, and which saw the burning of several government buildings, had an even clearer class character. Two decades after the U.S.-sponsored Dayton Accords partitioned Bosnia, in effect recognizing the results of Serbia's genocidal "ethnic cleansing," the nationalist politicians who came to power in Bosnia have utterly discredited themselves. They have syphoned off most the $billions of aid from the EU and other donors, and imposed neoliberal austerity measures. The result: an overall unemployment rate of 40% and that of youth a staggering 57%.

In predominantly Bosniak Tuzla, which saw the deepest mass unrest, demands included resignation of all politicians, workers' control of the factories, and that state functionaries be paid the same as ordinary workers. (See Michael Karadjis, "Bosnia's Magnificent Uprising: Heralding a New Era of Class Politics?" *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal* 2-13-14). The Tuzla revolt was particularly thoroughgoing because it had turned out its nationalist politicians in favor of social democrats in the 2010 elections, but found they were equally elitist and corrupt.

According to the Croatian linguist Mate Kapovic, "one of the most interesting and exciting things for the left is the appearance of the revolutionary organizational body called 'plenum' in Tuzla… as a political body of protest for democratic decision-making" ("A Revolution on the Periphery of Europe," *Transform!* 2-12-14). The plenums, which appeared in several cities, were mass meetings without any formal leadership and where all participants could speak. Many of the participants were working people who expressed class as opposed to ethnic consciousness. As reported by philosopher Srecko Horvat:

"During the first day of protests in Sarajevo, one young man, among 50 others, had been pushed into the river by the police. A few days later, I watched as he appeared with a broken leg in front of the plenum. 'I am a Catholic, I am a Jew, I am a Muslim, I am all the citizens of this country,' he said. Another man added: 'If I am a Muslim, and he is a Serb or a Croat, if we are hungry, aren't we brothers? We are at least brothers-in-stomach.' Then he muttered, 'I am not smart, but I just wanted to say this.' From the other corner of the fully packed hall, someone replied: 'If you're here, you're smart!'" ("Godot Arrives in Sarajevo," *New York Times* 2-19-14).

While the Bosnian protests did not achieve all of their goals -- and how could they have under capitalism -- they put forth a liberatory banner in a region that has been marked by genocidal ethnic division. Where during the 1992-95 Bosnian war, it was the people of Bosnia who defended a multiethnic, democratic politics in the face of narrow and authoritarian Croatian and above all Serbian nationalism, what we have seen in 2014 is the deepening of that earlier politics into one of class unity across ethnic lines that actually challenges the type of capitalism that was installed after Dayton.

The Tragedy of Syria and Iraq

What has been the fate of the 2011 Arab revolutions, which touched off the period of protest and revolution that we are still experiencing, albeit with many defeats and retrogressions? Let us first look at Syria, where those contradictions have been deepest and most destructive.

Over the past year, the Syrian uprising has gone from tragedy to tragedy. It has become increasingly likely that the murderous Assad regime will win out in the end, in no small part because much of the rebellion has been taken over by the equally reactionary forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The remnants of the genuinely revolutionary elements that sprung up in 2011 are now sandwiched between the Assad forces in the west and ISIS in the east. Syria's ethno-religious diversity has been exploited by both the regime and by ISIS for sectarian purposes, with the officially nationalist regime claiming to defend minorities, and ISIS the Sunni Muslim majority. Before the uprising, Sunnis, an important base for the opposition, comprised 75% of the population, whereas Assad's regime based itself to a great extent among elements of the Alawite offshoot of Shia Islam, as well Christians, who together totaled about a quarter of the population, although the Assads had also recruited many Sunnis into the elite, especially in the economy.

Over the past year, the Assad forces have driven millions of Syrians into exile, carrying out what amounts to an ethno-religious "cleansing" of the population. As Emile Hokayem of the International Institute for Strategic Studies explained ominously: "Assad seeks to take back territory, but not population. He doesn't need to maintain housing in place because the objective is not to allow residents back. It is a kind of cleansing going on" (*New York Times*, 2-18-14). The regime has reduced whole neighborhoods to starvation by besieging them and has also dropped massive barrel bombs on civilian neighborhoods.

Evidence of Assad regime war crimes mounts daily, as the world remains largely silent. In April, 55,000 photos of torture on an "industrial scale" were made available to the United Nations Security Council by a defector from the security apparatus (Somini Sengupta, "At U.N., a Grim Viewing of Alleged Syrian Torture," *New York Times* 4-16-14). That same month, a report by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, "Violence Against Women, Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict," also received international attention. It documented the rape of up to 6000 female prisoners by the regime. These were not carried out spontaneously but with meticulous bureaucratic calculation, including humiliating videos sent to relatives of victims, and medical doctors administering contraceptives on a regular basis (Anick Cojean, "Le viol, arme de destruction massive en Syrie," *Le Monde* 3-7-14).

Even more tragic in the past year is the rise within the opposition of extreme jihadist elements, most notoriously ISIS. The Syrian uprising started in March 2011 in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and, like them, involved a cross-section of youth, women, and working people, beginning in the most impoverished region of the country. From the beginning, the regime used gunfire and torture against the demonstrators, falsely labeling them jihadists in the pay of foreigners. The years 2011-12 saw the birth of an armed uprising spearheaded by soldiers who deserted the military.

During this early period of the uprising, numerous tendencies appeared, among them creative revolutionary thinkers like Omar Aziz, who died in an Assad prison last year. In 2011-12, before his arrest, Aziz had helped organize a self-governing community in a suburb of Damascus. As French journalist Christophe Ayad reported: "He was inspired by the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg on 'mass self-rule.' He formalized his humanist and almost anarchist vision in a long article: 'We did better than the Paris Commune, which resisted for 70 days. After a year and a half, we are still holding out'" ("Mort en détention de Omar Aziz, père des comités locaux de la

révolution syrienne," *Le Monde* 2-27-13; see also Leila Shrooms, "Syria: The life and work of anarchist Omar Aziz, and his impact on self-organization in the Syrian revolution," *Tahrir-ICN*, 8-23-13).

In 2011 and after, little aid to the Syrian revolutionaries came in from the outside powers, while Iran and Russia kept the regime armed to the teeth. Extreme jihadist networks stepped into the vacuum and they filtered arms and foreign fighters across the Turkish and Iraqi borders. Their funding came mainly from wealthy non-state Islamist networks in the Gulf monarchies, while Erdogan's Turkey allowed international jihadists to cross the border. By September 2013, it was estimated that a third of the armed fighters against the regime were extreme jihadists, a third somewhat more moderate Islamists, and only a third from more secular and nationalist groups that carried the spirit of the original 2011 uprising.

By December 2013, the extreme jihadists began to attack other tendencies within the uprising, while also continuing to carry out massacres of minorities as well as Sunnis who violated their narrow interpretation of Islam. In December 2013, the kidnapping in a rebel-controlled suburb of Damascus of Razan Zaitouneh, a well-known human rights and feminist activist, along with several other secular revolutionaries, was attributed to jihadists. This marked a point of no return for more secular groups, which decided to move against the extreme jihadists (Benjamin Barthe, "Enlèvement d'une icône de la révolution syrienne," *Le Monde* 12-14-13).

For its part, ISIS, the most extreme jihadist group, also began to move against other tendencies in the uprising, even Islamist ones, carrying out numerous executions. The ISIS leadership originated in Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQM), which had fought the Americans and massacred Shias during the Iraq war. With a rear base in northwestern Iraq and lavish funding from abroad, ISIS came to dominate a large swathe of territory in northeastern Syria, centered on the city of Raqqa, an area that includes the country's oilfields. Enjoying what seemed to be a tacit arrangement with the Assad regime, ISIS attacked the other rebels from the east while Assad did so from the west. U.S. journalist Ben Hubbard reported, "Although there is no clear evidence of direct tactical coordination between the group and Mr. Assad, American officials say his government has facilitated the group's rise not only by purchasing its oil but by exempting some of its headquarters from the airstrikes that have tormented other rebel groups ("Rebels in Syria Claim Control of Resources," *New York Times* 1-19-14).

The genuine Syrian revolutionaries are not going down without a fight, however. In January, after months of protests by civil activists against ISIS, a military alliance of secular nationalists, moderate Islamists, and even some other jihadists, charged ISIS with "stealing the revolution." Launching what they termed a "second revolution," they drove ISIS out of rebel-held areas of Aleppo and other regions, except for their stronghold in Raqqa (Hélène Sallon, "En Syrie, la 'deuxième révolution' des insurgés," *Le Monde*, 1-11-14). By now, however, the regime was, with help from actual ground troops from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraq Shia militias, also beginning to gain ground in the fighting, not least because the reactionary and oppressive politics of some rebel factions, above all ISIS, were disillusioning the Syrian people.

In early 2014, ISIS took a different tack, beginning what was to become a dramatic move from Syria back into Iraq. (For an analysis, see "Tragedy in Iraq and Syria: Will It Swallow Up the Arab Revolutions?" Statement of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization 6-22-14.) By January, ISIS and allied forces had taken over the major city of Fallujah, and in the ensuing months they were able to take other cities in heavily Sunni Anbar Province. In June, they staged a spectacular attack to conquer Mosul in the far north, Iraq's second largest city. Soon afterwards, Iraqi Kurds seized nearby Kirkuk, the multiethnic oil-rich city they have long claimed as the capital of their region and possible future state. In Mosul, the ISIS forces obtained control of vast amounts of very modern military equipment and of money from local banks. They have attempted to stir up a sectarian war by executing Shias and by shelling the important Shia mosque in Samarra. Disciplined and organized, ISIS has foiled attempts by Iraq's poorly organized army and Shia militias to retake a single city. Utterly reactionary, they have severely restricted women and driven religious minorities out of the city, offering them the choice of conversion, second-class status, or death.

How could this have happened in Iraq, and so quickly? First, ISIS took advantage of huge resentment, some of it legitimate and some of it not, from among the Sunni Arabs who predominate in the region it has taken over. The U.S.-installed government of Nuri al-Maliki had become increasingly authoritarian and sectarian. By persecuting and neglecting the Sunni Arab regions, the Maliki government burned its bridges with the moderate Sunni political forces that helped it and the U.S. to defeat Al Qaeda of Mesopotamia (AQM), the group out of which ISIS originated. AQM and other jihadists had mounted armed resistance to the U.S occupation, also touching off a sectarian civil war by massacring Shias. These

Sunni jihadist elements, along with Iraqi Baathists, had refused to reconcile themselves to the fact that Sunni Arabs (20% of the population) could no longer lord it over the Shia (60%) or the minority Kurds (20%). By 2014, however, a wider circle now allied itself with ISIS. Among those who did so was the most prominent leader of the former Baathist regime who had managed to escape the U.S. dragnet, Ezzat Ibrahim al-Douri. He was a key figure in the genocidal "Operation Anfal" that killed 180,000 Kurds in 1988, and is also a member of the clandestine Sufi-tinged Army of the Nakshbandi (Cécile Hennion, "'Ezzat le Rouge,' le phénix de Bagdad revient hanter l'Irak," *Le Monde* 6-30-14).

Since June, Iraq remains in a stalemate, divided three ways. Maliki has refused either to forgo his quest for another term as prime minister or to give the government a less sectarian face by working out a compromise with Sunni and Kurdish leaders. However, ISIS itself is sure to face problems holding such a large territory under its sway, as not only the general population, but also the other armed factions nominally allied with ISIS, will surely chafe under its puritanical rule. For now, instead of moving south toward Baghdad, ISIS seems to have instead launched an offensive in Syria against other rebels with its new military equipment, still continuing its tacit alliance with the Assad regime.

But even if ISIS fails to hold the Sunni areas of Iraq or to make further gains in Syria, it has succeeded in becoming a hero to many around the world by humiliating U.S. imperialism in the very cities where most of the Iraq war was fought. ISIS has already shaken up the politics of the region as well, placing its utterly reactionary politics at the forefront and forcing others to respond. This certainly plays into the hands of the Assad regime, carrying with it the possibility of that the U.S. would henceforth support Assad. The Iranian rulers are also using fear of ISIS to their advantage, both at home and abroad.

Egypt's New Dictatorship and Tunisia's New Constitution

Over the last two years, Egypt has seen a dizzying succession of events that has ended, at least for now, in a military-dominated regime that is even more repressive than the old Mubarak one overthrown by the 2011 revolution. That repression has recently moved from the crushing of political dissent to the economic targeting of working people. In early July, the new ruler, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, slashed decades-old subsidies on fuel prices, which will hike the cost of everything from gasoline used in transport to cooking gas. No measures to offset the toll on Egypt's poorest citizens have been announced.

A year ago, the mass Tamarod movement brought millions into the streets to force out the Muslim Brotherhood government of Muhammad Morsi. Despite pre-election promises, Morsi had not created an inclusive government after having been elected by a narrow margin in 2012. He had failed to incorporate secular and leftist forces that had been crucial to the 2011 revolution and even to his own election. The constitution that he rammed through in 2012 had some Islamist features and it also left the military as an autonomous institution standing above the state, including its elected government. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood's politics offered nothing concerning unemployment and poverty, key issues in the original 2011 revolution. As protests by the left and liberals mounted against Morsi and his constitution, he cracked down. After these protests grew into the massive Tamarod movement, the military moved in July 2013 to depose Morsi, promising to create a more inclusive democracy.

Instead, the military under General Sisi took power for themselves. (The military had never really given up power after the 2011 revolution, retaining a state within the state and sometimes more. But in 2013 they decided to rule openly once again.) In the summer of 2013, Sisi began by suppressing Muslim Brotherhood protests defending Morsi with great violence, killing hundreds of people. Most tragically, some on the left supported this military crackdown, arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood was fascist. Others took a more principled revolutionary course, denouncing both the military takeover and the Muslim Brotherhood, but making it clear that the latter should be combated politically, not criminalized as "terrorists" as the military and its allies were doing. By fall 2013, the more principled part of the left faced harsh repression as well, even as more and more figures from the old Mubarak regime were being returned to leading positions in the state and the mass media. A November law effectively banned all public demonstrations and in December several prominent leaders of the Tahrir Square protests of 2011 received prison sentences. In April of this year, the April 6 Movement, a key organization of the left in the revolution, was banned.

Even though street protests have almost disappeared under what amounts to martial law, election figures show a significant albeit passive resistance by the population to the new regime. In January of this year, for example, Sisi's new pro-military constitution was rammed through with what was reported as an improbable 98% majority, but it was admitted that only 38% turned out to vote. In May, after the presidential elections, it was announced that Sisi had won, again by an improbable 98% of the vote, with a slightly higher turnout of 47%. This was still lower than in

the relatively free 2012 elections. Moreover that 47% figure, even if true, was reached only after the polling was extended by a day amid a media blitz due to low participation. That did not faze the U.S., however, which resumed all military aid soon after, in June.

What has nearly disappeared under the repression is active, open resistance to the Egyptian regime and the class and property relations that underlie it. In this sense, the era that began in 2011 may well be coming to an end.

At a socio-economic level, however, none of the problems of unemployment, poverty, and burgeoning inequality that sparked the 2011 revolution have been addressed, let alone solved. Even the current level of repression has not stopped social and economic issues from emerging openly. Labor unrest has continued unabated since 2011, with regular strike actions by workers, who have been demanding, among other things, an adequate minimum wage (Marion Guénard, "Grèves a répétition dans une Egypte en plein marasme économique," *Le Monde* 3-1-14). Other social issues also fester, above all assaults on women, as seen most recently in the horrific gang rapes that occurred yet again during a celebration in May of Sisi's election win. A new anti-rape and anti-harassment law has been passed to great acclaim, a small gain after three years of protest by women activists.

Overall, while the new military-dominated regime seems on the surface to be solidly entrenched, it may actually be much weaker than it appears. And Sisi's near silence over Israel's carnage in Gaza will certainly not strengthen his support among the Egyptian people.

The Tunisian revolution of 2011 has achieved more positive results, after considerable struggle by secularists and leftists. In 2011, the moderate Islamist Ennahda Party, a group that had emerged out of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, had been elected to the largest number of seats in the post-revolutionary parliament and was working on a new constitution that many feared would erode women's rights and other democratic freedoms. Moreover, violent Salafist groups were on the march, intimidating secularists and leftists, with many convinced that Ennahda was using the Salafists as its shock troops. In February 2013, tensions reached the boiling point after a prominent labor attorney and Marxist, Chokri Belaid, was murdered by Salafists. (For details, see Kevin Anderson, "Tunisia on Razor's Edge after Assassination of Chokri Belaid," *International Marxist-Humanist* 2-13-13). Large demonstrations blaming Ennahda for having created the atmosphere in which Belaid was assassinated -- and others threatened -- continued

through last summer, especially after another secular democrat, the Pan-Arab leftist Mohamed *Brahimi, was killed with the same gun.*

By fall 2013, Ennahda, also fearing an Egyptian type outcome, and also under pressure from both the mass movement and the powerful General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), agreed to a major political compromise. It would step down and allow a unity government to be formed that would guide the country through new parliamentary elections after the ratification of the new constitution. The constitution was completed and ratified by an overwhelming majority in the constituent assembly in January. Moreover, Ennahda has been forced to promise that if it wins again in the 2014 elections, it will form a new government of national unity rather than a narrower pro-Islamist coalition, as in 2011.

Tunisia's new constitution is a remarkably progressive document on gender and on religion (Val Moghadam, "The Democratic Transition in Tunisia," PEWS News, Spring 2014). Article 45, which was extremely hard fought, establishes the principle of women's equality and also "equal representation for women and men in elected councils (parity)." Article 6, which was perhaps even more controversial, deals with religion and the state. It prohibits the "partisan instrumentalization of religion." In language supported by Islamists, it also commits the state to "protect the sacred and prevent it from being attacked." But in more progressive language, Article 6 additionally includes protections against religious extremism and violence. In this sense Article 6 states that Tunisia political system is "committed to prohibit charges of apostasy ('takfir') and incitement to hatred and violence, and to combat them." (Charges of apostasy by Muslim clerics in various countries have led to death threats and even assassinations.) The Constitution includes as well a comprehensive list of democratic freedoms and human rights. Let us hope the Tunisian people will have enough power in the future to enforce them.

At the same time, however, neither the constitution nor the politics of post-revolutionary Tunisia have led to very much real grappling with unemployment and poverty, especially among the youth, let alone moved to alter the overall class and economic structures of capitalism. In fact, the police continue to jail working class youth who participated in the riots that followed Belaid's assassination (Isabelle Mandraud, "La justice s'acharne sur les jeunes révolutionnaires tunisiens," *Le Monde* 6-17-14). At the same time, nearly all key figures from the old regime have been released and can run for office, with the exception of former dictator Ben Ali and his family, who remain in exile in Saudi Arabia. It is therefore not surprising

that new unrest has broken out in the phosphate mines in Gafsa, one of sources of radical ferment in the years preceding 2011 (Carlotta Gall, "Discontent in Tunisia Is Reflected in the Mines," *New York Times* 5-14-14).

The Example of South Africa

A look at South Africa may be instructive here, since its Constitution of 1996 is one of the most progressive in terms of democratic and human rights. The Constitution was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination based upon "sexual orientation" and included a host of other democratic provisions, as well as social justice principles like the right to strike and to housing and healthcare. It created the legal foundation for a multiracial democratic system after decades of struggle against a totalitarian form of racial capitalism, apartheid. Overall, the outcome was far more successful than in other countries of Southern Africa that also waged liberation struggles in the same period, for example, Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, all them now corrupt dictatorships.

And yet, South Africa today exhibits some of the deepest social contradictions anywhere, as a wealthy new interracial ruling class has consolidated itself, while the Black majority, the working people, continue to live in deep poverty. The current president, Jacob Zuma of the African National Congress, is building a huge mansion for himself out of funds syphoned off from the state, while millions of his fellow citizens lack decent housing. In May, Zuma was re-elected with 62% of the vote. While high, this was in fact the ANC's lowest result to date. Moreover, the ANC now has opposition from the left. The somewhat demagogic Economic Freedom Fighters polled over 6%, a million votes, on a platform that promised social justice measures like land distribution to Black farmers.

South Africa's widening economic cleavages have also expressed themselves in new forms of class struggle. Last August, dozens of Marikana platinum miners were massacred by police and mine security during a strike for higher wages, a strike that was opposed by the ANC-affiliated miners' union. In December, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the country's most important trade union, broke with the ANC and its ally, the Communist Party, calling for a new type of socialist movement. NUMSA called Marikana "a turning point in the social and political life of South Africa, similar to the 1960 Sharpeville massacre" ("South Africa: Numsa Calls for New Movement for Socialism," *Links* 12-13). This year, a larger strike in the platinum mines lasted five months, after which the workers received a hefty raise.

Above all, South Africa shows what lies in wait even for the most formally democratic of revolutions, if they fail to deal with social and economic questions, i.e., with capitalism.

Massacre in Gaza

The fate of the long-suffering Palestinian people offers another vantage point from which to view today's popular movements. Israel has attacked Gaza once again, killing hundreds with bombs and bullets, including small children, while the rulers of the world are watching in near silence, even more so than during earlier attacks. The U.S. typically echoes Israeli propaganda, but this time the Europeans have remained almost as silent about Israel's massacres, and even the Iranian regime has said little, leaving it to ordinary citizens to speak out and demonstrate. Why is this the case? Why now?

First, the contradictions and defeats that have followed the 2011 revolutions have to an extant shaken the confidence of the Arab masses in their own capacity to change things for the better. Many have withdrawn from politics, allowing rulers like the Egyptian generals to do what comes naturally, side with other rulers like those who control the Israeli state.

Second, despite the spectacular violence of a fringe group like ISIS, Islamist politics has on the whole been discredited and weakened as a result of 2011 and its aftermath. Among Hamas's allies, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has been decimated by the military, while Turkey's rulers have also been weakened by protest and dissension. This has left Hamas vulnerable, or so the Israelis seem to think, as they carry out their murderous war in Gaza with impunity. (For an analysis see the July 21, 2014 Statement of the IMHO, "Stop the Israeli Invasion of Gaza! Stop the Endless War Against the Palestinians!"). The problem is that the weakening of Islamism and its reactionary politics, with the exception of Tunisia, has strengthened equally reactionary forces like the Egyptian, Syrian, or Israeli rulers. Nor can Israel ultimately succeed in crushing Gaza, something it was unable to do during nearly 40 years of direct occupation, replaced in 2005 by an indirect one.

Thus, while the popular upheavals that began in 2011 are continuing, albeit with deep contradictions everywhere, the defeats they have suffered in the Middle East and elsewhere have had real consequences, whether in Syria, Egypt, Turkey, or

Palestine. Ukraine, Bosnia, and South Africa face somewhat different sorts of contradictions. But everywhere, we find democratic revolutions hemmed in by the harsh realities of 21st century capitalism. While some of these movements, like the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, raised issues of social justice and economic oppression at the start, the conflicts of the more secular and leftist forces with Islamist or military reactionaries hemmed in these struggles from the beginning, pushing the left into self-limiting alliances with liberals. Thus, while some political victories have been obtained, whether in Tunisia or Ukraine, nowhere have the revolutionaries been able or willing to seriously address in a sustained manner the class and economic issues that underlay these revolutions and uprisings.

At the same time, this is what masses of people the world over are yearning for, including in the Americas. This is the contradiction of our times, which cannot be solved unless the abolition of capitalism and the working out of a viable, socialist humanist alternative to it can be placed at the top of the agenda of the popular movements of our day.