

**"The Left and the Arab Revolutions"**

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**Conference Papers  
Cairo 24 to 25 April 2013**



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### **Case Studies**

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## **Introduction**

It seemed that the Arab revolutions came at the backdrop of a somehow clear absence of the Left factions and forces at the level of action as well as at the level of political impact in the Arab street on the different causes and concerns of the citizens. Still, Leftist forces, old as well as other new ones, born from the womb of the conflict in the last years of the new millennium, have tried to play different roles in connecting with the waves of the Arab Spring and trying to reorganize their ranks and their political cards as players who are supposed to be the main ones in the roaring mass movement which is raising slogans calling for political, economic, and social rights that have been stolen from them over the past decades.

Thus, conflicts and fragmentation within the Arab Left, in addition to the limited impact and political influence, have impacted on the Left and on the way in which it started its second millennium. This has made it appear in a state of confusion. **In Tunisia**, despite his focus on the Islamists, Ben Ali continued to adopt Bourguiba's repressive policies against the Left, which split into two opposition factions: public (acknowledged by the regime) and secret opposition. The public opposition is mainly composed of three parties: the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (a member of the ruling coalition today), and the Renewal Movement, the heir of the Communist Party, which changed itself into a democratic movement with communist origins, and the secular socialist Progressive Democratic Party. The three parties have faced multiple forms of restrictions on their activities and media institutions, and they were prevented from expanding their popular base and informing the people of their ideas and opinions. This blockade on these parties was eased when the symbols of these parties were able to voice their opinions in Arab as well and foreign media outlets.

**In Egypt**, these organizations and the Left factions, in general, have suffered a very big shock, and some of them have lost their contact with the masses after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in the wake of mass movements that liberated the people from years of oppression and tyranny under the rule of Stalinist communist parties. Revolution and socialism have become either a

space for questioning and revision or mere slogans based on the same old visions for fear of the abandonment of the revolution project. However, no effort was made to analyze the crisis and the political changes and their causes with the exception of a few who have attempted to understand what has happened and to continue the struggle on the grounds of radical change.

**In Yemen**, all internal factors and their interaction with the Cold War conflicts between the Eastern and Western blocs and the intervention of local and international political forces, which continued to resist the emergence of a Leftist state have gathered and eventually led to the outbreak of the crisis on 13 January, 1986. This was the first blow to the Leftist project in Yemen, especially after the assassination of its best leaders and the emergence of a local political discourse against the Left, creating a societal reaction that contributed to the emergence of extremist religious forces. These events and the subsequent ones were the key factors in the decline in the popular base of the party and for its being blamed for the civil war. The party continued to suffer from the repercussions of this partisan conflict, which had also reached to the party's organizational structures and its relations with its popular base.

In light of the January events, some party leaders attempted to provide an intellectual review and called for partisan democracy instead of narrow centralism. However, despite these important revisions in the history of the left, the party leadership continued to be unable to absorb the renewal discourse and did not respect the organizational structures of the party. In order to escape its continued internal crisis in the south, the party signed a unity agreement with the north unilaterally without the knowledge of the party's organizational structures. Because the balance of power was in favor of the power in the north, it was able to evade the agreement's terms and the partnership, and it launched its war on the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in the summer of 1994, the second blow to the Left in Yemen. After the 1994 war, the Secretary-General of the Party announced the political disintegration decision with the north and the return to the conditions that prevailed before 1990. This decision led to splits in the leadership of the party and confused its popular base, which was then unable to reach an agreed upon decision with regard to the war which they were part of and regarding the disintegration, especially because

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this decision was an individual one without consultation with the popular base or the party's regulatory bodies.

**In Syria**, the situation was more complicated. The position of the Leftist parties vis-à-vis the regime was confused. The Left refused to be in the opposition and stressed that it criticizes the regime. However, it continued to be bound by the vision adopted by the two communist parties, and it stressed the "national" stances of Syria and its "hostility to imperialism." However, it increased the level of its criticism to the economic policy and the "economic team," and stressed that this policy will lead to a "disaster" as a result of impoverishment process of this policy. This situation made these parties part of the "structure" and responsible for its policies. Its long participation in power had made it part of the state bureaucracy, although it continued to "softly" reject or criticize certain policies and to demand that the regime (of which it was a part) solve a problem here and there. This means that in the three cases when the Left was repressed, in power or part of its structure, the international transformations and the development of the Arab regimes have led to the same result: a state of confusion and some distance from the political scene in the early twentieth century.

The question echoed by many people is: "Where is the Arab Left?" This question is raised either in the context of confirming that the role of the Left has ended or to lament its absence based on the absence of the legal Leftist parties from the scene and the small number of its MPs and its political representatives, in addition to its fading cultural voice in the official media. However, those who want to evaluate the role and effectiveness of the Left realistically should not only take the above considerations into account but should also look at its role in the protest movements that have become a widespread and important phenomenon in the last ten years before the eruption of the protests in the Arab region, in addition to the roles it has played during the revolutions and their consecutive waves as we will see in the studies contained in this book.

This book is the outcome of the discussions and papers presented at a two-day conference held in Cairo, 24 -25 April 2013, in cooperation between the Arab Forum for Alternatives and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The conference was attended by a large number of intellectuals and activists from many Arab Leftist forces

and schools of thought. During the conference, the late Egyptian Leftist thinker, Dr. Samer Suleiman, and the Tunisian freedom fighter martyr, Chokri Belaïd, were honored.

The conference brought many issues to discussion, such as the role of the Left in the revolutions and the Left and issues from the Arab region. In addition, there were the working groups discussions that came at the end of the conference, which covered the following topics: the left action mechanisms in the transformation phase, organizational visions of the post-revolutions' Left, and activating joint action among the Arab Left.

The book contains eight chapters: case studies on five countries that have experienced mass revolutionary movements; some were successful in overthrowing the ruling regimes (Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen), while other battles (Bahrain, Syria) are still on-going. All the papers have basically sought to understand the nature of this phase, the role of the Left in it as an important political force, and how might the Left emerge from its historical crises. In addition, the book contains three analytical studies addressing many of the issues that have been covered in the case studies and tackling the following topics: the political performance of the Left after the Arab revolutions; the left and the Arab Spring: the complexity of movement and organization; and the left and the protest movements in the Arab region.

## **The Egyptian Revolution and the Role of the Left**

### **Success and Failure Factors**

#### **Ayman Abdel Muti**

These papers are the product of an internal seminar. They are issued in a non-periodic manner and reflect only the views of their authors and not necessarily the opinion of the Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA) or any of its partner institutions.

The Egyptian Left responded to the 25 January, 2011 revolution at a time when it was still suffering from its historic problems, despite the fact that there were attempts made by some of its streams to rid themselves of these problems during the 10 years prior to the outbreak of the revolution. In spite of the political efforts made by some leftist forces to build links with the popular impulse and the heated issues such as democratic transformation, anti-imperialism and Zionism and popular campaigns to confront the imposition of unfair taxes, the Left parties and organizations were absent from the change yards, and they did not have an influential presence at this very critical revolutionary moment.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the contradictions of the Egyptian revolutionary scene because while the people were demanding leftist agenda demands and calling for a just society, comprehensive and independent change and development, and bias for the toilers and the poor in public yards and in the heart of Tahrir Square, the Left was absent. That is to say that the Left was astounded by the wide protests that swept every place of Egypt, and when this happened, it was not present as an organized force seeking to mobilize people and lead their revolution which was carrying demands of a Leftist nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Imad Masaad Muhammad al-Sabea, *Al-Thawra wa al-Yasar al-Ghaeb fi Masr* (The Revolution and the absent Left in Egypt), *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaden* (The Civilized Dialogue), issue number 3419, dated 7/7/2011 on the following link:  
<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=266308>

## **The Egyptian Left: A historical background**

Throughout its history, and since its emergence in the wake of the Egyptian revolution of 1919, the Left continued to try to play the role of the vanguard of the masses during the different waves of struggle that have broken out at various times. However, it has also continued to be stuck in the midst of problems that have plagued the political movement in general and the Left in particular, such as factionalism, prejudice, fragmentation and lack of interaction with the broad masses. Unfortunately, the Left has not been awakened by the spontaneous movements of the masses every now and then. In 1977, when the 18 and 19 January uprising erupted, the Egyptian Left faced the hardest lesson ever. Despite the strong wave – of a Leftist nature - that had swept the whole world since 1968, the Egyptian Left missed the opportunities of associating itself with the movement from below at the time when this movement reached its peak before it was severely repressed after the uprising.

This idea – the relationship between the Left and the masses – has its roots in the history of the Left, in its practices and in the way it used for building itself and its organizations throughout its history. The historic conditions have allowed some Left wing factions, from the start of the creation of the first communist party in 1921 and until the development of the Left movement in the 1940's, to associate themselves with the mass movement. However, the Left has stayed away from the possibility of playing a role in mobilizing the revolutionary momentum in the direction of the victory of the masses away from liberal, national and religious and pan-Arab slogans that have prevailed in the political life at that time despite its struggle forces, which have grown with the Second Communist Movement in the mid-forties. This is because of reasons related to the nature of secret organizations which has led to the lack of their interaction with the on-going struggle. In addition, these organizations did not re-examine their ideas and their national-oriented programmes, and they were dependent on the Soviet Union and the Eastern European camp. This has reflected itself in the absence of independent stances taken by the Left organizations such as their support for the UN resolution which divided Palestine into two sovereign states when it was accepted by the Soviet Union and the State of Israel. Moreover, the

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Leftist movement has witnessed deep divides, and it has reached the point where the number of Leftist parties became 35 organizations in less than two decades.<sup>2</sup>

Since the emergence of the Third Communist Movement in the wake of the tidal 1968 wave, the organizations of this movement remained small in size and limited in their impact and influence in the political reality in general because of their heavy dependence on political theorization which does not essentially answer the questions posed by the realities on the ground in addition to excessive self-exaggeration. A small group would call itself a party and thus follow partisan policies and tasks not commensurate with its limited size and impact.

If we examine the National Progressive Unionist Party (*Tagammu*), which continued to be the only official Leftist party, since its inception in 1976 and until the 25 of January revolution, we find that the way it started and continued to be until the 1980's is very different from the roles it has played during the last two decades. During the last two decades, it has stopped its attempts to become a Leftist party which is trying to lead a wide mass of laborers, farmers and the poor. "It is for this reason that socialist streams have stopped working under the banner of the *Tagammu* because its leadership did not attempt to deep-root the Leftist approach as an ideology and in practice, and it did not support the advancement of its political unity and ideological framework as a formula which combines the Marxists, pan-Arab, and enlightened religious streams within one Leftist nucleus to face the ruling right-wing regime and the reactionary political Islam."<sup>3</sup>

Even the party which used the *Tagammu* as its cover, i.e. the Egyptian Communist Party, has changed. Its present is no longer the natural extension of its past which has been characterized by some struggle flashes. It has quickly become bureaucratized. In addition, it holds a conservative political view of politics and organization

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<sup>2</sup> Yusuf MUhammad, *Tarekh al-Haraka al-Shuyueiya* (The History of the Communist Movement), the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, 2013, p 75.

<sup>3</sup> Imad Massad Muhammad al-Sabea, *Al-Thawra wa al-Yasar al-Ghaeb fi Masr* (The Revolution and the Absent Left in Egypt), op cit.

stemming from a Stalinist distortion of the revolutionary heritage. The Socialist People's Party, the faction that has walked out of the Egyptian Communist party, is not very different from any small group with low-impact and influence.

In 1989, the United Workers' Communist Party was established. It emerged as a result of the merging of the United Workers' Communist Party and the Egyptian Communist Party (Jan 8). This unity did not provide the party with any tangible strength. After the security strike, directly after the unification, it remained a party with no real political presence in the 1990's except for a few publications. In the new millennium, it completely disappeared.

These Leftist organizations and factions have faced a huge shock, and some of them have lost all contact with the masses after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in the wake of mass movements that have rid themselves from years of oppression and tyranny under communist and Stalinist parties. Thus, the revolution and socialism either have become areas for questioning and revision or mere slogans based on the same old visions for fear of abandoning the revolution project but without making any effort to analyze the crisis and the political changes and their causes.

Small and ineffective groups have emerged and disappeared because of their severe weakness or because they have merged in other forms because they were not able to establish their presence in the political life. The only group that has continued to be present since its inception in the early nineties and which was able to create a space for itself in the Left vacuum was the Revolutionary Socialist Stream which has been able to provide some revolutionary answers to today's questions, especially in the state of disarray after the fall of the communist system. But this newly emerging critical stream was not able to rid itself of the problems suffered by the Left and which have ultimately led to the creation of three small and ineffective groups despite the critique it has provided at the start of its formation on the Orthodox, Stalinist and Trotskyist vision of politics and organization.

### **The Left on the Eve of the Revolution**

Those who say that the Left was completely absent and alienated from the Egyptian political activism, especially at the beginning of the new millennium, are simplifying this issue. The number of the

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stream's representatives in the representative councils may be limited; however, during the last ten years, the left has been, to a certain degree, the fuel, the engine, or the catalyst of many protest movements in Egypt. This means that it has returned to the yard after a period of inactivity and absence."<sup>4</sup>

During the ten years prior to the Revolution, some leftist groups and individuals tried to take advantage of the struggle momentum that emerged after the fraud in the 2000 parliamentary elections and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising, which had produced a strong solidarity movement in all the Arab countries and among sectors that had not paid any real attention to national issues and liberation from imperialism and Zionism for a long time. This was accompanied by a large opposition movement against the imperialist war against Afghanistan under the pretext of the fight against terrorism at a time when cities of the world were rising up against capitalist globalization and its solutions to the crisis that made the poor pay the price. After that, the Iraq war played a role in fueling popular anger in the whole world and in Egypt in particular. It was this war that revealed to everyone the close relation between the Mubarak regime and imperialism. In 2004, the *Kifaya* Movement emerged carrying the slogan of "no to extension (for President Mubarak), no to hereditary (his son)."

In the midst of this momentum, the resistant Egyptian Left played a role in the formation of groups such as the Egyptian Movement for Change (*Kifaya*) and the Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group (*Ajeej*), in addition to the creation of committees for the support of the Palestinian intifada, and against the war on Iraq. It also played a role in the creation of the different labor solidarity committees of a frontal nature. In this way, political activism in Egypt began to create a link between political and national issues but without efficiently creating a link between the two and social issues. The absence of this link continued to dominate the activism to a large extent of the Left until

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<sup>4</sup> Mohamed Agati, *Al-Yasar wa al-Haraka al-Siyasiya al-Masriya: Ghiyab am Taghyeer fi al-Dawr?* (The Left and Egyptian Political Movement: an absence of or a change in the role?) An article published in al-Safir newspaper in 2009 and is on the author's personal blog: <http://is.gd/2Tjp7u>

the revolution, in spite of the nascent rise of a strong labor movement by the end of 2006, which laid the groundwork for the creation of Egypt's first independent trade union since the 1940's as reflected by the case of the Real Estate Tax Authority's employees.

### **The New Left and the Revolution**

The new frontal formations and the campaigns formed or launched by Leftist groups and individuals have played an important role in restoring the Leftist voice which had almost disappeared in the nineties. Many of the old Leftists started to become politically active again and participated in the formation of committees, the launching of campaigns, and demonstrations, even leading some of them.

The most important development is the emergence of new generations in the political arena with the emergence of the democratic change movement. These generations have played the role of spearhead and the primary masses for mobilization in all forms of protests called by the change movements, including the "independence of judges" movement and later in the movements against police and its repression of activists and citizens.

These generations, as of the day of their emergence, have enjoyed a high sense of struggle and boldness in confronting the brutality of the state apparatuses and unmatched ability of political activism. Although some of them are affiliated with some political entities because these entities were able to mobilize them in the universities and the different neighborhoods, many of them joined the newly emerging youth movements such as "April 6 Youth Movement", "We are all Khaled Said," "Movement of Youth for Justice and Freedom," and the "National Association for Change." This has reflected itself in the courage of these movements but also in their lack of experience and the absence of political cohesion among the new generation which has started to make its footsteps amid this political momentum.

In spite of the fact that these new generations belonged to movements and new parties or groups and to political parties that already existed, or which were able to remain independent without joining any party or political force, we can confirm that the social sense in the visions and the struggle of many of them was clearly visible. It is what we can describe as Leftist oriented, even if they themselves do not describe themselves as Leftists.

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After that, the new movements played a major role in the formation of "Revolution Youth Coalition" (April 6 Youth Movement, Movement of Youth for Justice and Freedom, Young Muslim Brotherhood, Youth Democratic Front Party, Youth National Association for Change, the Campaign for the Support of El-Baradei) which was significantly leading the revolution in al-Tahrir Square during the 18 days through the committees which were formed in the field and the revolution radio, and which was identifying the demands and speaking to the media on behalf of the revolution.

### **A Broad Left Party**

The Revolution came as a big surprise to everybody. Although some Left parties had preached that the revolution might erupt, the size of participation and political action of the masses surprised everybody. In an attempt to quickly respond to the revolution, there was an initiative to create a broad Leftist party. This initiative was not a new one. It had its many harbingers in the attempts to create the "March 20 for Change," the "Left Alliance" and later on the "Union of the Left" in addition to other limited attempts to unify leftist organizations in one organization, and later on the formation of youth groups, committees, alliances and coalitions during the political struggle period.

On completely different grounds than those that prevailed before the revolution, and under conditions created by the very huge political momentum and the Leftist tendencies in the practices of many movements, many streams and forces positively responded to the call for the creation of a new party which later became known as the "Socialist People's Alliance." However, at an early stage of its creation, sorting inside the party started on political and programme levels. A group that had walked out after the founding conference later on formed, with others, the Social Democratic Egyptian Party, describing the Socialist People's Alliance as being more leftist than it should be at this stage. The Revolutionary Socialist Organization refused to continue its participation in the creation of the alliance because it refused to dissolve itself and merge into the new party and because many of its leaders were workers and peasants. Another group walked out and formed the Egyptian Socialist Party. Some of its cadres and leaders had, at a later stage, joined the Alliance Party. In

the end, the new party was formed of a group of those who left the *Tagammu*, when they failed to change the leadership of the party and to mobilize a majority against it, the Socialist Renewal Stream, the Revolutionary Stream,<sup>5</sup> some members of the Democratic Left, and a large group of independents or who were in old parties such as the United Workers' Party, the Socialist Peoples' Party, or the Socialist Egyptians.

In any case, apart from the emergence of various political formations even after the revolution, the left, with its broad sense, has had its prominent presence in the events, demonstrations, protests by millions, and the frontal formations that have emerged after the revolution. It also has had its stances regarding the overall political, economic and social issues, and it was biased to the poor and the toilers as reflected in statements issued by its forces and parties and by the writings and stances of its political symbols.

We will try here to examine three experiences in the creation of Leftist parties. In my view, one of these experiences is a right-wing one – if I may use such an expression; the second is a left-wing experience, and the third is a centrist one; these are: the Social Democratic Egyptian Party, the Workers' and Peasants Party and the Socialist Popular Alliance as examples but there are others, too, as evidenced by the presence of other parties such as the Social and the Communist Egyptian Parties.

### **The Egyptian Social Democratic Party**

The Egyptian Social Democratic Party considers itself centrist-left. The party has two objectives: political freedom and social justice, without any mention of socialism as a goal sought by the party in the long run. The party believes in liberties that ensure equal rights for every citizen. At the same time, it advocates a society dominated by economic values where individuals share the ownership and management of the production process with full refusal of the state's

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<sup>5</sup> The revolutionary socialist movement in Egypt split into three streams and organizations: the Revolutionary Socialists Organization, the Socialist Renewal Movement and the Revolutionary Stream.

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monopoly of the means of production. "We have to respect the legitimate interests of the majority of Egyptians through adopting economic policies that serve the majority of the people by spending more on health, education and housing and which help the poor to get out of poverty and raise the standard of living of Egyptians. We want everybody to have his rights. Whoever works hard and with dedication deserves an excellent income. The income of people in Egypt should be linked with their effort and dedication to work."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the "social democrats refuse the state's monopoly of the means of production and the control of freedoms by an authority from above – that is an authority which controls people because it considers itself as more knowledgeable and more capable of knowing the details of things." They also refuse to leave the market open for the monopolies of big capitalists and influential people and the deepening social inequalities."<sup>7</sup>

At the level of political action, the party did not have any problem in allying itself with the capitalist parties such as its alliance with the Party of Egyptian Liberals and its founder, Naguib Sawiris, a businessman, in parliamentary elections and its quest afterwards to merge with his party in one party. It also did not have any problem with having personalities remnant of the former regime listed in the list of the Egyptian bloc which it had led in the elections.

We can say that the party, instead of mobilizing young Leftists and other old Leftist parties and factions, has opted to mobilize liberal youth with social orientation and some of the old Left personalities who did not want to stay within the broad Left party for a variety of reasons. In this regard, some analysts say that the walk out of the founders of the Egyptian Democratic Party from the project of establishing a broad Left party was inevitable, not only because they do not agree with the party's programme and its vision of building itself, but more importantly because it did not provide a leftist vision,

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<sup>6</sup> *Mann Nahnu – Aan al-Hizb wa Ahdafih* (Who Are We? On the Party and Its Goals), the website of the Socialist Democratic Egyptian Party, available on the following link: [http://www.egydp.com/site/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=205&Itemid=29](http://www.egydp.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=205&Itemid=29)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

not even in the reformist sense of the word – better call it a liberal vision with a Leftist touch.

### **The Workers and Peasants Party**

The Workers and Peasants Party was established by a number of the traditional labor leaders and members of the Revolutionary Socialist Organization who have from the start of the preparatory meetings refused to continue in the initiative to found a broad Left party. The policy of the organization, in which its leaders have played a major role in the creation of the party, is to create a new party distant from the Left with its historic meaning – a party to be formed by labor and peasant Leftist leaders known for their struggle history with the aim of the victory of the revolution and preparing it to become of a radical labor and social nature.

The ideas put forward by the party seem different in its leftist and more radical nature. However, the party does not provide in its literature any means by which it is going to achieve its aims other than the repetition of slogans and general principles which the Revolutionary Socialists have been repeating throughout their history. More importantly, the party does not provide an analysis which explains the relation between these slogans and aims now with the development of the Egyptian revolution. It does not provide an answer to the question whether the social revolution forces have reached a level of organization and politicization which would allow them to achieve these revolutionary tasks or whether the conditions have not yet become ripe. Thus, one of the main problems of the party is that it has not crystallized these slogans into instant tasks that it is going to follow in order to reach its aims. The party, which has not until now succeeded in completing the procedures needed to become publicly acknowledged, does not see the importance of its competing in the elections but instead have called for their boycott.<sup>8</sup> Also, it does not participate in hardly any frontal activities, and its

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<sup>8</sup> Published in June 21, 2012 on the party's Facebook page on the following link:  
<https://www.facebook.com/aljnagy>

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activism is limited to participation in protest marches and events organized in the yards and neighborhoods.

In the history of the Left movement, there are those who are more concerned about their revolutionary purity than about the strength, possibility and opportunity of the success of the ideas they carry. Thus, they defend this purity and make it their slogan and their major discourse. They repeat the general principles, i.e. the call for the victory of the labor revolution and declare that the path to achieve this is by organizing this class itself in its revolutionary party, regardless of whether or not the possibilities are now present.

### **The Socialist Popular Alliance Party**

The initiative of the Alliance Party - which targeted many Leftist circles – not only did not succeed until now in gathering all the Leftist factions, but also has failed to mobilize the youth groups that were formed directly before the revolution such as the April 6 Youth Movement and the Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom. It was also not successful in mobilizing groups which have played active roles in the revolution during the last two years such as the popular revolutionary committees and the Egyptian ultras groups. It was also reluctant to invite the *Tagammu* and the Egyptian Communist party to join in. Thus, the Left remained divided among a number of entities: the historic, the youth and the parties that have appeared after the revolution. However, the Alliance Party which was able to bring together the biggest part of the ideological Left and those who are convinced of the necessity of building a big Leftist party capable of competing with liberal parties and religious groups in the political arena, has not yet sought to bring in what can be described as the revolution's Left, i.e. the Left which believes in the importance of achieving the aims of the revolution and further entrenching its demands regardless of the names these groups give to themselves and their relation with the Left and its ideology in the historical sense.

Since the beginning, the party had specified its political orientation. It has reflected it in the name it has chosen for itself because "the real guarantee for achieving the demands of the people, especially those of the working classes, is not the mere presence of persons or power institutions that are characterized by integrity and honesty, but rather the continuity of the revolutionary popular

movement which will be able to pressure every person who reaches power." It is for this reason that it is important that all sectors of the Egyptian society, in schools and in work places, should organize in democratic formations that adopt the demand of the social and political revolution."<sup>9</sup>

In its founding declaration, the party has stressed its four basic principles, first, the insistence on achieving all the demands related to democracy and political reform without diminution; second, linking political change with social change, and redirecting the economy and development plans for the benefit of the poor masses; third, addressing all forms of submission to Zionism and dependency of colonial governments; and fourth, the struggle for building a civil, not religious or military, state.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the party stands against "capitalist exploitation and domination of capitalism and monopolies. It is totally biased to the interests of the poor and the producer classes. It diligently seeks to invite workers, peasants, employees, and all the poor masses to engage in its ranks. It also wants to engage young people who are against corruption, tyranny and exploitation, and all intellectuals and artists who are biased to democracy, justice and the interests of the masses. Thus, it is an open democratic party that allows the presence of multiple platforms and streams from within it. Its political stances are based on consensus reached between its different streams and its organizational structures are based on open coordination. Moreover, it does not adopt the same old style of parties which is based on top down decision making processes."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The statement issued by the meeting held for the purpose of creating the New Left Party: The objectives of the popular revolution in the current stage, the preparatory committee for the creation of a new party for the left, 26 February 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Draft founding declaration of the People's Alliance Party, 26 February 2011

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

## **The Left and Frontal Work: the Parliamentary Elections as a Model**

The broad Left Party was not built on any partisan grounds towards other forces, specially the Leftist. From the beginning of the revolution, there was a tendency towards signing joint statements, entering into coordination bodies during big events - in particular demonstrations gathering millions of Egyptians -, entering into alliances and forming political fronts with other forces, especially the leftist forces. In the parliamentary elections 2011 - as a model for frontal work - the Alliance Party participated in the beginning together with the Egyptian bloc and the Liberal Egyptian Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the *Tagammu* and others. It then walked out and built the "Revolution Continues Coalition" which gathered it with the Revolution Youth Coalition and the Egyptian Socialist Party, the Egyptian Coalition, Freedom Egypt, Equality and Development, and the Egyptian Stream.<sup>12</sup>

The new parties that have formed the Egyptian bloc faced "major problems" because they were not present in the street before, and they do not have sufficient popular support to rely on or a popular base linked to them. Moreover, many of these parties were working on building their structures and most of them, especially with the start of the elections, did not have any organizational experience on the ground, or full-time volunteers to assist in the organization and management of the election campaign. This has created a big crisis for these parties."<sup>13</sup>

Not only this was the main problem, but the process of the creation of political parties itself was so difficult that it had contributed to the inability of some parties to finalize the registration procedures before the elections. The conditions for the registrations required that for a party to be able to register, it should have five thousand members coming from fifteen provinces. Moreover, some

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<sup>12</sup> The Egyptian Stream Party was formed by a group of Egyptian revolution youth and a number of young cadres, dissidents of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>13</sup> Conference Papers "Election Campaigns: Strategies and challenges," 30 January, 2013, a forum organized by the Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA).

parties did not have the financial means and could not provide funding for their election campaigns in all provinces. In addition to this, the newly created parties have very weak election experience and most of them did not have cadres who have lived such an experience before, with only a few who did have some cadres and candidates with election experience before the revolution.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the circumstances under which the elections were held were very difficult and made the whole process complicated, putting newly emerging parties to a real test in which they had to show their seriousness and their ability to create a foothold on the emerging political map. These circumstances were characterized by the dominance of the military council on power in the country, the election law itself and the composition and decisions of the Supreme Electoral Commission.

Soon, however, disputes started to surface within the bloc and many parties walked out and announced new alliances after disagreement over the definition of remnants (the symbols of the former regime and those who participated in the government under the presidency of Mubarak) and because many of them became candidates on the bloc's lists in addition to the political disagreement on the type of civil-Islamic polarization fueled by the presence of the bloc and the Democratic Alliance under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. The most important alliance which was initiated by those who walked out of the bloc was the "Continuous Revolution Coalition," which was mainly initiated by the Socialist People's Alliance and Egypt Freedom.

There were some distinctive features of the Continuous Revolution Coalition such as its decisive stance with regard to dealing with the remnants of the former regime, and its insistence on issues of social justice, equality, and its commitment to the goals of the revolution and its demands. Moreover, it has distanced itself from narrow partisan interests, and this has strengthened it. Furthermore, it has nominated women and youth on the top of its lists and enabled those who have popularity to compete in the elections, and thus, it has

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## **"The Left and the Arab Revolutions"**

provided a good space for the parties and forces who were members of this alliance.<sup>15</sup>

From the outset, the goal of the Revolution Continues Coalition was to build a political alliance on the basis of a program between parties with leftist, liberal and moderate Islamist orientation. Although there was a political agreement on this issue, the coalition has faced many difficulties, most importantly, the weak financial resources, the decentralized administration of the election campaign, as well as the halting of the coalition's campaign because of the events of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, which led to dozens of martyrs and injured people, immediately before elections, thus affecting the elections propaganda period.<sup>16</sup>

The elections ended and the Revolution Continues Coalition was able to win 8 seats in the parliament (one individual seat and 7 list's seats). However, soon the number fell to five when three MPs withdrew from the coalition and considered themselves as independent MPs, not committed to represent the coalition in the parliament. Moreover, the parliament was dissolved and thus the coalition, as well as other blocs, was not given enough time to show its cohesion and to provide an alternative vision under the dome of the parliament, but in spite of this, members of the Revolution Continues Coalition in the parliament, in such a short period of time, were able to submit some draft laws that are completely different from the ideas held by the parliamentary Islamic majority such as the trade unions freedom draft law and the investment and incentives guarantees.

### **The Presidential Election and the Fragmentation of the Left**

Unlike the polarizations that have emerged in the parliamentary elections, the presidential election put the Left in a dilemma of a different kind. The Left, in a broad sense, which was not able to win more than thirty-three parliament seats<sup>17</sup> out of more than 500 seats, the seats won by the National Progressive Unionist Party, the Socialist

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, the Egyptian parliamentary elections 2011-2012, available on the following link: <http://is.gd/uQ01K5>

Popular Alliance Party, the Arab Dignity Party, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, in alliances with other parties, decided to nominate three candidates (we will exclude Hamdeen Sabahi, who prefers to present himself as the heir of Abdel Nasser and the Nasiriyah) without agreeing on a single candidate, which was its opportunity to win in the election race.

The *Tagammu* nominated one candidate in the name of the party and that was Hisham Bastawisi, who nominated himself early after the revolution for this task before he completely disappeared from the political arena. Bastawisi returned as a candidate for a party considered by the other left factions as a person who has lost his popularity and put himself in the arms of the ruling authority. They consider that his stances stem from the power of the Muslim Brotherhood, not as a party that only has political and economic policies hostile to the masses like the former regime, but as Islamists who pose a threat to freedoms and civil society. The *Tagammu* continued in the coalition of the Egyptian bloc in the parliamentary elections together with the symbols of capitalism and the remnants of the former regime. The nomination of Bastawisi was the expression of the party's bankruptcy which has lost its Leftist orientation and did not benefit from the experiences of Leftist parties in the presidential elections, such as the experience of Chile in 1972 when Salvador Allende, was nominated as a candidate for a broad leftist coalition. Bastawisi won 29,189 votes (and ranked ninth among 13 candidates by 0.13 % of the total valid votes) in the first round of elections to come out of the presidential race.<sup>18</sup>

In an unprecedented historic step, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, a newly established party, nominated Al-Sakandari Abu Ezz al-Hariri, a freedom fighter, on the backdrop of the momentum created by the "Revolution Continues Coalition" in the parliamentary elections. Therefore, the new Leftist party has committed the same mistake of the *Tagammu* by nominating a symbol who only has popularity in his own electoral district. Al- Hariri at the end won 40,090 votes (and ranked in the eighth place among 13 candidates by 0.17 % of the total valid votes) in the

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<sup>18</sup> Wikipedia, the Egyptian Presidential Election 2012, available on the following link: <http://is.gd/RXNzGg>

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first round of the elections, and he, too, dropped out of the presidential race.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Khaled Ali, a lawyer and human rights activist, nominated himself as independent of political parties and forces,<sup>20</sup> based on his historical reputation among workers and his defense of their causes and freedoms in general. However, he could not collect more 134,056 votes (he ranked in seventh place among 13 candidates by 0.58 % of the total valid votes) in the first round of the elections, and he also was eliminated from the presidential race.<sup>21</sup>

This presidential race has witnessed the presence of the candidates who are members of the revolution camp such as the former leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh<sup>22</sup> and Hamdeen Sabahi. Although the five candidates were not able to agree on one candidate, a deputy and a head of the government, the candidacy of Khaled Ali, and his ability to raise the ceiling of his political programme, his direct defense of the causes of laborers and peasants and his demands for the importance of social justice, made other candidates raise theirs and attempt to become closer to voters through demands and slogans with social dimensions. In the end, none of them was able to compete in the second round although their agreement would have meant that the second round would be between one of them and Mohamed Morsi. Voters after the first round became limited to two choices: either they vote for the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Dr. Mohamed Morsi, or Ahmed Shafik, which meant the former regime would return to power.

The votes have shown that the political program was not the main difference between the candidates in the presidential race as much as the religious-civil-military polarization which have all played a bigger

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Khaled Ali after that joined the Socialist Popular Alliance Party.

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia, the Egyptian presidential election 2012, on the following link: <http://is.gd/RXNzGg>

<sup>22</sup> Aboul Fotouh announced his intention to run for the presidency immediately after the revolution. This made him leave the Muslim Brotherhood Movement because at that time the movement was against the nomination of any of its members for the presidential post. He then founded the Strong Egypt Party.

role in deciding the results of the first round and the runoff. The conditions on the ground did not radicalize to the extent of making people support a certain political programme that raises prospects and a clear class basis. Moreover, there was the absence of a historic symbol that has enough weight to become the revolution's candidate. In addition to all these factors, there was the unjustified competition between candidates who all claimed that they belong to the revolution's camp.

### **Revolutionary Opportunities and Future Possibilities**

The Left, its role in the revolution and its future cannot be analyzed away from the political conditions of the country and its developments. The path taken by the events is showing every day that there is a need to create organized forces ready to carry the flag of the revolution's aims and its demands, capable of politically interacting with the social and political forces present on the ground and of the radicalization of the whole process to serve the interests of the toilers of the society and give them more opportunities, and that these forces should be capable of struggling in order for the values of justice and equality between citizens to triumph and prevail. The general nature of the revolutionary movement is Left oriented because it is adopting radical demands and issues related to freedoms and social justice. There are many ideologies adopted by organizations and Leftist groups. However, there is a need for the creation of a real Leftist organization to reflect the radicalization process undergone by the movement.

The revolution has produced many different groups in their size and ability to influence the political reality. It has brought in to the political scene human beings who did not have any real interest in politics before the revolution - with the exception of active groups whose activities were limited to some forms of protests that were easily undermined or suppressed because they were small in size.

The mass momentum, which started to emerge since the Al-Aqsa Intifada of 2000, and further crystallized after a number of stations in the participation of millions in the January revolution, played a role in bringing thousands of young people to the work yard and raised their interest in politics and change. In spite of the lack of experience and political cohesion which characterizes this generation, its struggle

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capacity is very strong and influential. What is more important is the willingness of many sectors of this generation to organize and get involved in politics and struggle under banners that seek to radicalize the revolution and achieve its aims, particularly the social ones.

In my opinion, the most important factor when one reads the political scene, is the mounting of tension and anger among the public in the recent period. In a report on the social protests issued in 2012,<sup>23</sup> it was revealed that the number of protests exceeded 3800 throughout the year. The report revealed that the number of protests during the rule of Morsi was double the number of protests in the first half of the year. The public anger increased in the year 2013 and the number of protests until March 2013 has reached 1,354. With this number, Egypt occupied the first rank worldwide in the number of protests taking place in the country.<sup>24</sup> It is clear for everyone who wants to see the truth that all the economic and social demands as well as a number of the political demands have not been met. It is also clear that the society, specially the poor, is boiling on a hot tin and is on the verge of exploding. The people did not participate in a revolution and make big sacrifices to replace a dictatorial regime with another. Moreover, the living conditions of the people have deteriorated extremely in the process, and they are witnessing further severe deterioration.

This situation and this sorting suggest that there is a need for the creation of an open Leftist party which should seek to mobilize labor, trade and professional unions' leaders, the youth groups who are disaffected in order to put them in struggle positions that would give them experience and solidarity and in order to benefit from their struggle capacities to expand its political influence and impact as a party with broad popular nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Social protests in 2012, *Peoples' Cry Against Neglect, Exploitation and Repression*, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, December 31, 2012, available on the following link: <http://ecesr.com/?p=7113>

See also the 2012 Labor Protests Report, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, April 28, 2013, available on the following link: <http://ecesr.com/report/279484>

<sup>24</sup> "International development": Egypt ranks first worldwide in the rates of protests reaching 44 protests per day, *Al-Ahram*, April 1, 2013, available on the following link: <http://is.gd/dDMmiK>

## **Reasons and Factors for Success**

Are we on the verge of another revolution? This is how the leftist politicians read the political landscape and the reality of the protest movement. But, what is going to happen next? This question simply means: Is it possible that there was a revolution in this country that has carried slogans of "Life .. Freedom .. Human dignity .. Social justice" and that the country is expected to witness another round with struggle momentum, while the Left did not play a leading role in it as a spearhead and without its cadres being among the leaders of this movement? The answer is: If this does not happen, the next wave will bring counter results and might also bring an end to the revolution and become a frustration factor instead of becoming a revolutionary impulse that rectifies the conditions and paths and achieve gains to the revolutions' forces.

But the success of a Leftist party in becoming a big, popular and effective party on the path of the events, requires the provision of the necessary conditions of success in its historic mission in order not to allow for the failure of the experience and the isolation of the Left from the popular movement which is expected to rise again. We can summarize these conditions as the following:

### **First: Political Action**

The Left party should play the role of the engine in the social and political struggles in the workers, peasants, fishermen, employees and residents of slums and poor areas' circles. It should always take the initiative and seek to gain the leaders of the movement in its ranks through struggling side by side and through its participation in the movement as a struggling party and not only as a supporter or a backer.

The party should raise, in every battle it fights, the goals and demands of the revolution, such as achieving a democratic society based on popular participation in power, political pluralism, circulation of power, social justice, redistribution of wealth in favor of working people of the society or demands that can be linked to events taking place on the ground such as retribution from the killers of the revolutionaries, the rights of the injured people and the release of all detainees in military and civilian events of the revolution.

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The party should seek to interact with the revolutionary groups, which were formed and nurtured during the revolution's events and their evolution in order to win their support on struggle grounds. It should standardize work, and engage with these movements in broad frontal work in case they don't join the party's ranks in order to allow the joint work experience to prove which forces are closer to each other.

### **Second: Intellectual Propaganda**

The party should focus in its propaganda all the time on public issues of social and economic dimensions and on the issue of minorities and the oppressed groups in the society. It should seek, with straightforwardness and honesty, to carry the demands of the society for change and for improving the living conditions of women, Copts, Bedouins, Nubians and other religious and ethnic minorities.

The party should seek to develop its political and organizational tools in order to actually express the possibility of the success of a broad and open party capable of mobilizing all Left oriented groups and individuals in the struggle movement, even if the concept of the Left does not apply to them or even if they do not belong to the Left in the classic sense of the word.

### **Third: The Organizational Structure**

The party should seek to build itself in the different areas so that its cadres are present everywhere and are capable of associating themselves with the struggles arising at the workplaces, in the street protests, and in poor areas.

Expand the margins of democracy within the party by holding wider popular discussions before making decisions and policies in order to build the party in a manner consistent with its vision in defending a democratic society that has the right to make its decisions.

The party should seek to build the talents and abilities of its members through a wide awareness process linked to issues and struggles on the ground. This means that the party should skillfully link theory with practice in the struggle in order to create leaders and cadres convinced of its struggle project.



**The Predicaments of the Tunisian Left<sup>25</sup>**

**Dr. Sonia Tamimi**

**One Left or Many Lefts: The Problem of Identification**

Any researcher attempting to study the Left is confronted with the complexity of determining the subject of his research. The use of this term, Left, has become so subdivided to cover a wide range of views which describe the different streams gathered under the umbrella of the Left.<sup>26</sup> There is no one Left in the Arab world, and this is also true in Tunisia, but there are Leftist parties with contradicting intellectual and ideological backgrounds, and thus, they have different political programs. The concept of the Left is still confused to a certain extent, and it sometimes includes the nationalists. Thus, we cannot speak about the two sides in the same way. As a result of the diversity in the use of the term, there are conflicts between the Leftists themselves on what this term covers.

We can observe that the traditional Marxist Left, when it defines what could be considered as Leftist, it sets a minimum level of social and economic programs serving the interest of the people, limiting the

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<sup>25</sup> I would like to thank all the people who were kind enough to provide me with help and who made this this research see the light. I would also like to specially thank Sadiq Ben Mahni, who has spared no effort in providing me with the information that I needed and with his time in explaining the Left approaches since the 1970's.

<sup>26</sup> Due to the difficulty of determining the essence of the Left and the complexity of streams and parties it represents, I have chosen to work on the Leftist parties which have united some time ago under the name of the Popular Front, and on the two parties that have participated in the government during the revolution, namely the Democratic Progressive Party (named today the Republican Party) and Renewal Party (which became today the Social Democratic Path). I also thought it is important to listen to other representatives of the Left, especially people who joined the human rights field and the independent Left, which is not less important or influential than the organized Left.

dominance of capital and granting laborers their rights.<sup>27</sup> However, the "human rights" Left and the Left which is independent from political organizations focus on the general concept of the Left, that is the Left that believes in modernity, the principles of social justice, global ideas, equality between men and women, i.e, the feminine dimension, as important aspects in the definition of the Left. It supports the idea that all freedoms are guaranteed for human beings; it believes that there should be an alternative to the liberal economic system, and lastly, it adopts secularism.<sup>28</sup> There is another dimension that can be added: the Left is, in general, anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-Zionist and a defender of national sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the uncertainty, there are those who believe that the revolution mixed the cards, and it became difficult for us to define the Left after the revolution in the same way as we defined it before the revolution. During the difficult years, the concern of the parties was political activism stressing one side: democracy and widening the margins of freedoms allowed by repressive regimes. But, these parties, with the election of the National Constituent Assembly, were obliged to specify their programs and determine their position with regard to economic and social issues. And this allows us today to bring out some of them from the Leftist family and classify them as liberal or centrist parties, despite their leftist roots.

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<sup>27</sup> It is the dimension stressed by Nizar Amami, the Leftist Workers Association (a Trotskyite Party) and Abdul Aziz Ayari, the National Democratic Party (a Marxist-Leninist Party with a strong Arab nationalist dimension).The two parties are today under the umbrella of what is known as the Popular Front.

<sup>28</sup> It is the definition provided by most of the people who I spoke to, especially Sadiq Ben Mahni, from the *Afaq* Movement, but today he is an independent personality; Naila Jarrad, a member of the politburo of the Social Democratic Path Party; Ahmad Karaoud, one of the former activists who was also a member of the *Afaq* Movement before he worked with Amnesty International.

<sup>29</sup> See the article on "The Tunisian Left: Its Origins and Its Evolution" on the following link: <http://cahiersdelaliberte.org/blog/?p=488>.

## **A Summary of the Tunisian Left History<sup>30</sup>**

The Left in Tunisia emerged in the 1920's with the creation of the Tunisian Communist Party. It started to suffer from its crisis and to retreat since the mid 1970's, especially the Leftists who were active in the *Afaq* (Perspective) Movement,<sup>31</sup> with a big number of them being detained in the late 1960's. During the prison experience, heated questions started to surface and to require answers from the fragmented Left which was heading in many directions. This is because the Left had discovered that its long struggle over the years did not build anything and that the masses, especially those which it claimed to be defending - the laborers, the popular classes, the peasants, etc.... -, were not supporting it. It had its victims and its members were arrested and prosecuted, but it did not achieve success at any level except the level of the youth, school and university students. *Afaq* then became the Party of Tunisian Labor during the period 1972 – 1973. Many other parties emerged because there was a general feeling that the Left had failed in creating links with the people despite its sacrifices and attempts. Each of these parties had its own proposal. Between 1974 and 1980, the Left became small factions in numbers, quantitatively and qualitatively, and its presence was mainly in the university. The Islamists, as of the 1980's, also started to emerge in the universities along with the Leftists.

After the prison experience in the 1970's, where the majority of the Leftist leaders ended up, an important intellectual review was

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<sup>30</sup> This paper is not intended to study the leftist movement since its beginnings, as there are many studies on the emergence of the Left history. As an example, but not limited to it, see: Kraim (Mustapha), 1997, *Le Parti Communiste Tunisien Pendant la Période Coloniale*, Tunis, Institut Supérieur du Mouvement National, p. 369. Here we will discuss only the period between the late 1970's and the period before the January 14, 2011, revolution in its broad lines and subdivisions. For more details, see *al-Madini* (Tawfiq), 2001, *The Tunisian Opposition: Its Origin and Development*, Damascus, the Arab Writers Union, p.95-228.

<sup>31</sup> On the history of *Afaq*, see: *The Afaq Movement (Perspectives)*, on the history of the Tunisian Left, 1963-1975, Tunis, Saras Publications; al-Tamimi (Abdul Jalil) (supervision, 2008, *The Political and Cultural Role of Perspectives and Its Members*, in *Independent Tunisia, Tunisia*, al-Tamimi publications for scientific research and information.

made and the representatives of the Left knew that they had adopted the wrong approach. A large number of them, since then, started to focus on cultural issues and specifically on spreading a human rights culture. The aim was to widen the margins of the freedom of expression in cultural work. The Left, also, came out of prison bringing with them Amnesty International and the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Human Rights in addition to cultural and intellectual activism. If we take, for example, the experience of Nouredine Ben Khader, one of the founders of *Afaq*, we notice that after the prison experience he became an intellectual, and he started to take personal stances. Afterwards, he became one of the founders of Amnesty International in Tunisia. He also joined the cultural work as a publisher.<sup>32</sup> Sadiq Ben Mahni stressed this side, saying "I came out of prison determined to focus on cultural, intellectual and educational work before anything else in order to develop the country. I understood that a few persons with nothing to gather them other than some ideas cannot change the country. There should be a comprehensive intellectual movement like the one which had existed during the Age of Lights."<sup>33</sup> To simplify, it can be said that the Left had split into three directions:

Part of the Left had focused its attention on the intellectual, associative and human rights side outside the partisan organizations. However, this did not prevent it from taking political stances.

Another part was mainly at the university and in prisons. Its representatives chose to continue their political work, such as the Labor Party (which is the heir to the Tunisian workers party) and the Democratic Progressive Party. These parties have developed their concepts and abandoned their previous closed stances. They started to become aware that they cannot be a separate Left faction independent and isolated from others. They should approach and build relations with other opposition parties, including the liberal and national parties. In this respect, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights had played a major role in this convergence.

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<sup>32</sup> See his testimony in al-Tamimi (Abdul Jalil) (supervision), 2008, *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> An interview with the researcher.

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The third part is made up of activists who were at the university. The biggest confusion facing them, compared to that of the ruling regime, is the Rightist streams that were attacking them. Among these are Choukri Belaïd and the Democratic Patriots' Movement (*al-Watad*), who were stronger than other Leftist streams in the university. They have found themselves since the end of the 1970's and 1980's confronting violence which had become the rule with the Right introducing itself at the university, encouraged by the ruling regime to weaken the Left. This policy continued until Ben Ali came to power.

Despite its focus on the Islamists, Ben Ali continued to follow the repressive policies of Bourguiba towards the left, which split into two kinds of opposition: publicly recognized and underground opposition. The publicly recognized opposition mainly consists of three parties: the Democratic Alliance Party for Labor and Liberties (a member of the ruling coalition today), the Renewal Movement, the heir of the Communist Party, which turned into a democratic movement with communist origins, and the secular Democratic Progressive Socialist Party. The three parties faced multiple forms of restrictions on their activities and media institutions, and they were prevented from expanding their popular base and from spreading their ideas and perceptions among the masses. This blockade was only eased when the symbols of these parties started to appear on Arab and international media outlets. As for the underground Leftist opposition, it was composed of a number of parties, most prominent among them is the Communist Workers Party of Tunisia, led by Hamma Hammami, who was tried many times, most recently in 2002 and spent a total of more than 10 years in prison. Additionally, he spent more than 10 years in the underground life and was tortured more than once. The recognized, as well as the underground parties, were moving forward and were integrating.

There were also the Leftist lawyers, who played an important role at the level of defending human rights and resisting tyranny. Moreover, there were the Leftist intellectuals who were responding to every action taken by the government by issuing statements or by holding meetings. All of these were present before the revolution, moving and active. The Left had also built close relations with civil society organizations since the end of the eighties and, basically, with the General Union of Tunisian Workers. Thus, its work before the

revolution was more union activism rather than political activism as a result of the repression practiced against it. Its theses have had their echoes among the educated unionists and among the three levels of educated people. It also had its echoes among the petit bourgeoisie classes. This, in part, explains the lack of popular activism, which characterizes large segments of the Left. There is also a new phenomenon that had emerged in Tunisia, especially starting from 2008: the phenomenon of young online activists who were able to overcome the regime's attempts to prevent them from accessing information. This youth, mostly females, can be considered the new left, and it has succeeded in bringing part of the previous generations to adopt its way of working.

What distinguishes the left on the eve of the revolution is its fragmentation and its superior discourse. It was not deeply rooted among the popular classes and the situation continued as it is until today, remaining elitist in nature.<sup>34</sup> There has been no real possibility of joint work between its different spectrums on a continuous basis, despite the differences. The Left did have the opportunity to have common grounds with others despite the differences as is the case of the Popular Front today, where there are several national and progressive forces.

### **The Left and the Revolutionary Movement**

Since the days that followed the revolution, some analysts have promoted the idea that the revolution was spontaneous and did not have leaders in the field, which is an incorrect thing to say. The revolution has had its field leaders who are still present in the yard of social mobility until today. These are mainly the youth who are the real conscience of the revolution and who are demanding their rights of regional development and changes in the pattern of development. Moreover, the participation of the labor union and the professional movement, as represented by the General Union of Tunisian Workers, in the revolution, through strikes, especially the historic strike at Sfax

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<sup>34</sup> The view point of Nizar Amami. However, Abdul Aziz Ayari has a completely different view.

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on January 12<sup>35</sup> was crucial, and it was a declaration on the engagement and the bias of the trade union movement towards the course of the uprising.

The Union, especially its regional branches, developed its activism from solidarity to the actual engagement after opening its headquarters for the rebels since the early days and demonstrations were launched from its headquarters. However, the real fuel of the revolution is the educated and unemployed youth and the youth active online. The youth invented a solution to the overthrow the regime, even though they didn't think that they would be able to do so, but at least they knew that they could confront it, expose it, defame it and perplex it. However, the youth were able to reach a higher goal than they imagined, with the help of many internal and external factors inside the regime. But, the revolutionary youth did not have any other option because they were not practicing politics in the partisan and strategic sense. They were only protesting and demanding their rights of employment, development, freedom of expression and general freedoms. The demands of the revolution were derived from the leftist lexicon confirming that the revolution is a social and political one. It is also a confirmation that, the Left, even if failed politically, in the sense that it couldn't change the power or seize it, has culturally, intellectually, socially, and political succeeded in deep rooting principles and changing mentalities. The mobility that happened and, which is still going on, is more or less the result of the Left's sacrifices, and it confirms that the principled and valuable intellectual political heritage was behind the revolution. Despite this role, most analysts agree that the left was not up to the moment, because it did not know how to build channels of communication with the revolutionary forces, and it did not frame them during the revolution or after when it should have supported the revolutionary movement which is continuing until today.

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<sup>35</sup> The regional office of the union in Sfax, the second Tunisian city in importance after the capital city, implemented a historical strike two days before the escape of the dictator, with the participation of tens of thousands of people to condemn the repressive policies of Ben Ali , especially after the massacres of Thala and Kasserine.

The Left, in all of its spectrums, has not been able to understand the moment which made the highest authority flee the country or to take advantage of it. Part of the Left wanted peace to prevail, and so it "quickly joined the new authority"<sup>36</sup> to achieve a "continuation in the structure of the state institutions."<sup>37</sup> But the task of the Left, especially in the revolutionary moment, is not to achieve peace, but rather to strengthen the storm.<sup>38</sup> This part of the left has, to a large extent, a reformist tendency to the degree that it was not looking for revolution, in the sense of overthrowing the entire regime, but rather for pushing things toward becoming better.<sup>39</sup> There was another stream represented by the leaders of the radical Left, such as martyr Choukri Belaïd or Hamma Hammami, who supported the revolutionary youth, and there were those who spontaneously became involved like Menzel Bouziane and al-Riqab and wanted to push things further. But this part of the Left made many mistakes, partly because it did not know how to unite, and it joined the elections of the National Constituent Assembly with tens of lists.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, it continued to ally itself with the Ennahda, especially the Labor Party, which it described as moderate.

The Left had attempted, in several ways, to keep up with the revolutionary movement. For example, a movement emerged in January - February 2011, and this is the movement that was trying to express the popular committees to protect the revolution,<sup>41</sup> many of which were composed of trade unionists and leftists. They tried to gather, for example, in Sidi Bouzid, where the leftists collected 13 states and tried to establish, based on this result, a new structure to push the revolution forward. But

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<sup>36</sup> The word used by Sadiq Ben Mahni in his description of the position of the Democratic Progressive Party. The description of the radical Left is not different.

<sup>37</sup> We will assess the participation of the Democratic, Progressive and the Renewal Party later on in power.

<sup>38</sup> Quoting Sadiq Ben Mahni.

<sup>39</sup> For this reason, the radical Left – in the Marxist sense – does not consider these parties as Leftist parties.

<sup>40</sup> Laila Tubal, an artist who categorizes herself as a radical, politically independent Leftist, with no partisan affiliation, believes that this fragmentation was a normal narcissistic reaction after difficult years when every politician wanted to stand out and distinguish himself from others.

<sup>41</sup> Different from what is called today 'committees for the protection of the revolution', which is only a militia that obeys the orders of the Ennahda ruling party?

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this experience failed because these councils were spontaneously formed and gathered various levels of insights and intellectualism. From these councils several associations and networks have emerged.<sup>42</sup> But after the revolution, the civil society, in its old expressions – the post revolution associations – have emerged. The civil society reacted by getting angry and going to the street before and after the constituent assembly elections. In civil society organizations, the youth, especially females, have played the most important role. It emerged as a force capable of influencing decisions. It hasn't been structured, and there are no parties that were able to understand it. The revolution has made a fundamental change as reflected by the insistence of the youth in continuing their movement. The evidence can be found in the continuation of the protests even if the numbers are not as they were before.

There are also initiatives launched by provinces such as El Kef, which has rejected the appointed governor and decided to elect a new one. This represents a new understanding of democracy, which must be built on local democracy, which should be a participatory democracy. It is what is worrying the ruling authority, and thus, the Ennahda has decided to appoint the new members of municipal councils instead of holding elections where citizens can choose their representatives in the institutions closer to their daily lives, i.e., municipalities. In this regard, some believe that the Left did not play the role assigned to it because it could have pushed people to say that the municipal elections should take place under a new legal framework other than that of Ben Ali and Bourguiba. It is not possible to talk about a revolution incubated in the same old bowl. This is part of the things which the Left hasn't been able to embrace because it continued to think of elections and to run after the interim authority instead of performing the deep work and instead of starting from the roots, i.e, local democracy, in order to prove itself.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Left was not up to the level of the

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<sup>42</sup> Sadiq Ben Mahni was among the participants in this experience, and he gave me a summary of it.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that the violence of Ennahda and the militias affiliated with it did not start until after the parties from all streams started mobilization. The policy of the Ennahda is based on limiting the impact of other parties in Tunisia, but it fears their presence in the provinces and the possibility of them being able to convince the people and talk about local democracy, helping people through funded projects. This is because it wants other provinces to be under its own control.

moment, although it had understood that there is a high tide and that the masses are ahead of the leaders and the political class. It tried to link itself with the spontaneous mass movements organized by the youth, but it lacked a clear vision. None of the leftist, rightist or centrist political forces was able to impose its program and to have it accepted by the masses. The closest parties are the radical leftist forces, as represented today specifically by the Popular Front. However, it hasn't been able to completely keep pace with the popular movement because it has its own electoral and political interests. It did not succeed in mobilizing and pushing the revolutionary path because this requires courage and not only support to the revolutionary tide but also encouraging it. Thus, there is hesitation in supporting the revolutionary forces and suspicion because there are narrow partisan interests. This shows that the people, since the revolution, were ahead of the elite and their political classes in creativity and expression, i.e., "the ability to dream of the sun."<sup>44</sup>

### **Alliances and Participation in the Government<sup>45</sup>**

In the days that followed the revolution, Mohamed Ghannouchi, a former prime minister under Ben Ali's regime, formed on January 17, 2011 the first government after the revolution named the national unity government. The participants were the General Union of Tunisian Workers with three ministers and the President of the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties, Mustapha Ben Jaafar,

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<sup>44</sup> Quoting Sadiq Ben Mihni.

<sup>45</sup> I will not speak here about the tripartite government formed after the elections by the Ennahda Party and the Congress Party for the Republic, the party of Moncef Marzouki, the Interim President, of the Republic of Tunisia, followed by the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties, whose president Mustapha Ben Jaafar, is heading the National Constituent Assembly. All those whom I interviewed agree that the Congress Party has never been a Leftist party, but a secular party composed of activists against dictatorship and Ben Ali's rule. It did not have a clear ideological and political line, infiltrated by the Ennahda - that is not to say that it is a follower of the Ennahda. Regarding the Democratic Forum, which is a socialist party, it has no longer, according to analyses, the elements of the left. It has disintegrated, and it does not anymore express the interests of the laboring classes, but rather the interests of the bourgeoisie associated with foreign monopolistic companies. It is a bourgeois party with social slogans and its economic project is a capitalistic project.

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Ahmad Najib Chebbi for the Progressive Democratic Party, Minister for Local and Regional Development, and Ahmed Ibrahim for the Renewal Movement served as Minister of Higher Education. The government was also composed of many members of the old ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally. Thus, it was rejected by the rebels, and this led to the resignation of the Union's ministers and Mustapha Ben Jaafar days after its formation. A number of rebels from the Tunisian provinces, particularly from the south, came on foot and gathered in front of the Prime Ministry headquarters in Tunis - *Kasbah* - in what was later called the *Kasbah 1* movement. As a result of pressure, Mohamed Ghannouchi re-formed the government after the exit of the Rally ministers on January 27. However, Ahmed Najib Chebbi and Ahmed Ibrahim continued in the new government. The revolutionaries then organized the *Kasbah 2* sit-in, which was more organized than the first sit-in and was supported by some political parties such as the Islamists and specially the Labor Party. Their main demand was the toppling of the government and the organization of the constituent national assembly elections. Pressure continued in the government until the resignation of Mohamed Ghannouchi on February 27. Beji Caid Essebsi, a statesman during the rule of Bourguiba, was assigned to form the new government under the condition that its members should not stand for elections. This government remained in power until the election of the National Constituent Assembly.

There are many who blame Najib Chebbi for his participation in the government and especially for his performance in the Ghannouchi government, which some called the Chebbi government because of his media prominence and his defense of the government's policies and its members. The radical Left believes that the man was not up to the revolutionary moment because he was part of the government, and he could be the spokesman for the mass movement and encourage it, even in secret if necessary. But, in fact, he started pushing backwards while he was confronting the *Kasabah* and the sit-ins. The same thing happened with Ahmad Ibrahim who was a minister of higher education, and he made many serious efforts in this field. But, the revolutionary moment was not for what he did. There was still a movement and maturity, and there was supposed to be a push forward. The mistake, according to the Marxist Left, was not joining the

government, but in the fact that they should have joined it in a decision-making position rather than taking their orders from Mohamed Ghannouchi. The interpretation of the party, especially the interpretation of Najib Chebbi, is based on his understanding of the January 13. He did not understand that the January 14 had changed the balance, and then he could have been the one to push forward the social mobility instead of opposing it. The regime did not collapse with the flight of Ben Ali; only its head was removed because Mohamed Ghannouchi was part of the regime and the main implementer of Ben Ali's policy. This has given the old regime an opportunity to recover its breath. The party, after the revolution, has been classified as a liberal and centrist party because the governments it had joined did not change anything in the old pattern of development and in the economic, social and cultural policies pursued by Ben Ali. In its economic and political perceptions, it was very close to the former regime, and it did not differ with it except in its vision of the form of the state and the question of democracy. The Tunisian revolution did not break out just for the sake of freedom, but primarily for changing the pattern of development, which has led to those social and economic atrocities.

Thus, the experience of the Democratic Progressive Party government is considered a failed one, and it has contributed to diverting of the revolutionary path. It is not logical for a serious opposition, with well-known media outlets calling for the building of democratic institutions, and which to a certain extent condemns the marginalization, exclusion and impoverishment of the people, although its economic program is not socialist, to enter the government experience in the way it did, which is considered political opportunism. Behind the participation of Ahmed Najib Chebbi in the government, there were personal interests. He strongly opposed the *Kasabah 1* and *2* movements, and the slogan of the constituent assembly especially because he considers that there should first be presidential elections as he wanted to nominate himself, given the possibility of winning during that period. Thus, his participation in the government did not come for the purpose of serving the revolution's interests and those of the people. It was a personal and partisan choice.

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The advocates of the party have a different viewpoint. They criticize the radical Leftist opposition of today saying that it reads the events outside their historic context. What happened on 9 January cannot be read in the context of the 15<sup>th</sup>. It should be remembered that on January 9 January, 2011, the opposition met at the headquarters of the Democratic Progressive Party and Ahmed Najib Chebbi suggested at the time the idea of a national salvation government, which is the highest demand that could be claimed if things are studied in their historical context. There was nobody in Tunisia who expected the escape of Ben Ali on 14 January and nobody spoke about a revolution before the 16<sup>th</sup> of January. Chaos was prevailing in the country, and nobody knew what was going on: Why was the Tunisian air space closed after the escape of Ben Ali? Who helped him to escape? There were many other questions about what happened during that period. In the days that followed the revolution, there was a state of fear regarding how things were going to develop. Moreover, the deployment of the army was worrying, and the interior ministry was a mystery because no one knew how it was administrated. Moreover, it was necessary to reassure the police also because part of the revolution was against them and against the organization's practices.<sup>46</sup> The most appropriate solution for the Party was to penetrate the regime, but its mistake was that it was not good in the negotiations. The Party was right to be afraid of the vacuum, which could create the proper environment for the army to seize power because it was the only legitimate institution that was present at that time.

In the midst of this atmosphere, the Democratic Progressive Party has had a clear vision: to participate in a government with a 6-month term, implement constitutional reforms and presidential elections, followed by legislative elections and a new House of Representatives with constituent powers. According to the Party, the success of the transitional phase requires the presence of a strong executive authority

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<sup>46</sup> Sahbi Khalfawi, a young man who is a former member of the Democratic Progressive Party, says that the signs of the youth revolution against the oppressive regime, as represented by security men, began in Koura playgrounds where the police brutally suppressed people. The first political slogans against the regime started there. Ahmad Karoaud has also stressed this point.

that is able to take decisions and to bear the responsibilities for its decision. But the mistake made by the party – which both the supporters and the opponents of the party agree on – is that Najib Chebbi should have sent reassuring messages to the public, to come out and speak to the protestors and tell them that "the voice of the *Kasabah* is inside the *Kasabah*."<sup>47</sup> If he had done so, things would have calmed down. The role of the youth was political, and it was giving political legitimacy to a government that all the oppositions have united against. Mohamed Ghannouchi, whose second government was very similar to the government of his successor which the rebels had accepted and ended their sit-in after its formation, made a mistake by not giving people specific dates and by not making them feel assured. Although the demand for forming a National Constituent Assembly was an old one, and it was suggested in December 2009, Ghannouchi thought that the time was not suitable after the revolution. The party's vision was to achieve the demands of the October 18 commission,<sup>48</sup> and this had been achieved by the government in which Chebbi participated: general legislative amnesty, freedom to form parties, and free media. Its media performance was weak and its political discourse failed. However, it strongly contributed to the success of the first steps of this transition, according to its advocates.

### **Alliances between the Left and the Right**

The categorization of the Progressive Democratic Party after the revolution changed from a pan-Arab nationalist party before the revolution to a centrist party after it, similar to socialist parties that have today embraced market economy. After the revolution, it opted to preserve the Tunisian state, and this was a class option which serves the interests of the higher *petit bourgeois* classes of the society. Among the problems that it faced after 14 January is its structure. It was a resistance party, and it lacked experience such as how to write an economic program. After the revolution, it took economic stances

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<sup>47</sup> That is: the voice of the revolutionaries is voiced in the government.

<sup>48</sup> The 15 October 2005 Commission had gathered a wide spectrum of Tunisian Right and Left opposition to resist Ben Ali's regime.

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and options though with strong social procedures not related to Leftist parties, and this had dragged it to ally itself with right oriented parties. It can no longer ally itself with the Labor Party, for example, especially after the slogans against it during the *Kasbah 1* and *2*, despite the joint origins between the two. Regarding the Islamists, there is the complexity related to the form of the state: Islamic or civil. Today, the party can be classified within the centrist democratic family. It believes that coexistence with the conservative Ennahda party is possible under the condition that the Ennahda respects the democratic game and believes in the civil state. But according to the party, the Ennahda today has become a fascist party.

Regarding the radical Left, it had a different view before the Islamists reached power. It continued to build alliances with them, and especially with the Labor Party for the elections. These coalitions were tactical for the Right and an obligation for the Left<sup>49</sup> as the Labor Party was in the midst of movement and went down to the street and mobilized people. However, its problem was that it was not able to break its alliance with the Ennahda. Analysts attribute this to two reasons: the first is the legacy of the October 18 and what it represents of the joint work between the Islamists and leftists in addition to the common experience of prison, where close and intimate personal relations were built. The second is the Beji Caid Essebsi phase, which confused a lot of things. Everyone started talking about consensus and the **High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution's Objectives, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (HAARO)**, headed by Yadh Ben Achour, where all political parties were represented despite the dominance of the Left. While the main concern of the Left was the transparency and fairness of elections, etc., believing that the first enemy was still the remnants of the dissolved ruling party, the Ennahda was equipping and preparing itself. The Ennahda party was saying that it was a party not ready to reach power and it did not want to reach power, and the Left was dealing with the Ennahda on this basis. In the preparations for the elections, as an example, the Left was nominating persons for the

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<sup>49</sup> This is the view point of Sadiq Ben Mahni, who speaks about the "naivety" and "innocence" of the Left when it comes to political interests.

committees of the Independent Electoral Commission, especially in the provinces in order to ensure the transparency of the elections, with the blessing of the Ennahda, which was preparing itself for elections in all forms: observers, the assignment of people from the previous administration, influence, by buying consciences and votes. Everybody, especially the Left, thought that the electoral system chosen would represent all Tunisia and that the elected constituent assembly would become the mosaic of all the Tunisian society. Leftists formed hundreds of lists and were not well prepared for the elections. The Islamists acted as politicians, seeking power with enough external support, men, and TV channels supporting them. They also had external interests that cooperated with them and on whom they knew they could rely. Apart from "naïve" and "innocent" ideas, this is another interpretation of why the Left continued to ally itself with the Ennahda until elections. The Left did not expect to be defeated in that way in the elections. The results were a "thunderbolt", especially for the radical left. The Workers' Party won three seats only while the Ennahda ranked first with 89 seats.

### **Conclusion: towards new horizons**

After absorbing the shock of the elections, the awareness of Marxist Leftist parties developed, and they started to become aware that in Tunisia today, there couldn't be two parties that have the same political ideology without becoming united on political programs and without launching an ideological struggle. The Left has understood that if this fragmentation continues, it will not be able to achieve the demands of the revolution and reach its real horizons. The two Leftist parties became aware that if each of them competes in elections separately, they will be committing political suicide. This awareness has led the leadership to form what is known today as the Popular Front, which is a political coalition gathering 11 environmental, national, and Leftist parties, in addition to a number of independent intellectuals. The coalition was formed on 7 October 2012 and Hamma Hammami became the spokesman of the front.

The new thing about this Front is the role played by independent, democratic and activist Leftists who have made many sacrifices. Among its representatives there are those who have had their partisan experiences, but they left their parties and are no longer party

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members. The independents represent a very large number of its members and have a weight not less important, and the Popular Front is aware of their role. So, the independent Left is present in all regional coordination committees of the Front, and in some regions, the number of independents is higher than the Front's members. This is a new situation that has not existed before. Thus, one can say that there is a new awareness and a new method of work. Moreover, the Front's leaders are aware of the fact that the program and vision should be clear to enable the representatives of this independent Left, in case they become present in the parliament, to advocate a certain vision, rather than a certain person or party. The awareness of the importance of independents in these particular circumstances is a positive development, nevertheless, the Left knows that it has its weaknesses, including that it does not have a determining factor in politics today, i.e. the money factor because Leftist parties are poor. Moreover, the other weakness is the media, that is to say that the Left does not have the experience in conflict management in the media as spaces and the available media spaces for the Left are very limited. Thus, it needs to find mechanisms and information programs different from what is prevalent in the society and commensurate with its potential and its ideas.

If we want to be optimistic, we can say that the Tunisian political class, the Leftists in particular, has learned a lot because two years of revolution are worth many years of experience. Moreover, civil society associations, youth online and unemployed young people today are in the process of maturing and can form an alternative political class in the future. Thus, the solution for the future of Tunisia will inevitably come from the Leftist youth, who perhaps did not read as many books as the older generation and were not raised in the same way the old generation was raised. But these youth have a progressive sense and another method for envisioning things and for dealing with them. It is also more courageous than the older generation.



## **On the Role of the Syrian Left in the Syrian Revolution**

**Salameh Kaileh**

### **Introduction: On the Meaning of the Left and the History of the Leftist Movement in Syria**

Before discussing the role of the Syrian Left in the Syrian revolution, it is important to clarify the meaning of the Left we are talking about because defining the determinative is useful in understanding the context of the research and in identifying parties that will fit under this definition.<sup>50</sup>

#### **What is meant by the Left?**

It is useful to make it clear that the term Left does not carry an ideological charge. It relates to a stance. Every person who calls for progress and development is considered Leftist in contrast with the Right which seeks to maintain the status quo. Here it should be noted that the issue is associated with the achievement of socio-economic progress, and thus the Left is associated with the impoverished classes, which may be of the middle classes, workers and peasants, or workers and peasants only according to the concrete situation of these classes. Thus, the Left is associated with change that achieves the interests of these classes. Those who call for democracy or secularism alone cannot be considered Leftists despite the importance of these matters.

Thus, any confrontation with the existing structures in the context of progressively overcoming them, is an expression of a Leftist orientation. It is for this reason that the pan-Arab movements were considered Leftist movements because they attempted to dismantle the

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<sup>50</sup> On the definition of the left, see: Salameh Kaileh, "*Al-Yasar al-Souri fi waqiehi al-rahah*" (The Syrian Left in its Present Reality," Ashtarout Publishing House, Beirut, January 2008. The book explains the reality of the Syrian Left before the revolution and analyzes its trends and its grouping reality from a critical perspective.

existing traditional structures at that time and to make progressive strides. Hence, it should be noted that the definition is linked to a certain reality. What is considered at a certain moment as progressive can be seen as backward at other moments. This means that the term Left is more linked to the reality than it is linked to ideology or thought in general.

But it has become widely acknowledged that some intellectual and political streams are Leftist streams such as the Marxists and some are Leftist at a certain time and place and Rightist in another time and space (such as the liberal and national forces). Some of them could be considered Leftist, although they practice a rightist policy as the approach taken by the communist movement in the Arab world, in the sense that it is from the ideological perspective, necessarily, a Leftist movement because it is based on the achievement of progress and development and overcoming the status quo. However, the policies pursued by the communist parties do not exactly lead to what they seek to achieve, or they do not actually shoulder the achievement of change but rather they accept to adapt to the policies of other forces, which do not necessarily seek development and progress.

From this point, we can say that the Left is generally the Marxist parties and pan-Arab parties that have a social dimension. These parties have been present in Syria for a long time (for example, the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon was founded in 1924), and they played different roles in thought and in politics. Some of them were able to achieve significant changes in the socio-economic configuration. But we will notice that some of them have witnessed numerous divides and splits, which made the Left composed of many parties from the same stream. It is also composed of groups and individuals who do not belong to a particular party.

Based on this, the left in Syria, at the moment when the revolution started, can be categorized into three levels: first, parties that were present and were part of the existing regime, which is a capitalist, mafia regime that has taken the decision to liberalize the country and impose liberalism on it; second, opposition parties that have played a role in the struggle against the ruling regime over the past decades; and third, Leftist groups and gatherings formed during the revolution.

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When we refer to the condition of the Left, we are referring to the parties that have the Leftist nature or which consider themselves as communist (or Marxist) parties. There is only one non-Marxist party, and that is the Nasserite party, together with Leftist individuals and groups. Thus, we are going to discuss each of these parties and groups and their general stances before we delve into their role in the Syrian revolution which started on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2011.

### **1) The Left in Syria before the Revolution**

In Syria, there are a number of communist parties, parties which embrace Marxism, and one opposition Nasserite party. Some of these parties have participated in the government for a long time such as the Syrian Communist Party whose secretary general is Ammar Bakdash.<sup>51</sup> The party witnessed a split and another party emerged. This party, too, participates in the government, and its secretary general is Hanin Nimr<sup>52</sup>. In 2000, another group walked out and formed the Unity of the Syrian Communists organization known now as the People's Will Party, and this party continued to oppose and support the regime without taking a decisive stance until it recently decided to participate in the government.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, there is the People's Democratic Party, which is an extension of the Syrian Communist Party - the political bureau, which split from the mother party in 1972 and became an opposition party since the end of the 1970's.<sup>54</sup> There is also the Revolutionary Workers Party, which is linked to Yassin Al-Hafiz, a Syrian intellectual. It is a Marxist party with a Nasserite orientation, but it was focusing on modernity. In addition, there is the Communist Labor Party, which is the product of the New Left wave of the 1970's. When it first emerged, it was an opposition party calling for the overthrow of the regime.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, there were many other groups that have emerged which were the result of splits in the Communist Party such as the Communist Syrian

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<sup>51</sup> The party's site: <http://www.syriancp.org/>

<sup>52</sup> The party's site: <http://www.syrcomparty.org/>

<sup>53</sup> The party's site: <http://www.kassioun.org/>

<sup>54</sup> The party's site: [www.arrae.com](http://www.arrae.com)

<sup>55</sup> The party's site: <http://is.gd/E9oPg5>

Committee, a dissident of the Communist Unity Party, and the Communist Party - the Political Bureau, a dissident of the People's Democratic Party, which has kept the original name of the party. It must also be noted that several parties and groups were formed in April 2007 and were given the name of the Marxist Left Gathering with the participation of the Communists Committee, the Political Bureau, the Communist Labor Party and the Kurdish Left Party (which is a Kurdish leftist party as the name indicates).

The stances of each of these parties regarding the ruling regime and their policies in relation with the prevailing conditions can be summed up as follows:

### **Communist Parties Sharing Power under the "National Progressive Front"**

We have pointed out that the Syrian Communist Party, with its Secretary-General Ammar Bakdash, the son of Khalid Bakdash, who served as the secretary-general of the party for decades who handed over the party's secretariat to his wife, Wisal Farha Bakdash, who in turn handed it over to her son, and the United Syrian Communist Party (with its First Secretary Hanin Nimr), are partner members in the "National Progressive Front," which in the previous Constitution had stated that "the Baath Party leads the state and society through it." The constitution of the Front stresses on the "building of socialism" despite the fact that the policies that have been adopted have led to a massive financial accumulation for "senior officials." Given their status in the Front, these parties participated in the state institutions, with one minister in all cabinets formed, eight members in the Peoples' Council, four for each and in management positions in the different local administrations.

These parties have built their analysis of the situation on the basis of the distinction between the internal policies of the ruling regime and its foreign policy.<sup>56</sup> They agreed that the ruling regime is "anti-

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<sup>56</sup> An idea attributed to Khalid Bakdash, voiced three decades ago when he said that if he looks at the ruling regime from the internal condition perspective, he would be in the opposition, but when he looks at it from the perspective of international

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imperialist" and "anti-Zionist expansionist policy," and this deserves support and building an alliance with it. However, they were critical of the economic situation, especially when the economic liberalization tendency became the general policy of the regime. They softly criticized these policies, calling for the improvement of the workers' conditions and the solving of the affected social groups' problems. During the last decade, these parties "increased" their critique of the liberal policy, and they focused on the "economic team," considering it responsible for the deterioration in the economic situation and the impoverishment of the people. They blamed the team for the results of this policy without drawing the link between this team and the ruling regime and without mentioning that the team is only implementing the regime's policies. By doing so, they made the ruling regime a national and an anti-imperialist regime while the economic team is the one responsible for dragging the economy towards liberalization.

In 2000, a new party was formed as a result of the split in the Syrian Communist Party under the "National Committee for the Unity of Syrian communists," led by Qadri Jamil. The committee considered that its mission was to unite communists "from the bottom," that is the popular base. In the beginning, its stance regarding the ruling regime was confused. It refused to be in the opposition and stressed that it has a critical stance regarding the ruling authority. However, it continued to be committed to the vision that has governed the communist parties, and thus, it has stressed "Syria's national stances" and its "hostility to imperialism." However, it has increased the pace of its criticism of the economic policy and the "economic team", and stressed that this policy will lead to a "disaster" as a result of the impoverishing process, which leads to it.

This situation has made these parties part of the power "structure" and responsible for its policies. Their long presence in power has made them part of the state's bureaucracy, although they opposed certain policies, softly criticizing certain stances and sometimes

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relations, he considers it among the anti-imperialist countries which is why it is required to build an alliance with it.

asking the authority, which they are part of, to solve a problem here or there.

### **Opposition Leftist Parties**

In the opposition to the regime, the Syrian Communist Party - Political Bureau (with its Secretary-General Riad al-Turk) emerged and specifically focused on democratic demands. In 1980, it contributed to the creation of the National Democratic Gathering by allying itself with Nasserite, pan-Arab and Leftist parties. In 1980, the party faced strong security blows that weakened its structure, and many of its members were arrested. The party remained a secret party until after Bashar al-Assad reached power, when it became semi-open. It focused its policies on criticizing the regime from a political perspective which rejects tyranny and demands the building of a democratic state. Democratization continued to be the major demand of the party and the focus of its struggle throughout all these decades.

In addition to the above parties, in 1967 the Communist Labor Party in Syria was created under the name of the League for Communist Action. It was created by Marxist groups formed after the 1967 defeat as a result of alienation from nationalist parties or by active youth who embraced Marxism. The first demand of the party was the overthrow of the regime and the realization of socialism. The party refused the reformist approach of the Syrian Communist Party, being more inclined to the radical Communist Party Political Bureau. However, the party had quickly "frozen" the goal of overthrowing the regime after the outbreak of the conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood in 1980, and it took a stance rejecting the ruling authority and the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike the Communist Party - the Political Bureau, which supported the "popular revolution" carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood (the party later criticized this stance). The Communist Labor Party had faced severe security blows during the 1980's and until 1992 which weakened it and led to its disappearance with the exception of its groups outside Syria that have continued their activity under the party's name. The party was re-created when members who had been arrested were released from prison in the year 2000 by some of its former members. However, it adopted a different policy, focusing on democracy and the pursuit of a peaceful and safe

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transition from despotism to democracy, but it continued to be hostile to imperialism.

In 2005, after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in Beirut and the concentration of the struggle against the ruling authority in Syria, a new alliance was formed under the name of the "Damascus Declaration.". The new alliance was composed of the National Democratic Alliance (the Alliance, which was founded in 1980 from the following leftist parties: the Arab Socialist Union Party, the Communist Party – Political Bureau, the Revolutionary Workers' Party and the Baath Democratic Party). This alliance led the opposition over the next two decades of its founding together with the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society, the democratic formation that had been created during the Damascus Spring, and independent personalities from liberal streams. Thus, the Left was participating in the alliance although its aim was focusing only on "transition from despotism to democracy." It appeared ready to engage with the "West" in order to overthrow the regime, and this has implied the withdrawal of some Leftist parties while others have halted their participation in it. However, the Left in general, similar to other opposition parties, continued to focus on the demand for democracy from multiple perspectives. Some considered it the only target and others as an entry point for the creation of a state that allows demanding other rights peacefully. However, the effectiveness of all this opposition, including the left, seemed to be limited, and this was evident during the demonstrations that they were calling for during the so-called "Damascus Spring" (2001 to 2007), with the number of demonstrators not exceeding a few hundred.

### **2) The Revolution and the Left**

As I pointed out, the situation of the Left before the revolution was difficult because of its fragmentation and because of the participation of some Leftists in power. The Left has focused its activities on democracy and freedoms after long years of suppression that have led to the weakening of its structures. It also seemed as if it is stuck in a discourse that is characterized as "political" which touches on the structure of the state as a state. Thus it became a democratic discourse similar to the liberal discourse that has started to

become common with globalization after the collapse of the socialist system.

In this situation, the Left did not expect that the people would revolt even after the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya. It used to believe that things were different in Syria. Here I specifically refer to the opposition Left because the ruling regime's Left fears the revolution as it is aware of the economic situation and the levels of poverty, unemployment and marginalization.<sup>57</sup>

#### The Stances of Leftist Parties Participating in the Government

The Communist Party and the United Communist Party, the two communist parties participating in the government, were able in the beginning to understand some of the problems felt by the people who took to the streets. However, they continued to support the ruling regime and to demand that it solve socio-economic problems, such as increasing wages, finding solutions to the problem of unemployment, and the "promotion of democracy."<sup>58</sup> But then their discourse started to change, and they began to talk about "confronting the conspiracy against Syria,"<sup>59</sup> and they started to line up behind the regime.

The People's Will Party, the name given to the party after the revolution, quickly said that its analysis of the "economic team" policies had been right and that its predictions that this policy would lead to disaster had become realities. Thus, it seemed as if it was supporting the revolution, and it insisted that these policies were at fault and not a conspiracy.<sup>60</sup> However, the party soon changed its

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<sup>57</sup> The reader may refer to these parties' newspapers and their follow-up on the economic situation, as well as reports on their conferences during which economic issue used to take a big space of the discussions.

<sup>58</sup> See the opinion of the United Syrian Communist Party in the editorial of the *al-Nour* newspaper issued by the party: <http://is.gd/cYWdql>

<sup>59</sup> See an example of this on: <http://is.gd/PF1YMF>. Also see: <http://is.gd/GRsBDu> and <http://is.gd/MDPZal> Also see: <http://is.gd/GRsBDu>

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, the editorial of issue no. 496 dated 31/3/2011 of the *Qasyoun* newspaper issued by the party, which was written by Dr. Qadri Jamil, who became Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Consumer Protection. Comrade Qadri Jamil said that "Syria is not beyond time and space, and the current wave of the rise of mass activity is not fleeting or temporary, and it will not end before it achieves its aims that were the reasons behind its eruption.

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stance and started to raise questions about the revolution, focusing on the role of the "armed gangs" and the "conspiracy against Syria." Moreover, it started to promote the idea of "national dialogue," and then it participated in the parliamentary elections and won three seats. It also participated in the government, and one of its members held the position of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Consumer Protection.

Thus, the leaders of these parties have continued to defend the regime and to repeat their slogans that the conflict is with "Salafist gangs," and that Syria is under "a conspiracy by imperialist powers" with the aim of obliging the country to abandon its "honorable national stances." However, they continued from time to time to stress the need for responding to the demands of the demonstrators, which is in essence class bias, at a revolutionary moment that favors the dominant capitalist class – the ruling regime. This bias removes these parties from the yard of the Leftist parties because it makes them linked to a class hostile to the people and to progress. Given their current position, these parties have started to distort the reality of the revolution among the global left, pushing it to take supportive stances of the existing bloody regime.

### **The Position of the Opposition Leftist Parties**

In the opposition camp, stances were supportive of the revolution, with few who questioned what was going on, and feared "Islamization"<sup>61</sup> and thus they became closer to the regime than to the revolution. But this support was not in one direction. It has taken different and opposing directions. Some, such as the Communist Labor Party and the Marxist Left Gathering (which was formed in 2007 from a number of small gatherings, including the Communist

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See also: <http://www.kassioun.org/html/index.php?MyNo=497>, and: <http://www.kassioun.org/html/index.php?MyNo=499>

<sup>61</sup> For example, Fateh Jamous, a leading member of the Communist Labor Party, who has worked on the rebuilding of the party after 2000 when he was removed from the party and with others, formed a new gathering under the Peaceful Democratic Change Path.

Labor Party, the Syrian Communists Committee, the Communist Party - the Political Bureau and the Kurdish Leftist Party) and the leadership of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, have tried to balance between the revolution and the anti-imperialism position, and this has made them look as if they are closer to the ruling regime. They have also demanded democracy and "a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy," and they were against the slogan of overthrowing the regime. For this reason, this Left attempted to benefit from the revolution in order to put pressure on the ruling regime to accept dialogue and transition towards democracy. According to this position, it continued to insist on the importance of the "peaceful" revolution and it refused the armed struggle option. Its stances became close to those of the "National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change" without any distinction or difference. Therefore, it started to engage in dialogue attempts with the ruling regime in order to achieve this transition, but the regime did not respond to its attempts. After that, it built lots of expectations when the Arab initiative was made and on the international role. Today, it is betting on the Russian, Chinese and the Iranian role to pressure the regime to accept the transition process, although at a later stage it started to demand the departure of Bashar al-Assad. These stances have put this Left in a bad popular position because it was perceived as demanding a reformist solution at a revolutionary moment and when the people reached the stage of demanding the toppling of the regime.

As a result of the disagreements among the Coordination Committee members, the Syrian Communist Committee walked out and was inclined to form new alliances outside Syria. In the end, it participated in the formation of the "Union of Syrian Democrats." However, the remaining parties continued to gather other Marxist Left members within the Coordination Committee.

In contrast, the Democratic People's Party and the Revolutionary Workers' Party (which are part of Damascus Declaration) took a different political path based on a decisive stance vis-à-vis the regime and demanded its toppling. However, the vision of these two parties

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was based on an inclination towards foreign military intervention<sup>62</sup> based on a conviction that the people cannot win given an exaggerated assessment of the power of the regime although it is true that this regime is actually strong. The general tendency was to build an alliance with foreign countries and ask them for help or even push them to undertake a military intervention, as reflected by the policy of the Syrian National Council. Therefore, it has refused to enter into dialogue with the ruling regime and has insisted on the toppling of the regime and all of its symbols.

### **3) The Left in the Revolution**

As a result, as mentioned earlier, the participation of political parties considered as Leftist parties was limited because they have few members and most of them are old. However, there was some participation here and there within the limitations imposed by the prevailing conditions. What is more important is that this participation was not based on a strategic vision but rather on individual contributions as opposed to party-based contributions. Thus, the Left was not able to come up with clear aims of the revolution, and it did not formulate slogans and chants. It also did not know how the revolution would develop and to where it should guide it. Hence, it seemed as if the Left was spontaneously marching behind the people who started the revolution and continued the fight. It also focused on political activism and political alliances and thus entered into conflicts and disagreements. Some of the Left participated in the creation of the "National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change", an alliance which was based on the idea that the needed policy is that of pushing towards the achievement of a peaceful and safe transition to democracy. This was based on dialogue with the ruling regime and pressuring it to accept the democratic transition process. Therefore, it did not adopt the goal of overthrowing the regime which the street has adopted and which became the measure for involvement in the revolution. For this reason, the role of the Committee was marginalized in the revolution, but it is made up of the main parties of the Syrian opposition inside Syria, and this has

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<sup>62</sup> See: <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48398>

made the weight of the opposition to move to outside the country. The Muslim Brotherhood together with a gathering of liberal "academics," and members of the Damascus Declaration (inside Syria, but was weakened and shrunk to only gather the People's Democratic Party, some liberal personalities and some members of the Revolutionary Workers' Party) to form a "national council", on 2 October 2011. Thus, the People's Party, as well as the Revolutionary Workers' Party, became members in an alliance with a strategy based on working at the international level for the purpose of introducing a military intervention.<sup>63</sup>

### **Parties' Popular Base and Their Youth**

A strange phenomenon emerged during the Revolution: the young people of the Leftist parties – those participating in the government and those who are not - were all supportive of the revolution. The popular base as well as the cadres of communist parties participating in the government and those of the People's Will Party was inclined to get engaged in the revolution against the position of their parties. From these popular bases and cadres, new groups were formed and took part in the revolution. These are the Communists Coordination Committees,<sup>64</sup> "Vision for Change, a number of communist cadres in Sweida, the Democratic Left Rally," and perhaps some other groups that did not last for long. Moreover, there were some communists who were active as individuals or within other gatherings with secular or democratic orientation, especially that part of those who have considered that rebelling against their parties' policy makes the parties adopt the stances of those communists who are opposing them (such as the People's Democratic Party), and thus tends to adopt the policies of this Leftist opposition, which is no longer Leftist but has become closer to be a liberal party (perhaps

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<sup>63</sup> On this topic, one review of the statements of Riad al-Shaqfa the General Comptroller of the Muslim Brotherhood and Radwan Ziyadeh, who was part of the "academics" group," and who put much effort to push the United States to pressure the UN Security Council to issue a resolution under Chapter VII.

<sup>64</sup> On the communists' coordination committees, see: <http://www.al-manshour.org/node/412>

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similar to all social democratic parties in Europe, which has become purely liberal).

### **The Leftist Gatherings**

Thus, many of the Leftists who became engaged in the revolution were individuals, or small groups without names in the beginning. However, some of them soon started to form organizational structures and to be active under certain names which we have already mentioned above. They have focused on practical activities without giving any vision with the exception of some comments and statements published on the internet or printed and distributed in some areas. Also on the net, the Revolutionary Left in Syria was created and started to issue the "*al-Khat al-Amami*"<sup>65</sup> (*The Front Line*) Newspaper. This group is Trotskyist in its perceptions.

The stream, in its document entitled *The Transitional Program of the Revolutionary Left* stressed that it "adopts the major objectives of the Syrian people's revolution for freedom, democracy, dignity and social justice." It also stressed that it is "committed to engage in all the mass struggles to achieve these objectives." While it perceives that the revolutionary dynamic falls within the context of building democracy from the bottom, it does not hesitate, at the current stage of transition, from adopting the call for building a democratic, pluralistic and civil state. However, it emphasized that intellectually it adopts the call for the broader forms of participatory democracy and direct democracy, in order to enable the vast majority of people to manage their own affairs and directly. The document went on to say that "at the same time, the ongoing Arab interrelated revolutions, have demonstrated, in a way that leaves no room for doubt, the link between the democratic mass struggle from below with the struggle for radical social change from below, too. It pointed out that "the main reason for this confusion, on the issue of the leadership of revolutionary movement for the past six months or more in Syria, is the absence of an organized and active revolutionary Left as a result of

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<sup>65</sup> See: <http://syria.frontline.left.over-blog.com/article-102909276.html> As well as the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/rlcinsyria>

the Left's historic, ugly and inferior relation between the traditional communist movement and the regime on the one hand and the ability of the latter, through brutal repression, on the other hand, since the 1980's to crush not only the revolutionary left but all political opposition forces. Thus, the priority on the agenda of the revolutionaries in the Syrian arena is the production of an organized revolutionary Marxist Left through engaging, on the ground, in the struggle process raging now, and at the same time through focusing on current and direct transitional tasks, which should be an integral part of the transitional program for a historical phase started by the ongoing revolutionary process (some of whose essential components will be stated below) knowing that it might later on be enriched by other elements, according to the evolution of this process."

**It defines "transitional and direct current tasks as follows:**

A. "The toppling of the regime and the establishment of a provisional revolutionary government to implement the following tasks:

The dismantling of the security structure of the state.

Calling for the election of a constituent assembly on the basis of proportional representation to draft a constitution for a civilian, democratic and pluralistic state, on the condition that this constitution guarantees public freedoms, human rights, and achieves full equality between citizens, regardless of their religious and ideological affiliation, their national and ethnic origin or their gender, etc. At the same time, it stresses the utmost importance of combining the two political and social democracy, and commitment to an essential endeavor to accomplish the tasks of national and pan-Arab tasks related to the liberalization of the occupied Golan and those related to supporting the actual struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their right to return, and the right to self-determination on their entire historic land."

B. "Building the revolutionary Left in Syria through the consolidation of its members and groups and to work on transforming it into an active social and political force and assembling all of its components around a transitional program. Success in mobilizing mass support around the Left would open the door for the current democratic political revolution to mature into a comprehensive social

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– national revolution, and this will not take a long time to materialize in alliance with the revolutionary process forces in the entire Arab region."

It refers to the future program specifying its points "under four broad headings. The first relates to democratic freedoms and judicial independence and impartiality; the second to the separation of religion and state within the framework of freedom of belief, and the guarantee of the rights of ethnic minorities; the third heading is on the economic - social situation and the emancipation of women; and the fourth on national and pan-Arab issues." The document attempts to elaborate on these headings.<sup>66</sup>

There is also the "Syrian Left Coalition," which consists of a gathering of cadres, some of them members of the communist parties, some of which were growing before the revolution, and other leftists who were already out of the existing parties. It has issued the "al-Yasafi" (*The Leftist*) newspaper, which is published every two weeks.<sup>67</sup> This coalition issued a document entitled "Our Tasks in the Current Revolution" in which it provided an analysis of the economic formation that has been formed during the last decade and its impact on the popular classes which were impoverished in favor of the new business class close to the ruling family and who plundered the public sector over the past decades, under the umbrella of an authoritarian regime. The revolution was the result of the economic meltdown that has happened, and after the collapse in the living conditions of the populace.

Thus, "all means that allow for the development of the intifada, the organization of its activities' mechanisms, and identifying its slogans which reflect the real demands of the popular classes and also the aims it set forth should be well thought of." Thus, "it is imperative that the revolutionary movement should be activated and institutionalized and that the main demands that could be achieved are specified. If this happens, the regime will be unable to stop the

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<sup>66</sup> To review the document visit: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=279740>

<sup>67</sup> See the Coalition page on Facebook / left-Syrian coalition. <https://www.Facebook.com/Syrian.Leftist.Coalition/info?ref=ts>

intifada but the weakness of the revolutionary forces will open the door for an attempt to make a nominal change in the structure of the regime without any impact on its capitalist mafia nature or to allow for clipping the nails of the regime in favor of another kind of capitalism. This is the attempt based on rejecting the demands of the popular base to change the prevailing economic pattern although it may achieve a democratic demand to a certain extent."

For this reason, the Syrian Left Coalition struggles for the achievement of a productive Syrian economy capable of absorbing unemployment and new labor entering the market each year and for an economy capable of achieving a decent living for workers through balanced wages that put people in a comfortable situation, for the right to work, for wages for the unemployed equal to the minimum wage, for free and scientifically-based education, for real health and social insurances, for adequate housing and for the equitable distribution of economic development in different regions and provinces of the state.

This is what the popular classes want and are revolting to achieve, and this is what should be the basics of the new regime. It should be a democratic regime, and this implies that there should be a struggle to draft a new constitution that acknowledges freedoms, the separation of powers, the separation of religion from the state, freedom of association and of forming unions to protect the rights of their labor and professional members and all other social groups that have specific demands, a popular supervision on the political and economic state activities, a civil personal status law and an equal role for men and women.

The coalition, while it focuses on the current revolution, stresses that its struggle for change is based on its general vision of the struggle against imperialism, and it stresses the importance of resistance and the development of the conflict into a real war for the liberation of the land. It also believes that there should be full independence from imperialism and capitalist patterns because there is no independence under economic dependency which is inevitably imposed by the neo-liberal policies. The coalition supports the struggle against the Zionist state for the liberation of Palestine, and it supports engagement with other Arab revolutions in the aim of reviving a revolutionary liberation project in the Arab world based on

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independence, unity, development and modernity with prospects of the realization of socialism.

There is no possibility for internal development and for the possibility of building a real industry or the development of agriculture if capitalism is followed, and there is no possibility of overcoming the rentier-mafia-based economy unless there is a break with capitalism and striving to overcome its limitations. The issue here is a question of the destiny of this area, and it is not just an option. Development cannot be achieved without a real struggle with imperialism, and anyone who thinks that he can achieve it without this condition will only be re-producing the existing rentier tyrannical pattern.<sup>68</sup>

The Coalition has been active in the demonstrations since the beginning. When the popular movement was weakened as a result of the war which made many activists join the military action while others became involved in relief, the coalition established the "Revolutionary Syrian Youth Gathering, which continued to protest in Damascus, and then it started to extend its activities to other cities and areas such as Homs, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo.<sup>69</sup> The Coalition has also been active in the relief work within the limits of its capacities and has been engaged in military action, and many of its members have been killed. Also, the Revolutionary Youth members have been exposed to severe campaigns for their arrest, and many of its members have been imprisoned.

It should be noted that there have been discussions between a number of these gatherings for the formation of a Leftist coalition, but until now they have not yielded any results. Discussions were initiated between the Syrian Left Coalition, the Communist Cadres in al-Swaida, Vision for Change and the Democratic Left Gathering. In these discussions the Communist Coordination Committees and the

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<sup>68</sup> To review the coalition's document, visit: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=265832>

<sup>69</sup> On the Syrian Revolutionary Youth, visit: <http://www.jaredatona.com/index.php/issues>

The information is published in the ninth issue of the newspaper. Also visit: <http://is.gd/IxW53x>

Revolutionary Left Stream were invited to participate. However, the former refused to participate and the Stream did not have a representative inside Syria to participate (afterwards, the Syrian Communist Committee joined the dialogue and the Vision for Change stopped participating because of its conditions). Although the discussions have led to a political consensus (basically the demands mentioned in the Syrian Left Coalition document with some amendments); however, there were other disagreements related to the nature of work during the revolution. Some saw the coalition as a process in the context of the unity of the Syrian opposition and thus they were focusing on political alliances, while others saw that it is important to focus on actual activism and on building on-the-ground alliances, i.e., from the forces and groups that are actually active and that the focus should be on the development of the revolution's mechanisms on the ground and not through political alliances, where differences were clear in assessing them and in assessing the opposition, and determining the importance of its role in the revolution.

#### **4) Prospects for the crystallization of a real Left during the revolution, and in the foreseeable future**

**(An assessment of the reality of political parties and their policies, and the development of young people's awareness and the fundamentals that drive people toward the Left)**

According to what I have mentioned earlier, we can say that there are "communist" parties that are part of the ruling regime, and these parties are still defending it. These parties are doomed to fade away in the context of the evolution of the revolution and its victory, especially since they have lost their popular base and have become without any "popularity." There are also parties in the opposition that have participated in the revolution in one form or the other but from a marginal position as we have earlier indicated. These parties are not eligible to continue because they have become exhausted and because they lack any political horizon and lack a clear political vision or intellectual methodology which allows them to rebuild awareness among their cadres in order to formulate a new vision responding to

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the realities on the ground. Some of their members may merge in new contexts that may be created by the revolution.

On the other hand, we find that the revolution has started to create new groups; some of them are influenced by the awareness of the existing parties and some are looking for a new horizon. Perhaps we may not be able now to assess their situation because the revolution is still going on, contrary to what has happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, in terms of achieving a step, which the youth saw as very important in toppling the leaders. Although the conflict did not stop and is still taking new forms, but in Syria this initial step – the toppling of the leadership - has not yet been reached. Moreover, the conditions became more complicated when the armed action started to constitute a central element in the struggle against the ruling regime in Syria. The huge destruction of areas and neighborhoods exercised by the regime has led to the displacement of many people, and thus, many of these groups that were active in these areas also became scattered. This has created another challenge for activists who should now also shoulder responsibility for the follow-up on the conditions of the refugees.

But it must be noted that the groups formed during the revolution are still fragmented, despite the attempts underway to build a coalition between them. It is also worth mentioning that their vision is still somewhat confused because some of them are still influenced by the ideas of the structures in which they were active. Therefore, we cannot say that there is a Leftist vision that has crystallized and that based on this vision a Leftist activity can be built.

Despite all this, what should be stressed is that the realities that have led to the eruption of the revolution, as reflected in the impact of the rentier-style economy on the overall socio-economic structure, will also be the basis for the youth, shouldering the revolution, to search for visions and solutions in the Leftist perspective and not in any other option. This is because all other streams are neglecting this basis and are only addressing the political level in the context of the search for a democratic alternative. Therefore, the effectiveness of the leftist groups participating in the revolution will be the solid base for the crystallization of a real leftist alternative.



**Prospects for the Renewal of the Left in Yemen  
and Its Challenges**

**Bushra Maqtari**

The experience of the Yemeni Left has not been studied by Yemeni researchers, who have instead focused on the national liberation movement and have not provided any analysis of the Left and its experiences. It is difficult to speak about the role of the Left and its former positions before the revolution except for the experience of the Yemeni Socialist Party, which is considered the official expression of the Left. It is for this reason that I will try in this paper to give a brief and simplified summary of the experience of the Yemeni Socialist Party, the challenges it has faced, and the harbingers of the emergence of renewed Left during the revolution and beyond – a Left that has emerged from the Party, distanced itself from its official political context and matured in the revolution's squares and yards as represented by the Leftist youth movements. The literature of this Left and its political and revolutionary mechanisms have reflected its awareness, interaction in the field and its adoption of the demands of social groups that were marginalized by the political components that were in the forefront of the revolution.

**A note on the historic positioning of the old Left:**

The Leftist forces were part of the popular protest movements calling for social justice. They have relied on the disadvantaged classes as their social and political bases, and they have contributed to the increase of people's awareness of their rights and civil and political liberties. Although the Left has had its contributions in the Yemeni political scene, it was part of the regime's crisis as reflected in the South, where the Left was able to reach power, but it ruled the southern society according to contradictory terms. The same has happened in the North at a later stage. This ambivalence has had its impact on the effectiveness of the Left in changing the Yemeni realities and its contradictory stances led to the deepening of the gap between the Left and some groups. This has allowed religious forces,

who started to occupy the popular spaces of the Left, to fill the gap created.

If we examine the historical realities under which the Left forces have emerged, we find that the realities in the North are different from the realities in the South. In the latter, the social and political environment was fertile for the emergence of the Left which started with the emergence of unions and labour strikes in refineries. This has helped the Left to mature in defining its ideological discourse, unlike the north where it was active underground and under complex conditions even in the 1990's which contributed to the lack of clear programs and the ease of ending its effectiveness through the liquidation of its leaders by the totalitarian rule in the north.

If we return to these contexts, we find that the Left has grown with the intensification of the national movements' struggle against British colonial rule in the south and the Ottoman Empire colonialism in the north. The struggle of the Leftist factions was clearer in the south because they were able to specify the priorities of their national project, and they practiced in the armed struggle against the British colonizer and thus became the political expression of the national liberation project in the south. With the success of the September 26 revolution in the north and the October 14 revolution in the south, the idea of uniting the Leftist factions had crystallized as a historic necessity so as to unite the struggle of the leftist forces in the north and south of the country under the umbrella of the Yemeni Socialist Party, which took power in the South in 1978.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Three Leftist factions united in the south: these are the National Front, the Socialist People's Union, and the Popular Vanguard in the National Front Organization in October, 1975. As for the Leftist factions in the north, five factions have united and these are: the Revolutionary Democratic Party, the People's Union, the Popular Vanguard, the Revolutionary Resisters, and the Labour Party in the conference held in March 1979 and resulted in the creation of the People's Unity Party as an umbrella for the Socialist Party – the North Branch. On 9 March, the nine factions – from the north and south – met in a culmination of the organizational unity of the Yemeni Socialist Party in the north of the country and its south. However, the party continued to work in the north under the Popular Unity name.

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Not long after reaching power in the south and becoming the sole monopoliser of power, the internal vertical and horizontal contradictions of the party became clear for everybody. These contradictions have marked the experience of the Yemeni Socialist Party in power with many negative aspects which it has not yet been able to re-examine in order to identify its areas of failure, especially when the conflicts have developed into bloody events that have subsequently impacted the popularity of the Left and contributed to reducing the numbers of its followers. If we examine this decline in the popularity of the party, we find that there are many factors leading to it. These are:

The Left was not ready to reach power in a country that has suffered from the consequences of British colonialism for a long time. At the same time, when the party reached power, it did not work to resolve the economic and social problems in the south. Instead, it has imposed its Marxist ideology by force on a society with unidentified economic relations and more correctly, on a society where pre-state relations were still dominant in many areas of the south.

The Party's identity has had more dominance over the state's identity, and there were no clear lines defining the relations between the two. This has led to many partisan conflicts between the different political spectrums on how to resolve this dilemma. Moreover, some of the political and social parties in the South were reluctant to accept the Leftist ideology and considered it alien to the society and attempted to demonise it.

The persistence of vertical conflicts among political leaders in deciding which model to follow, the Soviet or the Chinese and the party's dependence on outside countries. This conflict has cast its shadows on the decisions of the party and created conflicts among its leaders.

The absence of inter-party dialogue and the lack of transparency have ultimately led to the creation of a dictator ruler (the first comrade) and his monopoly over the decision making process in more than one historical phase and the lack of respect for the organizational structures and traditions of the partisan work.

All of these internal factors and their interaction with conflicts associated with the Cold War between the Eastern and Western camps

and the intervention of local and international political forces, which continued to resist the emergence of a Leftist state in the region, eventually led to the outbreak of the January 13, 1986, crisis.<sup>71</sup> This was the first blow to the Left project in Yemen, especially after the liquidation of partisan leaders and the emergence of an anti-Left internal discourse. This has contributed to the emergence of extremist religious forces, and these events and the subsequent ones were the key factor in the decline in the popularity of the party with many blaming it for the civil war. The party continued to suffer from the repercussions of this partisan conflict, which also impacted on its organizational structures and its relations with its masses.

In light of the January events, some partisan leaders attempted to provide an analytic review and demanded partisan democracy to replace narrow centralism. Despite these important reviews in the history of the Left, the party leadership remained incapable of understanding the renewal discourse and did not respect the organizational structures of the party. Instead, the leadership continued to escape from its persistent internal crisis by the signing of a unity agreement with the north unilaterally without the knowledge of the party's organizational structures. Because the balance of power was in favour of the north, it was able to evade the agreement's terms and the partnership and launched its war on the Yemeni Socialist Party and on the south in the summer of 1994. This was the second blow to the Left in Yemen.

### **Isolating the Left after the 1994 summer war**

When the Secretary-General of the Party announced the political disintegration decision with the north and the return to the conditions that prevailed before 1990, the political leadership of the party witnessed a divide, and the decision confused the popular base of the

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<sup>71</sup> On January 13, 1986, Yemen witnessed a civil war which erupted in the south because of the conflict in the Central Committee between the Party's wings led by Ali Nasser Mohammed. This conflict led to the killing of Abdel Fattah Ismail, Ali Antar, Ali Shaea, and Saleh Musleh inside the Committee's premises. After this incident, acts of violence escalated and led to the death, injury and disappearance of thousands of people.

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party. It was then difficult to reach an agreed upon decision with regard to the war which they were part of and regarding the disintegration specially because this decision was an individual one without consultation with the popular base or the party's regulatory bodies. This was the second time that the party faced complete paralysis in its regulatory policy, and it made the popular base of the party almost isolated from the political decisions taken by the upper leadership. This had made the Left isolated from its popular base while the authoritarian regime in Sanaa was able to make use of the contradictions of the Left and to create a provocative discourse full of accusation of disloyalty in order to prosecute the party's cadres in the north and south. It used fatwas to encourage their assassination using the slogan that unity is a red line and whoever abandons this path is abandoning his religion.<sup>72</sup>

### **The tactics of the Left after the war**

The policy of undermining the Left, which was adopted by the regime, had succeeded in politically and socially isolating it. The post-war period was one of the most difficult historical periods experienced by the Left in Yemen. Under a closed political situation, which had contributed to demonizing the Left and isolating it, and with the support given to hard-line religious forces, the infrastructure of the party in the north as well as in the south became badly affected. This policy had also been successful in making the local public opinion blame the party for the disintegration of unity. It also made the party realize that this policy would continue to hit its national project, eliminate its cadres and the rest of its popular base and pit national forces against it. Thus, the party had realized that it should adopt a new policy in facing the regime instead of the self-defence policy pursued by the left after the 1994 war. For this reason, the

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<sup>72</sup>See the al-Dailami's fatwa in expiation of the Socialist Party and the southerners. This fatwa was attributed to Dr. Abdul Wahab al-Dailami, who served as justice minister during the 1994 war, and it was considered as the pretext for the political massacres and liquidations that occurred during the war. He repeated the same fatwa in an interview with the *al-Jumhuriya* newspaper (The Republic) issue no. (15760), Wednesday, 30 January, 2013.

party decided to boycott the 1997 and the 1999 parliamentary elections in order to expose and reveal the realities of the regime to the local and international public opinion. These decisions were steps forward made by the party in order to regain its natural role in leading the opposition political process and adopting the discourse of the Yemeni people.

This move by the political leadership of the party was a wise one. But the party had also realized that this tactical measure was not enough to face the regime which was monopolizing all the power in the country. It also realized that it should read the new changes with a perspective that responds to a political reality heading more towards the fragmentation of the opposition forces, the lack of clarity of its objectives in the creation of a general vision on the country which is being dragged to an abyss with the growing internal crises, the suppression of protest movements, the restrictions on freedoms and the impoverishment of the Yemeni people. Thus, the party has attempted to make ideological revisions in light of the challenges, and it realized that the continuity of its national political project is linked to its ability to create political alliances to gather national forces in a political opposition line. The preliminary result of this review was the creation of the first initial alliance under the so-called Supreme Opposition Coordination Council.<sup>73</sup> However, the Yemeni Socialist Party saw the need to attract the Religious Reform Party, which the regime had used to undermine it and to make use of the ideological conflict between the two in order to create a new alliance. This alliance developed into the formation of the joint meeting,<sup>74</sup> which is the first political alliance between the left and the Islamists in the Arab region. Among the most important achievements of the Yemeni Socialist Party is its adoption of this alliance and its ability to

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<sup>73</sup> The Supreme Coordination Council of the Opposition was founded in 1999 and was comprised of the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Popular Unionist Organisation, the Arab Socialist Baath Party, the Truth Party (al-Haq) and the Yemeni Union of Popular Forces.

<sup>74</sup> The JMP bloc was established in February 6, 2003, and it gathers the parties that joined the Supreme Coordination Council of the Opposition in addition to the Religious Reform bloc. The aim Of JMP is to coordinate between its components in the parliamentary elections and in political action.

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overcome the political difficulties that were trying to dissolve it, especially after the assassination of Jarallah Omar,<sup>75</sup> by an Islamic fundamentalist.<sup>76</sup> Omar was the one who engineered the creation of this alliance. The traditional opposition in Yemen succeeded in uniting national forces opposing the regime and was able to mobilize the people. The peak of the alliance's success was reflected in competing in the presidential election with one presidential candidate.<sup>77</sup> This experience created a political momentum for the first time in the history of Yemen. Moreover, the traditional opposition competed in the parliamentary elections in one list, despite the major contradictions between its components. With the regime insisting on holding the parliamentary elections without responding to the demands of the opposition, the opposition became united in its rejection of the regime's practices. The crisis between the regime and the opposition culminated when the opposition forces threatened to take to the street.

### **The Left and the Revolution:**

The bias of the left to the people's demands was spontaneous, and its adoption of the calls for overthrowing the regime was only natural, especially because this regime had been suppressing the party, prosecuting its members and assassinating them for decades. Thus, the party, in its literature, was insisting on the importance of the continuation of the political movement to confront the regime in the north through a number of protest activities and in the south by the

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<sup>75</sup> He is the master mind of the alliance. He is Jarallah Omar, a socialist politician who was assassinated in December 2002 at the 22 May Hall at the Reform Party's conference by al-Saawani, an Islamic fundamentalist. This incident has had serious repercussions on the political life of Yemen, and the regime took advantage of it to dismantle the coalition. Until today, the instigators of this crime remain unidentified.

<sup>76</sup> Faisal bin Shamlan was the candidate nominated by the JMP for the 2006 presidential elections. These elections saw the strongest competition for the post of the President of the Republic since the creation of the united Republic of Yemen in 1990.

<sup>77</sup> The Southern Movement is a peaceful popular movement which was started in the southern provinces in 2007. It relied on peaceful activities and protests to achieve its goals related to rights but then became more political in nature.

Southern Movement,<sup>78</sup> many of whose leaders, in the beginning, were party members. Given the Left experience in organizing popular protests, the activities held covered two parallel lines on the eve of the Yemeni revolution. The first was the political line, which the party has adopted inside the traditional opposition (the Joint Meeting Parties JMP). It is the political approach, which is considered as the continuation of the worsening conditions of the pre-revolution and the continuation of the dialogue with the regime to get some political and national gains. When the relations between the regime and the opposition (the JMP) became tensed, the JMP joined the revolution and became part of all the revolutionary components but it continued to pursue a political line based on finding out a solution to the situation in Yemen. This was reflected in its acceptance of the Gulf initiative, which was rejected by the party's youth and the youth of other parties in addition to the independent young people. The second was the revolutionary line, which had contributed to the rise of a renewed Yemeni Left where the young party's members took the lead without consulting with their leadership which was bound by the collective decision of the opposition (JMP).

The popular base of the renewed Left realized that the moves of the traditional opposition, which the party had taken part in, have been slow compared to the momentum of the Yemeni street and its aspirations to express its demands to overthrow the whole regime, not only the head of the regime. Thus, it was clear in its literature, and it has contributed through its protest discourse, to engage with all other social forces to express its rejection of the political settlements. Moreover, it was able to create new alternatives for youth leftist alliances that formed a break with the political line of the party and the traditional opposition. What is interesting is that the political leadership of the party has yielded to the Leftist revolutionary youth discourse and did not oblige its base, who is engaged in the revolution, to accept the political line based on the Gulf initiative, which some of

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<sup>78</sup> The “March for Life” procession, which kicked off, on foot, in the southwestern city of Taiz heading to Sanaa on 20 December 2011 and continued its march for 6 days, aimed at expressing rejection of the Gulf initiative and the militarization of the revolution. The march was organized by the Revolutionary Escalation Youth.

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the traditional opposition parties imposed on their base. In addition, there was a margin of partisan freedom which enabled the Leftist youth in the different provinces to form Leftist blocs and coordination councils, which have played an important role in the development of the revolution's goals and in defending it and its civil nature. Prominent among these blocs were: the Forum of Modernity Forces in Sanaa, which gathered a group of intellectuals, writers and revolutionaries; the February 11 Revolutionists in Taiz, and the Youth of Escalation and Revolutionary Decisiveness, which mobilized in its ranks a number of the Leftist youth, in addition to other youth organizations and movements, which have contributed to the fuelling of the popular movement.

Contrary to the experience of some Leftist forces during the Arab revolutions, which was characterized by confused discourse and stances regarding the revolution, the Yemeni Left as represented by the YSP was consistent in its positions with the revolution, and it has adopted it and defended it at the leadership as well as the popular level. This is, in my opinion, because, the YSP has been the carrier of the change project which Saleh's regime has tried to eradicate over the last decades by various tools and methods. Thus, the Yemeni revolution was an opportunity for the Leftist forces, in particular, to reorganize themselves and revive their stolen slogans during the previous periods, the slogans of social justice, equal citizenship, and the civil state. The Yemeni squares and yards, in the first months of the Yemeni revolution, were Leftist spaces par excellence, before the Islamization of the revolution and the rise of the religious, military, and tribal forces and the militarization of the revolution, which in my opinion, have formed a real challenge for the Leftist forces in Yemen, targeting the heart of the Leftist thought and its civil theses.

Hence, we find that the Yemeni revolution, unlike the Arab Spring Revolutions, did not lead to the fragmentation and isolation of the Leftist forces, but, on the contrary, the revolution has stimulated the Yemeni Left, tested its field capacities and showed the expansion of its popular base. This has created supportive prospects for the crystallization of a revived Yemeni Left supported by a political and historic legacy that derives its strength from the heritage of the Yemeni Left in general and bypass it in its political, pragmatic and tactical alliances. Moreover, its literature has formed a break with the

old traditional system. These components of this Left become clear when one reads the Yemeni revolutionary scene with its civil political discourse which contradicts with the discourse of the traditional, tribal, military and religious forces that have practiced guidance over the Yemeni revolution and diverted it from its right tracks and objectives. The role of the leftist youth movements in the revolution was prominent despite the media blackout, and there were important signs which allow us to assess the active role of this Left. Among the most important of these indicators are:

1. Organizing quality marches beyond the consensual will of the traditional opposition (the JMP).
2. Among the most important marches were the daily ones in the city of Taiz, which were carried out by the Revolutionary Escalation and Decisive Youth, and the emergence of its civic discourse rejecting the militarization of the revolution, which was carried out by the religious opposition party. This period witnessed confrontations between the religious party militias and the Leftist youth. The youth movements' effectiveness reached its peak with the launch of the Life March,<sup>79</sup> and its success was a turning point in the development of the Yemeni Left and its ability to mobilize and organize the masses. It was striking that before this stage, it was difficult to organize any march without being prepared by the organizing committee headed by the opposition Religious Party. This experience contributed to overcoming the idea that the Left is unable to mobilize the masses, and it was a real victory for the Leftist discourse. There were also important marches in line with the Leftist vision such as "the millions out" march, contesting political assassinations in August 2012, as well as the "I am participating" campaign, which was organized by the students of Sana University, against the military wing, the organizer of the revolution. This march was boycotted by the religious party, and its success was a new phase in the evolution of the Yemeni Left mechanisms and its ability to create a new awareness discourse.

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<sup>79</sup> The party's youth revolution in Taiz. The sit-in began five months ago, and it succeeded in electing a youthful secretariat on 15 March 2012.

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3. The emergence of a youth revolution within the party. This was represented in the open strike implemented inside the party's premises by the youth of YSP in Taiz to protest against the party's historic leadership which was unable to achieve the revolutionary aspirations of the youth. This step has caused confusion for the central party leadership, and the youth were able to overthrow the secretariat of the party. A new Leftist youth with clearer vision on the role of the Left in this phase has emerged, and this was the first youth revolution within the Yemeni parties in general.<sup>80</sup>
4. The increase in the popularity of the Left during the revolution. This has reflected itself in the number of young people who were active during the revolution and who joined the party because they considered it as being the closest to the Yemeni people's impulse. New youth party centers were opened in the rural areas of the different cities,<sup>81</sup> and this was an important step in reviving the role of the Yemeni Left after being eradicated by the regime and its tools.
5. The formulation of civilian, political and social demands. The New Leftist movements were able to adopt the discourse of the underprivileged classes which the regime had created, and they mobilized them to go to the streets to support them. This has led to the creation of political and social alliances between these forces and the Leftist youth who were biased to these classes and defended them.
6. Undertaking an intellectual re-examination of the Yemeni Left in the light of the revolution experience and the political performance of the party within the JMP system. The leftist youth movement was able to analyse this experience and provide new insights to promote the Left and to overcome the obstacles of the political alliance and its volatile performance impacting on the identity of the party.

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<sup>80</sup> The Party opened new premises in the al-Ma'afer countryside on 15 October 2012. This was a promising step indicating that the party is regaining its role among the peasants.

<sup>81</sup> See statement of the Yemeni Socialist Party Secretariat, issued on September 12, 2012, which criticizes appointments and giving more privileges to certain political parties at the expense of others.

With regard to the political performance of the Socialist Party in the revolution and its interaction with the revolution's paths, we can divide it into two phases:

**The first phase:** starting from the beginning of the Yemeni revolution and until the election of Abed Rabbo Hadi as President of the Republic on February 21, 2012. This phase was marked by negativity and political opportunism during which the party insisted on adopting a political discourse that maintains the alliance and keeping silent regarding the violations committed by the Religious Reform Party against male and female activists and the youth of the party. This policy has created lots of indignation among the party's popular base.

**The second phase:** This phase was a transitional one, and the voice of the party was heard by its adoption of the street's discourse which refused the conditions of the transitional phase that have allowed for the re-positioning of the old traditional forces. This phase was represented in many indicators which stress this role, among them are:

1. Rejecting some of the decisions taken by the interim president through a number of formal political party statements which have affirmed the party's rejection of military and civilian appointments which empower certain political parties at the expense of others.<sup>82</sup> These statements are considered as a future indicator on the change in the nature of the relation between the traditional opposition parties (the JMP) because the aim of this political alliance was to confront Saleh's regime, and when Saleh left, many disputes emerged between the components of this alliance.

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<sup>82</sup>See the statement of the Yemeni Socialist Party, statement (1), issued on 1 July, 2012 at the site of the Socialist Forum, which described the transitional phase and addresses many points leading up to the national dialogue.

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2. The Socialist Party issued the 12- point- paper in preparation for the national dialogue and for solving the issue of the South,<sup>83</sup> and it pressured the JMP to adopt these points.
3. The political statement condemning the deviation in the political settlement process in Yemen.<sup>84</sup>
4. Critique of the practice of the Reform Party and its attempts to isolate its partners in the alliance. This was reflected in the statement in which the membership of the Reform Party in the Ibb province was frozen by the JMP as well as the suspension of the al-Baida socialists in the JMP.
5. Through these indicators, reflected in new stances by the party in the transitional phase, one can say that they are positive factors which show that the party is recovering and is adopting a critical line within the traditional opposition (JMP), and that this critical line refuses the hegemony of the religious party (the Reform Party) and its attempts to impose its unilateral project of change without consulting with its political allies.

### **The negative aspects of the Left engagement in the JMP:**

Despite the positive aspects of this alliance in the pre-revolution phase and its ability to unite the patriotic forces against the regime during the revolution and in the transitional phase, the negative aspects of this alliance started to impede its development. Many conflicts have risen in the performance as well as in the political and intellectual discourse between the parties of the JMP, and these conflicts have caused harm to the Left. The reasons behind these negative aspects, according to some activists are:

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<sup>83</sup> See the statement of the Yemeni Socialist Party issued on 24 January /2 December 2013, which condemns deviation of a political settlement and holds some of the forces responsible for the continued deterioration of the situation.

<sup>84</sup> See the Ibb joint statement issued on November 23, 2012, which confirmed the freezing of the Reform Party's membership because it removed the tents of protesters in the Gulf of Liberty Yard without consultation with other parties. See also the statement on freezing the Socialist Party of its membership in the al-Bayda Joint Meeting on 18 January, 2013 because of the exclusionary practice of the Reform Party.

## **1. Diluting the party's identity:**

Among the main critical points raised against this alliance is that the party's identity has become part of it, and the Leftist discourse has started to disappear in favour of a consensus political discourse, especially because in the context of this alliance there is an ideological religious party (the Reform Party), which had before accused the Left of infidelity but afterwards did not refute this *takfiri* discourse. Moreover, the vision of the party and its project is not in line with the Leftist ideology, and specifically with the aim of building a civil state. This has been revealed by the discourse of the hard-line wing of the party. Some leftists regarded the alliance between leftists and Islamists as political opportunism which is no longer justified and that this contradiction will lead to the alienation of many young leftist people, pushing them to work outside the political framework of the party. But some party leaders justify that this alliance is a tactical one with the aim of overthrowing the Saleh regime, and its survival depends on the completion of the goals of the revolution.

## **2. The party's inability to work within the framework of the alliance given the political opportunism of some of its forces:**

This inability of the party is reflected in the decisions of the party's leaders. These leaders, under the umbrella of the traditional opposition (JMP), were trying not to take any political action outside the alliance, which was subject to chronic bureaucratic measures. Sometimes, these decisions were confronted by the interests of some opportunistic parties with regard their stance of the ruling regime. As an example, the YSP adopted the revolution option and its members were in the streets while the opposition religious party (the Reform Party) adopted the reforming of the regime rather than toppling it. These intrinsic contradictions led to a paralysis in the political decision of the party and made its popular base take their own decision to embrace the revolution. Thus, the party's popular base was more dynamic in dealing with the changing Yemeni street during the revolution, and it expressed the ceiling of the protests rejecting political settlement (the GCC initiative) later.

**3. The party kept silent about the religious party's violations (the Reform Party) against its cadres:**

Among the most serious drawbacks of the party during the revolution is that it has kept silent about the violations committed by the Reform Party, which is a member of the JMP against the party's youth and its leaders, which began with attacks launched by militant forces affiliated with the Religious Party against female and male activists, beating them with rods and batons, and firing their guns on the houses of the party's leaders as well as accusing a number of them of apostasy. The policy of the Socialist Party in the first phase of the revolution was to maintain the political coalition of the JMP regardless of the size of criticism echoed by the popular base of the party who realized that this alliance can no longer reflect the progressive spirit of the party.

**Challenges facing the Yemeni Left:**

Although the Socialist Party has partially recovered during the revolution, and it returned more effectively to the political arena than before, at the level of the renewed leftist youth as well as the level of the official line of the party after the transitional period, there are still some internal challenges in the structure of the party as well as local challenges impacting on the future of the Left in Yemen. Among these challenges are:

**First: Organizational weakness**

This is a chronic problem impacting all leftist parties and movements in the Arab world and all over the world, and it has its historic reasons. Moreover, there is an absence of communication channels between the higher bodies and the popular base, and this has led to the absence of dialogue between the upper and lower levels of the party and made the leadership take decisions without consulting with the specialized organizational structures of the party. This dangerous problem made many active party cadres walk out of the party. Some say that this organizational weakness is a result of the many crises of the party since the bloody events of the year 1986 and until the summer of 1994, which have damaged the party and created a sharp hierarchal split between the party organizations in the south

and the higher leadership, especially since many of the leaders of the South are currently adopting the disengagement project. Moreover, the party has not been able to overcome this obstacle by coming up with a joint political discourse between the party in the north and the party in the south regarding the Southern issue, which the Socialist Party was its political carrier in a previous historical period.

### **Second: The inability of the Left to market its discourse abroad**

The Yemeni Left, represented by the Yemeni Socialist Party or by the emerging Leftist movements, was not able to impose its civil progressive discourse in the internal and external media despite the growing effectiveness of the Yemeni Left during the revolution's yards. This is because the party does not have enough funds to create media channels and sites. However, the religious parties in Yemen succeeded in imposing their media discourse because it was adopted by local and foreign media outlets. This discourse is Islamic in nature, and it promotes a stereotypical image of the revolution in Yemen and provides a unilateral intellectual discourse which does not reflect the diversity of the Yemeni society. Some say that the reason for this is the financial strength of the religious party and its media outlets and the role played by the al-Jazeera office in Yemen, which promoted its discourse by promoting the Brotherhood youth leaders.

### **Third: The increase in the extremist religious forces in Yemen**

During the transitional phase, many religious forces, with different intellectual orientation, have quickly emerged, and they were able to have a prominent political and social presence in a number of the Yemeni provinces such as the Rashad Salafi Movement. Some of these forces were able to build a broad social-base by mobilizing the poor sectors of the society and recruiting them through the use of charitable associations' money coming from external sources and the use of the sectarian discourse by some forces which are influenced by the regional environment supportive of sectarianism. It is noteworthy that all these forces are hostile to the idea of building a civil state, and they all insist of the building the caliphate state.

### **Fourth: The components in the south are hostile to the Left in general and to the Socialist Party in particular**

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The Saleh regime was successful in creating a rupture between the party, its leadership and its popular bases in the south, especially after the 1994 war which had witnessed the walkout of many of the party cadres and leaders in the south, blaming the party for the unity and its repercussions and the adoption of the southerners of disengagement from the north and the dramatic emergence of religious groups on the ruins of the Left in the south.

### **Fifth: The return of the *takfiri* discourse**

This phase has also witnessed the return and rise in the *takfiri* discourse against male and female leftist leaders and activists, the advocates of the civil state and writers and journalists. This demonstrates the crisis of these forces, which resort to the use of the religious discourse at every historic phase because they do not have a modern political vision and a state project.<sup>85</sup>

### **Sixth: The positioning of conventional military and tribal forces**

The period after the revolution has witnessed the emergence of new alliances between these traditional forces, and they have attempted to obtain some political gains. This was clear in the Tribes' Conference and the attempts made by these forces to ally themselves with extremist religious forces which are hostile to the project of building a Yemeni state. This is another reason which hinders the chances of the Yemeni Leftist forces to grow.<sup>86</sup>

### **Seventh: Lawlessness in the cities**

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<sup>85</sup> The year 2012 has witnessed the re-emergence of the *takfirist* speech when a fatwa was issued against writers and journalists. The most recent one is the apostasy fatwa against Ali Saidi, a writer, the publication of the book entitled "al-Hiwar al-Watani: Amar am Damar" (The National Dialogue: Construction or Destruction) written by Sheikh Arif Sabri, who accused all members of the Technical Committee with apostasy and the publishing of the book on the civil state written by Sheikh Ismail al-Sahli, who accused most of the civic and leftist leaders of apostasy.

<sup>86</sup> The Tribes Conference was held from 6 to 10 February, 2012, in the presence of a number of tribal, religious and militant leaders. The mere holding of the conference and its recommendations reflect that there is a coup launched by these forces against the idea of a civil state.

Yemen is witnessing a dangerous phase with the continued divides in the army and the continued presence of military leaders who participated in acts of killings in leading military positions. This will make it more difficult to confront the repercussions of the change witnessed by the country, especially with the continuing campaign of political assassinations, which has already targeted political as well as military leaders, most of them are Leftists.

**Eighth: The dispersion of Leftist and nationalist civil forces in Yemen**

To date, these forces could not overcome their past and historical conflicts and create a unified vision to respond to the requirements of the next phase and to confront the traditional forces. On the contrary, these conventional forces still show a state of fragmentation and rivalry.

**Crisis of Leftist Ideology in the Arab Spring: Case in Point,  
the Left in Bahrain**

**By: Abbas Mirza al-Murshid**

**Overview:**

In Bahrain, protest movements had surfaced even before the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, or what was persistently named the Arab Spring. In these movements, the demands were expressed with a language of protest rejecting the status quo and adopting ideas and slogans that stress the need for change and overcoming the long-established conditions. These protest movements, as the article shows, escalated over the last few years preceding the Arab Spring. Popular committees took to the streets of Bahrain, and they were emboldened by legal authorities and human rights activists (most notably Abd-al-Hadi al-Khawaja, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment). These committees also thrived on the growth of some radical political movements such as *Haq* Movement for Liberty and Democracy, headed by Hassan Mushaima, also sentenced to life imprisonment). These protest movements highlighted social, economic demands and political demands unequivocally and stressed the need to take to the street (the masses' source of power) and maneuver the regime. These movements did not rely on opposition political parties; rather they pinned their hopes on the younger generations, which later served as the effective fuel of the Bahraini revolution on February 14, 2011.

The pre-revolution phase witnessed the use of different approaches and a lack of consensus on protest methods in rallying the masses in squares and bypassing the official narrative. There were sharp differences between the protest movements in Bahrain and opposition political parties. Such parties sought to distinguish themselves from the protest forefronts on the street, and sometimes they would resort to lifting the "political" cover from these protesters, thus causing sharp differences that spilled over to the masses.

After the outbreak of the revolution, such gaps disappeared, and political parties converged with the protest movement at their revolutionary stage, including associations with leftist backgrounds.

During the prime time of the revolution (that witnessed the Pearl Roundabout sit-ins between 15 February and 17 March 2011) differences arose over the ceiling of demands and means to mobilize, expand, and invest in the revolution. The active presence of the civil society at the Pearl Roundabout has relatively minimized such differences and the “democracy of the roundabout” was an incubator for those differences as it made them normal and positive. In this context, the leftist audience (both the elite and youth) was in tune with the predominantly revolutionary atmosphere at the Pearl Roundabout. However, the Peninsula Shield forces stormed the roundabout on 17 March 2011 and cracked down on protesters, thus dramatically confusing political stances toward the revolution, including those of some leftist trends that issued a statement of apology (**Progressive Democratic Forum Society**). That statement did not significantly affect the course of the revolution, as the revolution was mainly dependent on the masses that mostly did not belong to the leftist Progressive Forum Society, nor did they adopt its political discourse or criticism. In addition, the leftist notables and national figures’ continued support and sacrifice for the revolution maintained its pluralistic nature, and gave some room for influence for the Left, albeit symbolically. In this context, a staunch alliance was formed between the leftist liberal National Democratic Action Society (WAAD) and the religious fundamentalist *Al-Wefaq* National Islamic Society. Such alliance became stronger during and after the revolution, especially after sentencing Ibrahim Sharif, WAAD’S secretary general, to five years in prison. Sharif was also subjected to torture along with other Islamist prisoners. However, Sharif’s arrest and the restrictions imposed on WAAD adversely affected the party, which issued a statement that apologized to the Bahraini Army that participated in the crackdown on protesters and openly criticized its detained secretary general.

In general, the Left in Bahrain did not make positive achievements, and the Bahraini revolution revealed its main inherent weak points. It lacked a political vision consistent with the ideology of the **New Left**; its parties and elite members were closed and narrow-minded, and the Left was unable to develop a political discourse that interacts with the overall protest movement. Also, the Bahraini Left tended to enhance ties with the political authority and the political

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system, in general, rather than develop positive relations with the protesting people on the street.

### **Introduction**

Most interpretations analyzing the phenomenon of the Left in the Arabian Gulf are largely biased and lack consensus or coherence, which justifies the need to adopt a more critical approach so as to understand the transformations that the Left went through and its outputs over four decades of a centralized policy. Such a critical approach is also necessary for creating a more comprehensive model of knowledge that would reduce bias against political trends and treat political and social trends as equal on the grounds that the political trends are essentially a social multifaceted phenomenon.

Such need becomes more important when addressing the positions of the Bahraini Left and the compatibility of its ideology with the Arab Spring movements, including that in Bahrain. Most of the Arab Spring movements shattered the expectations of ideological visions, and the Arab Spring had overdone all ideologies and partisan fanaticism, and most importantly, the Arab Spring surpassed official political institutions and their hidden and public discourse.

This paper will seek to present a critical review of the leftist parties in Bahrain in view of their positions toward the Arab Spring in the country. To this end, the paper will seek to address the following themes:

### **First: Left in Bahrain and Dilemmas of Understanding**

Analysis of the circumstances of the emergence of leftist trends in oil countries would shed light on the importance of systematic differentiation between the ideological left and the circumstantial left. The first type is fundamentally linked to the cognitive and economic situations of the leftist ideology of socialism or communism. The accumulation of infrastructure and the modern political structure would give flexibility in the ideological way of thinking and would highlight a state of pluralism representing all components of society, including leftist or socialist trends in the general or specific sense. The circumstantial left on the other hand lacks cognitive and material elements necessary for full establishment. It is linked to emergencies

or temporary circumstances that require simulation of responses by other communities. This applies mostly to the emergence of leftist trends in the oil-producing Arab countries, as the oil boom contributed to igniting successive political tensions that prompted a set of political responses, including leftist ones. Therefore, containing those tensions and their repercussions by political regimes or the regional system have undermined the leftist movement in the region.<sup>87</sup>

The World War II era marked the introduction of leftist ideas in Bahrain through the communist Tudeh party of Iran. However, the actual start of the first Marxist Bahraini organization came late, with the establishment of the Bahraini National Liberation Front in 1955 as the first Marxist group in Bahrain. The Marxist organization had collided with the nationalist tide that had prevailed since the mid-1930s, and it was very difficult to promote Marxist ideas among individuals belonging to a conservative society that is politically nationalist.

The June 1967 *Al-Naksah* (Setback of June 1967) had reshuffled the cards of active political trends, not only in Bahrain but also in the Arab region as a whole, and as a result, most of the nationalist trends shifted to the Nationalist Left and the New Left, while the Marxist communist trend maintained its organizational and ideological power. As a result of that shift, many new elements joined the ranks of the leftist trends as they were influenced by their political vision that promotes the principles of justice, equality and the defense of Arab human rights, without addressing in detail leftist views on religion, customs and traditions.<sup>88</sup>

The independence of Bahrain in 1971 and the mid-1970s after the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1975 and the suspension of the 1973 constitution marked turning points in the Bahraini political action as they witnessed an economic renaissance and the thriving of

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<sup>87</sup> That does not mean ruling out other elements or downplaying their impact in reaching political options on the organizational or practical levels or with regard to the announced political cover, as much as it means that it is important to analyze the historical depth of the Left in oil-rich Arab countries, mainly the Arabian Gulf.

<sup>88</sup> See Abbas al-Mirshid: *Left and Islamic Movement; Shift from Conflict to Alliance*; study published in Bahraini *Al-Waqt* newspaper.

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the state, although this caused political turbulence at the beginning, particularly on the distribution of wealth and power. The oil wealth created a new space for leftist trends to present their ideological vision that called for supporting poor and middle classes and adopting their protests against the greed of the ruling class and its elite. These trends were also able to present their political platform related to radical change, democracy, and restricting political powers of the Bahraini tribes.<sup>89</sup>

Unlike most of the leftist trends created based on social classes and the division of labor in society, the prevalence of leftist ideas in society had a purely political background and lacked an organized unionist structure and a production base that is independent of oil that is dominated by the ruling elite. The oil revenues monopolized by the ruling party and contracts signed with Western oil companies obstructed pursuits for the independence of states. Political tribes could not be independent as they competed with the ruling elite in the areas of "surplus power," not the essence of power.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, the productive work environment became inactive as most of the laborers and members of the middle class turned into highly-paid "government employees," which caused the working and middle classes to lose the independence they needed to create their own state of consciousness.

Throughout history, leftist trends had been in conflict with one another, and they had tried to use temporary ideologies of ethnicities as a cover, particularly in light of the emergence of military-run republics in several Arab countries. Hence, these trends were concerned with occupying some space within mother organizations and sought to distinguish themselves from other leftist and political organizations, even artificially. For example, disagreements within the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in Bahrain broke into pro-Iraq and pro-Syria groups. Moreover, disputes erupted between the Marxist Soviet-backed National Liberation Front and the leftist nationalist Popular

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<sup>89</sup>Khaldun al-Naqib, *Authoritarian State in Arab East*, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 1996.

<sup>90</sup>On the impact of oil on the legitimacy of political regimes, see Khaldun al-Naqib: *Conflict Between Tribe and Democracy*, Dar al-Saqi, Beirut, 1996

Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. By contrast, the 1970s were full of political names with partisan orientation to avoid such artificial differences, yet these fronts reached an impasse and died out as soon as their first discourse disappeared.

The causes of such organizational fragmentation and decline of popularity were not different from the causes of disunity and breakdown of leftist trends in the Arab world,<sup>91</sup> most importantly the collapse of protective ideologies and the sponsors of leftist and communist momentums. Moreover, the Arab experiences with communism, their swift transformation into sources of repression and authoritarianism, and using pluralism to maintain the protective ideology, only served the ruling party and its beneficiaries. Political events were so erratic, leading to divergent political views that caused a deep divide among leftist trends, both in terms of the organization of the state and participation in the establishment of the Constituent Society (1973) or in modern state institutions such as the National Council in Bahrain (established in 1974). This verified the hypothesis that leftist trends in oil countries only act on a fertile ground where regional and local factors and interest groups contribute to the Left's political vision and ideology.

More than one year before the Arab Spring, leftist trends experienced a very harsh identity crisis, thus losing popular confidence in their organizations and parties as well as in the remaining intrinsic ideologies. Hence, they lost in the elections and would not even win a seat in the parliament without seeking the support of central power; namely, the regime or popular Islamist trends. The leftist trends have become marginal and live on a painful accumulation of history and harsh self-evaluation, thus making radical changes in their political practice and replacing their ideological system with a pragmatic one that, at least, ensures their survival.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the second millennium, the leftist trends placed themselves in a politically and socially complicated and varied landscape in light of clear domination

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<sup>91</sup> On the stance of Arab leftist parties on Arab Spring, see Hisham Ghasib, *Left and Revolution*, Al-Tariq Magazine, 2012

## **"The Left and the Arab Revolutions"**

by the Islamist trends, both Sunni and Shiite. The new political cover, namely, the Political Associations Law, has largely minimized the role and popularity of the Left as it deepened differences within a legal system that created divided small political associations and revived obsolete political approaches.

These historical developments and accumulations have weakened leftist organizations and their political influence. After more than three decades, the leftist trends in Bahrain and regional countries, due to the emerging political and social transformations, have foggy ideologies that are hard to identify. One reason is that those representing these groups no longer belong to the poor and marginalized classes, and many leftist activists of the 1970s and 1980s have turned into entrepreneurs and landlords, and in some cases they have become part of the upper and middle classes, which makes the Marxist affiliation for many of them a secondary designation. This normally gives rise to Marxist liberalism as a controversial phenomenon yet a unique outcome of the oil wealth.

In general, the current leftist trends can break down into Marxist Left and Nationalist Left. The first type acts based on purely ideological principles that conform to the maxims and interpretations of Lenin. Hence, the Marxist Left seeks to apply Lenin's original Marxist policies that were later upgraded in the Soviet Union to better understand political developments and deal with their repercussions. Despite the fact that the National Liberation Front has not joined international communism, it adopts principles similar to those of the Soviet Union.

The Nationalist Left does not hide its embrace of the maxims of Karl Marx and Lenin, but its ideology centers around the New Left, which emerged following the May 1967 events that included the rise of Gramsci, Guevara, and Osha. The leftist trend in Bahrain was historically and politically divided between the Marxist Left (Progressive Democratic Forum Society, formerly the National Liberation Front) and the Nationalist Left (The Democratic National Action Society, formerly the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain).

On the organizational level, <sup>92</sup> three political associations represent the various leftist groups that are different in terms of ideologies and policies. These three associations are:

**Progressive Democratic Forum Society:** This society adopts the line of the “Bahraini National Liberation Front” established in 1954 on the basis of the maxims of Karl Marx and Lenin. The National Liberation Front was “formerly” viewed as a communist party in Bahrain, and it boycotted the elections of the Constituent Council in 1972 but participated in the National Assembly elections in 1973. The Progressive Democratic Forum Society participated in the 2002 elections despite its rejection of the mechanism of issuing the constitution, and three of its members won in the elections. Despite its participation in the elections of 2006 and 2010 after political associations ended their boycott, the party did not have any significant representation although it controls a key part of the country’s trade unions.

**Unitary National Democratic Assemblage:** This society represents followers of the Iraqi branch of the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party in Bahrain. It consists of a number of political and economic personalities and doctors who pursued their college education in Iraq during 1960s and 1970s. The Unitary National Democratic Assemblage boycotted the 2002 elections as part of a four-way alliance but participated in the 2006 and 2010 elections without winning a single seat.

**WAAD:** This is the largest political association in the democratic trend, and historically, it is seen as an extension of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. This association now has a coalition that consists of leftists, nationalists, independent figures, and technocrats. It boycotted the 2002 elections but participated in 2006 and 2010 through its change list that included six candidates, though none of them won a parliamentary seat.

Second: Leftist Positions toward Bahraini Uprising

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<sup>92</sup> See Abbas al-Murshid, Abd-al-Hadi al-Khawaja: *Political Organizations in Bahrain*, Fridies Publication, Beirut, 2009.

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Calls for the Bahraini revolution were launched on 25 January 2011, inspired by the outcome of the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. Within a short time, 14 February 2011 was announced as a day of public rage, marking the beginning of the Bahraini revolution. The Bahraini revolution and the Arab Spring were similar in three basic aspects:

- Ending political centralization and replacing it with unconditional democracy based on succession of power.
- Adopting peaceful activities and relying on large-scale mobilization of the masses.
- Relying on modern youth networks instead of partisan entities.

At the beginning, only advocates and some activists took the calls for the day of public rage, but reactions started to take a new turn in the third week, especially because similar calls spread in many other Arab countries within a short time (during the month of February 2011), in countries such as Libya, Syria, Morocco, Jordan, and Iran.

Opposition political forces had varied stances toward calls for observing days of rage and engaging in the Arab Spring, but they agreed that they should not immediately embrace the Arab Spring.<sup>93</sup> Pro-regime political forces openly rejected the calls for an Arab spring in Bahrain, while the government took some restrictive measures such as prohibiting demonstrations, applying censorship on the Internet, and holding political trials for political detainees). They also adopted temptation policies such as disbursing a 2,000 (unit? BD?) award for each Bahraini family, cutting down housing loans for military personnel, and the king's meeting with parliamentary blocs and political figures. All of this was aimed at containing the calls for public rage.

Calls for support and assistance that were expected to be announced to enhance the push for a revolution in Bahrain targeted two key trends:

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Abdallah Janaji, member of the central committee in the National Democratic Action Society on 9 February 2011

First: the *Al-Wefaq* National Islamic Society, which has a religious authority represented by the Islamic Scholars Council and Sheikh Issa Ahmad Qasim, especially because *Al-Wefaq* Society and its religious authority constitute the majority of the opposition forces.

Second: the Nationalist Left, represented by WAAD, an opposition association that attracts different components of the Bahraini society (Sunnis/ Shiites/ Arabs /non-Arabs), and has the largest weight among the followers of democratic and liberal trends. However, WAAD is targeted by other leftist political trends and pro-regime religious parties. Government-funded newspapers lashed out on calls for an Arab spring in Bahrain, accusing their advocates of being backward and subordinate to the Islamist trend and “*velayat-e faqih*.”<sup>94</sup>

Other political associations, especially secular ones (both leftist and democratic) were not the target of calls for supporting the revolution because of their weak representation among the masses as their influence has become restricted to small groups, or because their political vision focuses on reform from inside and showing complacency about the outputs of the existing political process.

Thus, the Bahraini leftist forces showed two levels of interaction with calls for the day of rage:

### **First: Bahraini Left’s Role**

- Calling for Bahrain's Day of Rage

In fact, the Left did not contribute significantly to the uprising in Bahrain, despite its calls for respecting human rights and despite its public political opposition to the regime’s repressive measures and confiscation of rights and freedoms. Those public calls were very similar to the positions of many other political forces and intellectuals

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<sup>94</sup> Article on National Democratic Action Society (Nationalist Left): *Paradoxes of Bahraini Opposition; Leftists and Nationalists Follow Velayat-el Faqih*, 13 October 2012; *Sectarianism in Bahraini Left*, by Yusuf al-Bin-Khalil, *Al-Watan* newspaper – issue No.2378; *Backward Left* (2-5, by Muhammad al-Mirbati; *Bahraini Life: How To Raise New Generation Free of Sectarianism?* “10”, by Dr. Nu’man al-Musawi, *Al-Watan* newspaper, issue No.2514

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toward major Arab issues, yet such calls reached an impasse as they considered the local and the internal situation as a special case different from other Arab experiences. This was the same position of pro-regime forces that had strongly advocated the freedom of the people of Egypt, Tunisia and other Arab countries and called for toppling regimes, but when it came to the case of Bahrain, they viewed the situation as a normal manifestation of "democracy" that does not amount to an Arab spring.

The Marxist Left (Progressive Democratic Forum Society) remained silent about calls for the day of rage, whereas the Nationalist Left (WAAD) took a public step, albeit belatedly, by supporting and participating in the day of rage following several meetings held by the WAAD'S central committee. The issue would have been left unresolved at the beginning, but it had been agreed to defer any partisan decision and allow WAAD members to express the position they deemed correct. One day before the launch of the day of rage, WAAD held a meeting on 12 February to put all previous political stands aside and announce official support for the day of rage. WAAD demanded that authorities protect the demonstrators and allow them to exercise their political rights in a peaceful and civilized manner.<sup>95</sup>

There is no doubt that the escalation of events following the departure of former Egyptian President Muhammad Husni Mubarak, the government's uncalculated actions, and the involvement of influential political figures such as Hasan Mushaymi, the secretary general of the *Haq* Movement for Liberty and Democracy, and official spokesman for *Al-Wafa* Islamic Movement Abd-al-Wahhab Husayn and human rights activists Abd-al Hadi al-Khawaja and Nabil Rajab in supporting the day of rage, have led the WAAD leaders to show their public support. Other political associations did not clearly announce their political positions so as to see the possible outcome of these protests on that day, and whether the Arab uprising would be powerful or if it would be a repeat of rebel movements prevalent since 2006. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the position of the Nationalist Left's open and official decision to answer the calls for an

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<sup>95</sup> Minutes of WAAD's Sixth Conference 2012, political report presented to the Sixth Conference.

Arab spring in Bahrain was a historic one as it put the Nationalist Left back on track after it had failed to participate in the uprising of 5 March 1965 and the Constitution's Uprising in 1994, a position more advanced than that adopted by other leftist forces.

### **- Participation in Non-Stop Sit-Ins**

With the outbreak of the Bahraini revolution in the morning of 14 February 2011, events escalated dramatically, especially after the announcement of the first martyr in the evening of the same day and then the fall of the second martyr during the funeral procession of the first one in the morning of 15 February. As a result, the day of rage faced larger challenges than expected. Throughout that critical period, political opposition groups - including leftist forces – started to make media appearances and issued statements criticizing the security measures against the demonstrators. However, these groups did not take any further steps, such as engaging their leaders in the demonstrations or embracing the demonstrators' options. One exception perhaps was leftist leader Ibrahim Sharif (secretary general of WAAD), who issued a statement for WAAD's central committee in support of the day of rage. It was also Sharif himself who took to the streets and led the protesters in the attempt to reach the demonstration venue, the Pearl Roundabout. Immediately after building the sit-in platform, Sharif delivered a short speech addressing the protesters. He said: "We want this place to be the people's parliament, and I hope that we do not leave this place tonight. This protest should have a place to which people would come to know each other and elect field leaders."<sup>96</sup>

Ever since the day of rage, other leftist forces had actively asked their members to participate in the activities of the Pearl Roundabout protests. WAAD erected its own tent upon an organizational decision so as to open communication channels with the youth activists in the field and coordinate with the effective parties there. In the meantime, Sharif and his deputy addressed issues related to other political associations, media and external relations. For its part, the Progressive

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<sup>96</sup> Ibrahim Sharif speech at the Pearl Roundabout on 15 February 2011

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Democratic Forum Society's central committee met on 15 February and decided to participate in the political mobility movement, on the condition of "commitment to our legitimate demand to restrict the powers given to the constitutional monarchy and within the constitutional and legal legitimacy. We also demand respect for our citizenship rights, which prompted these protest movements in the first place, and in line with our political goals and demands stipulated by our statute and platform."<sup>97</sup>

Leftist forces also participated in other tents built for different segments of society, such as tents for lawyers, doctors, and journalists, some of whom were affiliates of these leftist forces and others were veteran political activists. Several activities took place inside those tents, including lectures, seminars and works of art such as shows of movies, drawing, or patriotic songs.

Such participation by leftist parties was weak compared with the organizers of the Arab spring in Bahrain, in terms of creating and directing the course of events. The leftist forces were unable to keep pace with the protest movement because their ceiling of demands was different, as it ranged between minimizing the powers of the constitutional monarchy and the overthrow of the regime. Their roles were limited to giving support to those who would organize and escalate the situation. This could be noticed in the leftist forces' failure to support the activities of the youth coalition officially while it was apparently sufficient for them to play some active roles in the protest fields.

On the other hand, the involvement of the leftist forces was very necessary to give the protest movement the same momentum as the Arab Spring, by reaching a semi-national consensus on the protests and on the existing centralized political system. This had given the leftist forces a boost to revive relations with the masses and end its leaders' isolation from the public in a new competitive atmosphere. On the one hand, the Bahraini protest movement had prompted the

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<sup>97</sup> Progressive Democratic Forum Society's Central Committee: Document on critical review of the Progressive Forum position toward 14 February Protest Movement, 15 June 2011, [http://www.altaqadomi.com/ar-BH/Document\\_critical\\_review.aspx](http://www.altaqadomi.com/ar-BH/Document_critical_review.aspx), visited on 20 January 2012

leftist youth to emerge as independent of their organizational fanaticism and to reorganize youth movements that had emerged in Bahrain in the 1960s and 1970s from under the cloak of the Marxist Left and the Nationalist Left, such as the Leftist Youth Coalition and the Marxist National Liberation Front.

## **Second: Organizational Level and Participation in Bahraini Uprising**

The leftist political parties and associations reacted to the calls for the day of rage, preparing for demonstrations and rallies. This level breaks down into two tracks. The first track is related to the organization of political associations and the leftist forces as part of Arab spring forces in Bahrain. The second track is the political forces' interactions with the main advocates of the Arab spring in Bahrain.

### **First Track: Role of Political Associations in Bahraini Uprising**

Opposition political associations (parties) had adopted an approach that is different from that of the Bahraini protest movement as they led the groups demanding restrictions to the absolute powers given to the constitutional monarchy. Those associations had announced the establishment of a political alliance consisting of seven political associations (Islamist, leftist, and nationalist). The Unitary National Democratic Assemblage had withdrawn from the alliance two days after it had been announced. At the same time, secular forces participating in the alliance focused their efforts on uniting political vision and tried to establish a democratic alliance of three leftist associations; namely, The Progressive Democratic Forum Society, the National Democratic Action Society, and the Unitary National Democratic Assemblage.

The National Democratic Action Society (Nationalist Left) led the alliance in both tracks, but efforts had failed to develop a democratic one, but the political alliance remained generally active under the leadership of Ibrahim Sharif, at whose house the heads of political associations would meet. Sharif also played a leading role in drafting the demands of political associations according to their political demands, at the top of which were drafting the Bahraini Constitution, resignation of the government, and the formation of a national salvation government.

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The six-way alliance continued until the Peninsula Shield forces and the Bahraini Army intervened in the political situation and dispersed the sit-in at the Pearl Roundabout, which involved crackdown and sectarian cleansing of all spectrums of opposition forces. WAAD was among the primary targets of the crackdown; its secretary general was arrested and stood military trial. Also, WAAD's offices were burned, and later the military ruler issued a decision to seal its headquarters between April 2011 and June 2011 when WAAD submitted a statement of apology to the Bahraini Army. The Marxist Left (Progressive Democratic Forum Society) went through a stage of harsh self-criticism and refrained from participating in the Bahraini uprising, considering this participation a sin that had not been reckoned with, while hoping events would take a normal course by achieving reform from inside. Following this critical review, the Marxist Left withdrew from the alliance and issued a statement regarding this review, thus distancing itself far from any political movement related to the Arab Spring, whether through political associations or youth activities leading the Arab Spring. The Progressive Democratic Forum Society considered the mobility dominating the country since March 2011 as unjustified violence, and the demands as unrealistic and contrary to the approved political procedures. The critical review document clearly indicated that The Progressive Democratic Forum Society was mistaken for not announcing its position to the public opinion and society in a separate statement that clearly identifies positions and efforts against escalation, even if this position would raise the ire of protesters at the Pearl Roundabout and would divide opposition views. The Progressive Democratic Forum Society did not have enough reasons to insist on its position during the meetings and contacts and in light of efforts to prevent escalation in the country. The Society's general congress approved this document, which has become a binding decision for the Society's central committee and its political bureau.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hasan Isma'il: *Progressive Forum Society's Alliances Firm-Footed, Based on Intellectual and Organizational Independence*, Article Published on the Society's website: <http://www.altaqadomi.com/ar-BH/ViewArticle/6/4183/Articles.aspx>, visited on 20 January 2012

## **- Second Track: Interaction with Youth Forces**

Given the political situation in Bahrain and the absolute hegemony and authoritarian ruling there, youth forces did not act openly, unlike many Arab Spring revolutions, and they adopted secrecy in interaction with other political parties, including those that agree with the youth forces on the call for toppling the regime.

Accessing and controlling the Pearl Roundabout was key to interactions between youth forces and political associations, including leftist ones. At the same time, previous political stands on the Bahraini uprising showed the actual level of interaction among the concerned parties. It was difficult for the forces described as pragmatic to adapt to the activities at the Roundabout and have a chance to participate in its activities, while the forces that were close to the masses and known for constant mobility and political “rejection” were close to playing a more positive role and ensuring quick reaction by youth forces.

In other words, the Nationalist Left can interact with the youth forces and understand many of their concerns, especially because the secretary general of WAAD had led the process of accessing the Roundabout the first time, and was present at the time of the Bahraini Army attack on protesters on 17 February. Also, he was among the first people who returned to the Roundabout on 20 February. This was true for other members of the Nationalist Left, as they were closer to the spirit of the Bahraini revolution, compared with the Marxist Left that remained in political isolation as a result of some previous political views, including participation in the 2002 elections and ending the boycott that opposition groups unanimously agreed to observe.

It was not surprising that the political associations meetings and their positions were made public. The “critical review document” mentioned above had acknowledged much of the news about the meetings and positions. The document, for example, referred to the role that the Progressive Democratic Forum Society in lowering the ceiling of the demands set by the seven political associations in response to the initiative of the Bahraini Crown Prince to start a national dialogue. The document also noted success in modifying the demands. However, they did not impose the necessary atmosphere of flexibility for dealing with the dialogue initiative because of escalation

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by some opposition parties, which led to rejecting some of the demands stated in the document. The Progressive Democratic Forum Society, during meetings with other political associations and in all other meetings, rejected some political movements announcing the escalation of slogans that are rejected on the political and popular levels. The slogans rejected were the calls for the overthrow of the regime and for forming an alliance with the aim of establishing a republic, as stated in their document, which added: "We also rejected provocative marches such as Al-Riffa and Al-Safiriyah Palace, and all calls for escalation and civil disobedience, banditry, putting up barricades, and demonstrating in front of public facilities such as financial institutions and Al-Salmaniyah Hospital. We are also against the involvement of teachers and students in the events that led to the disruption of the educational process, and against organizing protests without prior coordination. Moreover, we called for stopping such agenda as it poses a serious danger to the country and national unity and gives adequate justification for security intervention. However, such escalation imposed a serious agenda on the street."<sup>99</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Left's position and degree of participation in Bahrain's unrest did not translate into a unified position due to the divergent policies of leftist forces. Although the Nationalist Left reacted very well to the Bahraini uprising -- although it did not play an influential role in it -- it abandoned many of its political platforms, mainly due to the critical review it made in the early 1990s and because it adopted the policy of ending party-centered ideologies. On the other hand, the Marxist Left tried to benefit from the Bahraini uprising, but it could not continue because of its long-standing policies that have been in place for more than a decade. Such policies are based on the amplification of ideologies through firm pragmatism. As a result of these differences, a general analysis of the leftist positions toward the Arab Spring helped monitor their political performance, while weak positions were due to ideological failure among leftist forces that adopted classical approaches. Besides, addressing this setback

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<sup>99</sup> Critical Review Document by the Progressive Democratic Forum Society, op cit.

requires a review of these policies, ideologies and beliefs related to amplifying ideologies to achieve political objectives. Perhaps one drawback that impeded the materialization of these objectives was an excessive reliance on elite leaders to make political achievements.

Such caution by political forces, including leftist ones, is mainly attributed to the generation gap, as most of the heads and the leaders of leftist parties were over 50 years old, while the youth forces mobilizing protests were under the age of 30, not to mention the lack of communication that already existed between the two generations.

It turns out that the policy of ending party-centered ideologies was more effective than amplifying such ideologies with respect to the Arab Spring. Whenever ideological effects diminish, there will be better chances for positive interaction with the new political movement, which is generally not bound by specific ideologies.

A follow-up on leftist views on the prolongation of the uprising in Bahrain or the harsh blows it received indicates that the Left can retract again to the ideology-oriented policies, yet in agreement with the policy review approach. This could mean further isolation, as in the case of the Marxist Left, or retraction to old methodologies, as in the case of the Nationalist Left.

**The left and the Arab Spring: The Complexities  
of Organization and Movement**

**Georges Fahmi**

Arab leftist organizations face a major problem in communicating with the left-oriented popular movements, especially within the circles of students and workers. Most of the protests launched by these movements have surprised the Leftist organizations even if they have sought, at a later stage, to join and become part of them. This had happened in Egypt in 1977 with the bread uprising or more recently with the Arab protest waves, or what has been termed as the "Arab Spring." However, the Arab Spring, which was characterized by the millions of people who took part in it and went to the streets and yards, at an ongoing basis and throughout a period of more than two years, has made it possible for the Leftist organizations to meet those movements in the protest yards of al-Tahrir Square, the Pearl Roundabout, the Change Yard, as well as other Arab anger yards. This was the historic opportunity for the Leftist organizations and movements to revise their confused relations and initiate a new era in the history of the Arab Left.

This chapter seeks to analyze the relation of the Leftist Arab movements with Left oriented movements through finding answers to the following questions: 1) Why were the relations between the two tepid during the pre-Arab Spring? 2) What are the opportunities which the Arab Spring has provided for them to meet? 3) What is the future of the relations between the two? 4) Would this meeting lead to the renewal of these organizations' blood or to the same form of relations that prevailed before the Arab Spring? These questions will be answered by studying the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria in order to analyze these relations and their future.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first is about the state of the Leftist organizations before the Arab Spring; the second about the situation on the eve of the outbreak of the Arab protest; the third about the relationship between Leftist organizations and movements during the protest waves; and finally, the last section

addresses the future of the relations between the two and the challenges facing these relations.

### **First: The Leftist Organizations and the Complexity of Building a Leftist Movement**

The Arab Leftist organizations, with the exception of the Yemeni Left, have suffered from their being unable to communicate with grassroots movements with Leftist orientation. They remained locked in their Leftist organizations, and this has led to non-ending disagreements and splits. This issue is due to several factors, some of which are related to the Leftist organizations themselves, their method of work, and their organizational structures, and others are related to the political climate in the Arab countries, especially during the post-independence era and obstacles set by the Arab political regimes to confront the political activism of the Leftist organizations, their support to Rightist religious streams in order to confront the Left as is the case in Egypt and Tunisia during the 1970's and 80's.

In Egypt, Leftist organizations have distanced themselves from the poor and marginalized people's movements even when it was clear that there is a state of popular outrage on its way to explode because of *al-Sadat* economic policies in the mid 1970's. The Leftist organizations were surprised when the protests started on 18 and 19 January, 1997 against the economic decision of *al-Sadat* the same way that the political regime was surprised. Although the experience of creating the National Progressive Unionist Party (*Tagammu*) in 1976 to gather the different spectrums (Marxists, nationalists, pan-Arab and enlightened religious streams) had created lots of hope, this experience failed because the Party did not succeed in becoming a broad Leftist party and because its leaders were not able to deep-root the Leftist approach and make it reach the broadest sectors of the people. This has made many Leftist groups walk out and join smaller organizations or civil society organizations which started to flourish at that time.

In Syria, Leftist organizations, similar to the Egyptian scenario, had witnessed many splits. The Syrian Communist Party, whose Secretary General was Ammar Bakdash, had split into the United Syrian Communist Party with Hanin Nimr as Secretary and the

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National Committee for the Unity of Syrian Communists," led by Qadri Jamil.

The situation in Tunisia was similar. Leftist parties in Tunisia witnessed a clear diminishing role with the beginning of the 1970's. Since then, the Left started to become "small quantitative and qualitative groups that are mainly present in the university."<sup>100</sup> In light of the failure of the Leftist organizations to communicate with its society, a big sector of the Leftist activists walked out of the political activism field and joined civil society organizations through cultural activities or through spreading a human rights culture. An example of this is Nour al-Din Khader, who was among the founders of the Leftist *Afaq* (Perspectives) Movement, but he walked out to civil society and was one of the founders of the Amnesty International's office in Tunisia.

In Bahrain, too, things are not different. The Left in Bahrain, as described by Abbas al-Murshid, had become an "elitist framework living on an accumulated history mixed with blood." This had led to a radical change in its vision and practice of politics and its replacement of the ideological system by a pragmatic one which allows, at least, its elitist framework to survive.<sup>101</sup>

The political context of the Yemeni Left was different than that of the Arab Leftist forces, but it also suffered from the same problems. The Leftist Yemeni organizations have succeeded in communicating with a popular base which formed a popular support base for them. They also succeeded in instilling the values of rights and freedoms among this class. However, when this Left reached power in the south of Yemen and afterwards in the north, the Leftist organizations were not able to formulate their values in clear and active policies, and this led to the deepening of the gap between them and the society. This gap was used by the religious forces afterward to fill the vacuum.

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<sup>100</sup> Sonia Tamimi, "*The Predicament of the Tunisian Left*", a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab Revolutions," Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 4.

<sup>101</sup> Abbas al-Murshid, "*The Crisis of the Leftist Ideology in the Arab Spring*," a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab Revolutions," Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 6.

For their part, the Arab regimes, too, have sought to block any contact between the Leftist organizations and movements, which may form a popular base for them. As such, they have put a wide range of restrictions on their media and partisan activities. In their endeavors, the Arab regimes followed two paths: the first was to classify Leftist organizations as licensed and banned organizations. This has given the Arab regimes an active tool to reward and penalize these Leftist organizations in case they deviate from the paths which the regimes want them to follow. In Tunisia, there were recognized Leftist organizations, such as the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties, and there were also organizations that had chosen underground work such as the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, led by Hamma Hammami. Egypt had also witnessed the same phenomenon. The *Tagammu* was the expression of the recognized opposition, while the revolutionary socialist organizations and the Egyptian Communist Party were underground organizations. As for Syria, some communist parties have participated in power such as the Syrian Communist, and others remained in the opposition such as the Syrian Communist - the Politburo.

Besides that, the Arab political regimes have adopted a policy of supporting religious Rightist movements, especially in Egypt and Tunisia in order to restrict the work of the Leftist organizations and prevent them from spreading and from having influence, especially among students. The political power in Egypt and Tunisia have found in the religious Rightist groups an effective force in confronting Leftist organizations, and the two regimes adopted a discourse that urges people to return to religion and its importance for the Egyptian and Tunisian societies. At the same time, they allowed the Rightist religious forces to freely move in the universities starting as of the mid 1970's.

In general, what had characterized the Arab Left during the period of the seventies until the beginning of the twenty-first century are its fragmentation, its superior discourse, its elitist frameworks, and its inability to communicate with the masses and build popular support. As a result of this climate, many of the Leftist activists walked out and joined civil society to participate in its organizations and initiatives in order to promote a culture of rights and freedoms and expand the margin of freedom of public work, away from the closed

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political activism. A sector of the Leftist youth had chosen to work independently or under movements gathering the different ideologies away from the closed Leftist organizations.

### **Second: The Left on the Eve of the Arab Spring**

While Leftist forces had failed in finding vertical communication channels with the society, the years leading up to the wave of the Arab Spring have seen horizontal convergence with the Islamic political forces in an attempt to overcome ideological differences and to line up in order to confront the Arab authoritarian regimes. In Yemen, the JMP was created in February 2003, and it was considered the first political alliance between the Left and the Islamists in the Arab region. It was composed of the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization, the National Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party and Religious Reform Party as well as other movements and parties. The JMP coordinated between its various factions in the parliamentary and presidential elections, and it participated in the 2006 presidential election with one candidate: Faisal bin Shamlan. The *Kifaya* Movement was founded in Egypt in 2004 and it was composed of politicians from the Islamic, Leftist and liberal streams. The movement had worked to end Mubarak's rule, and it refused the inheritance of power as manifested in the slogan "No to extension, no inheritance (of authority)." In Syria, following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the political pressures on the Syrian regime that accompanied this phase, the "Damascus Declaration" was formed, and it gathered leftist, nationalist and Islamic parties with the aim to achieve transition from tyranny to democracy.

However, all these initiatives for rapprochement between the leftist and Islamic forces, with all of their positive sides, were not able to solve the crisis of the disrupted communication between the Left forces and the society.

On another level, the first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed the emergence of a new generation of young people in the public sphere in the Arab countries under study, carrying some ideas which intersect with the Left such as social justice and other ideas with a broad political nature such as freedom and democracy. This youth seems as if it refuses the idea of joining the closed Leftist

organizations and is more willing to work with open movements which give them greater freedom of movement. In Egypt, the protests situation, which began in 2004, allowed the mobilization of youth from different streams who became bored with the old organizations and preferred to engage in movements such as the April 6, the *Kifaya* Youth, the "We are all Khaled Said and the Justice and Freedom. According to Ayman Abdel Muti, a large segment of these young people has "a Leftist orientation, even though they do not describe themselves as Leftists."<sup>102</sup> In Tunisia, the engagement of a group of Leftists in the activities of civil society has led to close relations between Leftists and the civil society organizations, and especially with the General Union of Tunisian Workers, in addition to the involvement of a section of the youth in political activism on the Internet in order to get around the restrictions of the Ben Ali regime. This was considered by Sonia Tamimi, an expression of the "new left"<sup>103</sup> which has made additions to the political activism on the eve of the Arab Spring. In Bahrain, too, there were some demand-driven protest movements in the years that preceded the Arab Spring. These protest movements crystallized in the form of the People's Committees, and they were able to enjoy the strong support of civil society and human rights activists, foremost among them, Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, a human rights activist. The same thing happened in Syria and Yemen; while the role of the Leftist organizations declined, the role of the new independent Leftists grew.

During this period, there were communication attempts between the Left and the labor protest movements which had started to recover during the years that preceded the Arab Spring. Some members of the revolutionary socialists organizations in Egypt have sought to communicate with the workers of Mahalla in order to expand the margins of their demands from improving the working conditions of laborers and pushed them towards demanding the minimum wage

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<sup>102</sup> Ayman Abdel Muti, "The Egyptian Revolution and the Role of the Left, Success and Failure Factors," a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab Revolutions," Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 5.

<sup>103</sup> Sonia Tamimi, "The Predicament of the Tunisian Left", a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab Revolutions," Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 5.

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level. Moreover, some Leftist figures, such as Adnan Elhaji in Tunisia, have played a pivotal role in supporting the mining basin protests that broke out in 2008 in the Gafsa province, which lasted for several months. The Leftist Tunisian media has also supported and defended the demands of the people of Gafsa.

### **Third: The Leftist Organizations and the Arab Spring**

Factional protest movements escalated. In addition, this new generation of young people who rushed into the public domain with the beginning of the third millennium, has created a state of congestion which the Arab regimes could not handle. While all eyes were on Egypt, which had seen non-stop protests and demonstrations against the Mubarak regime during the last years of his reign, the spark of the Arab Spring started from Tunisia in December 2010, and it inspired the rest of the Arab countries, especially Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.

The Arab leftist organizations were absent when the call for demonstrations, which turned into an Arab Spring, started. The revolutionary scene was occupied by young people who became involved in the protest action during the years prior to 2011. In Tunisia, the field leaders of the popular movement were young people demanding their social and political rights after the death of Bouazizi. In Egypt, the call for protests started on the "We are all Khaled Said," page before being advocated by the April 6 Youth, the National Association for Change and the Movement for Justice and Freedom. In Bahrain, the call launched by a number of youth and activists for a Bahraini day of rage on February 14, was inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences. The same thing happened in Yemen and Syria, where the youth were in the forefront of the protest scene. Although a sector of the young people who called for the demonstrations in the Arab countries under study had its leftist allegiances, this sector has opted to participate in the protests in its individual capacity in order not to be hindered by its partisan obligations while coordinating with other youth groups.

In addition to the youth, workers and trade unions played an important role in pushing the protest movement on the track of toppling the existing political regimes. In Tunisia, the Union of Tunisian Workers opened its headquarters to become the place for the

launch of demonstrations. It also gave a big blow to the Ben Ali's regime with the success of the strike organized by the Union in Sfax on January 12, 2011, two days before the fall of the regime. In Egypt, too, while it seemed that the Mubarak regime would be able to pass the 25 January 2011 crisis during the first week of February, the escalation of protests by the workers during the second week of February ended any chance to override the protest movement and precipitated the fall of the regime.

The popular mobility came as a surprise to the Leftist organizations and their attitudes regarding them have varied. In Egypt, the *Tagammu* had agreed on the principle of negotiations with the Mubarak regime while this principle was not accepted by the broader sector of the demonstrators in al-Tahrir Square. In Yemen, the same thing happened. The JMP accepted the Gulf initiative and the youth of the Yemeni Socialist Party refused it. In Tunisia, although Ben Ali escaped from the country on January 14, 2011, the Leftist organizations became divided between those "who quickly moved to join the government" fearing the falling of the state such as the Progressive Democratic Party and other organizations who saw in the toppling of Ben Ali's regime an opportunity for a comprehensive change of the political game rules such as martyr Chokri Belaid and Hama Hammami.

In Syria, the Leftist parties participating in power, such as the Syrian Communist Party and the United Syrian Communists demanded from the regime to implement economic and political reforms and lined up with the ruling regime against what they described as a "conspiracy against Syria." However, the opposition communist parties supported the revolution and their support took many forms. Some tried to balance between the revolution and the anti-imperialism position, which made them look as if they were closer to the ruling regime, especially as the revolution was heading towards militarization, such as the Marxist Left Gathering and the leadership of the Arab Socialist Union. Some other political parties were fully supportive of the revolution such as the Democratic People's Party and the Revolutionary Workers Party, and this reflected itself on the participation of the Leftist organizations in the revolution, which was limited and which focused mainly on political alliances. Others created "National Coordination Committee for the Forces of

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Democratic Change" which called for a political solution through putting pressure on the Assad regime to accept a peaceful transition of power. However, the rapid pace of violence marginalized the political approach of the Coordination Committee especially with the increase in the influence of the opposition outside the country which has created the Syrian National Council with the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood, liberal academics, the Damascus Declaration group, along with the People's Party and the Revolutionary Workers Party.

In Bahrain, the Marxist Progressive Democratic Forum Society kept silent regarding the calls for a Bahraini day of rage. However, the Democratic National Action Association, *Waad*, supported the call even if this support was late. The leaders of the Bahraini Left were absent from the Day of Rage events on February 14 and the subsequent events with the exception of Ibrahim Sharif, the Secretary-General of the Association who participated in the demonstrations, and led them to reach the Pearl Roundabout. Following the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout, the Leftist organizations joined the demonstrators in a scene similar to what happened following the occupation of al-Tahrir Square in Cairo. However, the participation of the Leftist organizations remained limited compared to the activism of independent groups within the protest. While Leftist associations has participated with the unorganized youth in the Pearl Roundabout protests from February 15 to 17 March 2011, however, their stances changed after the invasion of the roundabout by Peninsula Shield forces. The Progressive Forum Association issued a statement apologizing for its participation in the Bahrain Spring and *Waad* apologized to the army after the arrest of Ibrahim Sharif and his transfer to a military court.

As for Yemen, the Yemeni Socialist Party had witnessed a split between its leadership, which was committed to the JMP stance, and it accepted the Gulf initiative and the youth of the party who decided to move independently without waiting for the decisions of the party leaders. This movement was described by Bushra Maqtiri as the

"renewed Yemeni Left Yemeni."<sup>104</sup> This stream refused the principle of political compromises and limiting the role of the popular movement to just toppling the head of the regime. It insisted on the demands of the Yemeni protestor on the importance of complete change to the rules of the political game.

In this revolutionary climate, the Left oriented Arab youth attempted to create new organizations to fit this new climate. The Tunisian Left formed the popular committees to protect the revolution, which was composed of active Leftists and unionists. However, this experience failed because of the spontaneous way of forming the committees and the diversity within them. In Yemen, the renewed Leftist stream had sought to organize itself in the form of blocs and coordination councils at the level of the provinces. Among the most prominent coordination bodies were the Forum of Modernity Forces in Sanaa, the February 11 Revolutionists in Taiz and the Youth of Escalation and Revolutionary Decisiveness. In Syria, the young people of the Leftist parties – those participating in the government and those who were not - were all supportive of the revolution regardless of their leaders' stances. These youth forces soon started to form organizational structures and to be active under names such as the Communists Coordination Committees and Vision for Change, as examples. On the internet, the Revolutionary Left Stream was created, and it started to issue the *al-Khat al-Amami* (The Front Line) Newspaper and the Syrian Left Coalition which issued the *al-Yassari* (The Leftist) newspaper. Moreover, the latter has issued a document entitled: "Our Tasks in the Current Revolution" in which it provided an analysis of the economic composition which had been formed during the last decade in Syria and its impact on popular classes for the benefit of Syrian businessmen close to the Assad regime.<sup>105</sup> In Egypt, the youth participating in the revolution formed the Revolution

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<sup>104</sup> Bushra Maqtiri, "Prospects for the Renewal of the Left in Yemen and Its Challenges," a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab Revolutions," Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 6.

<sup>105</sup> Salameh Kaileh, "On the Role of the Syrian Left in the Syrian Revolution," a paper presented to the Conference on "The Left and the Arab revolutions, Cairo 24-25 April 2013, p 9.

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Youth Coalition, which brought together various political spectrums: the leftist, the liberals and the Islamists. Moreover, popular gatherings were also formed such as the Popular Committees for the Protection of the Revolution, which had started during the lawless period in order to protect their residential areas, and then they became involved in the community and the developmental activities following the stabilization of the security situation. These committees are active in several Egyptian governorates.

In spite of the ideological diversity of those participating in the Arab Spring revolutions' waves in the different countries, the revolutions were clearly Left oriented as reflected in their slogans demanding social justice and bias to the toilers. The left, even though it had organizationally failed during the years preceding the Arab Spring, its ideas were the engine that moved the sectors of Arab youth who went to the street to demand their economic and political rights.

### **Fourth: The Stumbled Spring and the Future of the Arab Left**

We can say that the Arab Spring has provided the opportunity for the Left oriented youth and labor movements that have participated in this revolutionary wave, by mobilizing people and advocating it to meet with the Leftist parties who joined these movements at a later stage in the revolution's yards. At the time when the march of the Arab Spring seemed to be faced with several crises, either from the old regime forces or religious forces that were seeking to inherit it and produce a new authoritarian regime, the Leftist organizations, too, are facing the challenge of changing their organizational rules and their old ideas which had made them isolated groups distant from the street over the past decades. Now, they have become obliged to adopt new organizational structures which allow them to accommodate new groups and movements which have participated in the Arab Spring wave and which have proven in their slogans and ideas that their demands intersect with many of the Leftist values.

### **In his study on the Bahraini Left, Abbas al-Murshid wrote:**

"The Bahraini revolution has revealed that among the major factors of the damage of the Left is its lack of a political vision consistent with the ideology of the new Left, partisan and elitist narrow-mindedness, its inability to develop a political discourse

capable of interacting with the prevailing protest environment, its tendency to make close relations with the existing conditions (the political authority as well and the political system) instead of developing positive relations with the demand-driven groups in the street."<sup>106</sup>

These are the complexities facing the Arab Leftist parties, in general, during the period that has followed the overthrow of Arab regimes, as is the case in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. In Yemen, the Yemeni Socialist Party is facing the challenge of renewing its organizational structure to integrate and give a chance "to a renewed Left" which has become active during the revolution in the decision-making process, and which was able to overcome the problem of diminished communications between the leaders of the party and its popular base. In Tunisia and Egypt, the Leftist forces have taken a different path when some Leftist forces tried to create new organizations to gather the different Leftist groups.

In Tunisia, the People's Front, composed of 11 Leftist and nationalist parties groups, was formed. In Egypt, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party was formed to be a broad party for the Left in all of its streams. The independent Left plays an important role in these two experiences. In Tunisia, the independent Left plays a prominent role in the popular front's coordination committees in the different provinces. Moreover, the independent Leftists play an important role in the creation and the work of the Popular Socialist Alliance Party in Egypt although there is a broad sector that recently decided to withdraw from the party.

While there were hopes on the possibility of building more effective leftist parties than their predecessor with the wave of hope that has accompanied the fall of the Ben Ali, Mubarak and Saleh's regimes, many of those hopes have not met. Perhaps what has happened to the People's Socialist Alliance is a clear example of the crisis that is facing the Arab Left in the era of the post-departure of Arab authoritarian regimes. While the Socialist Popular Alliance Party was the result of the meeting between independent Leftist groups and

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<sup>106</sup> Abbas al-Murshid, op cit, p 3.

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other Leftists who were members of old Leftist organizations in al-Tahrir Square, the party quickly split into what is known as the "*Tagammu*" wing, relative to the National Progressive Unionist Party, and the independent leftist youth. While the independent Leftist youth have lacked the experience of organized partisan work and the method of administrating coalitions within it, the "*Tagammu*" wing was able to achieve a big success during the internal elections of the party. This has made many of the independent youth, who joined the party, feel that nothing has changed and then they decided to submit their resignations. This has again reflected the duality of the organization and the movement.

The experience of the Popular Alliance, which raised many hopes, had been unable to accommodate and communicate with movements with Leftist orientation. This has made many of its members resign to protest the failure of the party to communicate with the revolutionary movements and groups with Leftist orientation and its inability to develop its organizational tools so as to become a broad party for the Left. This has been very clearly expressed in the resignation of Ayman Abdel Muti, the Secretary-General of Awareness in Cairo, who resigned from the Socialist Popular Alliance Party:

"Because I believe that Socialist Popular Alliance Party has failed, in my opinion, to play the role of the engine in the social and political struggles in the circles of workers, peasants, fishermen, employees, residents of slums and poor areas and professionals, and because it has failed in always taking the initiative and seeking to mobilize the movement's leaders in its ranks through struggling side by side with it and through its participation as a struggling party, not only as a supportive or a sympathizer.... And because the party did not seek to interact with the revolutionary groups that were formed from the womb of the events and their evolution to win them on a struggle and unity grounds and enter with them into broad frontal work in case they don't join in... and also because the party did not seek to develop its political and organizational tools to actually reflect the possibility of the success of a broad and open party capable of attracting all those who are turning left in the reality of the struggle movement, even if the concept of the Left or belonging to it in the classic sense of the word does not apply to them. For all these reasons,

I announce my full withdrawal and my resignation from the membership of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party. Please accept my deepest comradeship regards to every honorable struggler. I express my deep respect and appreciation even if they disagree with my decision and my assessment of the situation within the party now. The revolution is very spacious, and we will definitely meet on its path."<sup>107</sup>

The stumbling of the Arab Spring not only reflects the failure in changing the political regimes and the rules of the political game, but it is also an expression of the failure of opposition political organizations to overcome their old style of work and their organizational structures which prevailed before the wave of the Arab Spring. The case of the Arab Left is clear evidence of this. While the protest movement has failed in changing the structure of the Arab political regimes, the independent and renewed Left is facing huge difficulties in changing the work style of the Leftist organizations. Thus, many of the Leftist figures have opted to work independently, away from their organizations, as is the case of the "Revolution Path Front," which has recently emerged in Egypt and which gathers in its ranks a wide spectrum of independent Leftist forces and youth movements who became fed up with the Leftist organizations and their problems

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<sup>107</sup> The text of the resignation of Ayman Abdel Muti, the Secretary-General of Awareness in Cairo, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party.

**The Political Performance of the Left after  
the Arab Revolutions**

**Habiba Mohsen**

In his paper on the Syrian Left after the Revolution, Slameh Kaileh noted that the term "Left" should not necessarily carry an ideological charge. He said that it is more a term that describes those who call for progressive and advanced stances, which often serve the interests of the poorer classes unlike the "Right" forces which seek to maintain the status quo. But with the passage of time, some of the political streams started - once they announce that they adopt a particular ideology - to classify themselves as Leftist parties even if these parties defend the continuation of existing conditions as they are and even if they strongly resist change. This paradox is reflected in the political performance of the forces that classify themselves as belonging to the left in the Arab world.

**Three types of organizations:**

By reviewing the five case studies presented in the previous chapters of this book, we can distinguish between the three forms of leftist organizations in the countries of the Arab Spring. These forms are not separate from each other, but there are areas of overlapping between them:

**The old traditional left:**

These are the traditional left elites of old organizations or parties, which were founded and have worked in the pre-revolution period. These have basic features which make them - despite the fact that they continually say that they belong to the Left camp in its ideological sense - adopt a political approach that seeks to appease the existing regimes and maintain the status quo. Moreover, the performance of these parties is characterized by the low ceiling of their demands in confronting the regimes, appeasing them, avoiding animosities with them, entering into alliances with them or even playing the role of a cartoon like opposition.

The most blatant example of this group is the different Syrian communist parties participating in power: the Syrian Communist Party and the Syrian Communist Party (Unified), who are both members of the Syrian National Progressive Front. These two parties, being members of the front, have been able to share power and wealth and thus did not seek to achieve a real change in the structure of the existing regime. The two parties claim that they participate in the National Progressive Front in order to defend the regime's foreign policy and that they reserve their right to criticize the internal policies of the Syrian regime. However, they have only softly criticized the economic policies of the regime which were heading towards the liberalization of the economy. Moreover, their criticism was very cautious, and they did not draw the link between these policies and the nature of the political leadership of the country. As for the Syrian People's Will Party, it also practiced what could be described as a "cartoon-like opposition" to the existing regime. Upon its creation under the name of the "National Committee for the Unity of Syrian Communists," it started to criticize, more than others, the economic policies of the regime, but it continued to refuse to confront it or to be hostile to it justifying its position by stressing the national stances of the regime in confronting Zionism and imperialism.

Although it is a Leftist ideology, in general, it was either against the popular protests during the Arab revolutions, skeptical about them or – as was the case of some Leftists- dealt with them in some kind of opportunism. We also notice that these parties were of closed elitist nature and distant from the pulse of the street. This is true also for the parties which were playing an important role in the past in mobilizing people. Perhaps one of the best examples is the National Progressive Unionist Party, the organization which was officially representing the Left in Egypt before the January 2011 revolution. The role of the party, which was one of the active parties with strong contacts with the people during the 1970's, started to diminish by the end of the 1980's, and it was unable to develop a leftist progressive discourse capable of attracting the vast sectors of the masses, especially among the toilers' classes of the Egyptian society. Just one day before the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, the leaders of the party gave statements which show that they were adopting a discourse skeptical

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of the street's movement and promoting the famous slogan that "Egypt is not Tunisia."

A similar example can be found in the Syrian Communist Labour Party. This party has historically been one of the parties demanding a radical change (democracy and safe democratic transition), but it had suffered strong security blows throughout its history, and it was part of the "Damascus Declaration" in 2005. However, after the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution, the party seemed skeptical about it and feared the risk of "Islamization," although it had tried to achieve a balance in its discourse between demanding democracy and rejecting the "violent and impulsive" approach followed by the revolution, as opposed to the safe democratic transitions which it was demanding. In the end, the discourse of this party became closer to the regime than to the revolution.

The same thing applies to the Leftist political associations in Bahrain, which have always opted to isolate themselves from the street movement, especially in the period leading up to the Bahraini revolution on 14 February 2011. These associations had often tended to remove the political cover from the protest movements in the streets alleging that they disagree with them on the methods and protest means. According to these associations, the protest movements were crossing the red lines in their criticism of the regime. Perhaps this could be attributed to the elitist nature of the Bahraini Left, and more specifically to the society structure associated with the rentier state where it is difficult to speak about a big working-class. Therefore, the discourse of most of the forces that have left-leanings had focused on national issues and, of course, Sunni as well as Shiite political Islam forces were able to compete with them in this discourse.

Despite the fact that the revolutionary moments of the Pearl Roundabout (Lulu) have created a democratic climate capable of embracing differences in an overarching framework, disagreements between the political associations and the protest movements have started to surface on the ceiling of the demands and the size of the bond with the street.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the case of the Bahraini "Progressive Democratic Forum", which was keen to remain silent regarding the call for Bahrain's Day of Rage on 14 February 2011. With the escalation of events and the increased levels of

repression of the protest by the regime's forces in the protest yards, the association, similar to other opposition political associations, only criticized the violent practices against demonstrators in the media, but it did not directly participate in the sit-ins or the protests. However, with the severe repression of the protest forces in Bahrain in the wake of the intervention of Peninsula Shield forces and the Bahraini armed forces, the arrest campaigns and crackdowns, the association decided to fully withdraw and to remove the political cover from the Bahraini revolution, preferring to maintain its organizational presence – even in its elitist form – and made a "critical review" of its previous stances regarding the Bahraini Spring, renouncing it completely and considering it a type of unjustified and unrealistic adventure.

It could be said that there are a number of Tunisian leftist forces, which also seem to fall under this type of forces or organizations, although they may seem more vibrant and youthful than their counterparts in other Arab countries. Among them, for example, is the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties, which seemed concerned about the participation in the power arrangements in the post-Ben Ali's era because it wanted to achieve a "continuation in the structure of the state institutions", even if these arrangements are not fully satisfactory for the broader sectors of the protest forces in the street. Another example is the Democratic Progressive Party. The two parties participated in the first transitional government formed after the Tunisian revolution together with the General Union of Tunisian Workers. The popular protest movement – as represented in the Kasbah I sit-in, has played a major role in rejecting this government and toppling it because of the participation of many of the old regime's members in it. This government was replaced by Mohamed Ghannouchi's government and ministers from these two parties participated in this government. The street pressure continued to demand the dissolution of this government, too, in the Kasbah II sit-in. Here, it was observed that the participation of these two organizations in the two transitional governments, which are not acceptable to the people, and the stances taken by their ministers in defense of the regime's policies and their sharp criticism of the protest movements and the people's demands, were decisive factors in categorizing them among the traditional Leftist forces. The other factor was, for example, the stance of the Democratic Progressive Party after the

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revolution when it redefined itself as a centrist party biased to the market economy replacing the old definition of the party before the revolution when it used to consider itself as a nationalist Arab Leftist party. It also said that it opts to maintain the "Tunisian State", which means maintaining the previous legacy of the Tunisian state's bias to the bourgeois classes rather than to the poorer and marginalized classes. This has become clear in the party's declared economic stances after the revolution and it also reflects the party's desire to maintain the status quo rather than demanding a change of the unfair existing policies. On the other hand, these two parties have resorted to build an alliance with the Islamic Ennahda Movement – although they disagree with it on the shape of the state – in the formation of the current government in Tunisia.

The second type of Leftist parties or organizations are the revolutionary Left which were present before the revolution, but they were not able to keep a minimum level of bond with the street movement. There are also the youth parties which were created after the revolution and profoundly succeeded in communicating with the street or mass protests that have accompanied the revolutions. These have always adopted stances biased to changing the existing regimes and strongly connected with the demands of the people. But - in spite of that - it is wrong to say that these organizations were leading the movement of the masses. In most cases, they were in a reactive position and popular movement was taking the lead. However, they were trying to be present and to embrace and adopt at least part of the people's demands.

These parties or organizations tried to diversify their political activism. They participated in the protests, and they used proactive participation patterns with the existing regime (such as participation in elections or in the national dialogue sessions and other forms of participation).

Perhaps the most notable model of this type of Leftist organization in Bahrain, for example, is the National Democratic Action Society - *Wa'ad*, which is considered one of the biggest political associations in Bahrain. This association was created many years before the Bahraini Revolution, but it continued to be close to the movement of the street to a large extent. This was clear in the stances of the association regarding the revolution throughout this

period. Before the call for the Bahraini Day of Rage, the association took a formal stance to support the call (even if it was not the one who initiated it). This support grew and reached a level of full integration in the protest movement by opening a tent for the association in the Pearl Roundabout, and the participation of a number of its members in the activities of the sit-in, despite the fierce media attack on the association launched by some media outlets affiliated with the regime. This active participation had reached its climax with the violent crackdown that followed the entry of the Peninsula Shield Force to Bahrain. Ibrahim Sharif, the Secretary-General of the Association and one of the most prominent opposition members in Bahrain, was arrested and transferred to a military court. Many of the Association's premises were attacked before the issuance of an official decision closing all the association's premises on charges of fomenting sectarian strife. The association's offices were closed for two months, but it issued a statement containing an official apology to the Bahraini army for its previous stances. Afterwards, the association participated in the national dialogue organized by the Bahraini regime, but it continued to issue strong statements criticizing the government's performance.

Another important example of this kind of associations is the Socialist People's Alliance Party (SPAP) in Egypt, which was directly formed in the wake of the Egyptian revolution, in a broad initiative by a big number of Leftist groups to establish a "broad and expanded party for the Egyptian Left." The aim behind creating it is to overcome the elitism and narrow-mindedness that marred other leftist organizations. Although the party did not succeed in bringing all Leftist streams into one fabric, for various reasons, its political performance was characterized by being close to the street's movement and with its attempt to embrace this movement and adopt its demands. During the major phases of the Egyptian revolution, and directly after the first 18 days, the party was keen to coordinate and cooperate with youth groups and other political blocs during the revolutionary events such as the millions demonstrations. It also built political alliances with other political forces and parties. Here, it is important to mention that the party's political participation was not limited to taking part in the protests' activities, but there was also a space for interacting with the regime in the first transitional period but

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without abandoning protests. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the party's participation in building the "Revolution Continues Alliance," an election coalition, together with a number of political parties and newly emerging ones carrying radical democratic demands (such as the central issue of social justice, and the exclusion of former regime figures from the political life, etc.), even though they come from different ideological backgrounds.

Perhaps, one of the Leftist parties that challenge the categorization presented in this paper is the Yemeni Socialist Party. This party shares the features of the historic elitist organizations but at the same time carries the features of the revolutionary Leftist organizations. The Party, for example, adopted two parallel strategies in its work. The first was elitist in its nature with the party continuing to play an active role within the front of the traditional opposition parties known as the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). Since the start of the Yemeni revolution, the performance of the party's leaders was characterized by a sort of political opportunism reflected in the adoption of a conservative approach more than they should towards the new regime (after the election of President Abed Rabo Mansour Hadi) or towards the Reform Party, which was representing an important part of the JMP. Moreover, the party approved engaging with the forces that have accepted the Gulf initiative which was perceived by many of the protest forces as not achieving the demands of the Yemeni revolution but rather manipulating them. However, it is important to note that the leaders of the Yemeni Socialist Party were "more Leftist" (meaning that they were more biased to the demands for change) when compared to other traditional elites of the historic organizations mentioned before. In its discourse and practices, the party was from the beginning, more biased towards the demands of the revolution and change chanted in the Yemeni yards, and it actively participated in it, especially in Taiz city, which had witnessed unprecedented protests during the Yemeni revolution. Additionally, when the Gulf initiative entered into force, the party took stances more reflective of its popular base such as condemning some of the decisions taken by the interim president and his government, or by pressuring the JMP to put heated and more sensitive topics on the agenda of the national dialogue. The party also criticized the practices

of the Reform Party which went beyond the proper methods of political competition.

The second strategy was the one followed by the youthful generation of the party who clearly announced that they reject the Gulf initiative as a solution to the political crisis in Yemen, and they implemented a number of opposition protest activities against the first strategy. In this context, it is important to indicate that these two strategies were not adopted by the party leadership in order to communicate with the protest movement or the general revolutionary space, while keeping the door open to achieve some political gains. The whole scene was so confused. On the one side, the party is dominated by elitist leaders who are, to a certain extent, isolated from the street movement, and these leaders have a low ceiling of demands which makes them closer to the first pattern of organizations which we have highlighted earlier. But at the same time, there is a strong youth movement within the party which is still capable of influencing the party leaders and threatening an internal organizational outburst inside the party that might separate the leaders from their popular base. This is, of course, a high political cost which the party leaders cannot afford, and thus, the party leadership has opted to be more flexible towards the youthful party members in order to absorb them (this has become very clear with the open strike implemented inside the party's premises by the youth of YSP in Taiz to protest against the party's historic leadership, and these youth were able to replace it by another secretariat more capable of achieving their demands and aspirations).

But even if the reactions of the party were slow, to a large extent, and were not fully able to absorb the energetic youth movement from within, the positive point is that the political performance of the party continued to be the umbrella gathering the Leftist movement in Yemen. The party has been able to maintain its organizational unity to a large extent, and it did not witness any major splits despite the formation of many coalitions and Leftist youth groups alongside with the party (which we will cover in some detail in the next section of this paper).

The same challenge is faced by a number of Leftist organizations in other Arab countries, but to a lesser extent in comparison with the Yemeni Socialist Party such as the Tunisian Workers' Communist

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Party and the revolutionary socialist movement in Egypt, and its party, known as the Workers and Peasants Party. We argue that these kinds of organizations have the features of the traditional left-wing organizations as reflected in some degree of self-isolation and factionalism. However, we cannot deny that they are still carrying, to varying degrees, the same closed methods of work because they had worked underground or in a semi-secret way for a long period of time under the repressive rule and the security prosecution of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes. Thus, their expected impact and ability to mobilize people in the street were limited; especially in times of elections, it became clear that the political and organizational machines of these parties have very weak effects. For example, the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party won only three seats in the National Constituent Assembly; the Workers and Peasants Party, which was founded by the leaders of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists Organization, has not succeeded – until this very moment - in finalizing the procedures needed to officially register itself.

Perhaps the Egyptian Social Democratic Party is another good example of this kind of organization, which is situated in the middle between the traditional old left and the new revolutionary Leftist forces even though it does not define itself as a Leftist party, and there is no reference in its literature to socialism. However, it was able to occupy a good space in the Egyptian political scene after the revolution. But the dilemma raised by the party here lies in the categorization adopted in this paper and which considers the Leftist forces as forces demanding change while it considers Rightist as forces that do not demand change but rather defend the status quo. The Egyptian Social Democratic Party competed in the 2011 parliamentary elections in an alliance with the capitalist-minded Free Egyptians Party. It did not mind much the nomination of some of the symbols of the former regime on its electoral lists. But at the same time it cannot be considered part of the old Left in any way, as it has succeeded in attracting a large number of young people to join what we call in this paper as the "public Leftist space," and its leaders have expressed, in a number of their stances, a qualitative bias to a number of the change demands.

## **The public Leftist space:**

Certainly, all the Arab revolutions were not initiated by the political parties and forces. The main comment by any observer of the scene in each of these countries is that the street movement has been often more aggressive and revolutionary than what the different political parties and forces were preaching. In most cases, the movement on the ground was associated with a number of non-ideological - in the traditional sense of the word - youth movements who were characterized by courage in confronting the different regimes' repressive apparatuses. Their movement was flexible and this has enabled them to quickly respond to the revolutionary moment and act outside the rigid structures of political parties which are dominated by the older generation. Here, the concepts pointed out by sociologists on "the age impact" become clear because the age gap has its impact on the political attitudes of young people as well as the older generations.

Exactly what we mean here is essentially the case of youth movements that adopt a leftist agenda, meaning that they are demanding radical change, but they do not adhere to the Left in its ideological sense. These movements are characterized by high ceiling, revolutionary and radical demands and by the fact that they may not be interested in practicing politics in the electoral sense.

Here we must also point out that this public leftist space does not work separately or in isolation from the different existing political parties and organizations which we have mentioned before. It interacts with them positively and negatively either by coordinating and cooperating with them, pressuring or attacking them or even by working independently of them. It may take multiple forms of non-partisan nature such as movements, youth groups, youth groups working to defend a certain case and to advocate it, frontal alliances as well as other forms. But the most important observation is that this public leftist space is bigger than these organizations, and it has not been able, until this moment, to fully structure or contain them. At best, it is only trying to positively interact with them and keep up with their pace. As noted before, there are many problems faced by the organized left in building frameworks for collective action that could be appealing for those who belong to the public leftist space.

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Although many of those who belong to the public space agree with the organized left on many perceptions about the seriousness of the prevailing social situation, they may not necessarily participate in activities or ongoing campaigns to confront these conditions.

Although the formation of this public space started at an earlier stage prior to the revolutions, the Arab revolutions have necessarily sparked this kind of movement. For many of the new movements, these revolutions have marked the beginning of the first phase of the mobilization cycle mentioned in the social movements' literature. In other words, the eruption of revolutions, according to Aristide Zolberg, was the "moment of madness", where everything seemed possible.

For example, the public space in Egypt is one of the richest spaces of this kind of movement. It began to emerge ten years prior to the Egyptian revolution, specifically since 2000 with the emergence of the Popular Committee for Supporting the Palestinian Intifada. This was followed by movements against the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. After that, the *Kifaya* Movement emerged, and it became the umbrella organization for a number of qualitative movements demanding change. Among its most important resources is the civil society organizations' movement in Egypt, especially on the human rights level such as the "Youth for Change Movement" and others. There was an escalation in the activities of such youth groups that belong to the public space including groups such as "Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom," "the National Association of Youth for Change" and others. In addition, there is also the group administrating the most famous, "We all Khaled Said" Facebook page. Here, it seems that one of the basic tools that contributed to the creation and stimulation of youth was their reliance on social media, which facilitated communication between young activists, and reduced the cost of engaging in political activism. At the stage of the first 18 days of the Egyptian revolution and the period that directly followed, the experience of al-Tahrir Square gave birth to a huge number of youth movements, initiatives and coalitions, with the most prominent among them the "Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution."

This kind of youth movement was also present in Tunisia. The unemployed youth as well as the General Union of Tunisian Workers were the basic fuel for social mobility in the Tunisian street. Most of

those had not exercised politics in its traditional partisan sense before. The reason for their involvement in the movements is to demand development, human rights and freedoms. This kind of political activist was the main fuel of the protest movement against governments. Some of the organized Left participated in these movements, but their participation was below expectations, as mentioned earlier.

In Syria, too, the impact of this generation was clear. Almost all the youth of the leftist parties – those who are members of the traditional organizations participating in the government and those who claim that they belong to the opposition – were supportive of the revolution, contrary to the stances of their parties. Through these popular bases, youth organizations and movements were formed outside the traditional partisan frameworks such as the "Coordination Committee of the Members of the Syrian Communists", "Vision for Change", the "Democratic Left Gathering," the "Revolutionary Left Current in Syria" and the "Syrian Left Coalition," in addition to the participation of a large number of young leftist cadres independently in other more frontal forms of activism.

The youth of the Yemeni Socialist Party, similar to the Syrian left youth, created leftist youth coalitions that fit more with the nature of the post-revolution phase because they were not satisfied with the political performance of their parties' leaders. These coalitions meant to be more flexible and capable of quickly working and coordinating on the ground with more independence from the traditional party which is bound by the restrictions of its frontal work under JMP. This was reflected in the youth movement rejecting the acceptance of the Gulf initiative as a basis for the transfer of power in Yemen. This has confused the leadership of the party and forced it to be more flexible regarding the revolutionary demands of the youth.

The protest movement in Bahrain, too, had mainly relied on demand-driven youth movements. These were further fueled by the critical roles played by human rights activists. Youth movements, that are not part of partisan frameworks and human rights activism, have played an important role in igniting the Bahraini revolution, by raising social, economic and political demands without waiting for support from the formal political opposition. This has angered the leadership and made it enter into conflicts with the youth forces and

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lift their political support in some cases, especially with the escalation of security prosecution by the regime.

Using the analytical tools which the theory of social movements provides us with, we can say that this public Leftist space is the most important achievement made by the Left during the Arab revolutions. Through these revolutions, we can say that the Left has relatively succeeded in framing some sectors of their societies. Framing here is used to mean "framing events and conditions, and giving them meanings in a way that ensures the mobilization of potential supporters and winning the support of the public." Or in other more detailed words, we can say that there is a critical mass of people that has been formed and which is participating in building perspectives on the current situation considering it unfair, immoral, and it is not possible to keep silent about it or about its possibilities. In the literature of the social movements, this is called the "diagnostic framing." It is also possible to say – and this is what we have noticed in many of the countries which are passing through stumbling transitional phases – that the Left has partially succeeded, even though not completely, in stimulating or pushing this critical mass to act in order to change this situation. This is called the "stimulation framing." However, the most prominent flaw of the Left in these countries is its stumbling or its inability so far to create a "prospects framework" which allows the formation of a homogeneous perspective on the way to address the current situation. This critical mass has been a "reservoir" which plays the role of the supportive or pressuring environment where the organized Left, with its different forces, functions. Without this public space, flexible in its shape, the organized Left becomes closer to bureaucratic elitist structures with no impact on the street or on public activism in general.

### **The Dualities Governing the Left in Formulating Its Alliances with the Arab Spring Countries:**

Through the different case studies, it becomes clear that the political performance of the organized Left in the Arab Spring countries has many similar spaces. Based on our observation, we can distinguish between a number of dualities or complexities that present themselves on the Leftist forces in these countries, and often govern the performance of the political Left, both in terms of formulating its

alliances, its frontal work with other forces or the nature of its relations with the regime in a sharp manner or in "either" and "or" manner. Of course, these dualities or complexities were present in the mentality of the Left forces before the revolution, but with the "madness" of the revolutionary moments and the potentials they present with the possibility of rapid change at all levels, these dualities seemed more urgent, and more clear for researchers. Among the most important of these dualities are:

**First:** The duality of the revolution / counter-revolution or opposition / authoritarian regime:

This duality is the most important problem *par excellence* faced by the Left in general after the Arab revolutions. By this duality, we mean the method used by the Left organizations in formulating their alliances with Rightist movements (especially the political Islam forces), in order to push forward the demands of the revolution, overthrow an authoritarian regime, or for fear of circumventing the demands of the revolution and the return of the old regime again. Examples of such alliances can be found in the Yemeni JMP, the participation of some Leftist parties such as the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties, the Democratic Progressive Party and the Movement for Renewal in the government coalition with the Ennahda Movement or the alliance of the 6 opposition associations in Bahrain.

**Second:** Secularism duality / political Islam:

Another central duality affecting the Left in formulating its alliances, and which has impacted most of the Left forces with the outbreak of the Arab revolutions is the secularism duality. The Left was busy with secular/ Islamic polarization which made this issue top of its alliances and political discourse and made it also accept alliances with secular rightist forces in order to avoid alliances with political Islam forces. In most of the cases, the forces which used to stress this duality have tended to ally themselves with the regime and to make peace with it for fear of the "Islamization." Thus, they preferred to keep the situation as it is without change and played down the importance of achieving social or political change. An example of this can be found in the stances of a number of the Syrian Leftist "opposition" forces such as the Communist Labor Party, the Marxist Left Gathering, and the leadership of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union.

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Another example is the alliance between a center-left party such as the Egyptian Social Democratic Party with the Free Egyptians right-wing capitalist party during the 2011 parliamentary elections in Egypt to achieve a central aim of confronting the forces of political Islam during these elections.

Contrary to this behavior, the Yemeni Socialist Party, for example, maintained its presence in the JMP alliance together with the Religious Reform Party although this party continued to commit blatant violations against the activists of the Yemeni Socialist Party such as accusations of apostasy, betrayal or even direct attacks.

**Third:** The duality of the political conflict / social and economic demands:

Among the observations on the case studies, there is one related to the political performance of the organized Left during the post-revolutions era. This observation relates to the fact that the alliances held by the left, since the outbreak of revolutions, in their essence, were focused on the political conflict while neglecting the social and economic demands. By political conflict, I mean the transitional period arrangements such as the drafting of new constitutions, competing in elections under the transitional phase, etc... Perhaps one of the very few attempts to link the political conflict and the social and economic demands was through the alliance which the Left has formed as represented by the Socialist Popular Coalition in Egypt together with two newly formed parties: the Freedom Egypt and the Egyptian Stream together with another newly emerging Revolution Youth Coalition movement in order to achieve the revolution's demands, central among them being social justice. This coalition competed in the 2011 parliamentary elections under the Revolution Continues Alliance.

The same thing applies to the Popular Front in Tunisia, for example, which was founded by some 11 parties and movements, and it preferred to stay out of the "Union for Tunisia" because of the dispute over economic and social programs.

In Syria, we notice that a number of the Leftist cadres have opted not to engage in the work of closed groups but rather in other broader frontal organizational forms independently in order to achieve the demands of the Syrian revolution.

In Yemen, the participation of the Yemeni Socialist Party in the JMP and its acceptance of the Gulf initiative, for example, are important indicators of its focus on the political struggle at the expense of economic and social change which were expected of the revolution; the same thing applies to the Bloc Party and the Democratic Progressive Party in Tunisia in their participation in the transitional governments that were formed after the fall of Ben Ali's regime and their refusal to achieve many of the economic and social demands of the people, claiming that the time was not yet suitable for achieving them.

### **Challenges Facing the Political Performance of the Left**

Going through the different case studies, it becomes clear that there are a number of common challenges facing the organized left, in general, in the different Arab countries. In my opinion, most of these challenges are related to the internal structures of these parties and their ability to "frame and draft a new attractive and renewed discourse in line with the vibrant society surrounding it after the revolutions and to express its demands. These challenges can be summarized in the following points:

#### **The first challenge:** Fragmented organizational structures:

It was noted that, in most of the cases under study, there was a significant organizational fragmentation of the Left forces in the sense that the Left forces are dispersed between a large number of small and sporadic entities. It may seem at the first glance that this organizational fragmentation and this big pluralism in the Left factions at the organizational level, is something normal in the wake of revolutions. However, this issue has greatly damaged the political performance of the left at the electoral level. This is evident, for example, in the Tunisian Constituent Assembly elections which the Left had participated in with tens of lists and was not able to win more than three seats. The same thing happened in the Egyptian presidential elections. The Left nominated three candidates at the same time.

It is certain that pluralism in the organizational structures of the left is not in itself a problem, but the problem here lies in the lack of coordination and cooperation to a large extent between these different leftist factions, especially since some of them still suffer from being

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influenced by the mentality of work with secret organizations or those which do not enjoy a great deal of internal democracy. This in turn, is reflected in performance problems such as seclusion, elitism and factionalism. All these are problems that have been suffered by the Left for a long time under authoritarian regimes. But, with the openness of the political sphere in most of the cases after the revolutions, new historic opportunities are becoming available for the Leftist organizations to reshape their organizational structures in a more open way towards other Leftist factions through coordination, cooperation or through building political or strategic alliances on the basis of programs to ensure their effective participation in the formal political life either through elections, advocacy campaigns or other means.

**The second challenge:** The inability of the organizational structures of these parties or organizations to mobilize the public Leftist space:

This was clear in the divides and conflicts, which were sometimes severe, between the youth of the parties and their older elites. It showed the inability of the parties to mobilize non-partisan movements and youth groups in their ranks. It is evident, in all case studies presented in this study, that there is a huge difference between the ceiling of demands of the movements and groups which belong to the public Leftist space and the younger generations and those of their elitist older leaders. It is also clear that the "public Leftist space" is characterized by more courage in its work than the courage of the elitist existing parties. Members of the public Leftist space have been always ready to cross the "red lines" in their political discourse as well as in their presence on the ground. This may be attributed to the fear of the parties' leaders of violent security crackdown in the event of failed revolutions, which would threaten the fragile organizational structures of these parties. However, young people did not have such an obsession.

This was demonstrated, for example, especially in cases where the revolutions did not succeed in shaking the structure of the existing regime. Here we are referring to the two cases of Bahrain and Syria. In Bahrain, the Progressive Forum Association, with a Marxist background made a self-criticism and announced that it made a mistake by supporting participation in the Bahraini Spring. In Syria,

the youth of the leftist opposition parties and those participating in power have tended to take stances supportive of the revolution contrary to the stances of their elites who were openly loyal to the regime or opposing because they fear "Islamization".

In cases where the revolutions were successful in striking the structure of the authoritarian regimes, parties, especially the traditional ones, seemed more eager to seize part of the political gains in the arrangements of the transitional periods, than to adhere to the protests' demands of the street. In some cases, the stances of these parties were against the demands of their own youth. The Yemeni Socialist Party is a clear example of this case. It insisted on its alliance with the JMP despite the violations and attacks launched by the Religion Reform, the party's ally, and it disregarded the clear and sharp stances of the party's youth regarding the Gulf initiative, but the party leadership accepted it because it is part of the JMP which accepted the initiative.

With the continued disparity in the stances of the organizations and elites and those of the public Leftist space, the capacity of these parties to implement the traditional tasks of political parties, such as spreading awareness, mobilization of new members and political education is challenged. This means that the flawed condition and the lack of framing of the public space in the Arab Spring countries are likely to continue for quite some time.

**The third challenge:** The weakness of the parties and their inability to turn their slogans into executable programs:

This is one of the critical challenges faced by parties in general at the post-revolution phase and by the Leftist organization in particular. This has been clear in countries that have witnessed transitional phases which allowed a space for the circulation of power through elections. In Tunisia, the biggest challenge at the level of public policy for the parties and organizations that belong to the left is the formulation of a fair and efficient public policy for employment capable of facing the high unemployment rates, which is the biggest problem facing the Tunisian society now.

The same thing applies to Egypt. For the Leftist parties who participated in the elections, the short lived parliamentary experience of 2011 has shown them that there are huge problems related to public policies. None of the Leftist and non-Leftist parties who participated

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in the elections was prepared for these problems by having detailed plans, policies and programs to help them when the parliament issues its laws. In Yemen and Syria, the Left is expected to provide real alternatives for public policies, which reflect the demands of the revolution and at the same time be viable. Thus, the Left forces are required to develop their research efforts and not only rely on political work or on engagement in the work on the ground.

**The fourth challenge:** The weak ability to communicate with the masses or to mainstream the Leftist discourse:

In most cases, we note that the Leftist discourse is still unable to express well the demands of the broader segments of citizens, who often resort to associate themselves with right-wing forces, such as political Islam or the forces of the old regimes. Thus, it is important to stress the need to truly link the Leftist discourse with the demands of the broader sectors of the society in a discourse that expresses their demands and does not exploit them or consider them as masses with no brains or functions other than calling them to vote during elections. It should develop their sense of belonging and citizenship on the one hand, and it should help in the formulation of peoples' demands in a clear, poignant and eloquent language away from theorization and the use of difficult language, which often negatively affects the understanding of people who are not familiar with this language.

This may be attributed to the fact that the focus of Left parties is mainly on the political conflict, and this is almost normal in the framework of the political climate that has followed the Arab revolutions during which the rules of the entire political game are being restructured.

**The fifth challenge:** The ability to formulate political alliances on program basis rather than on narrow electoral calculations:

As we noted earlier, we can see that the leftist forces that belong to the organized left formulate their alliances largely based on very narrow political or electoral basis. For this reason, most of the leftist forces when they enter into a frontal experience or an electoral alliance often ally themselves with other heavyweight political factions with whom they do not necessarily agree about any of their political perceptions or programs. For example, the Yemeni Socialist Party is still insisting on its alliance with the Religious Reform Party

in the JMP although the two parties have completely different political programs. The same thing applies to Egypt. For example, the *Tagammu* and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party decided to participate in the 2011 parliamentary elections together with the Free Egyptians Party, one of the right-wing capitalist parties, despite the differences between the two parties in their vision of social justice. Social justice is one of the main demands of the January revolution, and it is a demand stressed by the Social Democratic Party. However, this demand is considered a marginal issue by the Free Egyptian Party.

Perhaps the only exception was the Socialist Popular Alliance in Egypt, which had formed an electoral / political alliance with a number of youthful political groups by allying itself with other partisan groups such as the Egyptian Current Party, the Egypt Freedom Party, and the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution. The difference here is that this alliance is built on a joint political program which requires that all parties should work quickly and decisively to achieve when their candidates reach the parliament.

### **Conclusion:**

As can be seen from the above lines, it is very important for the Leftist forces at this very critical phase of the Arab revolutions to work as forces of major social and political change towards democracy; it is also important for these forces to formulate their alliances and develop their discourse and political programs in a way that makes them capable of attracting a broader segment of the masses and also in a way that makes them closer to expressing people's demands, without organizational or political exploitation, extravagance or hollowness.

It is also important to pay attention to a very important phenomenon, namely, that the Arab revolutions have proved almost conclusively that the public Leftist space, which contains a large number of youth initiatives and new social movements, has always surpassed in its movement and demands all other political forces. This is why it is important for the Leftist forces to perform diligent attempts to maintain this public Leftist space as a "reservoir" for individuals and youth groups for good performance on the ground or as a fertile land to transplant new members.

**The Left and the Protest Movements  
in the Arab Region**

**Mohamed Agati and Omar Samir**

**Introduction**

Social movements are defined as "organized efforts made by a group of citizens as representatives of a popular base which lacks formal representation with the aim of changing conditions, policies, or existing structures to become closer to the values which the movement believes in." These movements may be local, regional, or global such as the international small farmers movement, *Via Campesina*.

Although it is difficult to describe the movements in the Arab region as social movements as defined above, we can see the harbingers of what might be called social movements in our region, such as the formation of anti-globalization groups in several countries (Attack - sets anti), political movements that seek democratic change in other countries, or movements protesting capitalist policies that will harm the interests of the poorer classes, such as labor movements, and movements against high prices, unemployment, tax policies, and others.

Accordingly, we can say that what we have seen now in the Arab region in the period from 2000 to 2010, is closer to protest movements rather than social movements. The protest movements can be defined as "various forms of objections, which use tools invented by protesters to express their rejection or to resist or get around pressure practiced on them. These forms are widely spread among all social groups, especially those suffering social and political pressures. They may take different, quiet or unorganized uprisings." It is an environment similar to the one where the current social movements in Latin America have emerged, both in terms of policies that lead to these protests or accompanying conditions, as well as in terms of the shape of the protest, most of which is spontaneous and which sometimes

takes illegal forms.<sup>108</sup> This chapter tries to analyze the left movement from this perspective.

First: The Left and the Path to the Revolutions (the Pre-revolution Phase)

The confused situation that the left have witnessed at the beginning of the new millennium due to the increasing influence of the Neoliberal policies led to a new generation coming out of the old classical organizations, small ones dominated by the underground movements characteristics.

In Egypt, small and ineffective groups have emerged and disappeared because of their severe weakness or because they have merged in other forms that didn't find a space to establish their presence in the political life. The only group that has continued to be present since its inception in the early nineties and which was able to create a space for itself in the Left vacuum was the Revolutionary Socialist Stream which has been able to provide some revolutionary answers to today's questions, especially in the state of disarray after the fall of the communist system. But this newly emerging critical stream was not able to rid itself of the problems suffered by the Left and which have ultimately led to the creation of three small and ineffective groups despite the critique it has provided at the start of its formation on the Orthodox, Stalinist and Trotskyist vision of politics and organization.

The Tunisian secret Leftist opposition was formed of several factions, most important among them being the Communist Workers Party of Tunisia, led by Hamma Hammami, who was prosecuted many times, the latest of which was in 2002. He spent more than 10 years in prison, where he was tortured more than once, and also spent more than 10 years in underground work. The recognized as well as the unrecognized parties were both progressing and integrating.

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<sup>108</sup> Heba Raouf Ezzat and others, *"The Protest Movements in the Arab region between the Political and Social"*, edited by Amr Shobaki, Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2011.

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The emergence of religious movements at this stage played a big role in influencing the Left, both at the level of its movement or at the level of its ideology. In the Arab world as a whole, the Islamic stream started to replace the Left, which was considered in the sixties and seventies the main opposition force. Moreover, the values of the religious stream started to spread because of Gulf oil money, carrying the Wahhabi ideology from those working in the Gulf. This was appealing for regimes that were transforming themselves from national liberation project to capitalist systems to one degree or the other. In Yemen, as a model after the war in the 1990's, the policy of undermining the Left, which was adopted by the regime, had succeeded in politically and socially isolating it. The post-war period was one of the most difficult historical periods experienced by the Left in Yemen. Under a closed political situation, which had contributed to demonizing the Left and isolating it, and with the support given to hardline religious forces, the infrastructure of the party in the north as well as in the south became badly affected. This policy had also been successful in making the local public opinion blame the party for the disintegration of unity.

The idea of building political alliances has occupied an important space in the political process across the Arab world in the ten years prior to the revolutions. The Left was part of this process and was present in it. The traditional opposition in Yemen succeeded in uniting the national forces opposing the regime and mobilizing the Yemeni people and this success reached its climax when its alliance was able to compete in the presidential elections with one presidential candidate. This experience created a political momentum for the first time in decades in the history of Yemen. Moreover, the traditional opposition competed in the parliamentary elections in one list, despite the major contradictions between its components. With the regime insisting on holding the parliamentary elections without responding to the demands of the opposition, the opposition became united in its rejection of the regime's practices. The crisis between the regime and the opposition culminated when the opposition forces threatened to take to the street.

**In Bahrain**, the efforts made led to the convening of a constitutional conference in February 2004, which resulted in a petition containing constitutional-related demands and to the holding

of a second conference in March 2005. Tens of thousands of signatures on the petition were collected but the Royal Court again refused to receive it. Afterwards, efforts became dispersed and there were different opinions voiced. At the end, many associations decided to accept the *fait accompli* and to join the 2006 elections.<sup>109</sup> The idea of the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt to form an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood under the slogan "sometimes with the Islamists, always against the state" raised lots of controversy among the different Leftist streams. Some of the Left forces believed that this alliance was a duty in confronting the repressive state, and others considered it as a tactical coordination and could not in any way be considered as an alliance given the capitalist program and structure of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, there were also those who believed that it is better to support the state in confronting the religious stream considering it the main danger facing the Left in its enlightenment project. Here, it should be noted that these alliances have had their positive impact at the level of mass action. In the Egyptian street, strong opposition entities have emerged (the *Kifaya* in Egypt, the JMP in Yemen, Damascus Declaration in Syria and 18 October for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia), although these alliances were not limited to the two factions (the Islamists and the Left). However, the idea of building alliances between the two has allowed the emergence of these entities that have also attracted others. It also helped the Left to reach out to the youth sector, which the Islamists streams had monopolized through its social networks, and the engagement of the youth has had its impact on their awareness of the events. But, on the other hand, we cannot deny that this alliance had contributed to a large extent to the fragmentation of the left between those who accept and those who reject this alliance. This has led, in some cases, to hostilities between

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<sup>109</sup> Abdul Nabi al-Akri, "*The mass movement in Bahrain: Prospects and Constraints*" (in Arabic), in: Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari (Ed.), the proceedings of the fifth annual meeting of the Arab Group for Democracy, under the title "*Fostering Democracy Efforts in the Arab Region*," Studies of Democracy in the Arab Countries' project on the following link:

[http://arabsfordemocracy.org/uploads/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA/15/Bahrain\\_okairi.pdf](http://arabsfordemocracy.org/uploads/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA/15/Bahrain_okairi.pdf)

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the different Leftist streams (the revolutionary Left and the democratic Left), and this was very clear during the 2006 war in Lebanon. More dangerous was the transformation of the work with the Islamists from a tactic to a rigid ideology, which some of the Left was not able to change even when the Islamists reached power after the Arab Spring revolutions.

### **1. The Left and the Work with the Masses, a New Way to Return:**

The Left reappeared again at the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's through the civil society and its organizations. In Tunisia, a part of the Left had focused on the intellectual, associational and the human rights aspects outside the partisan organizations. This had prevented the Left from taking political stances given the long prison periods of the 1970's, which most of the Left leaders had experienced. An intellectual revision had been made and the representatives of the Left understood that they have been wrong in their method. Since then, part of them started to focus on the intellectual side and on spreading the culture of human rights. The goal was to expand the margin of freedom of expression in cultural work. The Leftists were also released from the prisons with the help of Amnesty International, the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Human Rights, and through cultural intellectual work.

**In Egypt and Yemen**, the Leftists started to create civil society organizations at this same period in an attempt to induce a change on the sectoral level after they felt desperate because of the experiences of the Egyptian political parties and their inability to bring about a real change in the political scene; thus, they became active in the field of human rights (Hisham Mubarak Law Center, for example), women's rights (the New Woman Foundation, for example), the rights of workers (the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS)),<sup>110</sup> **In Bahrain**, political associations with Leftist leanings have emerged such as (the Association of the National Democratic Alliance, National Democratic Action Society and the Progressive

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<sup>110</sup> For more information, see: "*The Future of the Civil Work in Egypt*," (in Arabic) Ed. Medhat al-Zahed, Center for the Support of Development and the Fustat Center, Cairo, 2013.

Democratic Forum Society). **In Syria**, despite the repression of civil society, some organizations working on civil liberties such as freedom of the press (Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression) or anti-globalization movements (*al-Badil*) have emerged.

It also extends to the relation with trade unions and labor movements. It is enough here to mention the General Union of Tunisian Workers.<sup>111</sup> It had actively participated in the framing of the revolution and in supporting it. However, Abdul Salam Jarrad, the Secretary General of the Union, appealed to the ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in the 2009 elections. Thus, we have the right to raise questions on this contradiction with the aim of understanding the contradictions of the Union almost since independence.

**Egypt** has seen a phase of social protests after the 2006 presidential elections, which resulted in the renewal for President Mubarak. Many considered this result as a failure of the movements that were resisting it, and this led to the diminishing role of *Kifaya*. Other similar movements started to stress their own factional demands. Despite the fading and receding political movement associated with *Kifaya*, the latter had succeeded in creating what some analysts have called the "culture of protest" or the "culture of 'extorting' rights." This has reflected itself in the unprecedented rise of the labor / professional protests in Egypt since 2006 until today.

Social protest phenomena increased in size and number. In 2005, the number of protests reached 202 to increase in 2006 to 266 and to jump in 2007 to 614 protests according to statistics conducted by the Land Center. The month of February 2008, witnessed the highest number of protests, reaching up to 62 in the different sectors. This number increased during the same year to reach 609 protests implemented by the different sectors of laborers. Estimates of the number of protests in the year 2009 indicate that there were more than 650 protest movements.

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<sup>111</sup> See, "I Love You, People: the General Union of Tunisian Workers – A Historic Background", the diary of freedom blog, August 3, 2012, at the following link: <http://cahiersdelaliberte.org/blog/?p=673>, and see the site of the General Union of Tunisian Workers, on the following link: <http://www.ugtt.org.tn/>

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Then there was a move from spontaneous protests to factional protests. This phase started with different forms of popular protests against certain issues such as the shortage of water, bread and highways accidents and, in some cases, they took violent forms such as blocking roads. However, soon they evolved into demand-driven protests. This big wave of protests was characterized by its demand-related nature and most of the demands focused on the increase of salaries and wages, employment in the public sector, social security and sometimes on improving public services or on eliminating administrative and financial corruption. There were no "political" demands in the sense of pro-democracy, for example, or repealing the emergency law, etc... According to available statistics, it is observed that the protests launched by government employees occupied the lion's share of the total number of the demonstrations, followed by protests organized by of the employees of the public business sector. The number of protests of the government employees reached about 267 and the number of protests of the private sector employees was about 235, while the number of protests of the public business sector was about 107 in the year 2008. This period also witnessed the spread of protests to new and unfamiliar sectors in Egyptian society. The protests of the employees from the Real Estate Tax Authority have shown the flabbiness and the indigence of official trade unions – as represented in the General Federation of Trade Unions – and their inability to adopt the legitimate labor demands in addition to its bias to the government stances. When the strike succeeded in giving laborers back their rights, the employees of the Real Estate Tax Authority resorted to creating their own union, independent from the general union. This was the first time in many years that such a union emerged. It was considered by analysts a qualitative leap in the context of protest movements in Egypt.

This period too has witnessed the spread of protests in new and unfamiliar sectors of the Egyptian society such as trailer drivers, pharmacists, and doctors, experts of the Justice Ministry, teachers, and the media. Historically, these sectors did not witness before the organization of strikes or labor movements. Below are some examples of the most important of these protests and their demands. In the middle of this momentum, the struggling Egyptian Left played a role in the formation of groups for change such as *Kifaya*, the

Egyptian Movement for Change, (*Ajij*) the Egyptian Group for Anti-Globalization, in addition to the committees in support the Palestinian uprising, against the war on Iraq, as well as the different solidarity committees of a frontal nature. Thus, the political movement in Egypt has started to draw a link between what is political and what is national but without linking the two with what is social. This had largely remained the missing link in the Left movement until the revolution, in spite of the emergence of a strong labor movement with the end of the 2006 which has led, as in the case of the Real Estate Tax Authority employees, to the formation of the first independent trade union since the 1940's.

**In Yemen**, the Leftist forces were part of the popular protest movements calling for social justice. They have relied on the disadvantaged classes as their social and political bases, and they have contributed to the increase of people's awareness of their rights and civil and political liberties. Although the Left has had its contributions in the Yemeni political scene, it was part of the regime's crisis as reflected in the South, where the Left was able to reach power, but it ruled the southern society according to contradictory terms. The same happened in the North at a later stage. This ambivalence has had its impact on the effectiveness of the Left in changing the Yemeni realities, and its contradictory stances led to the deepening of the gap between Left and some groups. This has allowed religious forces, who began to occupy the popular spaces of the Left, to fill in the gap thus created.

If we examine the historical realities under which the Left forces have emerged, we find that the realities in the North are different from the realities in the South. In the latter, the social and political environment was fertile for the emergence of the Left, which started with the emergence of unions and labour strikes in refineries. This has helped the Left to mature in defining its ideological discourse unlike the north where it was active underground and under complex conditions even in the 1990's, which contributed to the lack of clear programs and the ease of ending its effectiveness through the liquidation of its leaders by the totalitarian rule in the north.

It was observed that all the forces participating in strikes or labor protests were distant from the traditional partisan frameworks and from political groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and others.

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Moreover, they were not under the umbrella of the official trade union organizations or even the new protest movements such as *Kifaya*, but they were completely independent. They emerged as a result of labor and professional discontent over the existing economic and social conditions. These movements did not find any support other than that provided by civil society organizations and human rights and workers' rights associations. They have also impacted on these organizations and led to the creation of economic and social rights organizations, which focused on issues closer to the citizens, making these organizations closer to the society.

**At the level of youth movements in Tunisia:** a new phenomenon has emerged, especially starting as of 2008. This is when the youth, who were banned from accessing information, started to be active on the net. The youth, mostly females, can be considered the new Left, and this youth was able to attract some of the old generations to its methods of work. In Egypt, the young people have a strong sense of resistance, extremely courageous in confronting the state oppression and have tremendously strong abilities to act politically. Although some of them have joined political entities who were able to mobilize them when they were studying at the universities or in the different neighborhoods, many others joined youth movements that have begun to emerge such as the 6 April Youth, We Are All Khalid Said, Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom, and the youth of the National Association for Change. Thus, a gap has emerged between those who have the sense of resistance and courage, and those who lack the experience and a level of political coherence among new generations making their first step amid the on-going political momentum. Although the new generations became parts of new movements or of different political parties and groups that were present before, we can decisively say that the social sense, in the struggle of many of them, was clearly evident. This is what we call a Left orientation even if the youth themselves did not give themselves this description. Despite the critical developments experienced by Egypt, the Arab region, and especially the Egyptian left, there are certain events or stations that can be considered as the most prominent ones in the history of the Leftist parties and organizations. Many of the Left activists who were playing an active role in the Youth for Change Movement agree that the latter was

actually behind the creation of the *Kifaya* Movement and behind its actual momentum which has characterized it in the Egyptian street. Activists explain that the leaders of *Kifaya* were from the older generations – most of them were from the 1970's generation – who were against taking the risk of direct confrontation with the regime. Moreover, the ceiling of their demands against the Mubarak regime was always low compared to those demanded by the Youth for Change Movement. Here it should be noted that there were always internal battles between the Youth for Change and the older age leaders of *Kifaya* on the ceiling of demands that should be stressed and the method of administrating the conflict with Mubarak's regimes. The leaders of *Kifaya* considered that the youth's high ceiling of demands in confronting the regime only reflected recklessness and lack of experience, and it would not lead to anything other than more severe security measures by the security agencies in dealing with the activists of the movement and its sympathizers. However, it was difficult for young people to accept the status quo or even nominal reforms empty of content which the Mubarak regime was promising all the time.<sup>112</sup>

But most of these young people did not have the ability to develop a clear intellectual perception of the post *Kifaya* phase. At that time, a big number of them joined youth Leftist organizations such as the Revolutionary Socialists. This was followed by attempts to work on labor and peasants' issues with their organizations. This pushed them at a later state to create a new group with a wide coordination framework under the name of the Solidarity Group in 2008, which was acting on the adoption and support of these issues. During this period, the protest movements of laborers, employees and other toilers' classes were reaching their climax, and it was impossible for the Leftist organizations not to join or to at least attempt to show solidarity with them.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Habiba Mohsen, "The Untraditional Political Participation of the Egyptian Leftist Stream Youth" in the "Untraditional Patterns of Political Participation of Young People before, during and after the Revolution," the proceedings of the Cairo symposium, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2012, p 62.

<sup>113</sup> Habiba Mohsen, *op cit*, pp. 58-60.

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In Yemen, there were youth Leftist movements that had their literature and their revolutionary mechanisms that were reflecting the dynamics of the Left awareness, its field interaction and its adoption of the social sectors demands which were put aside by the political components leading the revolution. In Bahrain,<sup>114</sup> if we dig in the history of the political movements, we find that there were youth movements that were engaged in the national struggle movement since the 1970's. From these movements, the National Union of Bahraini Students (AWTAB) had emerged as a student union organization gathering thousands of Bahraini students studying at the Arab and foreign universities in a founding conference held in Damascus on 25 February 1972. In Bahrain, too, a youth faction of the struggle movement was formed under the name of the "Democratic Union of the Bahraini Youth" (ASHDAB) in 1974 after the merger of the "Bahraini National Liberation Front" and the "National Union of the Bahraini Students (NUBS)". It is an independent youth organization, which closely links the general interests of the youth movement and the general interests of the national movement. It was formed as a progressive democratic organization, and it gathers in its ranks broad masses of the Bahrain youth who had been a major component of the popular movement in Bahrain composed of the different national and progressive factions. Moreover, ASHDAB had been the right arm of the national movement in its bitter struggle for democracy and for the achievement of the peoples' demands. Youth movements continued their struggle in the 1980's together with other factions and forces in Bahrain and have played an important role in integrating young people and students in the struggle process such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf, which gave birth to the so-called "Bahraini Youth Organization" in the beginning of the 1980's.

The Arab political regimes have closed all means of traditional participation in the face of their people through parties, which with the passage of time have become useless despite their continuous attempts

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<sup>114</sup> Ahmad al-Haddad, "The Role of the Bahraini Youth in the Protest Movements between the Past and the Future," Jadaliya site, on the following link: <http://is.gd/8iunGS>

to have an impact and to develop their mechanisms. However, the regimes were able to paralyze them and make them unable to influence policies or express the aspirations of the people. With the accumulation of challenges faced by the non-traditional participation means - especially the growing role of the civil society and its ability to network between traditional opposition political parties at a certain moment – there was a need for new and serious methods for change. This was fueled by youth who are resentful of health, educational, economic and social conditions suffered by their parents and which have had their negative impact on the youth as reflected in unemployment, delayed age of marriage and increased psychological and social pressures. All this has inevitably meant that there is a need for change and for enforcing it.

Some say that since the beginning of this century, dissatisfaction in most of the contemporary societies is more prevalent than satisfaction. The people of this region are not the heresiarch of the human phenomenon seeking change as a whole, although they might be at the top of nations and peoples equipped with the elements of the dormant revolution. Thus, there is no wonder that the protest movements erupted across Europe and on Wall Street in the wake of the outbreak of the Arab Spring using the same approach and the same methods.<sup>115</sup>

The Left had also impacted on the thought of young people and was able to re-raise its slogans through these movements, which have fewer links with the organizations and more innovation at the level of their movement. The youth were able to develop their own methods of participation, and this has had its impact on the development of the Leftist organizations by borrowing the new methods and mechanisms of the youth in mobilization and rallying.

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<sup>115</sup> For more details, see the book entitled "The Young Generation in the Arab World and Means of Non-traditional Participation: from the Virtual Domain to the Revolution," Centre of Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2013.

## **2. Culture as an Old/New Entry Point for the Old Left:**

On the national level, the Union participated in the struggle for national liberation together with other political components in Tunisia at that time. It was close to the thought of the Tunisian Communist Party (the Renewal Movement) with regard to workers' rights, but it was critical of communism (Hached, 1951), and it had contradicting views with the new constitutional party despite close cooperation between the two organizations in confronting French colonialism. The Union was the first force to confront colonialism in the 1950's after the arrest or exile of the constitutional party leaders. The Secretary-General, Farhat Hached, was a political figure who had the biggest influence on the masses, which prompted the occupation forces to assassinate him. At the beginning of 1980's, the Tunisian regime started to adopt two strategies: openness and repression. This had led to the eruption of the bread events with the active participation of the General Union of Tunisian Workers' popular base while the leaders' stance was not clear. Despite this ambiguous stance, the government continued its efforts to end its presence and its Secretary-General Habib Achour was tried in the case of "Kussoup" in 1985 (this was the third trial after his 1965 and 1978 trials). These trials were Bourguiba's best method to keep away everyone who might be dangerous for him, his party or his rule.

During the revolution, the popular base and the middle cadres were actively supporting the revolution. The demonstrations were starting from the Union's regional offices, and everyone who wanted to escape the wrath of the police used to find shelter in these premises. However, the leadership did not take a clear position (and did not support the protest on 25 December 2010 in the Muhammad Ali yard). The regional cadres continued their moves and sided with the people and the rest of the active forces until the toppling of Ben Ali's regime on January 14 and the removal of the remnants of his regime through the *Kasabah* movements.

During the ten years prior to the revolution, leftists individuals and groups attempted to take advantage of the struggle momentum that emerged after the fraud in the 2000 parliamentary elections, and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising, which produced a strong solidarity movement in all the Arab countries and among

sectors that haven't been concerned with national liberation from imperialism and Zionism since a long time ago, to disseminate a certain degree of awareness of political and social issues from a Leftist perspective. This had been accompanied by a big rejection movement against the imperialist war against Iraq under the pretext of the fight against terrorism when all the cities of the world were rising up against capitalist globalization and the solutions to its crisis that made the poor foot the bills.

The Left has had its strong presence in the Arab region - even if this presence was not visible - at the level of the public movements, despite the fact that it had been facing a crisis at the political level. We cannot claim that it played the role of the engine or that it contributed to the crystallization of the movement's demands. However, it did play a prominent role in linking these movements, motivating them and raising their awareness. The period from 2000 to 2010 had witnessed the return of the Left after an absence dating back to the 1990's. It emerged through its interaction with realities and its evolution was accompanied by linking regional demands of confronting imperialism with internal demands for democratic change. It also took another step by raising social demands.<sup>116</sup> Its mobility and intellectual interaction with youth groups was one of the keys that opened the doors of the Arab Spring.

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Since the days that followed the revolution, some analysts have promoted the idea that the revolution was spontaneous and did not have field leaders, but this is not true at all. The revolution has had its field leadership which is still present in the social mobility yards until today. This leadership is mainly composed of young people who represent the real conscience of the revolution and who are demanding their rights of development and changes in the pattern of development. Moreover, the presence of the professional and trade union as

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<sup>116</sup> In Egypt, the first time people demanded the toppling of the Hosni Mubarak regime was during the demonstrations against the war on Iraq in 2003. Labor demands were prominent in the demonstrations organized by Kifaya against extension and inheritance (of authority)."

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represented by the General Union of Tunisian Workers in Tunisia, and by the laborers in Egypt on 9 and 10 February 2011, through strikes was crucial and decisive and it was a declaration of the labor movement's involvement and bias to the revolution process.

### **The Role of the Left in the Revolutionary Movement:**

The first observation regarding the revolutions' events is that there are some common features among the Arab youth which have emerged as a result of the previous conditions and because repressive regimes were able to develop their means in an unprecedented manner. These features have made youth more qualified to lead the transformation revolutionary process than the older generation or the generation which was born before the seizing of power by one of the longest Arab models in power. It is not strange that the vanguard of the Arab Spring and its fuel are youth, who had tasted the horrors of despotism and corruption since they were born and until they matured. They have developed the ability to criticize the conditions of their countries and the nation of which they are a part in a way which had made them resentful of the conditions more than at any time in the Arab history. Perhaps we can summarize the features of this generation in the following characteristics: courage, risk-taking, speed, achievement, having the ability to mobilize the street, innovation, determination, aspiration for democracy, freedom and aspirations for a decent life.<sup>117</sup> The left, because of its closeness to this movement in the pre-revolutionary period, was clearly present at the level of alliances or at the level of the slogans raised (social justice), and it was not absent from the Arab Revolution yards.

In Egypt, many of the Egyptian Leftist youth continued to believe in the need to radically change the Mubarak regime. These youth tried to emerge from under the cloak of party organizations, which froze its ideas. This was reflected in the emergence of movements such as Youth for Justice and Freedom and the April 6 Youth. Before these two, the Youth for Change group had emerged. All of these

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<sup>117</sup> Mohamed Agati (Editor), "The Young Generation in the Arab World and Means of Non-traditional Participation: from the Virtual Space to the Revolution," Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2013

movements played a pivotal role in deep-rooting a collective discourse gathering all forces ready to confront Mubarak's regime in one yard and to overcome their organizational and intellectual differences, even temporarily, and to raise slogans which were difficult to be raised by rightist religious forces or even stream without the Left having a clear impact on these streams and their discourse. This sparked the revolution. In the Revolution Youth Coalition, the Leftist youth was heavily present and strikingly, the Left, to a certain extent, succeeded in making some of the Islamic forces such as Strong Egypt and the Egyptian Current adopt some of the Left causes and defend them.

In Tunisia, young activists and bloggers were the fuel of the revolution with their "Flash Mob" campaigns, which are swift and thoughtful movements in many areas by the youth to announce a certain opinion or stance. This move is featured and posted on the internet. Many of these flash mobs were made on torture and the repressive practices of the regime before and during the revolution in order to break the media blackout.<sup>118</sup> Many of them are leftists, although they are not members of the same organization nor do they have the same goals. The Popular Front was formed to achieve the goals of the revolution, and it is a coalition composed of prominent leftist and nationalist progressive parties.

**In Yemen**, the popular base of the renewed Left realized that the moves of the traditional opposition, which the party had taken part in, had been slow compared to the momentum of the Yemeni street and its aspirations to express its demands to overthrow the whole regime not only the head of the regime. Thus, it was clear in its literature and its contributions, through its protest discourse, to engage with all other social forces to express its rejection of the political settlements. Moreover, it was able to create new alternatives for youth leftist alliances that formed a break with the political line of the party and the traditional opposition. What is interesting is that the political

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<sup>118</sup> See Sonia Tamimi, "The Tunisian Youth and Means of Non-traditional Participation: How to Produce Repression and Mass Participation, in Mohamed Agati (Editor), "The Young Generation in the Arab World and Means of Non-traditional Participation: from the Virtual Space to the Revolution ", op cit p. 39 to 43

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leadership of the party has yielded to the Leftist revolutionary youth discourse and did not oblige its popular base engaged in the revolution to accept the political line based on the Gulf initiative, which some of the traditional opposition parties imposed on their popular base. In addition, there was a margin of partisan freedom which enabled Leftist youths in the different provinces to form Leftist blocs and coordination councils, which have played an important role in the development of the revolution's goals and in defending it and its civil nature. Prominent among these blocs were: the Forum of Modernity Forces in Sanaa, which gathered a group of intellectuals, writers and revolutionaries; the February 11 Revolutionists in Taiz, and the Youth of Escalation and Revolutionary Decisiveness, which mobilized in its ranks a number of the Leftist youth, in addition to other youth organizations and movements, which have contributed to the fuelling of the popular movement.<sup>119</sup>

**In Syria**, the opposition Left was supportive of the revolution from the day it started although the participation of political parties considered as Leftist parties was limited because they have few members and most of them are old. However, there was some participation here and there within the limitations imposed<sup>120</sup> by the prevailing conditions,<sup>121</sup> and it has been part of the Syrian revolutionary movement since its beginning until now.

In Bahrain, calls which were supposed to be issued in support of the Bahraini Spring, were directed towards two main streams: the Islamic *al-Wifaq al-Watani* (National Conciliation Association) and its religious authority represented by the cleric council and Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qasem, given that the *al-Wifaq* Association and its religious authority dominates most of the opposition masses. The second stream is the Leftist national stream represented by the National Democratic Action Society (*Waad*) for being an opposition association attracting

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<sup>119</sup> See the paper on the situation of Yemen in this book.

<sup>120</sup> For more detail on the role of the Syrian Left, see the paper on the Syrian situation in this book.

<sup>121</sup> For more detail on the Syrian Left coalition and its role on the ground, visit the following link:

<https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Syrian.Leftist.Coalition>

the different components of the Bahraini society (Sunnis - Shiites - Arabs – non-Arab *Ajam*) and has the largest popular weight within the masses of the democratic and liberal stream. Because it is an association targeted by other Leftist political streams and loyal religious streams, the government-financed newspapers had launched a violent attack on it before the call for the Arab Spring and accused it of regression and dependency on the Islamic movement and the *Wilayat al-Faqih* (mandate of the al-Faqih).<sup>122</sup> The other political associations, especially the secular (leftist, democratic) ones, were not so much targeted because of the weakness of their popular base, their diminished influence within the narrow elitist framework, or because their political vision was based on reform from within and on accepting the outputs of the existing political process without uprising against it.

With the outbreak of the Bahraini revolution in the morning of 14 February 2011, events escalated dramatically, especially after the announcement of the first martyr in the evening of the same day and then the fall of the second martyr during the funeral procession of the first in the morning of 15 February. As a result, the day of rage faced larger challenges than expected. Throughout that critical period of time, political opposition groups - including leftist forces – started to make media appearances and issued statements criticizing the security measures against the demonstrators. However, these groups did not take any further steps, such as engaging their leaders in the demonstrations or embracing the demonstrators' options.<sup>123</sup> Ever since the day of rage, other leftist forces had actively asked their members to participate in the activities of the Pearl Roundabout protests. WAAD erected its own tent upon an organizational decision so as to open communication channels with the youth activists in the field and coordinate with the effective parties there. In the meantime, Sharif and

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<sup>122</sup> Among those articles that addressed the Democratic Action Society (the national left): The contradictions of the Bahraini opposition..Leftist and nationalist following "*velayat-e faqih*," Saturday 13 October 2012 - Bahrain's sectarian left, Yousef al-Bankhalil, *Watan* Newspaper, issue no. 2378 - retrograde left (2-5) Mohammed Mirbati, *The Bahraini Days: How to Educate a New Anti-sectarian Generation?*" 10" Dr. Numan al-Moussawi - Issue 2514.

<sup>123</sup> See the paper of Abbas Mirza al-Murshid in this book.

his deputy addressed issues related to other political associations, media and external relations. For its part, the Progressive Democratic Forum Society's central committee met on 15 February and decided to participate in the political mobility movement, on the condition of "commitment to our legitimate demand to restrict the powers given to the constitutional monarchy and within the constitutional and legal legitimacy. We also demand respect for our citizenship rights, which prompted these protest movements in the first place, and in line with our political goals and demands stipulated by our statute and platform).<sup>124</sup>

**In Syria**, a strange phenomenon emerged during the revolution: the young people of the Leftist parties – those who participated in the government and those who did not - were all supportive of the revolution. The popular base as well as the cadres of communist parties participating in the government and those of the People's Will Party were inclined to engage in the revolution against the position of their parties. From these popular bases and cadres, new groups were formed and took part in the revolution. These are the Communists Coordination Committees,<sup>125</sup> Vision for Change, a number of communist cadres in Sweida, the Democratic Left Rally, and perhaps some other groups that did not last for long. Moreover, there were some communists who were active as individuals or within other gatherings with secular or democratic orientation, especially that part of those who have considered that rebelling against their parties' policy makes the parties adopt the stances of those communists who are opposing them (such as the People's Democratic Party), and thus tends to adopt the policies of this Leftist opposition.<sup>126</sup> Although the Left had largely contributed to the coordination committees which

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<sup>124</sup> Progressive Democratic Forum Society's Central Committee: The critical review document of the Progressive Forum position toward the 14 February Protest Movement and its Repercussions, 15 June 2011, on the following link: [http://www.altaqadomi.com/ar-BH/Document\\_critical\\_review.aspx](http://www.altaqadomi.com/ar-BH/Document_critical_review.aspx), visited on 20 January 2012

<sup>125</sup> On the communists' coordination committees, see: <http://www.al-manshour.org/node/412>

<sup>126</sup> See the site of Syrian political parties and movements on the following link: [http://www.syrianparties.info/?page\\_id=302](http://www.syrianparties.info/?page_id=302)

were formed in Syria and they have given it a bigger space on the ground, the nature of mobility, which is based on geographical basis, made them not necessarily Leftist in nature. We could say that they were of Leftist passion but most of them did not contribute to gathering the Leftist forces. On the contrary, this geographical division may have reduced the ability of the Left to emerge on the scene as homogeneous units that work under one methodology.

**In Tunisia**, the Left had played an active role in the revolution. The demands of the revolution were derived from the leftist lexicon confirming that the revolution is a social and political one. It is also a confirmation that, the Left, even if failed politically, in the sense that it couldn't change the power or seize it, it has culturally, intellectually, socially, and political succeeded in deep rooting principles and changing mentalities. The mobility that happened and which is still going on is more or less the result of the Left sacrifices, and it confirms that the principled and valuable intellectual political heritage was behind the revolution.

There was another stream represented by the leaders of the radical Left such as martyrs, Shokri Belaid or Hamma Hammami, who supported the revolutionary youth, and there were those who spontaneously became involved like Menzel Bouzaïene and al-Riqab and wanted to push things further toward changing the regime from the first day of the Tunisian revolutionary movement.<sup>127</sup>

**In Yemen**, the Left had played an important role during the revolution's days. The bias of the left to the people's demands was spontaneous, and its adoption of the calls for overthrowing the regime was only natural, especially because this regime had been suppressing the party, prosecuting its members and assassinating them for decades. Thus, the party, in its literature, was insisting on the importance of the continuation of the political movement to confront the regime in the north through a number of protest activities and in the south by the Southern Movement,<sup>128</sup> with many of its leaders in the beginning

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<sup>127</sup> See the paper of the Tunisian researcher Sonia Tamimi in this book.

<sup>128</sup> Jorge Martin, "Tunisian Constituent Assembly elections: Ennahda Victory Prepares Further Uprisings" November 7, 2011, on a Marxist Tunisian website, on the following link:

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being party members. Given the Left experience in organizing popular protests, the activities held covered two parallel lines on the eve of the Yemeni revolution. The first was the political line, which the party has adopted inside the traditional opposition (the Joint Meeting Parties JMP). It is the political approach, which is considered as the continuation of the worsening conditions of the pre-revolution and the continuation of the dialogue with the regime to get some political and national gains. When the relations between the regime and the opposition (the JMP) became tensed, the JMP joined the revolution and became part of all the revolutionary components but it continued to pursue a political line based on finding out a solution to the situation in Yemen. This was reflected in its acceptance of the Gulf initiative, which was rejected by the party's youth and the youth of other parties in addition to the independent young people. The second was the revolutionary line, which had contributed to the rise of a renewed Yemeni Left where the young party's members took the lead without consulting with their leadership which was bound by the collective decision of the opposition (JMP).

The Left has strongly adopted trade unions' struggle, and it even managed to make them the focus of the revolutions' slogans and the subsequent events taking advantage of the crisis caused by the neo-liberal policies pursued by the Arab regimes during the last decade before the outbreak of revolutions simultaneously. Most of the slogans raised were carrying economic and social demands (living, social justice and human dignity). These are slogans deeply rooted in the Leftist discourse and are very close to it even if embraced by other streams. One could even say that it was able to impose it on the agenda of the religious Right and to impact the agendas of many of these parties by adopting slogans approaching the concept of social justice. It was able to create a national consensus on policies relating to social justice, such as the need to develop minimum and maximum wage levels. These are old demands but quickly crystallized in demands for laws to organize them. Thus, we can say that the Left,

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<http://www.marxy.com/africa/tunisia/constituent-assembly-elections101111.htm>

during the revolutionary movement, was able to affect the level of mobility as well as the level of slogans and demands.

## 2- The Left and the Revolutionary Process

The role of the Left did not end with the end of the first days of the revolution and the fall of the head of the regimes in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. During the "transitional period", the voice of the Left emerged by adopting the discourse of the Yemeni street refusing the conditions of the transitional phase. This has helped re-positioning of the old traditional forces.

**In Tunisia**, a few days after the elections of the Constituent Assembly, a strike broke out for three days by the postal workers, and a national strike by hotel workers and workers in the tourist agencies. There were also other demonstrations in several cities such as Sousse. Moreover, the workers of the cooling company and of the beer plant in Tunisia went on strike, as well as the workers of the Italian ENI oil company demanding permanent employment contracts. Young people and the working class quickly gained confidence and started to organize direct revolutionary struggle to achieve their goals.

Among these, we find unemployed graduates who played a key role during the course of the revolution. The union of the unemployed graduates (UDC) had recently held its national meeting in Sousse with the participation of 500 people representing thousands from all over the country. A joint demonstration, with the Lefts trade union activists, succeeded in the gathering more than ten thousand people in Tunis, on August 15, 2011, to demand jobs, social justice, and punishment of those responsible in the old regime.<sup>129</sup>

Despite the fact that President Moncef Marzouki is considered to be affiliated with the Tunisian Left forces, the protests 'left of the Left' against the Tunisian troika did not subside, and it was further fueled by the economic and social crises and political assassinations that had occurred recently against two symbols of the Tunisian Left: Shokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi and the threat of assassination against Hamma Hammami and others.

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<sup>129</sup> M. Agati, "How Egyptians Voted," Rawafed for publications and distribution, Cairo, 2013

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**In Egypt**, the Leftist youth flourished although their parties did not achieve big percentages in the legislative elections and despite the fact that their young presidential candidate, Khaled Ali, a human rights activist, did not win in the elections. The Leftist youth, as represented by the "no constitution under the rule of the military," the "April 6 Youth" campaigns and many symbols of the Left who called for voting with "NO" on the constitutional amendments in March 2011, and on the Constitution of 2012, played an important role in raising the rates of "No" votes on the two constitutions. In addition, there was the "Boycott the Constitution" campaign whose main promoters were the revolutionary socialist youth and raised rates of boycotters of elections in the second round of the presidential election and also the referendum on the Constitution of 2012, which was observed in all the elections that took place between March 2011 and December 2012.<sup>130</sup>

In Yemen, youth revolutions within the Yemeni parties themselves started to erupt. The SYP's youth in Taiz implemented an open strike inside the party's premises to protest against the party's historic leadership which was unable to achieve the revolutionary aspirations of the youth. This step caused confusion for the central party leadership, and the youth were able to overthrow the secretariat of the party. A new Leftist youth, with clearer vision on the role of the Left in this phase, has emerged, and this was the first youth revolution within the Yemeni parties in general.<sup>131</sup> The Leftist youth also strongly participated in all social and economic protests that followed the fall of Ali Abdullah Saleh and even in the national dialogue conference, which is still in session as of March 18, 2013. Many of the symbols of the Yemeni revolutionary youth are Leftists, and they have criticized, in one way or the other, the Gulf initiative and have participated in many revolutionary events, individually or within the framework of progressive youth organizations.

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<sup>130</sup> The Party opened new premises in the al-Maafer countryside on 15 October 2012. This was a promising step indicating that the party is regaining its role among the peasants.

<sup>131</sup> See the paper of Sonia Tamimi, *The Predicament of the Tunisian Left*, in this book.

**In Bahrain**, the 14 February youth coalition was formed. It has been widely active in documenting the revolutionary movement in Bahrain since its outbreak and even now. Many of the symbols of the Bahraini Left and its activists are members of this coalition and are participants in one way or the other in the events on the ground or in framing its views and positions regarding the political developments on the ground.<sup>132</sup> The Bahraini Spring has created a desire among the Leftist energetic youth to show their independence of their partisan affiliations and to take this opportunity to revive youth organizations that had emerged in the sixties and seventies of the last century under the cloak of the Marxist Left and the nationalist Left such as the Leftist youth coalition and the Marxist National Liberation Front.

However, this role has faced several challenges represented in the absence of organizational structures and weak political representation. Moreover, the complexity of working with Islamists surfaced again. In Tunisia, for example, the point of view of the radical Left, before the Islamists reached power, was to cooperate with the Islamists, if cooperation was still possible. That is, if the Islamists continued their alliance with them – specially the Labour Party - until the election. This coalition was tactical for the Right and an obligation for the Left.<sup>133</sup> The Labour Party was in the midst of movement and went down to the street and mobilized people. However, its problem was that it wasn't able to break its alliance with the Ennahda. Analysts attribute this to two reasons: the first is the legacy of the October 18 and what it represents of the joint work between the Islamists and leftists in addition to the common experience of prison, where close and intimate personal relations were built. The second is the *Beji Caid Essebsi* phase, which confused a lot of things. Everybody started talking about consensus while the Islamists were seeking power with enough external support, men, and TV channels supporting them. They also had external interests that had cooperated with them and on whom they knew they could rely. Away from "naïve" and "innocent" ideas, this is another interpretation of why the Left continued to ally

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<sup>132</sup> Quoting Muhammad Waked, the founder of the National Front for Justice and Democracy.

<sup>133</sup> See the paper of Sonia Tamimi, *The Predicament of the Left*, in this book as well.

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itself with the Ennahda until elections. The Left did not expect to be defeated in that way in the elections. The results were a "thunderbolt," especially for the radical left. The Workers' Party won only three seats while the Ennahda ranked first with 89 seats.

With the Islamists close to reaching power in several countries (Egypt and Tunisia) or their loud voices which started to surface on the scene with the length of the movement (Syria and Bahrain), the Left again found itself divided between a fundamentalist Left looking for the economic dimension as a determinant of its alliances, and thus, it suggested working with the Islamists on a social agenda, disregarding that Islamists in the government would no longer be the stream that they could ally themselves with on certain issues and overlooking others. It has become in power, which they have to deal with its integrated project – a project different than the one prepared before the revolution. There was also another Leftist postmodernity stream, which considers that the Left is basically an enlightened project, and thus it deals with the Islamists as enemies because they carry reactionary ideas against the values of the society which the Left advocate. Thus, the two streams overlooked the nature of the moment represented by the fact that the Islamists are ruling, thus the controversy which had prevailed before the revolutions continued.

### **3- The Left and Linking the Revolutionary Process with Political Transformation**

The identity crisis has surfaced in a number of cases such as the Tunisian case as an example. There are many who blame Najib Chebbi for his participation in government and specially for his performance in the Ghannouchi government, which some called the Chebbi government because of his media prominence and his defense of the government's policies and its members. The radical Left believes that he was not up to the revolutionary moment, because he was part of the government, and he could be the spokesman for the mass movement and encourages it, even in secret if necessary. But, in fact, he started pushing backwards while he was confronting the *Kasabah* and the sit-ins. The same thing happened with Ahmad Ibrahim who was a minister of higher education, and he made many serious efforts in this field. But, the revolutionary moment was not for what he did. There was still a movement and maturity, and there was

supposed to be a push forward. The mistake, according to the Marxist Left, was not joining the government, but in the fact that they should have joined it in the decision-making position rather than taking their orders from Mohamed Ghannouchi. The interpretation of the party, especially the interpretation of Najib Chebbi, is based on his understanding of the January 13. He did not understand that the January 14 has changed the balance and that he could have been the one to push forward social mobility instead of opposing it. The regime did not collapse with the flight of Ben Ali; only its head was removed because Mohamed Ghannouchi was part of the regime and the main implementer of Ben Ali's policy. This has given the old regime an opportunity to recover its breath. The party, after the revolution, has been classified as a liberal and centrist party because the governments it had joined did not change anything in the old pattern of development and in the economic, social and cultural policies pursued by Ben Ali. In its economic and political perceptions, it was very close to the former regime, and it did not differ with it except in its vision of the form of the state and the question of democracy. The Tunisian revolution did not break out just for the sake of freedom, but - and primarily - for changing the pattern of development, which has led to those social and economic atrocities.

The categorization of the Progressive Democratic Party after the revolution changed from a pan-Arab nationalist party before the revolution to a centrist party after it, similar to socialist parties that have today embraced market economy. After the revolution, it opted to preserve the Tunisian state, and this was a class option which serves the interests of the higher *petit bourgeois* classes of the society. Among the problems that it had faced after 14 January is its structure. It was a resistance party, and it lacked experience such as how to write an economic program. After the revolution, it took economic stances and options - although with strong social procedures - not related to Leftist parties and this had dragged it to ally itself with right oriented parties.

The other form of this crisis was the failed experiences of the Left in gathering the all the Leftist spectrums in one party. Here we will take the Socialist People's Alliance Party as an example. In Egypt, many streams and forces positively responded to the call for the creation of a new party which later became known as the "Socialist

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People's Alliance." However, at an early stage of its creation, sorting inside the party started on political and program levels. A group that had walked out after the founding conference later on formed, with others, the Social Democratic Egyptian Party, describing the Socialist People's Alliance as being more leftist than it should be at this stage. The Revolutionary Socialist Organization refused to continue its participation in the creation of the alliance because it refused to dissolve itself and merge into the new party and because many of its leaders were workers and peasants. Another group walked out and formed the Egyptian Socialist Party. Some of its cadres and leaders had, at a later stage, joined the Alliance Party. In the end, the new party was formed of a group of those who left the *Tagammu*, when they failed to change the leadership of the party and to mobilize a majority against it, the Socialist Renewal Stream, the Revolutionary Stream, some members of the Democratic Left, and a large group of independents or who were in old parties such as the United Workers' Party, the Socialist Peoples' Party, or the Socialist Egyptians. With the presence of members of the *Tagammu* (the Left Party during the Mubarak era), historic conflicts returned and the party witnessed a wave of resignations coming mostly from the active youth on the ground.

In this respect, we can speak about two positive experiences: the first is the "Revolution Continues Coalition" in Egypt. The broad Left Party was not built on any partisan grounds towards other forces, specially the Leftist. From the beginning of the revolution, there was a tendency towards signing joint statements, entering into coordination bodies during big events - in particular demonstrations gathering millions of Egyptians -, entering into alliances and forming political fronts with other forces, especially the leftist forces. In the parliamentary elections 2011 - as a model for frontal work - the Alliance Party participated in the beginning together with the Egyptian bloc and the Liberal Egyptian Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the *Tagammu* and others. It then walked out and built the "Revolution Continues Coalition" which gathered it with the Revolution Youth Coalition and the Egyptian Socialist Party, the Egyptian Coalition, Freedom Egypt, Equality and Development, and the Egyptian Stream.

There were some distinctive features of the Continuous Revolution Coalition such as its decisive stance with regard to dealing with the remnants of the former regime and its insistence on issues of social justice, equality, and its commitment to the goals of the revolution and its demands. Moreover, it has distanced itself from narrow partisan interests, and this has strengthened it. Furthermore, it has nominated women and youth on the top of its lists and enabled those who have popularity to compete in the elections, and thus, it has provided a good space for the parties and forces who were members of this alliance.

From the outset, the goal of the Revolution Continues Coalition was to build a political alliance on the basis of a program between parties with leftist, liberal and moderate Islamist orientation. Although there was a political agreement on this issue, the coalition has faced many difficulties, most importantly, the weak financial resources, the decentralized administration of the election campaign, as well as the halting of the coalition's campaign because of the events of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, which led to dozens of martyrs and injured people, immediately before elections, thus affecting the elections propaganda period.

The elections ended and the Revolution Continues Coalition was able to win eight seats in the parliament (one individual seat and seven list's seats). However, soon the number fell to five when three MPs withdrew from the coalition and considered themselves as independent MPs, not committed to represent the coalition in the parliament. Moreover, the parliament was dissolved and thus the coalition, as well as other blocs, was not given enough time to show its cohesion and to provide an alternative vision under the dome of the parliament, but in spite of this, members of the Revolution Continues Coalition in the parliament, in such a short period of time, were able to submit some draft laws that are completely different from the ideas held by the parliamentary Islamic majority such as the trade unions freedom draft law and the investment and incentives guarantees.

In Yemen, too, contrary to the experience of some Left forces during the Arab revolutions, the Yemeni Left as represented by the YSP, was consistent in its stances with the revolution, adopted it and defended its taking a role at the leadership level as well as at the popular level. In my opinion, this is because it is the carrier of the

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change project which the Saleh regime had tried to eradicate over the past decades by various ways and methods. Thus, the Yemeni revolution was an opportunity for the Leftist forces, in particular, to reorganize themselves and revive their stolen slogans during the previous periods, the slogans of social justice, equal citizenship, and the civil state. The Yemeni squares and yards, in the first months of the Yemeni revolution, were Leftist spaces *par excellence*, before the Islamization of the revolution and the rise of the religious, military, and tribal forces and before the militarization of the revolution, which in my opinion, has formed a real challenge for the Leftist forces in Yemen, targeting the heart of the Leftist thought and its civil theses.

Hence, we find that the Yemeni revolution and its challenges, contrary to the Arab Spring revolutions, did not lead to the fragmentation of the left forces and to their isolation. On the contrary, the revolution has contributed to the stimulation of the Yemeni Left, testing its field capacity, and its increased popular base. This has created horizons supportive of the emergence of a renewed Left with political and historic attributes deriving its strength from the legacy of the Yemeni left, in general, and going beyond the theses of the left in its political pragmatic and tactical alliances. Moreover, its literature has formed a break with the old traditional system. It also conducted an intellectual review of the Yemeni Left in light of the revolution's experience and the political performance of the party within the JMP system. The youth of the Left were able to analyze this experience and provide new insights for the advancement of the Left and for overcoming the obstacles of the political coalition and its volatile performance impacting the identity of the party.

In light of the Left radical emphasis on building new organizations to fit more into the nature of this phase, and with an organizational history marred with lots of problems and a legacy of secret work thought, the Left became more occupied than it should with the settling of conflicts between its members. Thus it became divided between organizational work and the follow-up on the revolutionary developments on the ground. For this reason, it hasn't been able to perform its primary role at this stage of linking the revolutionary path with the political path. On the contrary, it had for long years separated between the two paths because it considered that mass movements should self-evolve without being corrupted by

politics or without being exploited by streams and political parties, and this had been, to a large extent, an impediment for linking the two paths. In a climate with a Leftist orientation, given the nature of the popular revolutions, a democratic Leftist stream has started to become more prominent in the political scene. However, its broad alliances, as in the case of the Egyptian elections – which allied itself with the most right-wing party (the Free Egyptians) under the name of the Egyptian Bloc or as in the case of Tunisia, where the Democratic Progressive Party was created after the revolution - had made this stream lose its identity. Therefore, the leftist tendency continued to be evident in the mass movement but at the same time its capacity to transform this tendency into a real program which can be translated into the achievement of the revolutions' objectives, remained absent.

### **Conclusion:**

At the structural level, the movements of the left have witnessed a continuous development associated with the events and developments in the region, especially at the level of youth movements and organizations that have experienced a great deal of innovation at the level of organization and tools. This had enabled the engagement of several categories in these movements. The activities carried out by these movements on the local or regional level - compared to their age - is also quite good under the available and possible limitations. These movements have impacted many sectors of the society and contributed to changing the fear and negative culture which has prevailed for long years in the Arab street. The Left has also contributed – through its inter-communication and though the youth, too, in having an impact between the different countries in the region, and it was instrumental in the communication process between the Arab revolutions.

However, in the recent history of the Left movements, most of it was reactions to events, which did not enable them to take the initiative, and thus, they were unable to do serious work which enables them to bond with the overall reality, and to work on developing and changing it. The openness of these movements also has had its limitations, too. Working with political religious streams – especially the Muslim Brotherhood – was a controversial issue. Discussions and controversies on this topic were always a source of

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tension and wasted energies. Regarding their relation with the ruling regimes, the Leftist ideology prevailed. The prevailing view was to work to bring about change and not only reform; on this basis, the relation between the Leftist movements was a confrontational one with the regimes most of the time. On the other side, the regimes' strategy was to give these movements some freedom and strike them strongly when they try to cross the red lines.

The main obstacle facing protest movements associated with the Left in the region is the state of fragmentation experienced by this stream in addition to the historical differences between its various organizations as well as the predominance of the interests of the various political streams over the interest of the movement and joint action. We should not overlook the fact that many of the leaders of these movements work through their historic experiences derived from the underground work, despite the fact that these movements have become public, and they need a different kind of experience. The absence of any accumulation on the level of organization remains the main constraint facing this stream in interacting with reality, and this puts its own movements in a state of a permanent ebb and flow.

In this context, we see that there is a fragile organizational position of the Leftist stream. It is confused between the aspirations of the Left unity – which in my opinion is an unrealizable legend in any political stream because of the presence of significant differences between its components - and between broad alliances which would make it lose its Leftist identity. There is also the absence of efforts to build coordination between the Leftist streams which can "sing the same melody from different locations." This was accompanied by unreasonable self-criticism without an intellectual review of the foundations, which had helped in changing temporal tactics into a part of the ideology (the relationship with the Islamists as an example). This has prevented the Left from acting and interacting with the post-revolutions phase, especially in its political track. And this had contributed, to a large extent, to its inability to link the revolutionary and the political processes. This is one of the main crises of the Arab revolutions until now. Moreover, the state of civil-religious polarization gives the Islamic stream a wide space to gain supporters because it is the protector of religion and its representative *vis-à-vis* others, which this stream does not hesitate in accusing them of

infidelity. This battle conceals that the liberal stream does not have any vision of the nature and form of the state different than that which was present before the revolutions. Thus, the state of polarization makes one party stronger and gives the other party the cover. The Left, which has a vision, remains unable to present it under this situation where it is obliged to support one of the parties. This means that it is the main loser in the prevailing state of polarization in the region.

The claim that the Left was absent in the Arab arena contains a great deal of simplification. It is true that the numbers of the stream's representatives in representative councils may be limited, but, during the last ten years, the left has been the engine, the upholder, and the catalyst to some degree of many of the protest movements. However, the Left needs to deal with realism and innovative ideas with the previously mentioned challenges inspired by its youth its approach and its method of work in the last five years instead of controlling them with rigid organizations and passing its historical problems to them .