Sounding the alarm for solidarity
A fragile lifeline for migrants risking the Mediterranean crossing

Rebranding Sudan’s brutal militia
How the EU’s migrant management schemes empowered the RSF

Towards a new Algerian republic?
Samir Larabi analyses the state of the popular movement

Clampdown after Egypt protests
Over 3000 thrown behind bars after viral videos spark anger

Sowing the seeds of hunger in Iraq
How US agribusinesses profited from the occupation
‘Church Street’ by Rayan Elnayal

This project by British Sudanese artist and architect Rayan Elnayal explores ideas on multicultural identities, hybridity and the third space and how literary magic realism has been successfully used by novelists to tell unconventional narratives.

Elnayal’s exhibition of digital prints, *A Magical Realist Afrabia* was on display at P21 Gallery in September 2019.

Go to www.p21.gallery to find out more.
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Mourners demand justice for martyrs

After seven months of protests and mass strikes a coalition of civilian opposition parties sealed a deal with the Sudanese military in August. The power-sharing agreement has led to the creation of a joint civilian-military Sovereignty Council, and a new government led by economist Abdalla Hamdok, while a transitional legislative assembly has also been agreed in principle.

Yet the mass movement which made this agreement possible has not gone away, and the people who risked their lives on the barricades and in the sit-ins are still hungry for change and social justice.

Funerals for some of the victims of the massacre on 3 June, when the Rapid Support Forces and army cleared the sit-in outside the Army General Command in Khartoum mobilised thousands in early October. Hundreds of mourners chanted “justice for the martyrs” as they gathered to remember Qusay Hamedto, whose body was so badly injured that he was only identified from his DNA. Marches and demonstrations have also called for an independent judiciary and the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of protesters. Carrying out those demands would put the military partners of the new civilian government in the frame for investigation, including the current chairman of the Sovereignty Council, General Abdelfattah al-Burhan, and his deputy, Mohamed Dagalo, known as Hemedti, who commands the RSF.

People who risked their lives on the barricades and in the sit-ins are still hungry for change.

The same week that Qusay was buried, al-Burhan travelled with Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to Saudi Arabia and UAE to discuss details of a multi-billion dollar aid deal promised by the Gulf states to help rebuild Sudan’s “stability and prosperity”.

The joint Saudi-Emirati offer was first made in April, barely ten days after the fall of El Bashir, and long before any progress had been made towards civilian participation in the transitional government. Further weeks of protests and a two-day general strike brought Qusay Hamedto and hundreds of thousands of others repeatedly onto the streets to demand real change.

Al-Burhan and Hemedti toured the capitals of the Gulf, and their ally, Egyptian dictator al-Sisi in late May, and returned home to launch the RSF against the sit-in, killing over 100, many of whose bodies were dumped in the Nile.

There is no question that Sudan’s economy badly needs support, but will the mourners who want justice for Qusay agree that his blood is a price worth paying for the Gulf states’ gold?

Read more at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
News | Egypt

Thousands arrested as protests defy regime

Hundreds demonstrated in Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta, Mahalla, Suez and several other cities across Egypt on Friday 20 September in a rare show of public defiance against al-Sisi’s authoritarian regime.

Videos circulated on social media showing crowds chanting against the regime.

In Suez, where clashes erupted with police for a second night on Saturday 21 September, crowds could be heard chanting “There is no God but God, and al-Sisi is the enemy of God.”

Protesters who gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo, the epicentre of the 2011 revolution, could be heard using the familiar slogan: “The people want the downfall of the regime.”

The trigger for the protests was a series of videos by whistleblower Mohamed Ali, a former military contractor, now living in Spain.

Ali accused al-Sisi, his son, and other senior figures in the regime of corruption by diverting public funds into their own pockets, building luxurious palaces and villas while ordinary Egyptians struggle to feed their families.

Frustration at rising inequality and poverty was one of the reasons behind the protests, Egyptian human rights activist Mina Thabet told Middle East Solidarity.

“President al-Sisi has been applying extreme austerity measures for the past three years under the label of economic reform and removing the social safety nets which were providing financial support to the families who needed it the most.”

Viral videos accused al-Sisi of building palaces while ordinary people struggle to feed their families

According to government statistics, one third of the population live below the poverty line.

The protests on 20 September seemed to have caught the regime off-guard. Al-Sisi scrambled to respond directly in a speech at a youth conference organised by the regime.

But as expectation of further protests mounted over the following week, the machinery of repression swung into action.

“Since President al-Sisi came to power in 2014, he has been systematically cracking down on every social and political structure in the country,” explained Mina.

“That includes civil society, social movements and parties. He has been systematically closing down these movements, attacking freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of political participation.

Thousands are in jail: according to some estimates there are 60,000 people detained right now in Egypt, because they tried to exercise those freedoms.”

“According to our statistics at least 3120 people were arrested between 20 September and 2 October, 2447 of those appeared in front of the prosecutors, 113 confirmed as remaining disappeared, 94 reappeared after disappearance, and at least 57 released without charge.”

Forced disappearances are chillingly common. Thousands are in jail: according to some estimates there are 60,000 people detained right now in Egypt, Mina told us. “The disappeared include men, women and children. Our colleague Ibrahim Izz-al-Din disappeared on June 11 and he is a human rights defender. There are thousands like him.”

Lawyers representing detainees have themselves become targets of repression.

Award-winning human rights lawyer Mahienour el-Masry was seized by police on 22 September. According to reports from a friend who was speaking to her on the telephone during her arrest, and several eyewitness, Mahienour was bundled into a microbus by plain-clothed officers on the afternoon of 22 September after attending the prosecutor’s office to follow up on arrests of alleged protesters.

Leading opposition activists have been arrested, including senior figures in the Karama (Dignity) Party and the Bread and Freedom Party, as well as academics such as Professors Hassan Nafaa and Hazem Hosny of Cairo University.

Well-known activist Alaa Abdelfattah was among those arrested as the clampdown widened.

Images of al-Sisi as a gangster have spread online | Photo: revsoc.me

Turn to page 22 for more on how you can support political prisoners in Egypt and read more online at www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
Students and university staff played a key role in Sudan’s revolution and are continuing to organise and push for real justice and democracy, writes Dr Iman Hamza

El Bashir’s regime created what was called the ‘Higher Education Revolution’, which extended higher education horizontally by opening a lot of new universities with minimal infrastructure. Some of these universities were rented houses: there were no libraries, no proper lecture rooms, no offices for staff. Sometimes all the staff of the university were in one room.

Even tables were lacking, or 2 or 3 people would be at one table. Staff had nowhere to sit and nowhere to contact students. Even the basic living conditions and minimum needs of students were not met.

The regime also invented a body responsible for student accommodation and assistance, but this was targeted at the students supportive of the regime who were members of the ruling National Congress Party, while other students did not receive the same benefits.

The imposition of the Arabic language on the universities prevented students from strengthening their knowledge of English as a second language. The regime introduced subjects with the aim of brainwashing students, to make them feel positive about the regime.

Those subjects would take up most of the first year, thus affecting the scientific content of the curriculum. When these new universities opened, the needs of the labour market were not considered, and as a result students suffered from unemployment.

Staff were also victims of the Higher Education Revolution. They suffered poor working conditions, wages were not paid at market rates, which meant that lecturers had to work in more than one university to fulfill their living needs.

The regime and its Higher Education Ministry interfered with every aspect of university life, leaving no room for staff or the university itself to be independent. The regime sacked staff members and excluded students who opposed it. The government and the Ministry of Higher Education intervened in every detail of the curriculum while some of the subjects were geared towards brainwashing students.

There is no funding for academic research. The Ministry of Higher Education has negligible funding, and they control the topics researched.

If you agree to work on those topics you will get some of this funding, but if you want to research anything else you will get nothing. Moreover, there are no rewards for the research staff whatsoever, which creates little incentive to pursue a career in research given the poor economic conditions in the sector.

Students and staff have been organising themselves. They tried to gather and strike. They struggled greatly and have exposed themselves to the aggressiveness of the regime. Many of them are in jail. At last however, they have made some gains. All the organisations began secretly. They used WhatsApp and Telegram for meetings to avoid the violent response of the military and the security services.

It was the strikes which really got rid of the regime: they mobilised everyone. People going into streets, raising their voices and striking had a huge impact.

The deal signed by the military council which agrees to a new government with civilians is not entirely what we want. The agreement is full of faults and we still think that the military council doesn’t want justice to be achieved. Unless we keep a close eye on the agreement and scrutinise it, it might put us back again on an undesirable path. We will put on pressure to make sure the agreement leads to a democratic transition, otherwise we will go back to the streets again!

The role of all activists, and not only students and staff is to keep an eye on what’s happening and try to help in getting things in the right direction.

People benefiting from the former ruling National Congress Party are still there. However, with our help and alertness, the path of the revolution will go where we want, and we will be there to correct it along the way.

Dr Iman Hamza is a leading activist in the Sudanese Association of University Teachers. Find out more online about how Sudanese university staff are organising at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
At Europe’s deadly borders thousands die every year. Meanwhile in Libya and Sudan, “better migration management” schemes funded by European states are benefitting brutal militias.

Death is a daily occurrence at Europe’s borders. Conservative estimates in 2017 placed the number of deaths since 2000 at 33,761.

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the world’s deadliest borders and divides some of the richest and most secure regions on the planet from the poorest and most insecure. This is not an accident but by design. Europe’s restrictive visa system shuts out most of the world’s poorest people and those in need of asylum by denying them access to legal routes of free movement.

Instead, those escaping war, the terror of authoritarian regimes, displacement, famine, poverty and exploitation, are forced to take long and dangerous journeys to find safety and a liveable life.

The details of people’s journeys are as complex and multiple as their reasons for embarking on them, many spending years living in transit. Moving North from West Africa through Niger to Algeria and Morocco, or from the Eastern Horn of Africa up through Sudan to Libya or Egypt, most have risked their lives crossing the Sahara
Over the last decade, European border controls have been increasingly externalised and outsourced to countries in the MENA and Sahel regions. Under the auspices of the Rabat and Khartoum Processes, summits in Valletta 2015, Malta 2017, and Sharm El-Sheikh 2019 saw the EU provide billions of Euros in exchange for neighbouring states to implement restrictive border control policies aimed at disrupting, detaining, and deporting migrants before they even reach Europe’s borders.

Close collaboration has been further developed through bilateral agreements, such as the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding 2017 which designated assigned primary responsibility to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard as the primary responsible agent for border control and search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean.

Given the conflicts and human rights abuses documented in many of these partner countries, a huge amount of violence is involved in implementing the EU’s borders. The Libyan detention centres offer a stark picture of this violence, where people are incarcerated by Libyan militias in inhumane conditions and subject to routine abuse, torture, and extortion.

In the Mediterranean itself, European states have moved from a policy of search and rescue, to abandonment, to what can be seen as the institutionalisation of refoulement (the forcible return of asylum seekers to a country where they risk persecution) which is a violation of international human rights law.

Since the EU-Turkey deal in 2016 established automatic deportations for ‘irregular’ migrants and those with rejected asylum claims, we are now also seeing EU states coordinate with Libyan and Moroccan authorities to have migrant boats ‘pulled-back’ to North Africa and their passengers arrested.

At the same time, solidarity has been increasingly criminalised, with civilian NGO rescue ships denied entry to European ports, or else impounded and their crew charged under anti-smuggling laws.

In this way, the EU actively perpetrates the physical and structural harms migrants face even as it turns its back on them.

Set up 5 years ago, Watch the Med Alarm Phone is a transborder network of activists from different countries in Europe and beyond that is committed to the freedom of movement for all. It operates a 24 hour emergency distress hotline for people who are crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas.

The Alarm Phone helps to coordinate their rescue by alerting the European coastguards and then monitoring the situation until we can confirm they are rescued. When confronted with EU state inaction or collusion with pushbacks, we raise the alarm through social media to apply pressure and demand a rescue is carried out.

We also raise the alarm in a more general sense through regular reports documenting the daily violence going on at Europe’s borders and their structural injustices.

Alarm Phone develops its vision and argument for a world without borders out of direct action in the Mediterranean. We stand in solidarity with all those who struggle to enact their freedom of movement despite the borders that seek to make this freedom impossible.

Struggles for freedom of movement are intimately bound up with struggles for freedom against state tyranny and economic inequality that exist everywhere but have been particularly prominent in the uprisings of the last decade in the MENA region.

Many people who called the Alarm Phone in distress over the years have got on that boat to escape the civil war in Syria that began with a revolution against the brutal Assad government, or the racist persecution of the Sudanese regime against the populations of Darfur and Nuba Mountains, or the degrading horror of the Libyan camps.

At the same time, the struggle for freedom of movement, for ‘no borders’, is a struggle against a political and economic system that maintains the wealth and power of Europe in part through stabilising and upholding authoritarian states in the Middle East and Africa.

Therefore, struggles for national democracy and rights, regional peace and prosperity, and global free movement are all part of the same project of building another world.

Alarm Phone has members across the Mediterranean, West Africa and Europe. As part of the project, acts of solidarity with diaspora communities working to claim and defend civil and political rights are vital. In order to facilitate this Alarm Phone organises and participates in a variety of networks.

An example is We’ll Come United, a network Alarm Phone members helped to establish and participate in, which assists in networking exiles, diaspora communities and European activists, particularly in Germany, with refugee and migrant communities in various countries that are involved in political and societal struggles to improve refugee and migration policies.

We show unconditional support for the Sudanese revolution and Sudanese community activists in Europe, and stand in solidarity with our friends in the Kurdish and Afghan communities.

Alarm Phone strongly criticises European-Egyptian cooperation in the fields of migration and security, as well as the use of development discourses in order to open up the state for international capital.

However, Alarm Phone’s interests extend beyond solidarity to influencing public policy. The organisation facilitates information exchange,
Feature | Alarm Phone and Libya

sharing the experiences of exiled activists in order to communicate successes to other activist groups.

With other networks, Alarm Phone recently organised the transborder summercamp (TSC) in France, which was attended by approximately 556 activists from across the Mediterranean. Initiatives such as this have real connective and productive impacts on refugee and migrant solidarity actions, helping to develop in the exchange of ideas and experiences, and inspiring those taking part.

The TSC brought activists together from across the MENA, Sahel, Central and Western Africa, and Europe to share and learn from each other’s struggles. Discussions made links between struggles against corporate resource extraction in central Africa, mass displacement, authoritarian regimes in North Africa, and the EU’s increasing security-border infrastructure. These conversations reminded us that we need to develop common strategies which link our different struggles across and against borders. Fighting deportations in Germany is also fighting the terror of the Egyptian regime. Each search and rescue boat that docks in Italy is a challenge to rising European fascism and its partners, and the Libyan militias that profit from death and torture. These links were highlighted for us during the camp when we received news of the occupation in Paris, organised by the gilets noirs, a movement of undocumented migrants. Their message: “We are not simply fighting for documentation, but against a system that makes us undocumented immigrants”. The Alarm Phone is one part of this wider project of building networks of solidarity and resistance.

This article expresses the individual views of the authors and not the official position of Watch the Med Alarm Phone.

The Libyan ‘coastguards’ who smuggle people
Julie Henri

F
ollowing years of civil war since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, Libya is controlled by thousands of rival militias. At the same time, the European Union’s policies have turned from rescue to outsourced border control.

Abd Al-Rahman Milad (aka Bija) is the leader of a militia in control of part of the Libyan coastline and was paid by European governments to patrol the Mediterranean in search of “illegal migrants”.

A 2017 Libya Experts Panel report identified Bija as a key smuggling figure in the region. Isobal Yeung, a Vice News reporter, interviewed Bija back in October 2017, who is well aware of his position of power in this context: “They are accusing me of smuggling. The government – with all of our capacities – just can’t ... If I were a smuggler, no one would be able to stop me”.

The documentary also shows that Bija knows who the other smugglers are, and ensures he brings the migrants trafficked by other smugglers back to the Libyan coast to be able to smuggle them himself later.

Originally, the European Union’s missions were aimed to save lives and disassemble human trafficking networks in the North African region. However, since 2016, following disputes among European member states around receiving incoming migrants, the Italian government refocused its priority on reducing the number of crossings through greater collaboration with the Libyan Coast Guard by providing them with “training, patrol boats and other equipment, and financial and other support”.

In January 2017 alone, the European Union announced the immediate allocation of €1 million to the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy as well as a grant of €2.2 million under the Regional Development and Protection Programme in North Africa and establishing a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. The overall programmes of the European Union’s support to migration management in Libya are worth over €20 million.

Yet, this same Libyan Coast Guard which received millions of euros in EU funding, are in fact human traffickers themselves. Amnesty International’s Libya’s “Dark Web of Collusion” 2017 report revealed that seven of the 72 migrants interviewed by Amnesty International confirmed that they had been stopped by the Libyan Coast Guard while at sea and were allowed through after their smuggler was identified as someone who had paid for safe passage of his boats.

In 2018 following campaigns by human rights organisations and media investigations, Bija was sanctioned by the UN for human trafficking. Other militias continue to cash in on the EU’s migration policies, however, by running camps where migrants “rescued” by the Libyan Coast Guard are detained. This is a vicious circle that enriches smugglers, maintains human trafficking networks in Libya and puts displaced people’s lives at risk.
The Khartoum Process and the rebranding of Sudan’s brutal militia

Marwa Jalal

Established in 2014, the Khartoum Process was originally called the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative. It was an outcome of the African Union Regional Ministerial Conference on Human Trafficking and Smuggling in the Horn of Africa which took place in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

The conference’s claimed aim was to explore solutions to human trafficking in the Horn of Africa and establish a coordinated action plan between the member states in the region.

However, the outcomes of the conference took a different route when representatives of the European council decided to engage in the discussion. Just a month after the conference in Khartoum, in November 2014, a document called the Rome Declaration was adopted at the Ministerial Conference.

The Declaration saw 37 African and European countries agree to cooperate in tackling human smuggling and the social and “human” effects of “mixed migration”, through providing technical assistance and improving national capacity building.

The European Commission has taken the tragic phenomenon of people being forced to leave their homes and rebranded it as a crime.

The term mixed migration mentioned in the document refers to cross-border movements of groups of people who may have a variety of legal statuses - some may be refugees fleeing persecution, others may be victims of trafficking, while others are trying to escape unbearable living conditions.

According to the Mixed Migration Centre, a research body which is part of the Danish Refugee Council, all are entitled to protection under human rights law.

Yet instead of working on strategies to help these groups of “mixed migrants”, the governments of these countries signing the Rome Declaration decided to represent them as enemies and a threat to social harmony.

Indeed, it is this approach of rebranding vulnerable groups as hazardous that has allowed for such an initiative to take place. The African Commission and European Commission have taken the tragic phenomenon of helpless people being forced to leave their homes and expose themselves to all forms of danger and rebranded it as a crime.

The focus - and funds - have shifted from helping the vulnerable and weak, to ensuring they can only leave their countries through routes approved by the same oppressive regimes they were trying to flee.

Even funding for projects aimed at tackling hunger and disease were brought under the umbrella of the...
Khartoum Process, in effect making humanitarian aid conditional on “improved” border control. Through the EU Trust Fund for Africa, 217 million euros have been allocated to projects in Sudan since 2015.

Although this was the same regime which had instigated a genocide in Darfur, a civil war that contributed to the separation of South Sudan and got Sudan listed as a state sponsor of terrorism, the EU governments continued to work with El Bashir’s security apparatus on “migration management.”

This involved direct support to the Sudanese police, which is notorious for brutal treatment of refugees, and collusion in the rise of the Rapid Support Forces militia.

Under the leadership of Mohamed Dagalo (also known as Hemeti), the RSF brought together and relabelled the Janjaweed militias which had terrorised Darfur on behalf of the government a decade previously, and then tasked by Omar El Bashir with protecting Sudan’s borders in 2016.

As Sudanese researcher Dr Amgad Eltayeb points out, the RSF’s role was not exactly secret: “Hemiti bragged several times in the media about the role of his militia in protecting Europe. He went as far as to demand a ransom in the form of monitoring equipment and drones or he will open the borders to the asylum seekers.”

Although the EU continues to deny that the RSF has benefited directly and indirectly from the Khartoum Process, it is hard to see how else to describe the way in which the militia has risen to prominence within the Sudanese state.

EU governments continued to work with El Bashir’s security apparatus on “migration management,” despite the regime’s role in genocide.

Pressure from Sudanese activists finally forced the suspension of some Khartoum Process activities in Sudan earlier this year. These included the relocation of a key intelligence centre, the Regional Operation Centre Khartoum (ROCK), to Nairobi.

A German-led project training Sudanese border guards and police was also “halted” in mid-March, German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, revealed. EU officials said that this project had stopped because it required “the involvement of government counterparts to be carried out.”

In mid-March, the EU’s “government counterparts” in Sudan were mainly busy trying to repress a mass, peaceful movement which was mobilising hundreds of thousands of protesters across the country to demand “freedom, peace and justice.”

Dozens had already been killed and hundreds injured by police and the RSF militia. Although El Bashir was removed from power in April by his own generals, the attacks on protesters continued. On 3 June, RSF troops were among the armed men who smashed a sit-in in Khartoum, killing over 100, injuring hundreds and raping dozens of women and men.

This mass movement for revolutionary change boosted campaigns against the Rapid Support Forces, challenging the rebranding aimed at hiding their past crimes.

Sudanese regions have suffered decades of war and genocide | Photo: Enough Project
back at covert efforts by the regime to influence public opinion and boost the military rulers’ support.

Sudanese youth groups sent emails and held meetings with senior managers at Facebook and Twitter demanding that all content praising the Rapid Support Forces be removed and their pages and accounts deleted.

These posts and pages were part of a campaign orchestrated by an Egyptian company which used fake accounts to increase pro-military content on the internet.

Facebook recently announced that it had shut down fake accounts and pages related to Sudan that were linked to this Egyptian company, New Waves.

Sudanese activists spoke up in parliaments across Europe and the UK to demand action

A Sudanese activist, who asked to remain anonymous, sent emails to Eva Perez Gonzalez, Secretary to the head of the Horn of Africa Unit at the European Commission. Another encounter happened on Twitter between various Sudanese activists and the European Commission spokesman for humanitarian aid and crisis management protesting at his vague and ambiguous replies.

The European Union’s Facebook page was also raided by Sudanese activists regarding their complicity in abhorrent acts against protestors in Sudan.

Sudanese activists spoke up in parliaments across Europe and the UK to demand action to stop the funding of mercenary groups through the Khartoum Process. Lugain Salih, a young activist residing in Ireland, said that most of the efforts in Ireland were made by the Sudanese Revolution Support Committee (SRSC).

Lugain and other members of the SRSC met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dublin about the Khartoum Process and held a briefing session at the Parliament that was attended by political parties and various civil society organisations.

They also held awareness sessions that addressed the human rights violations that African immigrants are subject to and the attempted rebranding of the Janjaweed militia using taxpayers’ money. Lugain told Middle East Solidarity, “we wanted to make the Irish public aware that the Khartoum Process is funded through their taxes in order to put pressure on the EU through public opinion”.

Although these campaigns have been successful in the short term, as long as anti-immigration discourse prevails in Europe, institutions such as the European Commission will continue to invent methods to use taxpayers’ money to extend European borders further south. Meanwhile new laws are making life harder for migrants who manage to reach Europe.

Civil society organizations need to make it clear that they will not tolerate EU states funding oppressive and tyrannical regimes to keep migrants out.

In June 2019 the German parliament passed a controversial legislative package that included the expansion of migration police powers and introduced what it called the “Orderly Return Law”. The law extends the grounds on which asylum seekers may be deported and permits officers to access apartments and put migrants awaiting deportation in regular prisons in a stark violation of their privacy and human rights.

This is the context within which projects such as the Khartoum Process need to be discussed. It is also one of the reasons why the suspension of the Khartoum Process shouldn’t be considered the end of the struggle.

Parties, political activists and civil society organizations in Europe need to make it clear that they will not tolerate funding oppressive and tyrannical regimes on the grounds that they are helping European governments keep migrants out of Europe.

Marwa Jalal is a Sudanese student and activist. Read more about what you can do in solidarity with the revolution in Sudan online. Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com and search “Sudan” for resources and background.
Ten months since the mass movement erupted, hundreds of thousands still surge into the streets. **Samir Larabi** asks if the people or the old regime will emerge the winners from this contest?

Since 22 February 2019, Algeria has been living to the rhythm of an immense popular movement, the like of which we have not seen since the independence of the country in 1962, a movement which can be described as a revolutionary process. Certainly, everything started with the rejection of a 5th term in office for deposed president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, but the reasons for popular anger run much deeper than that.

They are essentially connected to the structural contradictions of an anti-popular, authoritarian regime. This popular movement has accentuated the crisis of the regime and is fundamentally challenging its authority over society.

The dynamic of popular mobilisation, with all its limits and contradictions, is part of the process of destroying the regime and replacing it with a democratic and social republic.

Since 22 February the regime has found it difficult to impose its solution, which it calls “a road map for resolving the crisis”, through organising a presidential election.

The movement is insisting on the departure of all the symbols of the regime and on a revision of the constitution before engaging in any electoral process. The key issue at stake is the question of popular sovereignty and the rejection of any foreign interference.

In the face of repression and dozens of arrests, the mass movement continues to challenge the regime. Despite threats by Gaïd Salah (Chief of the Army General Staff) and the repression in Algiers every Friday, maintain itself.

Although everything began with the challenge to the 5th term for the former president, the people’s demands radicalised over time towards rejecting the role of the regime in organising a political transition or elections on the grounds that this means the reproduction of the regime.

The mass movement in the streets has been able to force the cancellation of two presidential elections and it is preparing for a massive boycott of those planned for 12 December 2019.

The movement is insisting on the departure of all the symbols of the regime and on a revision of the constitution before engaging in any electoral process. The key issue at stake is the question of popular sovereignty and the rejection of any foreign interference.

In the face of repression and dozens of arrests, the mass movement continues to challenge the regime.

**Is Algeria on the road to a new republic?**
Most workers are participating in the mass movement as citizens, rather on the basis of their class identity or their professional role. Nevertheless, the popular mobilisation has boosted the independent trade unions, in particular the Confederation of Independent Unions (Confédération des syndicats autonomes - CSA) which has been involved in this dynamic of protest.

From the first weeks of the movement, the CSA has shown its support for the popular movement by refusing to recognise the existing government and demanding the return to popular sovereignty.

The CSA, which solely organises in the civil service, is not raising socio-economic or sectional demands, but rather echoes the demands of the street in calling for the departure of the regime and the installation of a second republic. The confederation has organised two strikes and two marches with the same political demands in the capital on 10 April and 1 May, despite the efforts of the regime to repress them.

Since the two marches in April and May, however, the leadership of the unions have fallen silent and no further major strikes or protests have taken place. For the moment the union leaders prefer to get involved in a kind of coalition with certain parties and with civil society organisations which have regrouped around the demands for a return of the elections with minimum guarantees over the transparency of the process.

In effect this is not far from the regime’s proposal for a political solution within the framework of the existing constitution. However, popular pressure and the regime’s repression may force the development of these positions in future.

With the launch of the revolutionary process a new tendency or coordination in the heart of the major trade union federation the UGTA has come into being. This coordination brings together four of the UGTA’s provincial federations, which have declared their support for the movement “to create a new republic,” as well as demanding the departure of UGTA General Secretary Sidi Said and all the UGTA’s leaders who colluded with the regime.

They have been joined by several members of the UGTA’s National Executive Committee, which is the federation’s governing body between congresses, and by the National Federation of Workers in the Metallurgical, Mechanical, Electrical and Electronic Industries.

Through gatherings organised on 17 April and 1 May in front of the House of the People, the headquarters of the UGTA, this coordination which is called the “National Committee for the Restoration of the UGTA to the Workers”, attracted the support of a large number of trade unionists, workers and left-wing militants.

The idea of a general strike has been gaining ground

The Committee launched a national petition for the organisation of an extraordinary congress of the UGTA before the end of the year composed solely of delegates properly elected by the membership.

However, the movement for taking back the UGTA has not been able to win the support of the majority of workers and trade union officials, nor prevent the organisation of a federation congress. This attempt to recover the UGTA has not lasted the course, as it was led by trade union bureaucrats who ended up being reabsorbed into the UGTA apparatus.

The idea of a general strike have been gaining ground recently, particularly with the relative success of the general strike in Bejaia province on 25 September, which was called by a number of local unions and left parties. However, the success of the general strike at a national level requires more organisation and the involvement of the trade unions. This is also the case in relation to civil disobedience.

We have witnessed several struggles by workers over the last few months where the demands have been connected to the question of pay and working conditions. For example in the petroleum sector workers have been able to secure pay rises of around 20 percent.

This is also the case in the textile sector, where a cycle of strikes has shut down the TOYAL (Algéro-Turque) factory demanding permanent contracts. As purchasing power falls, the coming weeks will witness more protest movements in different sectors, particularly in the civil service.

Samir Larabi is a sociologist and an activist with the PST party in Algeria. Read more on p20 about the campaign in solidarity with political prisoners.
‘They take our flags: that’s why we continue to march’
Sheila Amrouche

In the mountainous region of Kabylia in the north of Algeria, the village of Ihitoussène is one of about 20 villages in the municipality of Bouzeguene (population 26,000) within the wilaya or province of Tizi Ouzou, and about 170km from the capital Algiers.

The nearest city, Tizi Ouzou, is 60km away. The area is known for its high number of emigrants in different parts of the world, especially in France, where many locals left to find work during French occupation. That continues today, with many families reliant on the support of their relatives abroad.

During a visit to Algeria in July, I spoke to Henia Sadi, a teacher at a local high school in the Kabylia region of Algeria who has been active in the weekly protests which have led to the forced resignation of President Bouteflika, and which have progressed on to the demand for an end to the system, for a civil not a military state.

The Kabyle people are one of several Berber or Amazigh groups indigenous to North Africa, and comprise about seven million of the 12 million Berbers in Algeria. They have their own language and identity which they are fiercely proud of. Kabylia has a long history of struggle before, during and after the war of independence.

The ruling FLN decided Algeria would be a monolingual Arab and Muslim country, denying any other languages and cultures. In 1980, during the Berber Spring, demonstrations and strikes demanded the recognition of Berber or Tamazight as an official language.

The movement was violently suppressed. In the Black Spring of 2001, riots took place following the killing of a young Kabyle student by gendarmes, who subsequently killed 126 Kabyles, mainly by gunfire, and severely injured or tortured thousands more.

Villages like Ihitoussène still display portraits of the victims today. Marches in the capital Algiers have remained banned since the Black Spring.

It is this background that makes this year’s hirak or protest movement so significant. It has united the Kabyles with the entire country for the first time in opposing the regime, whether in large urban centres, remote mountain villages or steppes and deserts of the south. And it has resisted the divide and rule tactics of repression.

The first local demonstration against the fifth mandate of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and against the regime took place on 16 February 2019 in the Kabyle town of Kherrata, in Béjaïa province. On 19 February protests broke out Khencela, a city in the Aures Mountains populated by Berber Chaouis. By 22 February, the movement had become a national popular revolt, with protests spreading across the country.

Henia and other women from her village first joined demonstrations in a neighbouring town, but as the movement developed they began to make a regular journey to the city of Tizi Ouzou.

“On 8 of March I was with fifteen women from our villages. We walked to Bouzeguene town, without saying anything, with Amazigh flags and Algerian national flags, to say that we were against the fifth mandate. And then just after the 8th of March we did another march in Bouzeguene, a major one. That is to say that everyone understood that something must be done. So after the march of Bouzeguene we joined the marches at Tizi Ouzou, giving our messages with songs.”
Students have been organising as part of the popular movement, mobilising every Tuesday with their own protests: “They go out in the streets on the demonstrations, peacefully, with leaders, with guides, it is well organized. The teachers are in the movement, with their students,” Henia told me.

In late June Gaid Salah, Algeria’s strongman since Bouteflika was ousted on April 2nd, played the card of Algerian nationalist allegiance and banned the carrying of the Berber or Amazigh flag. Many protesters have since been arrested and imprisoned.

“The one guiding everything now is General Gaid Salah. We don’t want him or his laws. Since July 9th, the period for Bensalah as president is over, so now Gaid Salah is acting unconstitutionally. Gaid, he has managed to put everyone against him, with his actions.”

The flag ban sparked a reaction in solidarity across the country.

“All the races, all the provinces, they were all against it. Nobody accepted that decision. He tried to divide the Algerian people, but after that the Algerian people became united. This decision, it was more of an advantage than an inconvenience! He incited the people to unify. Because before it was a bit ‘you’re Kabyle, you’re Arab’, there were differences. Now we’re all Amazigh of North Africa. They continue to seize our flags, and that’s why we continue to march. We don’t stay at home on Fridays, we are in Tizi Ouzou, we are in Algiers, we are everywhere.”

Women are playing an important role in the movement, Henia said, despite facing oppression in many areas of their lives. “In the east of the country the situation of women is lamentable. In big cities in some provinces she can go out, but in the small towns she can’t freely, unless her husband accompanies her or authorizes her. In Tizi, Algiers, Oran, Constantine, where there are Kabyles there is the scent of liberty for women. It’s not total freedom though, it’s limited.”

Yet when it comes to the demonstrations, women are often very visible. “Women are put in the forefront, and the men make blocks to surround and protect us from violence.” Protesters fear the police, who regularly attack the demonstrations and arrest activists. “The world should know that there are police who are paid a premium, paid money in order to break the movement. There are people in prison at the moment.”

Activists from the RCD opposition party, which has strong support among Kabyles have been targeted by the state. “There is a young woman who we march with every Friday and she is now in prison. Her name is Samira Messouci, and she was elected for the RCD to the provincial assembly of Tizi Ouzou. She’s been in prison in Algiers since 21 June. They tried to take the Amazigh flag from her and she resisted. They are doing everything to break our unity, banning the flag.”

“Samira Messouci told her lawyer “I don’t want you to free me because I am a woman. I want to be freed with my brothers, with the men. If not, don’t free me because I am a woman.”

That’s a woman who is fighting for the condition of women, for equality. “Secondly, if they imprison me, I want it to be for ten years, so that I won’t find this Gaid still living”.

As the movement has developed, activists have debated the best tactics to force out the regime. In the major cities, independent trade unions have organised general strikes. Henia sees civil disobedience, not strikes as the way forward. “In Kabylie we don’t have factories to close, we have cafeterias to close, schools to close, transport. But in Algiers it worked for two or three days, then little by little some shops started to reopen.”

The hirak has raised big questions for the millions of Algerians who have taken part, Henia told me.

“No one can say what is going to happen tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow. After Gaid Salah goes, there are other Gaids behind this Gaid. We demand a complete end to the system. But how? As long as the military regime rules in Algeria, nobody can commit suicide and say they represent the movement and can do something. So we are in an impasse.”

The movement has deep roots in ordinary people’s frustration at the way in which the regime and its cronies keep Algeria’s wealth for themselves. The minimum monthly wage in Algeria is quoted as 20,000 Dinars, approximately £135, and the average wage 40,000 Dinars or £270. “An Algerian works hard, full time, for a baguette, for a bag of milk. Algeria is a rich country. Where there’s petrol there’s wealth. Of all this wealth, the Algerian people have nothing. They work hard for 30,000 dinars (£200) a month. You can spend that in two or three days.”

For someone who wants to eat normally, with five or six children, in three days his pay is gone. What is 30,000 dinars, or 60,000 dinars? It’s nothing. He lives on credit, or he finds a second job. There is money sent from abroad, or from the south where they are paid relatively well. Here it is pitiable. As a teacher, I have 25 years of experience; I get 60,000 dinars (£400) a month. A less experienced teacher gets half that.”

Many young people have been leaving Algeria and risking their lives by crossing the sea to Europe.

“What hurts is that people leave, especially the young, they die in the oceans, they die in the sea. They’re called ‘harragas’, those who attempt to illegally migrate to Europe in makeshift boats. I have a boy. I don’t want him to say to me ‘Mum, I want to leave because I want to live’. I want him to live in front of me, because we have a rich country, we have petrol, we have metals but the money is taken by the rulers we want to get rid of.”

This social injustice is a powerful factor driving the mass movement, Henia said. “We have misery in our blood. Abroad, even when misery is forced upon us, it’s nothing compared to Algeria. That’s why we won’t stop hitting back, to shout out against repression, against division. After accepting 20 years of nothing, we’re a people that will continue to struggle to the end.”

Sheila Amrouche is a member of Lewisham NEU. Read a longer version of this article online at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com and turn to page 20 for more on the campaign in solidarity with political prisoners.
Olivia Palmer analyses the roots of Iraq’s agricultural crisis in war, occupation and neoliberal reforms.

Iraq is the birthplace of agriculture. Its wheat, legumes and other seed crops have been developed and refined for local conditions over a period of 10,000 years.

It is also unique among Middle Eastern countries for its water resources and thus in its potential to be self-sufficient in food production. Indeed, it was up until the 1970s.

Approximately 27 percent of the country is available for agriculture - half of which is from extensive irrigation of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

In the 1980s, Iraq was a major agricultural market for the US, accounting for 90 percent of American rice exports and wheat exports worth half a billion dollars a year.

Oil exports and government subsidies in food products sustained conditions of food security until the early 1990s. According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) report, before the Gulf War, “calorie availability was 120 percent of actual requirements.”

Iraqi agriculture was devastated by the 1990-91 Gulf War, the ensuing sanctions and the “Shock and Awe” of the 2003 US-British invasion.

The United States began bombing Iraq in January 1991, with extensive strikes on civilian infrastructure targets. Caught in the crosshairs of the US Air Force were power generators, sewage plants, water purification facilities and the extensive canals and irrigation systems on which Iraqi agriculture depended.

Declassified Pentagon documents show that the US had studied Iraq’s water-drinking system, assessed its weakness and intentionally bombed it. After the war, the US then shaped the post-war United Nations sanctions to prevent its repair. As a result, 1990-91 agricultural output was 80 percent lower than the previous, pre-sanctions production in 1989.

Additionally, the UN Oil for Food programme (1995-2003) was prohibited from purchasing Iraqi-produced food, creating food dependency on imports. The UN sanctions were specifically designed to exacerbate hardship and to
reduce Iraq’s ability to feed itself, if not to eliminate it outright.

Among the US’s primary motivations in seizing control of Iraq and creating a free market, neoliberal client state in Iraq was to extend global capital penetration into the largely closed-off Middle East via the US-Middle East Free Trade Area and to expand the American agribusiness model of corporate agriculture.

But US efforts to create the conditions for large-scale corporate agriculture have been at the direct expense of Iraqi food sovereignty.

By eliminating tariffs and other protections, the US instantly created a billion-dollar annual market for its own agricultural exports which did not exist previously under the UN sanctions regime imposed on Iraq.

US efforts to create the conditions for large-scale corporate agriculture have been at the direct expense of Iraqi food sovereignty.

Via the WTO and free trade agreements, the United States profits from forcing its own highly subsidised food onto countries that have agreed to tariff reductions and the reduction of impediments to trade. Combined with the liberalisation of Iraq’s economy to facilitate direct investment by Western corporations, this has directly contributed to destabilising food security, slashing or removing altogether the country’s farm and price support systems.

From 2003-2007, the US applied a policy of “reforming” the Iraqi state - pushing it out of the economy and imposing a radical form of free market economics. This included lowering Iraq’s corporate tax rate from 45 to 15 per cent, permitting foreign companies to own 100 percent of Iraqi assets, and for investors to take 100 percent of the profits they made in Iraq out of the country; they would not be required to reinvest, and they would not be taxed.

The Bush administration’s first working model for post-war Iraq closely mirrored World Bank and IMF policies developed over the 1980s and 1990s, with the difference being that structural adjustment would be driven by the power of American weaponry.

The implementation of this plan caused a descent into anarchy following the US invasion, beginning with looting, at an eventual cost of $12 billion - equivalent to as much as one-third of Iraq’s annual gross domestic product - and accelerating the collapse of the state.

The Ba’ath party was disbanded in May 2003. Anyone in the top four levels of the party was banned from holding government jobs, driving out the institutional memory and what was left of the state. The US strategy prioritised the danger to American power in the region posed by the Iraqi state’s coercive capacity.

Head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Paul Bremer stated repeatedly that his most important mission was empowering the free market and shrinking the state. “Getting inefficient state enterprises into private hands,” Bremer said, “is essential for Iraq’s economic recovery.”

Once established, the CPA assumed all executive, legislative and judicial power over the Iraqi territory.

One of Bremer’s economic edicts specifically prohibited the Central Bank of Iraq from offering financing to state-owned enterprises. The CPA’s relentless focus on privatisation and creating favourable conditions for international investors in Iraq at the expense of practical, logical and moral considerations is representative of this. The CPA’s mandate to eliminate all tariffs, duties and taxes on imports led to Iraq being flooded with foreign foodstuffs.

This created a new and substantial market for American farmers, with $190 million worth of wheat exported in the year after the invasion. Overseering Iraq’s agricultural reconstruction was Daniel Amstutz, noted by Oxfam’s policy director at the time as being “uniquely well placed to advance the commercial interests of US grain companies and open the Iraqi market.”

Amstutz oversaw the USAID’s Agriculture Reconstruction and Development Program for Iraq (ARDI), and quickly began to eliminate the price supports and other agricultural subsidies that Iraqi farmers had received under the government of Saddam Hussein.

ARDI was part of a political agenda within a larger US shock-therapy strategy for the Iraqi economy. Its central objective was to “liberalise” and privatise Iraq’s wheat sector. The actual work was contracted to Development Alternatives (DAI), for “the transition from a command and control production and marketing system to a market-driven economy.”

The immediate focus was on expanding Iraq’s wheat crop via high-grade imported wheat seed. Traditionally, wheat is the country’s most important crop.

However, rather than utilising Iraqi seeds that had been developed to the conditions of Mesopotamia over the last 10,000 years, or assisting Iraqis in ensuring their indigenous wheat-seed supply was protected and could be regenerated, wheat and barley seed was imported that could “theoretically” survive in Iraq.

The decimation of Iraq’s ability to replenish its own seed stocks meant that new seeds would have to be imported.

In a demonstration of astounding arrogance, seeds were selected despite the US “not knowing the specifics of Iraqi production as to soils, rainfall and/or irrigation.”

Before announcing his departure from Iraq, the CPA’s Paul Bremer issued “100 Orders” designed to transfer Iraq’s economy and legal ownership of Iraqi resources into the private hands of US corporations.

Order 81 specifically deals with Plant Variety Protection (PVP) – that is, it is designed to protect the commercial interest of corporate seeds companies.

The order aims to force Iraqi farmers to plant “protected” crop varieties defined as “new, distinct, uniform and stable” - and most likely genetically modified.

Order 81 opened the way for patenting of plant forms and facilitated the introduction of genetically modified (GMO) crops to Iraq.

In the absence of an independent, sovereign Iraqi government to repeal this edict, the US was able to override Iraq’s original patent law of 1970, which had prohibited private ownership of biological resources.

The US did not protect Iraq’s national gene bank from post-invasion looting, with the national collection of plant genetic resources being lost, stolen or destroyed.

As a result, since 2005, Iraq has only been able to provide 4 percent of its
seed requirements. The decimation of Iraq's ability to replenish its own seed stocks meant that new seeds would have to be imported. These were in the form of wheat and barley seed developed to "theoretically" survive in Iraq by scientists from the World Wide Wheat Company (WWW).

The intellectual property rights established through the WTO's TRIPS agreement defines genetic materials, seed plasmas, and all manner of other products as private property. Rents for use can then be extracted from populations whose practices had played a crucial role in the development of these genetic materials. WWW's seeds would not work without dependency on pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilisers readily available from Western agricultural firms Monsanto, Dow and DuPont.

Despite doubling the area sown over the project's first three years, Iraq's national wheat production dropped from 2.6 million tonnes in 2002 to 2.2 million tonnes in 2006. The monoculture and reduced biodiversity encouraged by GMO-based agriculture can only diminish an Iraqi environment already polluted by the detritus of the US invasion - including "depleted" Uranium dust - napalm, chemical weapons and phosphorus bombs.

Allowing ancient varieties of seeds to be genetically manipulated or otherwise modified and then "registered" under corporate ownership involves the theft of inherited intellectual property, the loss of farmers' freedoms and the destruction of food sovereignty in Iraq.

According to a Focus on the Global South and GRAIN Report, "Iraq has the potential to feed its people. But instead of developing this capacity, Washington is shaping the future of Iraq's food and farming to serve the interests of US corporations."

The intent behind American efforts to revitalise Iraqi agriculture was clear: to hook Iraqi farmers on a path of corporate dependence that facilitates the consolidation of small farms into larger agribusiness entities specialising in monocrops, which can be owned and manipulated by western agricultural giants such as Monsanto and Cargill to create a dependency on Western fertilisers, tractors and carbon-intensive practices.

Olivia Palmer is an investment analyst and studied international political economy at KCL.

Syrian refugees face disaster as Turkey prepares for war
Ozan Tekin

If the result of the war in Syria is the stabilisation of an autonomous region, resembling the one which emerged in northern Iraq following the US invasion of 2003, Turkey will have all her southern borders surrounded by Kurdish regions.

This will increase the danger of the 15 million Kurds in Turkey launching a campaign to unite with them. That is why for the Turkish state this is a "problem of survival" and why the whole of Turkish politics during the last 4 years has been shaped by efforts to stop the emergence of a Kurdish autonomous region in Syria.

Turkey's army leaders and current Recip Tayyip Erdoğan say they will not "repeat the same mistake" as 2003, when they were unable to prevent the creation of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The peace process between Kurdish groups in Turkey and the Turkish state was abandoned in the summer of 2015. This question has also reshaped Turkish politics in other ways: Erdoğan is now allied with the generals who previously tried to overthrow him, and also with the fascist party MHP on the Kurdish issue.

People in Rojava will probably be fleeing from war to the southern cities in Syria - or possibly to the east into the Iraqi Kurdish region. For 4 million Syrian refugees inside Turkey this will create a disastrous situation as well. Last July the Turkish state started operations in big cities to deport some Syrians to Idlib.

This brutal plan by the Interior Ministry was executed by the police, who deported an Egyptian and Afghan refugees to Idlib alongside Syrians!

The leadership of Erdoğan's party, the AKP, are telling us that they are "aware of the economic, cultural and social problems caused by the refugees." They say that the operation will ensure a "safe region" where refugees will be sent.

They are planning to build 10 towns each with a population of 30,000, and also around 140 villages. This means that around 2 million Syrian refugees will be forcibly removed from their current locations in Turkey to the region set up by the Turkish military.

The radical left in Turkey opposes the war efforts alongside the HDP, a coalition party mainly controlled by the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. But there is the confusion caused by the stance of the main opposition party CHP as well, which supported the war bill in parliament.

The very poor stance taken by CHP and also the racist Iyi Parti (a recent split from the fascist MHP on the basis of opposition to the government) has helped Erdogan divide the opposition formed against him in the latest local elections.

This war effort has also given Erdoğan a chance to manoeuvre and regain popularity. But nobody expects that it will last long and stop his terminal decline as he has been in a very difficult situation in the past few months and all the opinion polls show that his electoral support is collapsing rapidly.

Ozan Tekin is a revolutionary socialist activist living in Turkey and a member of DSIP party.
The rising repression in Algeria has sparked an international campaign in defence of political prisoners. Trade unionists, MPs and activists in Spain, France, Portugal, Peru, Brazil, South Africa and Germany gathered outside Algerian embassies in September to condemn the arrest and sentencing of Louisa Hanoune, general secretary of the Workers Party and other political prisoners.

The regime in Algeria has hit back hard at opponents as it tries to contain the mass movement for democracy which erupted earlier this year and is still bringing tens of thousands onto the streets.

On 8th October the 33rd students’ march in Algiers was brutally attacked by police, anti-riot and plain clothes police, with dozens of arrests of students, passers-by and journalists. Most have been released, but some have been charged with “unarmed assembly, disobedience and breach of public order”.

Karim Tabbou, a national leader of the Democratic and Social Union party, is one of the major opposition leaders arrested in September, while Louisa Hanoune, has been condemned to fifteen years in prison in a trial by a military court. Elected members of provincial parliaments, political activists and protesters have been seized by the police for carrying the Amazigh flag on demonstrations.

Over 100 protesters remain in custody, most in Algiers. Some are under investigation for “harming the integrity of the national territory,” which carries sentences of up to 10 years in prison. They include Samira Messouci, elected to the provincial assembly of Tizi-Ouzou, activist in the RCD (Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie), who was arrested on the 21 June demonstration for being in possession of the Berber flag.

Karim Tabbou was arrested on 12 September for “undermining the morale of the troops” of the army, according to the article 75 of the Penal Code. He was arrested without warrant or explanation. Tabbou recently took part in a conference which called for the rejection of the upcoming presidential elections.

On 30 June police arrested 87-year old Lakhdar Bouregaa, one of the few surviving commanders of Algeria’s war of independence, four days after he said at a public meeting that Algeria’s army is a collection of “militias.” He is being investigated for “weakening the morale of the troops,” which could lead to a prison sentence of up to 10 years. Bouregaa is a founder of the opposition Socialist Forces Front party and was a political prisoner in the 1970s under President Houari Boumedienne.

Louisa Hanoune, general secretary of the PT (Workers Party) since 1990, was arrested on 9 May after being summoned to the military court as a witness during the investigation of two ex-intelligence chiefs as well as Said Bouteflika, younger brother of the ousted president.

She was charged with “conspiring against the state and the army” and held in solitary confinement before being sentenced to a fifteen year jail sentence on 24 September.

In a statement, the Workers Party called her trial a “judicial farce riddled with lies. Louisa Hanoune has been condemned in order to terrorise and try to silence all the voices that oppose those in de facto power. The same goes for Lakhdar Bouregaa, Samira Messouci, Samir Benlarbi, Foudil Mourmala and dozens of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.”

Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com to take solidarity action.
Creative resistance greets DSEI “death market”
Miriam Scharf

The Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms market has been called “a shameless marketplace for global death and destruction” and “the most awesome glamorisation of death on the planet”, as it fuels conflict and repression around the world.

From 9-13 September 35,000 delegates from 68 countries traded bombers, drones and vanity warships. The UK government and companies were amongst those weaponising regime defence and the suppression of dissent in Egypt, Bangladesh, Colombia, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia. Even the UK Foreign Office describes these states as “human rights priority” countries. But this hasn’t stopped the British government wholeheartedly backing sales to them.

Of the record £14bn UK government sales last year 80 percent were to the Middle East. The tragedy being inflicted on Yemen led to the court of appeal ruling in June that arms sales to the Saudis are illegal. But they go on. Despite the catastrophic devastation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria military interventions continue. The ‘securitisation’ of borders, no longer defined by a thin line but stretching across whole countries of the global south, is a rich and growing market for arms equipment, as the rich world tries to contain and suppress the poor.

The 9-day protest against the arms fair were organised and determined. One hundred and sixteen protesters were arrested attempting to stop equipment getting in. The first day focussed on ‘Stop Arming Israel’ with Ben Jamal Palestine Solidarity Campaign president calling for an arms embargo. 32 Israeli companies, including Elbit with its ‘battle-proven’ technology, were exhibiting. Local and national groups are starting now working to oppose and aiming to stop the next DSEI, planned for September 2021.

Search ‘Stop the Arms Fair’ for more information

Academic boycott of Israel boosted by win in Middle East Studies
Anne Alexander

Supporters of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel scored a victory in June by winning an important vote at the Annual General Meeting of the British Society for Middle East Studies (BRISMES), the scholarly association representing academics who work in Middle East Studies in the UK.

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israeli, PACBI welcomed the vote in a statement: “Israeli academic institutions play a well-documented role in not only justifying but also planning, implementing and maintaining Israel’s system of oppression that denies Palestinians’ basic human rights, including the right to education.

This historic vote gives us hope. It is a beautiful act of meaningful solidarity with Palestinian students and faculty who face Israel’s institutionalised racism, armed raids on campus, military checkpoints and systemic attempts to undermine Palestinians’ basic right to education.”

Academics have also stepped up a campaign targetting Israeli higher education institutions in illegal settlements, such as Ariel University. Exeter UCU branch overwhelmingly passed a motion calling on the university not to recognise degrees from Ariel to avoid “complicity in breaking international law.”

Go to www.bricup.org.uk for more information on the Ariel campaign.
Stop academic collusion with military regime

The revelation that University of London and University of Hertfordshire are opening for business in Egypt’s New Administrative Capital (NAC) has prompted an angry reaction from academics.

More than two hundred have signed a letter of protest at these new ‘franchises’ offering UK degrees through Egyptian partners based in the New Administrative Capital at the same time as the military regime is engaged in a ferocious crackdown on protests.

“UK universities are showing their willingness to put potential revenue from student fees before commitment to human rights and academic freedoms,” the letter states.

The NAC is a prestige project for the military regime, and has attracted vast foreign investments. A business-park style “City of Knowledge” has been planned for campuses and local partners of global universities.

The most recent deals follow a succession of similar agreements signed or proposed between UK universities and Egyptian institutions. University of Liverpool’s attempt to open a branch campus in the NAC was halted last year after a campaign supported by hundreds of academics which was led by the UCU branch.

However, Coventry University has since announced that it is opening a branch in the NAC in collaboration with El Sewedy Education, a private education firm funded by a major electrical cables manufacturer.

University of London has designated the European Universities in Egypt (EUE) as a “recognised teaching centre” the Founder and Chairman of the Board of Trustees at EUE, University of London’s partner, is Professor Mahmoud Hashem.

Professor Hashem was previously the president of the German University in Cairo (GUC), a private university set up in 2002.

Students at GUC repeatedly protested over the failure of GUC’s leadership to uphold their rights to freedom of expression on campus and the university’s refusal to allow them to organise a student union for the first eight years of the university’s existence.

Dr Hashem himself was captured on camera in 2015 allegedly instructing his driver to run over students who were protesting over the GUC’s response to the death of 19 year old Yara Negm who was killed in an accident involving two of the university’s buses.

The government in Egypt is clearly keen to associate the global reputation of University of London institutions as centres of excellence in research and teaching with the New Administrative Capital.

On 11 September this year the Ministry of Foreign Affairs put out a press release claiming that the London School of Economics was opening a “branch campus” in the NAC, prompting LSE to issue a clarification contradicting the Ministry’s statement.

Support Egypt’s political prisoners

Over 2500 people have joined the ranks of Egypt’s political prisoners since 20 September, while hundreds more have disappeared. According to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, detainees appearing before prosecutors are being charged with “helping a terrorist group achieve its goals, illegal protest, misuse of internet and social media to spread false news undermining national security and calling for protests”.

Some of those detained have been jailed multiple times in the past, such as human rights lawyer Mahienour el-Masry, and blogger and activist Alaa Abdelfattah.

What you can do:
• Sign the open letter condemning the crackdown and calling for an end to universities in the UK whitewashing the al-Sisi regime’s human rights record.
• Organise a meeting on your campus or invite a speaker to your union meeting.
• Spread the word on social media check out Egypt Solidarity Initiative on Facebook and Twitter.
• Write to the Egyptian embassy in the UK calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners.

Download resources and find out more at www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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

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

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

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Why are young Iraqis braving bullets to protest?

Qasim Muhammad analyses the grievances behind demonstrations in the Iraqi capital and southern cities which have faced violent repression by the security forces.

The popular movement which exploded in early October was driven by young people using social media to mobilise. The scale of the protests took everyone by surprise. People on the left were saying “these are Islamists”, but the Islamists themselves, such as the Sadrist current, were also afraid of the movement, asking “what are these spontaneous protests?” “Who is behind them?”

Yet the accumulating reasons behind the protest movement are the same as those which drove protests in 2011: corruption and poverty.

There are also more immediate triggers. One of these is the government campaign removing informal housing. People have been building small houses in informal settlements, and the government has been rapidly clearing them away in recent weeks.

Despite the Prime Minister’s announcement of a major national campaign to build housing, in reality the government has been knocking down people’s homes and shops and destroying their cars.

Graduates have taken to the streets during the past month: young men and women have been holding sit-ins to demand that the state provides them with jobs. They have been attacked violently by the police and security forces, facing beatings and water cannons.

These frustrations exploded with the sacking of Abdulwahab al-Saadi, deputy head of the Counter-Terrorism Service. Al-Saadi is well-known for his role in leading the liberation of Takrit, of Fallujah and of Mosul from ISIS fighters.

The CTS is one of the organisations built up by the Americans, but the officers serving there are known for their professionalism. In addition, many Iraqis see the CTS as uniquely free from sectarian infighting and splits.

Al-Saadi was considered a hero by the people of Mosul, where several months ago, a statue of him was erected, but not unveiled. Government officials came and removed the statue in the middle of the night, prompting protests by local people.

Al-Saadi was also seen as one of the few figures who could act as a counterweight to the influence of Iran inside the Iraqi armed forces.

The wave of protests in early October was concentrated in the capital Baghdad, in al-Wasit province and in the southern provinces.

“This government must fall, we want to change this corrupt regime and get rid of its cronies.”

The provinces which have a Sunni majority, such as al-Gharbija and the city of Mosul remained silent, reflecting the population’s fears of being accused of terrorism or wanting the return of ISIS.

There was little sign of protest in Kurdistan, although at least one organisation was calling for solidarity demonstrations. The Movement of the New Generation warned that the same grievances which pushed people to demonstrate in the south were also present in Kurdistan, where 200,000 graduates are unemployed.

The violent response by the state to the protests has radicalised the movement. Initially the demonstrators had a set of seven demands, but by the second day of the crackdown, the young people protesting were calling on the regime to go. “We have no water, no electricity, nothing” was a common chant. “This government must fall, we want to change this corrupt regime and get rid of its cronies.”

Qasim Muhammad is the pseudonym of an Iraqi activist living in France.