

STATEMENT

From Tahrir to OWS

[Following is a statement of solidarity issued by activists in Cairo in support of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protesters. It is by a group of Egyptian activists who were in Tahrir during the 18 days in Jan- Feb 2011 that led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak. They've continued to be active since then and have, along with several others, organized multiple sit-ins in Tahrir (the longest one in July 2011) as well as numerous actions and campaigns critical of the ruling military council's crackdown on protests, labor strikes, and freedom of expression. They've been following OWS and were inspired by what was happening, so they wrote this statement collectively but would like, for several reasons, to remain anonymous.]

TO ALL THOSE IN THE UNITED States currently occupying parks, squares and other spaces, Tahrir activists in Cairo are watching the events in solidarity.

Indeed, Egyptians are now in many ways involved in the same struggle. What most pundits call "The Arab Spring" has its roots in the demonstrations, riots, strikes and occupations taking place all around the world, its foundations lie in years-long struggles by people and popular movements. The moment that people find themselves in is nothing new, as they in Egypt and others have been fighting against systems of repression, disenfranchisement and the unchecked ravages of global capitalism : a System that has made a world that is dangerous and cruel to its inhabitants. As the interests of government increasingly cater to the interests and comforts of private, transnational capital, Egyptian cities and homes have become progressively more abstract and violent places, subject to the casual ravages of the next economic development or urban renewal scheme.

An entire generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally, that they have no future in the current order of things. Living under structural adjustment policies and the supposed expertise of international organizations like the World Bank and IMF, Egyptians watched as their resources, industries and public services were sold off and dismantled as the "free market" pushed an addiction to foreign goods, to foreign food even. The profits and benefits of those freed markets went elsewhere, while Egypt and other countries in the South found their immiseration reinforced by a massive increase in police repression and torture.

The current crisis in America and Western Europe has begun to bring this reality home to American youth as well: that as things stand people will all work themselves raw, their backs broken by personal debt and public austerity. Not content with carving out the remnants of the public sphere and the welfare state, capitalism and the austerity-state now even attack the private realm and people's right to decent dwelling as thousands of foreclosed-upon homeowners find themselves both homeless and indebted to the banks who have forced them on to the streets.

So the people of Egypt stand with fighting American multinationals not just in their attempts to bring down the old but to experiment with the new. People are not protesting. Who is there to protest to? What could people ask them for that they could grant? They are occupying. They

are reclaiming those same spaces of public practice that have been commodified, privatized and locked into the hands of faceless bureaucracy , real estate portfolios, and police 'protection'. Hold on to these spaces, nurture them, and let the boundaries of occupations grow. After all, who built these parks, these plazas, these buildings? Whose labour made them real and livable? Why should it seem so natural that they should be withheld from public, policed and disciplined? Reclaiming these spaces and managing them justly and collectively is proof enough of its legitimacy.

In the occupations of Tahrir, activists encountered people entering the Square everyday in tears because it was the first time they had walked through those streets and spaces without being harassed by police; it is not just the ideas that are important, these spaces are fundamental to the possibility of a new world. These are public spaces. Spaces for gathering, leisure, meeting, and interacting - these spaces should be the reason people live in cities. Where the state and the interests of owners have made them inaccessible, exclusive or dangerous, it is up to people to make sure that they are safe, inclusive and just.

What people do in these spaces is neither as grandiose and abstract nor as quotidian as "real democracy"; the nascent forms of praxis and social engagement being made in the occupations avoid the empty ideals and stale parliamentarianism that the term democracy has come to represent. And so the occupations must continue, because there is no one left to ask for reform. They must continue because people are creating what they can no longer wait for.

But the ideologies of property and propriety will manifest themselves again. Whether through the overt opposition of property owners or municipalities to encampments or the more subtle attempts to control space through traffic regulations, anticamping laws or health and safety rules. There is a direct conflict between what people seek to make of their cities and their spaces and what the law and the systems of policing standing behind it would have them do.

Egyptians faced such direct and indirect violence, and continue to face it. Those who said that the Egyptian revolution was peaceful did not see the horrors that police visited upon them, nor did they see the resistance and even force that revolutionaries used against the police to defend their tentative occupations and spaces: by the government's own admission; 99 police stations were put to the torch, thousands of police cars were destroyed, and all of the ruling party's offices around Egypt were burned down. Barricades were created, officers were beaten back and pelted with rocks even as they fired tear gas and live ammunition on protesters. But at the end of the day on the 28th of January they retreated, and people had won their cities.

It is not people's desire to participate in violence, but it is even less their desire to lose. If they do not resist, actively, when they come to take what they have won back, then they will surely lose.

Occupy more, find each other, build larger and larger networks and keep discovering new ways to experiment with social life, consensus, and democracy. Discover new ways to use these spaces, discover new ways to hold on to them and never give them up again. □□□