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Global Justice

Part III: From the Arab Spring to the Indignados movement to Occupy Wall Street

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Living conditions in Tunisia and Egypt, neither of which export raw materials, or only marginally, have worsened over recent years. The resulting civil protest has been met with brutal repression. In Tunisia first, this led to a mass reaction, which quickly took on a political dimension. People gathered in the streets and squares to face the forces of repression, which left 300 dead, and demanded the departure of the dictator, Ben Ali. He was forced to step down on 14 January 2011.

From 25 January 2011 on, the movement spread to Egypt where the population had been subjected to decades of neoliberal counter-reforms dictated by the World Bank and the IMF, with a dictatorial regime allied, like Tunisia's, to the major Western powers as well as being totally compromised by an alliance with the Israeli government. On 11 February 2011, less than a month after Ben Ali's demise, Mubarak too was obliged to resign from office. Repression clamped down on other countries in the region as civic unrest spread like wildfire. The process of struggle throughout the region is far from over. In Tunisia and Egypt, the ruling classes, helped by the major Western powers, are trying to control the situation to prevent the movement from becoming a full-blown social revolution.

The wind of rebellion has swept across the Mediterranean from North Africa towards southern Europe. In Portugal, on 12 March 2011, hundreds of thousands of temporary workers demonstrated in the streets but the movement did not last. On 15 May, the protest reached Spain and carried on until 23 July, before escalating to a global level on 15 October 2011. Meanwhile, the movement had reached Greece from 24 May 2011. Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, Catalunya Square in Barcelona, Syntagma Square in Athens and hundreds of other squares in Spain and Greece vibrated to the same rhythms in June 2011. In July and August, social protest also shook Israel: the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv was occupied but with no threat to the government and without seeking to connect with the Palestinian cause.

In September, the movement crossed the Atlantic. From the East Coast of the United States, where it started in New York and Wall Street, it spread over a large part of U.S. territory to the West Coast where Oakland was the site of the most radical action. On 15 October 2011, the date fixed by the Indignados movement in Spain, over a million people were demonstrating around the world, from Japan to the West Coast of the United States, mainly in the highly industrialised countries.

The most imposing of the 15 October demonstrations were those in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Athens and Rome. In Spain, where the action started, almost half a million demonstrators marched through the streets of about 80 different towns, including at least 200,000 in Madrid. Demonstrations took place in the planet's main two finance centres, New York and London, as part of this vast movement.

In over 80 countries and nearly a thousand different cities, hundreds of thousands of people, young and old, marched in protest against the way governments were dealing with the international economic crisis. Governments had rushed to the aid of the private institutions who were responsible for the collapse and who were taking advantage of the crisis to enforce neoliberal policies such as massive redundancies in the public sector, drastic cuts in social spending, massive privatization, measures undermining collective solidarity (cutting retirement pensions and unemployment benefits, sabotaging negotiated agreements between employers and workers, and so on.) Everywhere the need to repay the public debt is the pretext invoked to justify increased austerity measures. Everywhere demonstrators condemn the banks.

There is no permanent organization behind this movement and it has not sought to establish any kind of international

coordination; nevertheless, communication is clearly functioning well.