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It is easy to despair. It is easy to be pessimistic. The difficulties of organizing in the United States sometimes overwhelm us, and make us feel that maybe justice is unattainable except in the most limited sense. But now there is Egypt. Now there is an example, witnessed by the entire world, of a people's ability to unite, of a people's ability to resist, and a people's ability to achieve victory. What can we learn from the Egyptian people's incredible accomplishment?

* We can never predict what will spark people's anger and struggle. In this case, the struggle in North Africa was ignited by a young Tunisian college graduate who could only live by peddling fruit on the street. When the police confiscated his fruit cart, his despair led him to set himself afire. This young brother's despair ignited the long-simmering outrage of the Tunisian people and led to a mass movement that drove out the dictator Ben Ali within three weeks!

* The Tunisian example liberated the rage and anger of the peoples in Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen -- all dictatorships, propped up by US weapons, money, and political support. The conditions for struggle have existed for decades: poverty, inequality, state brutality and repression, the sale of national pride to the US, and looting of national treasuries by a tiny oligarchy.

* The struggles in North Africa did not happen by magic or purely spontaneously. People in all countries have been organizing and fighting for years: labor unions, students, small business people, farmers, intellectuals. Mass movements are not a product of virgin birth. They are the product of years of patience, difficult, often frustrating struggles, mostly on a local level. Sound familiar?

* In most cases, the struggle is initially generated by young people -- in the case of Tunisia and Egypt young college graduates unable to find work. No social movement is successful without the fearlessness, energy, and creativity of youth.

* The working class has played an essential role in the struggle in both Tunisian and Egypt. In Egypt the mass demonstrations were accompanied by numerous strikes, mostly of public sector workers. The workers helped to shut the country down.

* The struggle for democracy is at the heart of every struggle now taking place in the Middle East. This too should sound familiar. Every one of our struggles has, as its core, the question of "who decides"? The people, or corporations and their government cronies?

* The Egyptian struggle did not abandon its nonviolent character even

when confronted by thousands of organized police and thug forces. It's like a saying I once heard, "the people are like a diamond, the more you strike them, the more they shine." The Egyptian people never lost their resolve, their dignity, or their commitment to see the struggle through to the end. They took on an entrenched dictatorship backed by the largest military in the region and the superpower US, and they defeated them. This should inspire us.

* Money, power, and arms are not always decisive. The US government has long assumed that the Middle East was "under control": Iraq was destroyed and splintered, Iran is squeezed by an economic embargo, Egypt -- the largest nation in the region--had long been bought off, most of the countries of the Persian Gulf and Middle East were ruled by pro-US dictatorships. Now, the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples have upset the best laid plans. People without money, without armies, without political office upset the strategic appletart of the most powerful imperial power in history. Who knew?

* The struggle is not over. Celebrations of the Egyptian victory occurred in Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Yemen, and the occupied territories of Palestine. No one can predict the outcome of all of these struggles, but clearly the US empire is being powerfully besieged on two critical fronts: Latin America, and the Middle East. The Egyptian struggle could also inspire the pro-peace and pro-Palestinian forces in Israel. The United States will use all of its power and resources to try and control the outcome of these struggles, but they will find it very, very difficult to put the genie back in the bottle.

* The people we organize are poor, marginalized, unequal, and oppressed. Every day they face thousands of new forms of insult and oppression, much like the people of Egypt. We can learn from the people of Egypt that organizing means something. Organizing is the right thing to do. Organizing can prepare the ground for that day when an unexpected spark ignites their anger and resistance. Let's make sure that we are ready.

Thanks to all of you for your incredible commitment to social justice and freedom.