Uprising in Egypt: a revolution is not being televised (Feb 2011)

by Simon Belt

I volunteered to write an article or two before the first of the Manchester Salon's current affairs discussions and put my neck on the line to have it picked apart. The idea is to develop and test the analytical and journalistic capabilities of all the attendees at these current affairs discussions every First Tuesday of the month, but little did I realise that one of the most exciting stories for a while would unfold in the week before that couldn't be ignored in favour of an easier topic.

Street protests in Egypt followed quickly after the flight of President Zine Ben Ali of Tunisia to Saudi Arabia in the Jasmine Revolution, and just as quickly escalated to an uprising with rather excited talk of revolution. Big events for sure but seems to have caught many by surprise and with little understanding of what caused such unexpected events. This article then is my comment to help with the **First Tuesday** discussion.

Before we all get carried away with the prospect of revolution in one of the Middle East's pivotal

country, which would surely change the course of world politics, let us just recap on the events leading up to the protests in Egypt. In Tunisia a fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself alight in protest at police seizing his cart, with economic conditions being so desperate. That triggered angry protests resulting in the resignation of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

Reporting for the Sunday Times, Marie Colvin says that several young men in Egypt have emulated Bouazizi's suicide by setting themselves on fire to protest against poverty, unemployment and the humiliation of not having enough money to get married. And the existence of such high numbers of many young, unemployed and umarried men is seen as one of the reasons that the protests escalated so quickly and spontaneously, which is worth considering.

Last year, Khalid Saeed, 28 was hauled out of an internet cafe in Alexandria and beaten to death by the police in full view of people on the street - after he accused police officers of taking part in a drugs deal. The initial demonstration last week was called on the officially organised '**P olice Day**
' to highlight police brutality, under the organising name of 'We are all Khalid Saeed'. After the size of demonstration on Tuesday took the police by surprise, forcing them to retreat temporarily, the Government banned demonstrations on the Wednesday, though demonstrators defied the ban incurring the wroth of uniformed police batton charges and plain clothes snatch squads beating and arresting any stragglers they could.

Some useful background readings

Egyptian Demonstrators Rev up for Big Friday as Regime Cracks Down , Juan Cole, 28 January 2011

Egyptian youth and new dawn hopes , Firas Al-Atraqchi, Aljazeera 29 January 2011

Egypt protests surprise analysts , Alaa Bayoumi, Aljazeera 29 January 2011

Who is Omar Suleiman? , Jane Mayer, The New Yorker 29 January 2011

Julian Assange: 'How do you attack an organisation? You attack its leadership' , Ed Vulliamy, The Observer, 30 January 2011

Egypt crisis: will Obama trust 80 million Egyptians? , The Telegraph, Monday 31 January 2011

Victory to the Egyptian people! , Brendan O'Neill, spiked 31 January 2001