



# Sudan's revolutionary and popular movements

*A Middle East Solidarity research report*

**By Muzan Alneel, Rania Obead and Khalid Sidahmed**



## Introduction

# Introduction and contents

**S**udan's revolution is a story of grassroots organising, sacrifice, and unwavering resistance to oppression.

From the fight against British colonial rule to the revolutions that toppled military dictatorships, Sudanese workers, women, students, and grassroots movements have led every major battle for freedom.

This pamphlet highlights the mass mobilisations that shook the streets, the role of neighbourhood-based Resistance Committees, and the vital contributions of the workers' movement. The Emergency Rooms, grassroots initiatives providing life-saving aid amid the war, embody the resilience of Sudan's revolutionaries in the face of state and militia violence.

But this fight is not just Sudan's—it is a battle against the same global system that fuels war, racism, exploitation, and oppression everywhere. International solidarity is not an act of charity but a necessity.

The final section provides a guide for trade unionists, activists, and organisations worldwide to take action in support of Sudan's struggle. The revolution lives on in the streets, in the workplaces, and in the hearts of those who refuse to be silenced. This pamphlet is both a record of their struggle and a call to action.

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# Sudan's revolutionary history

## Rania Obead

Before winning independence on 1 January 1956, Sudan was under combined British and Egyptian rule. One of the main reasons for establishing the colonial system was to secure sources of cotton for the British textile industry. The colonial government kept expenditure on the country's development and the people's welfare to a minimum, a pattern that remained true with many central governments that followed. The main workforce generating Sudan's national income was farmers and agricultural workers in the cotton producing areas, and railway workers.

Most of the major Sudanese political parties were formed between the mid-1940s and early 1950s, including the Umma Party (UP) (party of the nation) and the National Unionist Party (NUP) which are largely considered representatives of traditional right-wing politics.

Each is supported by one of the two main religious sects in the country, representing the traditional, moderate form of Sunni Islam. The

Umma party has a higher presence of agricultural capitalists, while the NUP has more members among commercial capitalists.

The Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) was founded in 1946, and drew its main support from the trade union grassroots and the student movement. Finally, the Muslim Brotherhood movement was also formed in the late 1940s as a direct reaction to the growing left and communist activism in the student movement, and it was based on extremist Islamist ideology.

In 1958 the country experienced the first military coup in its history, and this was led by the right-wing leaning General Aboud who then led a six-year long dictatorship that was defeated by an organised peaceful revolution and general strike in October 1964 known as the October Revolution in Sudanese political literature.

All political parties and more significantly, the trade union movement, participated in the campaign to remove Aboud from power and re-establish multi-party parliamentary democracy. Thereafter, a transitional government led the country until a general election in



The National Revolutionary Command Council following 1969 coup | Photo: Wikimedia

1965, which resulted in an unstable government led by the Umma Party.

During the time of this government, a right-wing coalition led by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Umma Party conspired to ban the Communist Party and dismissed its members in the parliament which led to a constitutional crisis and political turmoil. This culminated in the second successful military coup on May 25 1969, by left-leaning Arab nationalists led by colonel Gafar Nemeiri. The country was then led by a military revolutionary council of seven Arab nationalists and two communists.

The military council promoted major changes in economic policy aimed at developing Sudanese agriculture and industry, but a bloody crackdown on the right-wing opposition and a power struggle between Communists and Arab nationalists led to the collapse of the ruling coalition and a failed attempt to seize power by the

communist military and their closest allies in July 1971.

The failure of this attempt led to the execution of the most prominent communist civilian leaders and members of the military establishment. Nemeiri's regime shifted towards alliance with the Gulf regimes and formed a coalition with Islamist forces including the Muslim Brotherhood who established a power base in the banking system and promoted the regime's enforcement of Islamic Sharia law in September 1983.

Nemeiri's application of Sharia to all citizens regardless of whether or not they were Muslim met with extensive criticism and public outcry from those opposed to Islamic law. Neoliberal policies, implemented following Sudan's first foreign loans which took place under Nemeiri's government, reduced expenditure on social services.

Following the oil boom in the Arabian Peninsula, Gulf investments

## Sudan's revolutionary history

in Sudan strengthened segments of the Sudanese ruling class allied with the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan. These investments also contributed to the prioritization of producing export corps (mostly to the Gulf) instead of feeding Sudanese people leading to the 1983-85 famine.

Nemeiri's regime though, like its predecessor, would be overthrown in a popular revolution in April 1985. As in the October 1964 revolution, opposition forces from left and right united with a trade union assembly to overthrow the Nemeiri dictatorship through a popular uprising and general strike. A transitional military council led the country before a general election was held in 1986, benefitting the same two main traditional parties.

This time, elaborate design of the voting constituencies meant that also the Muslim Brotherhood, appearing with the new name "The Islamic National Front (INF)" won a significant share of parliamentary seats. In 1989, the NIF, led by Hassan Al-Turabi, carried out a military coup with Colonel Omar Al-Bashir as the military leader for the self-appointed 'revolutionary council'. Their early programme combined Islamist and anti-Western rhetoric with brutal neoliberal economic policies. The military Islamist regime also waged a massive war against the south of the country in the name of Islam. This fueled religious and ethnic divisions, leading in 2011 to splitting the country into two: Sudan and South Sudan.

Arabization was another policy practiced by Al-Bashir's regime. The

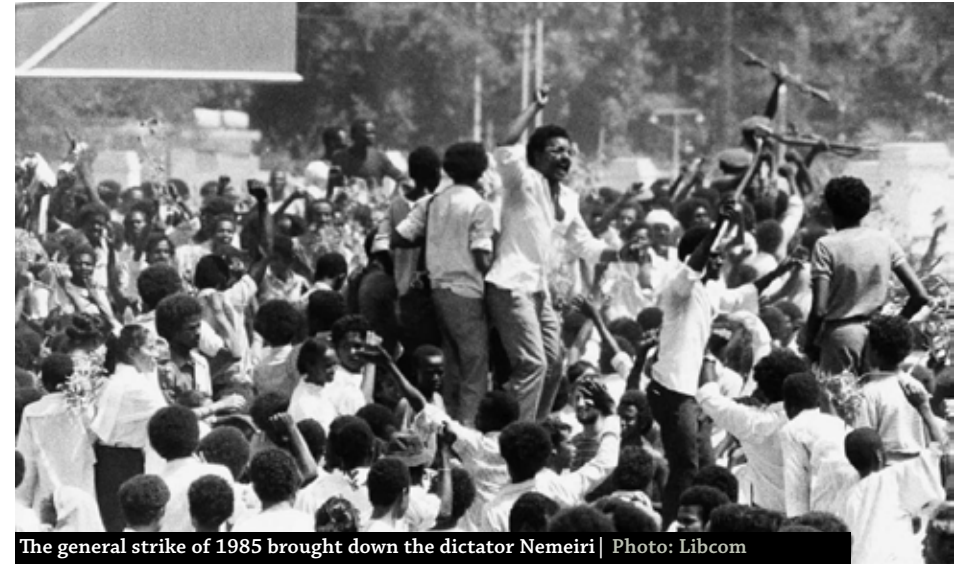
government reacted to the reasonable demands from Darfuri movements against austerity and injustice by triggering another civil war in 2003, which led to nearly half a million dead and more than 2,000,000 displaced. Al-Bashir and many leaders in the ruling party are wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for committing crimes against humanity and genocide in Darfur. In 2011 another civil war took place in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile states that constitute the new South of Sudan.

The ugly face of the regime was revealed not only by the war and atrocities, but also by implementing a brutal set of so-called 'enabling policies' to achieve complete supremacy of the Islamist agenda over the entire society.

Thousands of public sector employees, armed forces, and police officers were removed overnight by a single decree and later on replaced by unqualified members and followers of the Muslim Brotherhood, and this continued for three decades. The country witnessed one of the worst oppressive regimes in recent years as oppression, racism, suppression of free speech, and major human rights violations were part of everyday life.

Political activists from all parties were prosecuted, unlawfully arrested, tortured, or even killed. Nevertheless, the Sudanese people never stopped their struggle against the regime, going through several uprisings in 1996, 2011, 2013, and finally, the December 2018 revolution.

## Struggles in the streets



The general strike of 1985 brought down the dictator Nemeiri | Photo: Libcom

# Struggles in the streets and workplaces

## Rania Obead

In 1920, a group of Sudanese graduates started the Sudan Union Association. This association had political and cultural activities. A group that wanted to focus on political activities against colonization split and formed the White Brigade association. This group worked to connect different groups of Sudanese

from different classes and social groups against colonisation, as it included civil servants, soldiers, merchants and others, as well as had branches in different cities around the country. For 5 months from July 1924, the White Brigade Association organised big demos in most of Sudan's main cities. These demos faced huge oppression from the British authority; many lost their lives, and many were arrested. Even when a group of

## Struggles in the streets

Sudanese soldiers tried to support this movement, they were oppressed. By the end of 1924, the White Brigade was totally crushed.

In October 1964, after six years of the Abboud coup, the coup council prohibited any discussions about the Southern Sudan issues, which mainly focused on the discrimination the southern Sudanese are facing in an environment dominated by Arabization. The Khartoum University student union organised a meeting to discuss the Southern Sudan issues on 21 October 1964.

The students showed their anger toward the regime and concluded that this problem would never be solved under a military dictatorship. The police dispersed the meeting using tear gas and fire, and Ahmad al-Qurashi was killed.

The day after, around 30,000 people attended Ahmad al-Qurashi's funeral, chanting against the regime. Historically, the students and mainly Khartoum university students played a major role in Sudanese political life, as illustrated by the influence of the Graduates Club in the struggle for independence.

The demonstrations spread to other cities, such as Omdurman, Juba, and Port Sudan. On 26 October, a general strike announced by the National Front of Professionals included professionals and political parties. The strike was very successful and affected government workplaces, general communications, and shops.

On 27 October, negotiations began between the United National Front

and representatives of the armed forces and ended by the establishment of the transitional government on 30 October.

The model of mass mobilisation which led to the downfall of Nemeiri's regime also involved students and workers; mass protests in the streets and workers' strikes. In March 1985, university students led many demonstrations in the capital after a huge increase in essential living costs by up to 100 percent. On the 29 of March workers joined the students in big marches followed by a call for a general strike the following day. The demonstrations continued, with the strikes becoming stronger after many professional bodies supported it.

On the 3 April, Sudan witnessed the biggest demonstration in its history, with about 2 million people hitting the streets. The following day, the political parties, trade unionists, and professional associations met to draft a unified leadership program with common goals. On 6 April, the government announced Nemeiri was out of power and formed a one-year traditional government.

As we can see in both the October and April uprisings, the combination of street movement and workplace movement managed to overthrow a dictatorship. Sudanese people have a long experience of organizing and building for demonstrations, as well as creating a united front from the political parties and trade unions and joining strikes.

## Resistance Committees

# Neighbourhood organising and the Resistance Committees

## Muzan Alneel

Emerging as a defining force in Sudan's 2018 revolution, the grassroots neighborhood Resistance Committees (RCs) established themselves as perhaps the most iconic symbol of the uprising. Their decentralised organizational structures demonstrated remarkable effectiveness, cementing political influence both on the streets and within Sudan's broader political arena, while also garnering regional and international recognition — from grassroots activists and global institutions alike — for their role in advancing revolutionary change in Sudan.

## Origins and formation

The conceptual foundations of Sudan's Resistance Committees trace back to the 1990s, rooted

in efforts to forge a cohesive organizational network for opposition groups. The Sudanese Communist Party, drawing inspiration from Soviet-style communal democracy, has for long called for the formation of grassroots structures as both a rebuttal to the state's violent suppression of dissent and an alternative to hierarchical, autocratic governance. Instances of forming neighbourhood resistance committees can be found in 2013 during the mass protests against the removal of subsidies on wheat and fuel as well as in 2016 general strike in opposition to the increase of medication prices. Though small-scale and experimental, the Resistance Committees' initial iterations in 2013 and 2016 planted the seeds for their meteoric rise starting in early 2019.

Protests erupted across Sudan in early December 2018, driven by dire economic conditions, with soaring bread prices acting as the final catalyst. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA)—a coalition of underground unions with limited public visibility



Resistance Committee meetings involved all generations | Photo: via Facebook

at the time—called for a number of pre-scheduled mass demonstrations against the regime. On January 1, 2019, the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) emerged through a landmark declaration, jointly signed by the SPA and a coalition of established opposition parties. The SPA's overwhelming public backing soon positioned it as the de facto leader of the uprising.

Faced with the state's violent suppression of large-scale demonstrations, the SPA issued a call in January 2019 for the creation of Neighbourhood Resistance Committees. These decentralised units were tasked with organizing simultaneous, hyper-local protests, a

tactical shift designed to reduce the risk of mass repression and safeguard participants by dispersing mobilization efforts across neighborhoods.

The appeal resonated widely among a population already deeply engaged in protests, sparking the rapid proliferation of Resistance Committees (RCs) nationwide. Many announced their formation through social media platforms, leveraging digital tools to mobilise support. While their membership mirrored the diverse demographics of their neighborhoods, RCs were predominantly led by university and high school students, young professionals, and unemployed youth in their 20s and 30s, providing a tool of political participation for groups

previously excluded from a political landscape crowded by elite powers with little popular legitimacy. The RCs operated with flexible, non-hierarchical structures, though over time, many evolved to include specialised roles—such as communications or on-the-ground organizing offices—to streamline their activism.

In the months preceding the April 2019 sit-ins that encircled military headquarters nationwide, protests surged across Sudan with unprecedented scale and frequency. Coordinated by the RCs, demonstrations erupted multiple times weekly, drawing tens of thousands of participants. These marches faced relentless, brutal crackdowns

by security forces, which in turn compelled the RCs to refine their tactical and structural resilience. Tasked with planning routes, evading surveillance, and safeguarding protesters, the committees evolved into sophisticated units capable of sustaining momentum under repression.

The RCs demonstrated their growing strategic acumen during pivotal moments such as the call for the 2 days general strike in May 2019, where the RC's strong connections to communities advanced spreading the call and popular support for the strike despite the attempts of the FFC to dilute these calls in favour of sustaining the negotiations with the military

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Scenes from the 28-29 May 2019 general strike. Top: Flour mill workers. Centre: Bank workers Bottom: Airport workers | Photos: SPA via Facebook

## Resistance Committees

leadership. Following the brutal attack on the peaceful sit-ins by the security apparatus in the massacre of June 3rd tens of protesters were killed and hundreds disappeared. Following the massacre the Transitional Military Council (TMC)—which had seized power after ousting Omar al-Bashir in April—imposed a nationwide internet blackout lasting over a month. The TMC was formed of the heads of Al-Bashir’s security apparatus, including the police, the national security services, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Abdelfattah Alburhan -at the time the inspector general of the SAF—as head of the TMC, and Mohamed Hamadan Dagalo (Himidti) the leader of the RSF as his deputy.

Following the internet blackout, the RCs, stripped of digital tools, relied on offline networks and hyper-local organizing to sustain momentum. By June 30th, they had forged city- and state-level coordination bodies, uniting neighbouring committees to plan a mass demonstration. The resulting march, the largest since the revolution began, delivered an unmistakable public rebuke of military rule, underscoring the RCs’ evolution from neighborhood units and towards a cohesive, nationwide resistance front.

Despite the clear public opposition to military rule, the FFC signed a partnership agreement with the TMC, supported by regional and international powers such as Saudi, the UAE, Egypt and the EU. Regional and international support for the agreement played a larger role in

pushing it against the will of the Sudanese public, however the lack of a revolutionary party to strengthen and organise the popular front was the main reason this battle was lost to compromises. The agreement created the Transitional Government of Sudan (TGS) composed of civilians and heads of the TMC which was supposed to rule Sudan for the following three years.

Amongst the general public including the members of the RCs two trends emerged, one that remained committed to the original demands of the protesters in a fully civilian rule, freedom, peace and justice, and another open to tactical compromises with heads of the ousted president’s security apparatus, now known as the TMC.

## Evolution during the transitional period

The transitional period was defined by escalating tensions between two competing visions: the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and their allies, who prioritised negotiated compromises with the military, on one side, and the Resistance Committees (RCs), trade unions, and radical factions demanding unwavering adherence to the revolution’s original goals and justice for victims of the June 3rd Massacre and economic relief for Sudan’s struggling populace on the other.

This divide widened as authorities -including the FFC ministers and

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officials- neglected meaningful dialogue with grassroots movements and stalled on prosecuting security forces for atrocities, while failing to address crippling inflation and resource shortages. By October 2021, the rift had hardened into open confrontation. Days before the October 25 military coup, Khartoum's RCs issued a scathing declaration ahead of the planned "March of Millions", condemning the FFC's power-sharing pact with generals as a "blood partnership" and vowing to protest against all factions of the ruling coalition.

The TGS sought to neutralise the RCs by recasting them as apolitical, state-aligned administrative units, delegating duties like supervising the distribution of subsidised fuel and wheat, maintaining schools, and other municipal services. This strategy forced internal debates: Should the RCs prioritise their revolutionary mandate as grassroots political organisers, or pivot toward pragmatic service provision?

Responses varied widely. Some committees embraced these roles and others rejected state-linked tasks outright to preserve their autonomy. A third faction adopted hybrid models, creating parallel service-focused subcommittees or designated offices within existing RC structures. While this experimentation advanced debate and theorization over the RCs' core purpose, their involvement in addressing daily needs—from bread shortages to infrastructure gaps—deepened their grassroots legitimacy and sharpened their understanding of



Demanding justice for the revolution's martyrs, 30 June 2020 | Photo: via Facebook

community struggles.

RCs decision-making processes were rooted in the collective deliberations of their members. While initially united by opposition to Al-Bashir's regime, this shared resistance initially lacked a cohesive political framework or guiding ideology, leaving individual perspectives to heavily shape each committee's direction.

Membership demographics mirrored the socioeconomic realities of their neighborhoods, with higher concentration from some of the groups facing relatively more direct injustices. In urban centers, RCs predominantly drew young adults—a demographic battered by soaring unemployment and inflation—while rural committees, such as those leading the North

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This theoretical void also rendered them susceptible to uncritically absorbing societal norms, such as patriarchal glorifications of militant masculinity, which marginalised women's participation and reinforced exclusionary dynamics.

Moreover, as Sudan's most visible political force during the revolution, the RCs' ideological ambiguities reverberated nationally. Their immense public influence could have catalyzed a transformative political project; instead, their ad hoc pragmatism often mirrored—rather than dismantled—the status quo. The failure to articulate a clear vision of post-revolutionary governance left a strategic chasm, one that counter-revolutionary forces eagerly exploited.

The lessons of earlier struggles crystallised after the October 2021 coup, when Sudan's military junta (TMC) dissolved its fragile alliance with civilian leaders. Generals Abdelfattah al-Burhan of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Mohamed Dagalo (Hemedti) of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) conspired together to put the civilian ministers in the transitional government under house arrest and seized power for themselves.

This rupture reignited the revolutionary movement, propelling the RCs from frontline organisers to its de facto political vanguard—a shift fueled by widespread disillusionment with elite-driven compromises and eroded trust in traditional parties.

Within hours of the coup, protesters flooded the streets along routes the RCs had meticulously mapped over



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prior months, echoing their chants and invoking calls to reclaim “abandoned battles”—a stark indictment of the transitional period’s perceived betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

Just five days after the October 2021 coup, the RCs mobilised a historic “March of Millions” on October 30th, outlining seven core demands: an end to military rule, prosecution of junta leaders, rejection of dialogue with the regime, disbanding the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), creating a unified national army, halting military interference in politics, and reclaiming Sudan’s economic and political sovereignty. These demands coalesced into the RCs’ iconic “Three Nos” slogan—“No negotiation, No partnership, No legitimacy”—a rallying cry upheld relentlessly in protests for over a year.

Sustained demonstrations eroded the coup’s credibility, paralyzing its ability to establish a functional government and to appoint a cabinet, including the prime minister. This deadlock persisted until conflict erupted in April 2023, underscoring how grassroots defiance had boxed the military into a corner—unable to govern yet unwilling to relinquish power.

The RCs underwent profound organizational and ideological maturation during this period, marked by their development of comprehensive political charters. These documents—born from nationwide deliberations involving over 8,000 committees—diagnosed Sudan’s systemic crises and proposed governance models centered

on grassroots democracy. Through public debates, internal consultations, and participatory drafting processes, the RCs not only codified their vision but also stress-tested their decentralised democratic practices.

Two seminal charters emerged: the Revolutionary Charter for People’s Power (RCPP), initially endorsed by committees in seven states before spreading nationwide, and the Charter for the Establishment of the People’s Authority (CEPA), drafted by Khartoum’s RC coalition. While both prioritised bottom-up governance, they diverged strategically. CEPA emphasised unifying the revolution’s political factions to consolidate power—a pragmatic, coalition-building approach.

The RCPP, conversely, dissected Sudan’s structural inequities and advocated forging new alliances to dismantle entrenched systems. These could be seen in the RCPPs call for a developmental economy and a total rejection of neoliberal policies as well as the charters’ governance model which proposes local councils as the first level of governance which should be created even before the fall of the regime. These differences between the two charters reflected the earlier tensions between compromised incremental reform and radical transformation.

After months of grassroots deliberation, Resistance Committees (RCs) from Sudan’s 18 states collaboratively drafted and ratified the Charter for the Establishment of the People’s Authority (CEPA) in

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Street battles and barricades built RCs capacity to mobilise | Photo: TAM

October 2022. The charter outlined a roadmap to redefine Sudan’s governance, economy, and power structures through inclusive, bottom-up processes. Its stated mission: to forge a unified vision of national renewal by interrogating foundational questions—from the role of the state to equitable resource distribution—and dismantling systemic barriers to democratic sovereignty.

The RCs have actively grappled with systemic challenges to their political development and alignment with core values. For instance, to counter disparities in representation between Khartoum and marginalised regions, they proposed mechanisms like electing delegates from peripheral states to advocate directly in the capital—a structural fix aimed at decentralizing decision-making power.

Beyond governance reforms, the RCs engaged publicly with grassroots concerns, articulating stances on pressing socioeconomic rights: from unemployment and student welfare to protections for informal workers. By anchoring debates in the daily struggles of ordinary Sudanese—access to housing, education, and fair wages—they expanded their role beyond protest leadership to policy interlocutors, reinforcing their legitimacy as both revolutionary vanguards and community stewards.

The Resistance Committees (RCs) repeatedly rebuffed efforts to co-opt them into power-sharing deals with Sudan’s entrenched elites. This included outright rejection of the 2021 Burhan-Hamdok Pact—a bid by junta leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and ousted Prime Minister Abdalla

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Hamdok to repackage military rule under a veneer of civilian approval. The RCs denounced the agreement as a cynical ploy to exploit Hamdok's residual popularity, mobilizing mass dissent that forced its collapse.

Subsequent initiatives—backed by domestic elites and international mediators like the UN—similarly floundered against the revolution's unyielding core demand: total military withdrawal from politics.

## The RCs in the time of war

The unwavering resolve of the RCs and the broader revolutionary movement exacerbated fissures within Sudan's military elite, culminating in the April 15, 2023 outbreak of war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

While framed as a rivalry between former allies vying for dominance, the war also reflects a deeper clash: a violent backlash by authoritarian forces against grassroots demands for systemic change. The war embodies the elite's desperation to obliterate revolutionary momentum and reassert military hegemony.

At the war's onset, Khartoum's Resistance Committees (RCs) urged civilians to reject warring factions' incitement and avoid violence. They mobilised grassroots networks to provide critical aid—emergency rooms, communal kitchens—amid chaos. Yet two years of conflict strained

their pacifist principles, with some RCs tolerating pro-army narratives to preserve state structures, swayed by collapsing infrastructure and relentless propaganda.

A growing number of RCs have moved even further towards outright support for the army. This is another manifestation of the political challenges that continued to face the RCs and the entirety of the Sudanese revolution which can be linked to the lack of a strong revolutionary party that can counter the elitist propaganda.

Despite the dual onslaught of war and elite counter-revolution, Sudan's Resistance Committees (RCs) endure as vital vessels of emancipatory potential—a fact underscored by the relentless targeting of RC members in conflict zones. Crucially, the RCs' years-long experiment in decentralised organizing—mobilizing thousands, drafting revolutionary charters, and weathering existential threats—has forged a blueprint for participatory politics rare in the Global South.

Even now, amid war's wreckage, their emergency rooms and communal kitchens demonstrate how radical care networks can shield communities while sustaining revolutionary horizons.

These structures, though imperfect, offer more than survival tactics. They are the scaffolding for a future Sudan rebuilt not by warlords or foreign mediators, but by the collective agency of its people. In the revolution's darkest hour, the RCs' legacy—of grassroots sovereignty forged in crisis—remains its brightest compass.

## The workers' movement



Workers demonstrate on May Day | Photo: Sudan Labour Bulletin

# The workers' movement

## Khalid Sidahmed

From the very inception of British-Egyptian colonial rule in 1899, Sudanese workers were thrust into a brutal system of exploitation. The colonial regime, driven by imperial greed, sought to suppress any semblance of workers' power, employing divide-and-rule tactics to fracture solidarity. These tactics deliberately fanned the flames of ethnic, regional, and religious divisions to thwart any unified resistance. A

stark embodiment of this was the 1924 "Southern Policy", a calculated manoeuvre that isolated the South and restricted movement between North and South. This insidious policy not only sowed the seeds of disunity but also paved the way for future conflicts, culminating in the historic struggle that led to South Sudan's emergence as an independent nation in 2011. Such acts of oppression were not mere administrative choices; they were deliberate attempts to fracture a nation and stifle the revolutionary spirit of its people.

As early as 1907, sawmill workers

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(whom the coloniser used to prepare the railway for transporting wood to England to run factories, ships, and locomotives) and farmers in the Fadlabi plantations in Barbar launched strikes, igniting a flame that would burn for decades. The 1909 Kamleen Project farmers' strike (which occurred twice in 1909), the 1913 forest and Arqawet road workers' strike, and the railway workers' strike from 1920 to 1923 were not mere economic protests—they were acts of defiance against a colonial system that sought to strip workers of their humanity.

By 1929, private sector workers joined the national struggle, and in 1948, the historic '33 Days Strike' by railway workers forced the colonial government to introduce labour legislation. But these reforms were a façade, designed to placate workers while maintaining the colonial economic structure that reduced Sudanese labour to a cheap commodity for imperial interests. The growing anger culminated on 15 March 1949, when over 150,000 workers executed Sudan's first general strike, a successful and powerful show of workers' collective strength against colonial rule.

Prominent Sudanese trade unionist Mahjoub Kanari detailed over 22 strikes for different demands across different regions and cities in his book, *The Sudanese Labour Movement* during the period of 1931 and 1947. These strikes lasted for varying periods.

He also detailed that the first trade union magazine, *The Sudanese Worker*, was released in 1964 and that there

were 80 trade unions by the year 1950, with a membership of 90,000 workers. These unions united to form the Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation in the same year.

## Military repression after independence

Sudan's 1956 independence brought hope but not true liberation. The elite-led government upheld colonial exploitation, as seen in the Joda Massacre, where 207 farmers were slaughtered for resisting exploitative cotton deals—a reminder that political independence without economic and social emancipation is an illusion.

Military regimes deepened this betrayal: Aboud (1958) crushed unions, but workers fought back, leading to the 1964 uprising that toppled him. Nemeiri's 1969 coup posed as pro-worker but soon turned reactionary, executing Communist leaders, including Al-Shafei Ahmed Al-Sheikh, a martyr of the workers' movement. Yet, the mass uprisings of April 1985 once again proved that workers are the vanguard of revolution, toppling Nemeiri and igniting another wave of struggle.

Despite the heroic efforts of major unions—including railway workers, teachers, and farmers—who played pivotal roles in toppling both dictators, the aftermath saw a profound betrayal. These unions cemented the central role of the working class in the revolution, yet their voices were silenced. The elitist governments that

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## Memories and traditions of struggle

Prominent Sudanese trade unionist Mahjoub Kanari recalls in his book *The Sudanese Labour Movement* a moment that captures the power of collective action. As a child growing up in a working-class neighbourhood in Khashm el-Girba — a town shaped by labour militancy — Kanari learned early that even children could taste the strength of solidarity.

In that town, workers from the Ministry of Irrigation had built their union in the 1940s and '50s, standing firm against colonialism and playing a crucial role during the October 1964 Revolution. The fight was relentless. Pro-government forces sought to crush independent trade unionism, arresting communist and democratic leaders. But the movement persisted. Children carried messages and supplies to the imprisoned union leaders, smuggling cigarettes, tahini, and jam into Halfa New Prison. Even in chains, their influence was felt—some union leaders won elections while behind bars, proving that repression could not silence the working class.

One day, when a manager dared to take away the school bus – a hard-won right for workers' children from their union – the kids rose up. They marched, fists raised, chanting "We want the bus!" The power of that collective voice forced the ministry's undersecretary to retreat, ordering his own car and every government vehicle to be used to carry the children. The bus — a symbol of their collective strength — remained theirs.

emerged offered little to no genuine representation for the very workers who fought bravely for change.

Then came the most devastating counter-revolution of all. In 1989, General Omar Al-Bashir, backed by the reactionary forces of the Muslim Brotherhood, launched a military coup and embarked on a ruthless campaign to dismantle the workers' movement.

Trade unions, workers' associations, and political parties were outlawed. Over 300,000 government employees, factory workers, and production workers were purged and replaced with regime loyalists. This was not just repression—it was class war. The coup regime's so-called "empowerment" project (tamkeen) was designed to

crush organised labour and cement the regime's grip over the workforce.

Under Al-Bashir's rule, workers faced systematic terror. Strikes and protests were brutally crushed, and ghost houses—secret torture chambers run by National Security—became instruments of repression, where trade unionists and revolutionaries were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered.

## The road to the 2018 revolution

Yet the Sudanese working class never surrendered. Even under relentless crackdowns, militant strikes

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A mass meeting of striking court workers, December 2021 | Photo: SWARTU

erupted—led by doctors, pharmacists, and workers' organisations. In 2016, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) emerged from four unions—doctors, teachers, lawyers, and journalists—becoming a vital force of resistance. That same year, the SPA organised a “Day of Disobedience,” directly challenging the regime’s authority. The state retaliated with arrests, torture, and executions—but it could not crush the struggle.

By the time the revolutionary wave erupted in December 2018, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) had expanded to 8 unions and—alongside other revolutionary forces—played a decisive role in leading mass mobilisations. It reignited Sudan’s traditions of militant unionism,

organising general strikes, mass civil disobedience, and street protests that shook the regime to its core. This revolutionary force, built on the power of the organised working class, proved instrumental in toppling Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, once again demonstrating that it is the workers—united and in struggle—who hold the real power to transform society.

One of the most powerful moments of this revolution was the general strike on May 28-29, 2019. This monumental display of workers’ power brought large parts of the country to a standstill, delivering an unmistakable message to the Transitional Military Council (TMC) - the military generals, loyal to the deposed Al-Bashir, who had inherited his regime: the streets and

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the working class were the real centres of power.

What made this strike even more remarkable was that it was driven by popular pressure from below. It was ordinary workers and the masses who pushed for escalation, defying the hesitations of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)—one of the leading coalitions of the 2018 revolution, consisting of rebel groups, civil society organisations, and political parties—and the SPA leadership itself. Both feared jeopardising negotiations with the TMC, but the working class and the broader revolutionary public demanded direct confrontation.

## Contradictions and compromises

This moment laid bare the deep class contradictions within the revolutionary movement, exposing a sharp cleavage between the militant working class and the bourgeois political leadership, which was desperate to preserve its seat at the negotiating table.

The TMC, recognising the existential threat posed by this unprecedented surge of workers’ power, abandoned any pretence of compromise. Days later, on June 3rd 2019 and in the following days, the counter-revolution struck with savage violence in the infamous military headquarters massacres.

These attacks targeted peaceful protesters across fourteen sit-ins throughout Sudan, aiming to crush the revolution through sheer terror and

blood. But the seeds of betrayal had already been sown.

The signing of the so-called Constitutional Declaration in August 2019—an agreement between the FFC and the TMC—marked a devastating retreat for the revolution. Instead of deepening the revolutionary struggle, the SPA was sidelined and undermined.

As Mohanad Elnur, the SPA’s former spokesperson, explained to MENA Solidarity: “In the 2020 SPA elections, leftist trade unionists won leadership positions in the SPA. The reformist parties within the Forces of Freedom and Change, fearing the radical potential of a militant working-class force, ignored these results and continued working with the old SPA leadership. This deliberate sabotage slowly dismantled the SPA’s revolutionary role”.

## Workers resist the military coup

The Sudanese working class refused to be silenced by the 2021 October coup. Yet these heroic struggles remained fragmented, lacking the revolutionary leadership and strategy needed to transform them into a generalised assault on the ruling class.

Too many strikes were boxed into narrow economic demands, disconnected from the broader fight for workers’ control and the overthrow of the ruling class. Without a unified revolutionary organisation to lead the working class toward seizing power, the movement could not escalate into a

decisive confrontation with the state.

Despite these challenges, the period saw glimmers of hope and resilience. New unions emerged through democratic elections—such as those representing dramatists, doctors, and journalists—revitalising the labour movement and laying critical groundwork for future organising and resistance.

Sudan's ruling classes—from the colonialists to the post-independence elites—have systematically worked to suppress the emergence of a revolutionary workers' movement. Under British rule, industrialisation was deliberately strangled to keep Sudan dependent on raw material exports, ensuring that a militant, organised working class never emerged.

After independence, the military regimes simply inherited and reinforced these colonial structures, maintaining the stranglehold of capital and domination over Sudanese labour. Breaking this cycle requires more than periodic uprisings—it demands the conscious organisation of workers into a revolutionary force capable of dismantling the old order and seizing power for themselves.

## Lessons for the global workers' movement

Sudanese unions have deployed various tactics in their fight against exploitation, but nothing shook the ruling class more than the 2019

general strikes. When union leadership hesitated, rank-and-file workers took the lead, forming escalation committees to push the struggle forward.

One key lesson is the necessity of militant, sustained action. Intermittent strikes, while disruptive, allow the bosses and ruling class to wait out the storm. But when Sudanese workers escalated to indefinite strikes—paralysing key sectors, occupying workplaces, and directly challenging state power—they forced the regime into crisis.

Another critical lesson is that economic and social struggles must be inseparable from political demands. Sudanese workers did not just fight for better wages—they rose against dictatorship, austerity, the state's divide-and-rule tactics, and imperialist looting. The labour movement must not confine itself to workplace grievances but become a militant force against the ruling class's assaults—whether it's the mainstream parties' attacks on workers' rights, women, and the planet, or the crimes of imperialism from Palestine to Sudan.

Above all, the Sudanese workers' experience shows that trade unions alone cannot bring about revolutionary change. The state, whether in Sudan or Britain, exists to defend capitalist interests. Real transformation requires a revolutionary working-class movement—one that not only fights for better conditions under capitalism but organises to overthrow it altogether.

# The voice of women is the sound of revolution

Sudanese women have played a key role in building the country's revolutionary movements. In these interviews, women activists speak out about their experiences.

## Fatima Joda

On 17 January 2019 I was in the crowd, out on the streets of Burri, one of the most politically active neighborhoods of Khartoum. As we were moving peacefully along, women and children from the area joined the protest and started chanting with us. Security Forces started breaking up the crowd by throwing teargas at us. Everyone began running and hiding inside the houses, which the neighborhood families opened up in order to hide the protesters. After a couple of minutes we began to gather again as security forces and police

drove to a near street to separate other protesters.

The crowd was bigger the second time, but this time the force used was more brutal. The security forces used live bullets, and detained everyone they captured. The teargas they use makes your body and eyes burn, your vision becomes blurred and sometimes you completely lose your sight for minutes. You have a hard time breathing; I have witnessed many people fainting and having a complete blackout during other protests.

A teacher who was arrested from his home was tortured to death inside the detention cell. Mahgoub Al-Taj Mahjoub, a second year medical student from Al Razi College was beaten to death in front of his university for defending his female colleagues from policemen.

Despite the repression, we feel the revolution is different this time. Unlike previous movements like the one in 2013 where many protesters were also killed more people are involved. We are fed up. People are starving, they are being oppressed in every aspect

## Women's voices

of their lives. They know how corrupt the government is and the extent of human rights violations since Omar al-Bashir's regime came to power in 1989.

We are no longer scared of death, and you can tell this from the increasing numbers of people joining the protests every day. Everyone is out on the streets now. It's not easy to overthrow a dictatorship that has been in power for 30 years. It will take months and maybe years till we get our freedom. The only thing I am sure about now is that we are not going to be silent anymore.

## Gamareia Omar

Women have had a very active role in the movement in general, and they were the ones to launch the demonstrations during the December 2018 uprising with enthusiastic cheers. Sudanese women have also been present in meetings, they have been writing and distributing clippings, leaflets, and graffiti, as well as making public addresses in the markets.

There have been challenges facing women as trade unionists, including family obligations, the grip of the security services, and the fact that meeting timings are often inappropriate. Despite this, the Sudanese Teachers' Committee is strong and influential and its voice is clear due to the larger percentage of female teachers compared to male teachers in the education sector, they are about sixty percent.

Although the presence of women is large in street mobilisations, they



Women in Darfur demand justice | Photo: TAM

are excluded from political and professional processes and issues of negotiation and decision-making.

This is a problem, but in my opinion, the response is to promote awareness and enlightenment about the role of women. Awareness has the priority over anything and requires concerted physical and material efforts from everyone, including women and men who support and believe in women's rights, through establishing workshops, seminars, and small meetings in schools and within work institutions.

Everyone must work to educate women. Aware women will be supportive of all women in the public sphere and active in trade unions and political work. If women are aware of their rights, they will be able to stand against the existing governments,

## Women's voices

peoples of the world. I, from Sudan, salute the women who are fighting for their rights in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and throughout the Arab world. Your messages give us a sense of solidarity and support.

However, I demand that solidarity be in standing against your governments' intervention in our countries, for example, against the first world countries such as Britain and the European Union and their military support that does not serve the interests of the people. The colonial mentality that is used by the international community against Sudan since the time of Muhammad Ali Pasha, for slaves and gold, continues to oppress Sudan.

We work for a dear and generous homeland that honours its citizens, rejecting the policies of the World Bank and rejecting policies of impoverishment, supporting human rights, supporting women's rights, their right to a dignified and just life and equality, and supporting stable families away from displacement, wars, and away from problems. A society that enjoys its rights of education, health, clean drinking water, and housing.

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Sudanese activist Fatima Joda was interviewed for Middle East Solidarity magazine in 2019. Gamareia Omar is a member of the executive of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee and Amira Osman is the head of the "No to Women's Oppression"; they spoke at an online meeting organised by MENA Solidarity to mark International Women's Day in 2023.

whether they are totalitarian dictatorial governments or democratic governments elected through the authority of the people.

## Amira Osman

We held a protest in Al-Qasr Street on March 8 2023 to express our rejection of the coup, the systematic violence of the state, and the policies of impoverishment, killing, and rape. We reject violence and reject all forms of military presence in Sudan's ruling government. What is required from unionists and activists is to stand in solidarity with us against marginalising women from participating in negotiations about political reforms.

We hope for solidarity from the unions in Britain and from among the

# Union Noticeboard



From the earliest days of the 2018 revolution, the Sudanese Teachers' Committee was at the forefront of the struggle. They established escalation committees and demanded better wages, improved conditions, and a 20 percent increase in education spending from the country's annual budget, alongside 6 percent of GDP. Sami Al-Bagir, the official spokesperson for the Sudanese Teachers' Committee, explained their tactics to MENA Solidarity.

"The first steps of the strike began with drafting a memorandum of rights and demands comprising 8 points, including increasing education spending, raising the minimum wage, and implementing some resolutions in favour of teachers. This memorandum was submitted in a single day to state governments in all 18 Sudanese states, including the capital Khartoum. A higher escalation committee was formed, alongside subcommittees in each state, and strike committees in all 189 localities across Sudan. These committees evolved to even lower levels, including schools. The strike initially began intermittently, allowing for negotiation and to encourage as many participants as possible to join. The intermittent strike continued for three weeks, marked by advertising and media campaigns, but our decision to escalate to a comprehensive strike shook the authorities and forced them into negotiations."



In mid-2022, the Electricity Workers took their fight to a new level. Organising under their own grassroots Electricity Workers Salary Committee, they occupied the Bahri Thermal Plant, cutting power to the symbols of their oppression — the republican palace and the military's headquarters. In that moment, they reminded the generals and the capitalists who really keep the lights on in Sudan.

"We warn that the dilapidated electricity network situation portends damage leading to the complete blackout and we hold the Minister responsible for everything that happens as we assured him in today's meeting. We also apologise to the citizens for any harm done! No retreat, no compromise. Our strength in our unity"

**Electricity Workers Salary Committee**

"We demand that the status of the workers and drivers of the Khartoum state Cleaning Authority be changed to permanent and to be compensated for the injustice inflicted on them over the past years, and stress that this treatment should include all workers and drivers of local cleaning bodies throughout Sudan. Because it is a shame and moral deficiency to let them cover the inability of their meagre salaries to meet the cost of living by selling empty cans and bottles, metal materials and others to survive.

We believe that there is no alternative but for the general assemblies to build their trade union organizations, because the circle of infringement of the rights of workers and the rest of the categories of workers is expanding every day, and in our estimation that a free and independent democratic trade union organization based on the legitimacy of its general assembly is enough to protect the rights of its members, defend their common interests and ensure the achievement of the mission and objectives of work and workers towards society as a whole".

**Sudanese Workers Alliance for the Restoration of Trade Unions**



## Demand-based campaigns



# Fighting for justice: demand-based campaigns

## Mohamed Siddiq

The Alliance of Demand-based Campaigns (acronymised as TAM in Arabic) is one of the Sudanese revolutionary forces, and contributed to various revolutionary activities such as demonstrations, strikes, rallies, and the formulation of charters.

The onset of the alliance was in 2015 when the initiative “This Land is For Us” was established by a coalition of demand-based organisations. This

initiative emerged from a shared understanding among its founding members that the problems they were individually struggling with were fundamentally interconnected, even if they manifested themselves in different forms and degrees of injustice and exclusion. In 2019, the initiative was rebranded as the “Alliance of Demand-based Campaigns”, with a continued focus on fostering solidarity and deepening awareness of the interconnected nature of these

## Demand-based campaigns

problems and the need for alternative policies to achieve lasting solutions. TAM has since grown to encompass 82 member campaigns.

Among the key issues and commonalities underpinning the demands of TAM’s member bodies, the alliance has identified: the crisis in governance, the flawed concept of citizenship, the mismanagement of diversity, the misuse of power and resources, lack of justice, the suppression of political freedoms, and participation through violent means.

TAM’s objectives encompass the development of a comprehensive vision for alternative national policies by drawing on the diverse experiences of its member campaigns. These policies address a wide spectrum of issues, such as war, displacement, land expropriation, the societal impacts of dams, consequences of mining, oil and industrial activities, human rights violations, the privatisation of national projects, and workers’ rights. TAM strives to serve the causes of the people, preventing injustice and securing their rights through support for demand campaigns, coordination facilitation, network building, and fostering solidarity with members and similar organisations in Sudan and worldwide.

## The heavy cost of gold-mining

One pressing concern for many Sudanese local communities and TAM member bodies revolves around gold

mining activities. Traditional gold mining, which employed rudimentary extraction methods involving mercury, predates the industrial sector. The industrial sector later capitalised on the remnants of traditional mining with enhanced technology at a lower cost. This situation, and in the absence of democracy, transparency, and accountability, hindered the enactment of appropriate regulations. Consequently, mining activities led to environmental damage, water source contamination, livestock fatalities, negative impacts on farms, and the proliferation of diseases. Furthermore, these issues extended beyond environmental concerns, disrupting the social fabric in communities adjacent to mining sites and local gold markets. This disruption manifested in school dropouts, increased crime rates, and the expansion of drug trafficking and abuse. Furthermore, millions of workers in these sites faced grave neglect of their rights, experiencing insecurity, inadequate health facilities, and unsuitable working and living conditions that resulted in fatalities, injuries, and chronic illnesses.

Illegal gold mining and production have expanded significantly during the current wartime, especially in the northern and eastern states, which are considered outside the war zone to result in flourishing the old parallel economies, and there is an ongoing effort to gain full control over the mining sector. Besides the economic consequences, this expansion, occurring in the circumstances of a non-functioning state, intensifies the



## Demand-based campaigns

concerns of environmental and social harm.

Addressing the detrimental consequences of gold mining has been a primary focus for many organisations affiliated with TAM since the era of the Al-Bashir regime. TAM and its member organisations actively established and participated in advocacy campaigns, which included organising rallies, sit-ins, conducting studies, engaging with the media, and approaching relevant authorities.

One of the prominent protest against the negative impacts of gold mining occurred in al-Ebaidiyah Administrative Unit, Nile River State in August 2022. Local resistance committees and TAM/River Nile State organised an 18-day sit-in, joined by hundreds of residents from numerous villages. Demands included ceasing mining in residential areas, ensuring safe treatment of mining waste (e.g., cyanide, mercury), expelling mining waste processors from River Nile streams, enhancing security, and requiring companies to follow safe mining practices and social responsibility.

The sit-in concluded after agreements were reached with River Nile State authorities, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, and mining company representatives. The demands would be addressed according to a set schedule, which encompassed various improvements. These included, but were not limited to, upgrading local health and education facilities, the construction of a connecting road to a nearby town, and plans based on public

bidding systems for a water pipeline network to cover the entire area and an electricity generation station.

Another significant aspect of gold mining in Sudan is the extensive involvement of the Sudanese Army, National Intelligence Services, and Rapid Support Forces militia in financing their military endeavours. This involvement has profound implications for the national economy, as it enables these entities to exert political dominance and perpetuate autocracy while thwarting democratic progress. The Sudanese army exerts its influence and control over various sectors by operating a network of companies engaged in diverse economic activities, including the gold trade. Also, the military authorities have granted permission to some of their high-ranking officials to engage in mining investments, even within the confines of military zones.

Additionally, these areas have become alluring for gold investors seeking protection for their illicit activities, who often lease land within these military zones. On the other hand, the Rapid Support Forces, previously assigned to safeguard mining sites, assumed command over these locations, founded gold companies, and subsequently fostered autonomous economic partnerships with Russia and the United Arab Emirates. The competition among these forces intensified dramatically after their coup on October 25th, 2019, which led to the current devastating war.

Within the context of the ongoing

## Demand-based campaigns



conflict, there are clear indications that the Rapid Support Forces are aggressively pursuing control over gold reserves, refinery, and production sites, particularly in the Darfur states. They aim to finance their costly military operations through this control. In stark contrast, the Sudanese army has not undertaken security operations to safeguard gold stocks or production sites, despite holding sway over substantial areas of the country.

Due to the exploitation of the gold sector by Army commanders and companies, and the Rapid Support Forces militias, gold has become a primary source of funding for these groups. This situation necessitates action from both the international and regional communities to impose restrictions on the trade of Sudanese gold. The mining of gold in Sudan is

closely linked to the war, widespread corruption, and severe human rights violations in mining areas. In order to curtail the use of gold as a means to finance conflicts and instead promote its role in aiding the reconstruction and economic development of Sudan, it is crucial to enforce measures to control its trade.

TAM will persist in its efforts and collaboration with revolutionary forces to oversee the infractions linked to military involvement in gold mining, which disrupts the economy and heightens the risk of a prolonged war. Furthermore, TAM encourages the establishment of a dedicated resource abuse monitoring body to address the utilisation of resources in funding the war in Sudan.

Mohamed Siddig is a member of the external affairs office for TAM

# Resisting war



War has destroyed swathes of Sudan | Photo: TAM via Facebook

## Khalid Sidahmed

Sudan's bloody war, which began in April 2023 between the state's two largest military factions—the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)—is nothing but a counter-revolutionary war. Its aim is to crush the 2018 revolution and seize control of Sudan's wealth and governance, with the support of regional and global powers.

To date, these forces have displaced over 13 million people, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and destroyed Sudan's fragile infrastructure, as well as its education and healthcare systems.

Fourteen of Sudan's eighteen states are now — or have been in the past two years — war zones. Food, medicine, communication, and even women's bodies are weaponised to suppress resistance. Kidnapping, rape, and murder are daily tools of terror. Saying no to war is a crime in Sudan now. Children are forcibly recruited, orphaned, or malnourished, leaving an entire generation deprived of education, healthcare, and safety.

The revolutionary forces remain the primary targets of the warring parties. Resisting this destructive war requires rejecting both the SAF and RSF, their narratives, and their war. We must continue to build a revolutionary alternative.

## The Rapid Support Forces

The RSF, commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), born from the Janjaweed militias, was created by Omar al-Bashir and backed by al-Burhan to crush insurgencies in Darfur, committing atrocities that propelled Hemedti to power. They brutally suppressed protests, fought in Yemen for foreign currency, and secured millions from the EU and Britain under the “Khartoum Process Agreement”. In 2017, Al-Bashir rebranded them as a state force, granting impunity. Hemedti amassed wealth through war crimes, gold mining, banking, and mercenary work for Gulf states, even bailing out Sudan's Central Bank in 2019. More than a militia, the RSF is a pillar of Sudan's counter-revolutionary state, serving imperialist interests while violently crushing revolutionary change.

## The Sudanese Armed Forces

The SAF, the mother of all militias, led by Abdelfattah al-Burhan, has upheld Sudan's oppressive state for over 30 years through genocides, war crimes, exploitation, and counter-revolutionary violence. Dominated by generals linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, it has collaborated with militias to serve the ruling elite. Its crimes span South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, South

Kordofan, and Darfur, reflecting its role in crushing dissent. Economically, the SAF operates as a shadow state and controls 82 percent of Sudan's budget outside the formal system, monopolizing banking, agriculture, mining, and industry while the masses suffer.

Despite its brutal and exploitative history, the SAF has entrenched itself in the public narrative as a symbol of sovereignty and patriotism—manufacturing a false consciousness to mask its role as an oppressor of the very people it claims to defend.

Both militias are fuelling the country's descent into full-scale civil war, spawning new militias and inflaming ethnic divisions to tighten their grip on power.

They are not simply fighting each other—they are tearing Sudan apart, turning entire cities into battlegrounds, and pushing the region toward greater instability—all while imperialist powers look on, calculating how best to exploit the crisis for their own gain.

The SAF, desperate to reassert its crumbling authority, has unilaterally declared a puppet government in Port Sudan, forced the reopening of schools in states ravaged by war and hunger, and begun printing new currency to impose its rule. Meanwhile, the RSF is consolidating alliances with other armed groups, signing deals like the recent declaration in Kenya, openly plotting to form a rival government.

Yet, despite the SAF's recent advances and the ongoing bloodshed, these two gangs of warlords could



Protesters challenge the pro-war narratives | Photo: TAM via Facebook

still sit at the same table to carve up what remains of Sudan, trading lives for power and profit. Neither has any allegiance to the people or the revolution—only to their own wealth and survival.

The SAF and RSF are nothing but criminal organisations—perpetrators of genocide, mass rape, and crimes against humanity. They are the enemies of the revolution, standing as a brutal barrier to the struggle for a civilian-led government and genuine liberation. There can be no compromise with war criminals. They must be overthrown, not negotiated with. The future belongs to the revolutionary masses, not to the butchers of ordinary people.

## The role of foreign powers

From the beginning, imperialist and regional powers have sought to abort the Sudanese revolution. The US, UK, EU, Israel, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the African Union have all played a role in undermining the revolution. They pressured the civilian Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC)—one of the leading coalitions of the 2018 revolution, consisting of rebel groups, civil society organisations, and political parties—into signing the 2019 Constitutional Declaration, a power-sharing agreement with SAF and RSF, and forming the transitional

government. This agreement legitimised the very institutions the revolution sought to dismantle, placing al-Burhan at the head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council and Hemedti as his deputy.

In October 2021, SAF and RSF overthrew the civilian government. Despite this, foreign powers continued to push for “negotiated settlements” that preserved the structures of oppression. The UK provided diplomatic cover for both militias, while its ambassador to Sudan, Irfan Siddiq (2018–2021), pressured the transitional government to lift subsidies on essential goods like fuel—deepening the suffering of the Sudanese people. The UAE and Saudi Arabia armed both the SAF and RSF. Israel, meanwhile, signed a “peace treaty” with al-Burhan, prioritizing its regional interests over the lives of Sudanese people.

Turkey shelters Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood figures, enabling them to launder billions through Turkish investments. Meanwhile, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, and the UAE arm both SAF and RSF, fuelling endless bloodshed. Eritrean warships docked at Sawakin highlight growing militarization.

SAF and RSF serve as proxies in a wider power struggle, with foreign actors exploiting Sudan’s resources, strategic location, and trade routes. For global powers, Sudan’s suffering is just another chance to expand influence and plunder wealth.

The reality is that armies—whether the SAF or the RSF—are not

neutral institutions. By their very nature, they are instruments of the ruling class, designed to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie, maintain systems of exploitation, and suppress revolutionary movements.

The death and displacement of ordinary Sudanese people generate wealth for imperialist arms dealers, multinational corporations, and complicit governments. Sudan’s natural riches—Arabic gum (world’s largest producer), gold (third largest producer in Africa), oil, uranium, and fertile lands—have become a curse, exploited by foreign powers to enrich themselves at the expense of the people.

Their common goal? To crush Sudan’s revolution. A victorious revolution would threaten imperialist control, inspire the oppressed worldwide, and challenge capitalism’s grip. Whether through dictatorship or puppet regimes, these powers seek to suppress the Sudanese masses and maintain their rule over the country’s wealth—without accountability or interference.

## Why should we reject SAF and RSF?

The war between the SAF and RSF has ripped Sudanese society apart and dealt a heavy blow to the revolutionary hopes of the masses. But this is no accidental tragedy — it is the violent outcome of a counter-revolution determined to crush the

## Resisting war

dream of a free and just Sudan.

The SAF, wrapped in the lies of the Muslim Brotherhood and backed by regional despots and global imperialist forces, parades itself as the so-called “lesser evil”. This is an illusion — a narrative pushed by those desperate to preserve the old, rotting order. Some activists, demoralised by war, have fallen for the trap — believing the SAF could somehow be a vehicle for reform. But there is nothing to salvage. The SAF is not a force for sovereignty or patriotism — it is the brutal arm of the same state that has bled Sudan dry for generations.

Talk of reforming the SAF or rallying behind it to “preserve Sudan’s unity” is not just naive — it is a betrayal of the revolution. The SAF and RSF are two faces of the same murderous system — a system built on exploitation, racism, and repression. Neither can be reformed because their very existence depends on keeping our people shackled.

There is no people’s unity under the SAF — only unity for the generals, for the capitalists, and for the imperialists who feast on Sudan’s suffering. Real unity can only be built from below — in the streets, the workplaces, and the neighbourhoods — through the self-organisation of the masses fighting to smash this rotten system once and for all.

Sudanese activists, political parties, trade unions, and civil organisations in the diaspora have always been at the forefront of resistance—organising, mobilising, and fighting against the Sudanese state’s oppression and



the successive military regimes that have plundered the country. From the protests against the 2003 Darfur genocide to the revolution of 2018, the diaspora has played a crucial role in the struggle for liberation. When the masses rose against dictatorship, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese across the globe took to the streets, standing in solidarity with the revolution in Sudan in the fight for a just and free future.

But like the revolution at home, the diaspora movement has also faced fragmentation and setbacks since the outbreak of war. While diaspora activism has been marked by relentless efforts—organising protests, providing aid, and issuing statements—it is too often disconnected from local struggles

## Resisting war

exploitation or revolutionary transformation.

The revolution must reject both militias and fight for a Sudan led by its workers and oppressed masses. Victory lies not in military factions, but in dismantling their rule and building a people’s power.

## Our Revolutionary Alternative

Rebuilding the diaspora movement is now an urgent revolutionary task. Learning from past setbacks is essential, but it is not enough—Sudanese revolutionaries abroad must actively link their struggle for liberation at home with the battles waged by workers and oppressed communities in the countries where they live. Revolutionary organisation cannot be confined to protests and statements; it must be rooted in a clear revolutionary analysis, a bold strategy, and an unwavering commitment to internationalism.

To succeed, Sudanese revolutionaries must connect with local workers’ struggles and grassroots movements fighting for justice, equality, and workers’ rights. The battle against Sudan’s warlords and military elites is part of a broader fight against global imperialism.

Sudanese revolutionary forces must take up critical debates within their communities in the diaspora—how to end the war, how to bring the generals to justice, and most importantly, how to smash the existing state and replace

in the countries where activists reside. Furthermore, it frequently finds itself appealing to the very imperialist powers that have looted Sudan’s wealth and fuelled its destruction. Seeking support from these governments only reinforces their grip on Sudan’s fate, rather than advancing the cause of genuine liberation.

Some in the West selectively condemn RSF while downplaying SAF’s crimes—this only strengthens the military’s grip. Both militias are imperialist tools, and neither will bring justice or liberation.

A SAF victory won’t bring peace—it will entrench oppression, forcing another uprising under even harsher conditions. The choice isn’t between SAF or RSF, but between continued

## The Emergency Rooms



Fuel distribution, April 2024 | Photo: East Nile Emergency Rooms via Facebook

# The Emergency Rooms

## Muzan Alneel

Within hours from the start of war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in April 2023; a new form of grassroots organizing started taking shape in Sudan. These were the Emergency Rooms that later became the main lifeline supporting the livelihoods of populations in the war zones and others displaced, supplying health care, food, education and other services.

Emergency Rooms were first birthed to respond to health needs as can be seen in their first statements which often announced the creation of the room along with a call for healthcare professionals to join the room and for

residents to donate medical supplies. In their first statement in May 2023, The Ombadda Neighborhood emergency room mentions that they “decided to form an emergency room in the Ombadda neighborhoods after the withdrawal of the central state apparatus from public services and the use of its capabilities in the war of power and wealth”. This is one of many statements that shows how the ethos of the Emergency Rooms were connected to the recent history of political struggle in the country; as they emphasised basic services as a right, the responsibilities of the government and the gap between its interests and those of the people. The Emergency Rooms were also supported

## The Emergency Rooms

by organizational experiences and tools that the Sudanese public developed during the previous four years of protesting and organizing. This was evident in their utilization of resistance committees’ online platforms and messaging groups to communicate with the public, but also in their emphasis on transparency, in the language of the statements and in their focus on establishing public support, participation and legitimacy as a foundation for their operations.

The rooms were formed by volunteers in their neighbourhoods, in one case they might be a group of friends, in another a group of colleagues in previous mutual aid activities, members of resistance committees and in some cases the rooms were formed after a call from an individual. Those are examples of the many ways in which Emergency Rooms were formed in every area depending on its circumstances and resources and skills available, leading to them emerging in large numbers although an exact account of their numbers is not available. Being formed of neighbourhood residents themselves, the emergency rooms grew and evolved in response to the residents’ demands and needs.

Within the war zones, the initial focus was on health care, however as the war continued beyond the first days a need for food provision rose, and the Emergency Rooms responded by including it in their scope. This led to the beginning of communal kitchens becoming a main part of the survival strategies utilised by Sudanese

civilians in war zones. This evolution in response to community needs continued in the following months, extending the scope of emergency rooms to the creation of children centers, electricity maintenance teams, women’s centers and physico-social support activities.

Emergency Rooms were not limited to areas with active military operations, but were also created in other areas, initially to supervise sheltering the displaced and later grew to cover other needs of both the displaced and the host communities in their areas. It is also worth noting that many similar mutual aid initiatives outside the war zones and specifically in areas controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces do not use the name Emergency Rooms. According to the members of these initiatives they find this name to cause tension with the authorities as an extension of the military rule’s animosity towards the Resistance Committees, grassroots organizing and related concepts.

The Emergency Rooms mostly depend on donations from residents, the general public and the Sudanese diaspora. This makes their financial situation highly unsustainable as can be observed from many online posts from Emergency Rooms calling for donations and stating that their treasury is empty, and they can no longer provide the daily meal or the necessary medication.

Many rooms have also received funding from local and international aid organizations which increased their resources but not their sustainability



Activists from Madani Resistance Committees remember one of their martyrs, April 2023 | Photo: Madani RCs via Facebook

giving the uncertainties linked to external donors.

Despite the limited resources of the Emergency Rooms they managed to provide to the people of Sudan at levels that large international organizations weren't able to. That was a result of their on-the-ground presence, direct communication with the public and prioritization of people's needs. The rooms have also started developing structures that link them and coordinate their needs, such as the Localization Coordination Council and the Khartoum Rooms Support Office.

Sudan's Emergency Rooms drew lessons from the Resistance Committees (RCs) and decades of grassroots mutual aid efforts, such

as the 2013 Nafeer Initiative—which mobilised popular efforts of flood relief—to Shari Al-Hawadith (2015–present), a healthcare collective subsidizing medical costs for the poor.

Like the RCs' oversight of fuel distribution during the transitional period, these initiatives reignited debates: Could service provision risk depoliticizing struggles by addressing symptoms, not systems? Yet Sudan's experience, alongside global precedents like the Black Panthers' survival programmes in the U.S. during the 1960s, reveals that when paired with explicit critiques of state failure, mutual aid transcends mere crisis management. It becomes pedagogical—exposing systemic voids,

sharpening public consciousness of structural inequities, and modeling alternatives.

Far from delaying revolution, such efforts if guided by a revolutionary understanding, can fuse immediate relief with long-term mobilization, ensuring survival and solidarity become twin pillars of liberation. However, the lack of such understanding can indeed lead to diluting revolutionary sentiments and exhausting the resources of political organizations.

The ongoing experience of the Emergency Rooms has benefits that are not limited to the important material services they provide the public, but extends to promoting social cohesion

and laying ground for a rights-based approach to services. The opportunity allowed the public to experience social services as provided by a people-centered approach is an invaluable one and can support current and future struggles for the kind of services people expect and demand from their governments.

It also opens spaces for the practice of direct democracy and local governance. The idea of basic services managed and operated by the people was generally considered utopian and unrealistic in the Sudanese public opinion up until the eve of the war.

However Emergency Rooms proved it to be not only doable but necessary and fundamental to engage in mutual

## The Emergency Rooms

aid, public organizing and self-governance for the protection of our communities at the face of war or other disasters brought upon us by the greed and adventures of the ruling class.

However, realizing the full potential of this promising and effective form of grassroots organizing is challenged by both external realities and internal structural shortcomings, which deserve attention and discussion to foster the growth of community organizing efforts.

Externally, Emergency Rooms face threats from the dangers of war and the pressures of authoritarian powers on both sides of the war. Emergency Room members encounter direct violence, intimidation, and arrests by armed actors across all regions of Sudan, regardless of their proximity to war zones or the party in control of the area.

In some instances, SAF and RSF have attempted to co-opt the functions of the Emergency Rooms, using them as recruitment spaces, staging propaganda photoshoots with military leaders alongside Room members or in the hospitals they operate—despite providing minimal or no support to the Rooms.

In terms of internal challenges, the Emergency Rooms, like the Resistance Committees before them, is the problem of lacking a revolutionary theory and understanding of the existing structure, and the top of them the state itself.

The Emergency Rooms is yet to develop an understanding of the importance of smashing the state and

growing their emergency activities into a strategic approach to replacing the existing system. The potential of Emergency Rooms to advance the revolutionary project of long term and sustainable local governance is further constrained by the temporary, crisis-driven, and “emergency” frameworks within which they operate.

This is partly a consequence of the war’s harsh realities and the urgent needs the Rooms address, as well as a broader public perception of the war as a temporary phenomenon. Such a framework limits the innovative capacities the Emergency Rooms have already demonstrated, hindering their ability to explore sustainable solutions that position local governance as a transformative political project rather than merely a short-term survival strategy.

Recognizing the work of the Emergency Rooms as the political project it truly is also equips them with the analytical tools necessary to resist co-optation by armed groups, civilian factions of the ruling class, “the international community”, and other counter-revolutionary forces.

The challenges facing the Emergency Rooms are significant, but so too are their potentials. They embody a model of local governance and mutual aid that has saved thousands, if not millions, of lives across Sudan. This experience serves as a vital foundation for envisioning and realizing a Sudan that truly serves its people, just as the rooms have done.

## Solidarity Guide



Joining British trade unions to say ‘refugees welcome’, February 2025 | Photo: MENA Solidarity

# Guide to solidarity action

**S**udan’s revolutionary struggle against military rule, war, and imperialist plunder is not just a regional issue—it is a fight that echoes across the world. Workers, trade unionists, and activists must stand in solidarity with the Sudanese people as they resist warlords and foreign interference. International solidarity is not charity; it is a necessity in our shared fight against exploitation and oppression.

MENA Solidarity has been actively working with Sudanese trade unions and revolutionary forces in support of

their demands. This work includes:

- Organising protests and issuing statements alongside Sudanese organisations and unions worldwide in support of the Sudanese revolution and demanding an end to the war in Sudan. This includes organising Sudanese blocs in major protests and marches.
- Submitting motions on Sudan and attending trade union meetings to raise awareness and build support for Sudanese struggles.

- Holding meetings with various Sudanese trade unions and revolutionary forces. A key example of this is the regular meetings held between the National Education Union (NEU) and the Sudanese Teachers' Committee (STC).
- Participating in and contributing speakers to major conferences and events, including those organised by the National Education Union (NEU), University and College Union (UCU), Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), Stand Up to Racism (SUTR), as well as climate and anti-fascist events.
- Exchanging solidarity messages between Sudan and Britain and delivering these messages to British trade unions, civil organisations, and the public.
- Issuing and distributing Sudan Update leaflets, along with other informational materials such as postcards and pamphlets, at various protests and events.
- Organising annual Sudan Solidarity Conferences from 2021-2024 which have connected trade unionists, activists, and Sudanese revolutionary forces from Sudan and Britain in building international solidarity and provided a platform to exchange ideas and learn from each other



## Take action:

- Access our Stop the War in Sudan Toolkit (<https://tinyurl.com/sudanwartoolkit>) for key resources.
- Share information about Sudan on social media, discuss it with friends and family, and write to local media to keep the issue in the public eye.
- Follow us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/MenaSolidarityNetwork>) and X (<https://x.com/MENAsolidarity>) for real-time updates from the revolutionary forces.
- Subscribe to our website for updates: <https://tinyurl.com/MENAJoin>.
- Share and advocate for this motion in your union branch: Model Motion – Stand with Sudan: Stop the War, Support the People (<https://tinyurl.com/SudanModelMotion>).
- Promote solidarity actions among members, invite Sudanese speakers to union meetings, and mobilise for marches and protests called by MENA Solidarity.

## Demand action from authorities

- Sign the postcard to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, urging the British government to support the Sudanese people (<https://tinyurl.com/sudanwartoolkit>).
- Contact government officials and organisations involved in Sudan to demand transparency about their role. Any responses can be made public or sent to us at [action@menasolidaritynetwork.net](mailto:action@menasolidaritynetwork.net) for further action.

## Show direct support

- Donate to the Sudanese Doctors Union UK medical aid appeal: <https://sdu.org.uk/>.
- Send a message of solidarity to Sudanese revolutionary forces at [action@menasolidaritynetwork.net](mailto:action@menasolidaritynetwork.net).





Sudan's revolution is a story of grassroots organising, sacrifice, and unwavering resistance to oppression. This pamphlet highlights the mass mobilisations that shook the streets, the role of neighbourhood-based Resistance Committees, and the vital contributions of the workers' movement. The Emergency Rooms,

grassroots initiatives providing life-saving aid amid the war, embody the resilience of Sudan's revolutionaries in the face of state and militia violence. The revolution lives on in the streets, in the workplaces, and in the hearts of those who refuse to be silenced. This pamphlet is both a record of their struggle and a call to action.



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