



# Workers and Thieves: Labor Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt

*Joel Beinin*

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Since the 1990s, the Middle East has experienced an upsurge of wildcat strikes, sit-ins, and workers' demonstrations. Well before people gathered in Tahrir Square to demand the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, workers had formed one of the largest oppositional movements to authoritarian rule in Egypt. In Tunisia, years prior to the 2011 Arab uprisings, the unemployed chanted in protest, "A job is a right, you pack of thieves!"

Despite this history, most observers have failed to acknowledge the importance of workers in the social ferment preceding the removal of Egyptian and Tunisian autocrats and in the political realignments after their demise. In *Workers and Thieves*, Joel Beinin corrects this by surveying the efforts and impacts of the workers' movements in Egypt and Tunisia since the 1970s. He argues that the 2011 uprisings in these countries—and, importantly, their vastly different outcomes—are best understood within the context of these repeated mobilizations of workers and the unemployed over recent decades.

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