

To Work

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Back to the issue of Alaa – Alaa Abd el-Fattah whose imprisonment on remand against charges related to the events of 9 October the Military Prosecutor decided to renew for a further 15 days even though it's perfectly clear that he intends to stay in Cairo; to be there for the birth of his son, and to face the charges against him when they are presented through a civil court –

Back to the issue of Alaa – and here's one more effect of the unpleasant stage we're passing through: it keeps lobbing you problems that force your attention towards them and away from your essential project: the country's essential project, so you go round in circles, repeating yourself, while time passes and events race past you. Take for example the No to Military Trials for Civilians campaign; if we count the young people who are and have been involved with it, and work out the amount of thought and time and effort that they've put into it - imagine if all that thought and time and effort had gone into one of the projects that actually place us at the beginning of the road towards achieving some of the revolution's goals – imagine how far we would now be along that road. This is not even taking into account the waste of time and energy of the young people unjustly imprisoned, and the time, energy and resources of their families so burdened now with procedure and visits and expenditure – but this is where we are: those in power attack, and to respond or evade we have to leave our main road and veer into alleyways of their creation.

Never mind. What this requires is a doubling of our efforts, and that we work together, as we worked in the Midan – as one living body, each part of which knows its job and excels at it. This, actually, is what Alaa reminds us of when he writes:

“One of the worst things about this imprisonment is that it holds you up. Time in jail passes really slowly and my main feeling is boredom. Outside I race after time hunting for an extra hour so I can get things done.”

So what “things” are they that Alaa wants to get done, that he feels his imprisonment is holding up? Are they his personal affairs? His career, perhaps, as a distinguished programmer? Making a bit of money, maybe? Polishing himself in the media so he can land himself a position in the new Egypt? Alaa is frank and transparent (qualities which probably helped to land him in jail) and he tells us in his next sentence:

“I'm worried that the initiatives of the revolution that I was going to take part in may be affected. Luckily the revolution doesn't rest on one person so I'm going to depend on those who're showing solidarity with me to take my place.”

This sentence alone exhibits much of what we value in the character and attitude of this young man who is accused of sabotage and the theft of army weapons. I detail them here, not to praise him, but to remind us that this character and these attitudes are precisely the spirit of the revolution of 25 January, the spirit we all took on in those inspired 18 days with which we were blessed in the Midan:

1. Altruism: he is occupied with public rather than private affairs; with the project – the initiatives of the revolution. This is a central feature of Alaa's attitude. Had he given precedence to his personal interests (such as being present when his son is born, for

example) perhaps he would not have refused to deal with the Military Prosecutor. His refusal was meant to ward off the threat that this exceptional judiciary process holds for every one of us; his civilian compatriots.

2. Modesty: Much of what Alaa mentions from his jail are initiatives that he, or he and Manal, started. But he sees them – genuinely – as initiatives in which he would have “participated”.
3. Communalism: the sense of oneself as part of a larger whole, part of a living organism, interacting within itself, one part making up for another when necessary.
4. Confidence in the effectiveness of others and their ability to work and achieve.
5. Empowerment: this confidence in others, this entrusting them with responsibility, in itself empowers and enables them.
6. Commitment. Here he is: imprisoned, removed from the field of action, but he is anxious, worried about the work. He will not be content to take a short, enforced holiday, but will look for whatever contribution he might still make – in this he resembles his mother, Laila Soueif, who, concerned for her work and for her students, continues to go to her university and carry out her duties while she is on hunger strike.
7. Optimism: all the above, and indeed, the act of writing itself, points to a deep faith in the usefulness of action – and that is the heart of optimism.

All these features are features of the revolution, they are what the regime of Hosni Mubarak declared war on and tried to destroy within us. Our young people, our shabab, rose up to defend their spirits against this war, and we rose with them, and these features found their roots in our spirits and blossomed once again: altruism and modesty and communalism and confidence and empowerment and commitment and optimism – we felt them anew in ourselves and in others, so they appeared bright and clear in the people of Egypt in the streets and midans of the country. And we thought they would remain bright and clear in the Egypt of the revolution and we thought – innocently – that they were among what our Armed Forces promised to protect when they announced their belief in the revolution and their intention to protect and protect the people. How sad and terrible that they should become what leads you to the Military Prosecutor and to prison on remand.

But, and here is the genius of paradox: they are also the key to remaining free of prison, that larger prison which we broke out of on the 25th of January, and which the coalitions of old and exhausted forces are trying to drive us back into. And this is why the articles and blogs that Alaa abd el-Fattah is producing from his cell are so important; because with them he reminds us of the actual projects that shape the revolutionary reality; the reality the people demanded and for which they brought down the head – if not yet the whole – of the regime.

Alaa recommends: “We’re planning to revive the “Let’s Write our Constitution” initiative. We need help to complete the initiative’s website quickly and we need volunteers to go into the streets and midans and lanes and villages to collect our people’s responses to simple questions about the Egypt they dream of. We need popular organisations like the independent and the freed unions and the Popular Committees and the young revolutionary movements to take part in this initiative. To issue a People’s Document describing the features of revolutionary Egypt is in my opinion the best resolution to the crisis which the political forces, the elites and

the military are embroiling us in in the matter of the Constitution. Who will volunteer? Contact [Maha Ma2moun](#) at the Hisham Mubarak Legal Centre to co-ordinate.

If I were free I would support [Ta7aluf “al-Thawrah Mustamerrah”](#) (The Revolution Continues Coalition) in the elections. Their lists and candidates are the closest to expressing the revolution. And they’re not going into the elections in search of power but are using election publicity to continue the revolution. Their [program](#) is against the rule of the military and adopts social justice and human rights. “The Revolution Continues” is the poorest in terms of funding, so its campaign is completely dependent on volunteers and revolutionary shabab and social media. We need it to win as many seats as possible so that there is real opposition in parliament, and so that there are people there whom we trust to keep an eye on the government and the other political forces. We need them so that we have members who can propose laws for the people; formulated by popular forces and activists, such as laws to establish the freedom of the unions, national health insurance, a minimum wage – or to adopt initiatives such as [A Police for the People](#), the most important and comprehensive plan to reform the Ministry of the Interior.

I had intended to support some good candidates from outside the Coalition – whatever their Parties, like Gamila Ismail, for example.

Supporting the candidates of the revolution is not just by campaigning for them; supporting them also means pressuring them so they don’t forget the concerns of the revolution and don’t stray from their bias - their commitment to the people. Pressure them so that justice and the rights of the martyrs, an end to torture and to military trials, handing over authority and reforming our institutions remain at the heart of their [programs and their campaigns](#).

[The People’s Satellite Channel](#). This is a tough project, and it will be easy for it to get lost, and easier for it to fall into a trap dominated by well-intentioned Oldies and experts. All the shabab who are interested in media (old and new) should join it and should assert themselves. We need to create the mechanisms to run a truly democratic channel – we need the participation of the workers and the audience before even the broad base of owners. We need a real national media that reaches most homes and can resist both authority and capital.

I don’t need to ask you to go back to the midans on [November 18](#). After the supra-constitutional principles document it’s become clear that the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces – even if it allows us in its own good time to elect a president – does not intend to relinquish power.

These are the things I intended to do at this time. But there are thousands of other ways to contribute to the revolution – to its continuation and its success. Join or form [People’s Committees to Protect the Revolution](#) in your neighbourhoods and your workplaces and places of study. Work for the [No to Military Trials for Civilians](#) campaign. Join in the initiatives to keep popular watch on the elections. Support the independent unions and the workers’ strikes. Organise [Tweet Nadwas](#) in your towns. Expose the [fuloul](#) and inform people of the transgressions of the military.”

So here we are: concern about Alaa brings us right back to concern about our main project: how do we protect the real gains of the revolution, activate them and develop them? And here is Alaa, generously presenting us with a selection of projects and initiatives we can contribute to. What’s

required and wonderful and honourable and dignified is that we should *be* the revolution, not praise the revolution and use it as a cover for anti-revolutionary actions and intentions.

Two small notes to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces:

1. Please note that Alaa does not recommend destroying the army or harming it in any way. His recommendations simply support the return of the army to its natural place, away from civilians, defending the country against external enemies.
2. Note also that I am one of those whom my nephew describes as “Oldies with good intentions”. Did I get upset? Angry? Did I say lock him up? No. I’m proud of him; of his energy and creativity and revolutionary outlook and strength and optimism. And I would be content for my country’s future to be in his hands and those of his comrades, the shabab, to whom he speaks when he says:

“The best way to show solidarity with a political prisoner is to prove to him that he’s not important, and that there are millions out there who are better than him and of more use.”

So let’s go ya shabab: show us some work, and show us some hope. And if you need some Oldies alongside you, we’re right there.
