



# Revolution as a product

## Interview with Srđa Popović

By CARLOS GONZÁLEZ VILLA



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Srđa Popović (1973) is one of the founders of the Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), a Belgrade-based non-profit institution that defines itself as “an organization that advocates for the use of nonviolence resistance to promote human rights and democracy”<sup>1</sup>. Since its foundation in 2003, CANVAS has worked with organisations from all five continents, training them in specific techniques and approaches for challenging authoritarian regimes. As its executive director, Popović has been portrayed both as a guru of non-violent resistance and an internationally recognised public intellectual<sup>2</sup>, and as an agent serving the US foreign policy agenda<sup>3</sup>.

In order to avoid generalisations, it is important to consider CANVAS not only as a global actor, but also as a Balkan phenomenon within the post-Cold War context. CANVAS’s origins are linked to the experience of Otpor!, the youth group that played a key role in the social mobilisations that ended Milošević’s rule in 2000. Besides the efforts and initiatives of its

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<sup>1</sup> “About Us—CANVAS.” *About Us—CANVAS*. Accessed July 1, 2017

<http://canvasopedia.org/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> Popović has taught courses on nonviolent struggle at universities such as Harvard and Columbia. In 2011, he was named one of Foreign Policy’s global thinkers for his influence on some of the groups that participated in the Arab Spring. His TED Talk from that year has been seen by more than 270,000 people: TED, “Srdja Popovic: How to Topple a Dictator | TED Talk,” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, n.d. accessed July 1, 2017

<sup>3</sup> These accusations gained weight after Wikileaks disclosed CANVAS’s and Popović’s ties with Stratfor: Steve Horn and Carl Gibson, “Globally Renowned Activist Collaborated with Stratfor,” [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org), accessed July 1, 2017,

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/03/globally-renowned-activist-collaborated-with-stratfor/>

founders, CANVAS is a direct result of US intervention in the Balkans since the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Established in June 2000, the Office of Yugoslav Affairs (OYA), a US “embassy in exile” based in Budapest, strongly supported Serbian opposition groups (including Otpor!) during the weeks prior to the Yugoslav presidential elections in September of that year<sup>4</sup>. As part of these efforts, the OYA organised a four-day training workshop in Budapest on non-violent resistance, which Popović attended, led by Robert Helvey, a retired US army colonel who worked with Gene Sharp at the Albert Einstein Institution<sup>5</sup>. The experience had a deep impact in Popović, who has described Helvey as a “Yoda master of our Jedi order. He’s the best trainer I’ve ever seen”<sup>6</sup>. Since then, CANVAS’s work has been guided by Sharp and Helvey’s work<sup>7</sup>.

Ideologically, CANVAS is a well-defined output of the post-Cold War era. The organisation supports pro-democracy groups worldwide while declaring political neutrality and the uselessness of left-right designations in the struggle against non-democratic regimes<sup>8</sup>. CANVAS’s know-how is packaged as a standard product. Its target market is urban-based youth groups in developing countries and emerging economies that aspire to enhance their position in the global middle class<sup>9</sup>. In Popović’s tale, working classes and rural populations emerge as passive subjects of political change. CANVAS’s teachings are transferred to the clients as a do-it-yourself product ready to be adapted to local conditions. The group projects a certain rebellious and innovative attitude that brings to mind the notion of “cool” capitalism, which synthesises corporate business with counter-cultural ideological traits<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to his CANVAS background, the executive director possesses the qualities of a leader of this era: a strong personality, clear ideas, and the ability to communicate them.

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<sup>4</sup> For an account by the head of the office see: Wiliam Montgomery, *Struggling with Democratic Transition: After the Cheering Stops; a Memoir Ba the Last American Ambassador to Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Dan Graf [u.a.], 2010). For a synthesis on the importance of US support to the Serbian opposition see: Thomas Carothers, “Ousting Foreign Strongmen: Lessons from Serbia,” *Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief* 1, no. 5 (May 2001), <http://carnegieendowment.org>

<sup>5</sup> Sharp is the author of *From Dictatorship to Democracy, A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, first published in 1993 and later translated into more than thirty languages.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Mackinnon, *The New Cold War: Revolutions, Rigged Elections and Pipeline Politics in the Former Soviet Union* (Random House of Canada, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Ruaridh Arrow, “How to Start a Revolution,” TVF International, 2011; États Unis: à La Conquête De L’Est (2005)–{Documentaire Français}–Canal+, “YouTube, n.d. accessed July 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NOdoQQsouE>

<sup>8</sup> For a recurrent classification of political regimes see: “Freedom in the World 2017,” Freedom House, accessed July 1, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>

<sup>9</sup> The global middle class refers to a “globally oriented, globally connected, and globally mobile segment” of local middle classes in regard to issues such as consumption patterns, lifestyle, and education, and which tends to develop a cosmopolitan identity: Hagen Koo, “The Global Middle Class: How Is It Made, What Does It Represent?” *Globalizations* 13, no. 4 (2016), 10

<sup>10</sup> Jim McGuigan, *Cool Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2009)

After interviewing him, it is possible to envision *revolution* as a question of strategic management, mentorship in tactics, and motivational coaching. Our conversation took place in May 2013 at the CANVAS facilities in New Belgrade, a small set of offices with a Google-like space set up to receive a group of young activists ready to learn techniques for revolution. By then, the Slovene protests against their political elite had already ended.

**Carlos González Villa:** In March, I witnessed a massive demonstration in Ljubljana. One of the groups was waving flags with a fist very similar to Otpor!'s symbol<sup>11</sup>

**Srđa Popović:** Slovenian *indignados*! The group is called Kričač<sup>12</sup>. That was the name of the illegal radio station during the Second World War during the Italian occupation [in Ljubljana]. They are using the very same iconology as Otpor!

**C.G.V.:** Are they in contact with you?

S.P.: I visited them<sup>13</sup>. Slovenia is a very interesting case. It's like walking in the battlefield. You can see that there exist two very hot areas when it comes to people's power. One is, of course, the non-free countries, with the waves of democratic revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. There was one isolated and very big struggle in the Maldives in 2008, which was the first Muslim country to achieve change. Afterwards, you have the surprising Arab spring. This is basically the fight for freedom. You have guys who deny freedom on one side, and the people who want freedom on the other. But in a capitalist society, you also have the blossom of the people's power. It started in Israel, with the housing protest of early 2011, and spread to Italy, Greece, and Spain, and then to the United States, and then back to Germany. The Occupy movement is a very interesting phenomenon, and we have been meeting a variety of people, including Occupy, of course. Some of these movements are effectively making change, and some of them not.

There was this misconception that it had something to do with the enemy, so if you have a visible enemy, like a dictator, then you are more likely to be success-

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<sup>11</sup> For a contextualisation of Slovene protests in 2012-2013, see: Gal Kirn, "Slovenia's Social Uprising In The European Crisis: Maribor as Periphery from 1988 to 2012," *Stasis* 2, no. 1 (n.d.), accessed July 1, 2017, <http://www.stasisjournal.net/>.

<sup>12</sup> Meaning "one who shouts," derived from the verb *kričati*

<sup>13</sup> For an account of his two-day visit to Ljubljana and Maribor, see: Srđa Popović, "Protesti u Sloveniji po Receptu Srpskog Otpora: 'Gotof Je!'," Blic.rs, last modified February 10, 2013, <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/protesti-u-sloveniji-po-receptu-srpskog-otpora-gotof-je/3c2wnwc>.

ful than if you are struggling against a corrupt political system. But this is where Slovenia comes in. Two of the most successful protests in capitalist countries, or liberal democracies, if you want to call them that, were in Israel—housing protests—and Slovenia. They both met the expectation. The Israelis first made the government withdraw the laws on expensive housing and Slovenians have made tremendous achievements. The uprising started against the mayor of Maribor, and they were capable of dismantling him. Even better, they were capable of finding an independent candidate who ran and won in the first round three weeks ago. I was pretty shocked about how good they are, how well organised they are, how much they look like Serbia in 1996-1997. Serbs do not normally expect this from Slovenians, who are considered to be the *Germans* of former Yugoslavia...

**C.G.V.: This might look contradictory. Serbs were fighting against an authoritarian system, but Slovenes are struggling against the elites of a liberal democracy.**

S.P.: It is not whether you can elect your elites or not. It is about how much you can keep these elites accountable. If your prime minister is caught up in a corruption scandal—which he is, for instance, in Spain—what are your tools to punish this type of behaviour? It is necessary to understand how common people launch movements and participate in the change, which is from the bottom to the top. People do not like elite-driven changes. I think that there are many different things to do, even in democracies. When you look at one of the most successful movements in the last thirty years, it was not about democracy, but about the rights of the LGBT population. It started as a group of crazy gay freaks in the Castro in San Francisco, and then grew into a mainstream movement that mobilised hundreds and thousands of people that, at the end of the day, made every normal person, like you and me, support the idea of gay marriage. The tremendous victory of the gay rights movement took place in a non-dictatorial political space, like Catholic Spain!

**C.G.V.: Are you in contact with people in Spain?**

S.P.: No. We met a lot of people from the Indignados Movement, but we never worked with them.

**C.G.V.: Last year, in May, I could see a big flag with the Otpor! fist at the first anniversary of the Indignados Movement.**

S.P.: It became a very popular symbol, and has been used in many different cases.

**C.G.V.:** Can they use the symbol without contacting you?

S.P.: Of course. The creator of the fist, Nenad Petrović, allows using the fist for non-commercial purposes. If you want to use it in a protest, it's ok.

**C.G.V.:** You made reference to “capitalist society” and liberal democracies in a previous answer. Would you say these are the goals of CANVAS?

S.P.: We do not have an ideological agenda. I think the world is divided into unhappy places, which are the places where the people are afraid of their government, and happy places where the governments are afraid of the people. If people can change their governments in an accountable way, it is ok for me. I do not get into this left-right thing. We work with leftist groups and with groups considered to be right-wing. The first goal of the Serbian opposition was to create unity. The reason why we were successful against Milošević was that the coalition was made up of sixteen different political parties: from something similar to Demochristians to something completely liberal that was standing up for gay rights in the Serbia of the nineties. Only that kind of coalition—in which ideology was not important but the goal of winning freedom and democracy was—could work.

**G.G.V.:** What is the methodology of CANVAS for supporting these groups?

S.P.: We do not support groups. We do not take sides. If there is a group from Slovenia that wants to learn about how to make their struggle more efficient, they come to us. They either invite us to go to the country—we can go to places like Slovenia—or we meet out of their country. That is the case with people from places like Burma. I can go to Burma now, but five years ago we needed to meet outside of the country.

We walk them through this understanding of political power, the importance of a vision of tomorrow, and the understanding of what really matters, including universal principles of success like planning and discipline, understanding the importance of strategy, and different tactics and how they can be used. At the end of the day, they are capable of planning their own ideas into their own campaign. We do not tell them what to do. We do not support groups in a traditional way. I do not stand for left or right in Slovenia. I do not live in Slovenia. I do not vote in Slovenia. Serbia is the only country where I could comment on politics, because this is where I vote. We just deliver knowledge to many groups that are fighting for many different causes. We work with people from a variety of races and a variety of religions. We work with human right groups in Iran, with anti-corruption groups in Nigeria. I gave a presentation at the Yes Lab, a very anti-globalist group in the United States, and then we worked with the opposition in Venezuela and

were accused by the leftists that this was taking a right-wing approach. You cannot really put this on the ideological spectrum. Was Gandhi left or right-wing? I do not know. Was he struggling for capitalism? I do not know. He was struggling to end colonial rule. We try to take the rationale of how these movements work, put them into something user-friendly, and then talk to the people who are eager to learn and give them tools for how to do their own things. We do not believe that a Serb can tell a Slovene or a Spanish guy what to do. Foreigners never know. They just sell shit.

**C.G.V.: There is a standard methodology for many different places in the world. The same repertoire.**

S.P.: But if you use the same repertoire of unity, planning, and discipline in a place like Tunisia, you get a successful revolution. If you lose your unity or your vision of tomorrow before the end of the day, meaning that you remove Mubarak but you do not have a replacement, then you have a problem. If you do not have vision, decision-making process, or strategy, and do not understand the importance of growing numbers, then you end up like Occupy Wall Street. If you have vision and strategy, and execute tactics, then you end up like the Slovenes. What we are really focusing on are the skills of these groups; the principles they can apply and the skills they need. What they will do with these skills is completely up to them.

**C.G.V.: Can you give me a brief summary of how these workshops are, how they function?**

S.P.: They consist of four two-hour blocks each day. Forty hours overall. On the first day, you go through the introduction to non-violent conflict; you learn a little bit of history and the importance of non-violent struggle. Then we also do a group exercise on developing a vision of tomorrow. What [kind of] Slovenia or Spain you want to see in the future? This is the point where they learn about how to build group and unity, and also how to think in terms of numbers. They cross-interview different people roleplaying women, youth, police, etc. They make sure that the vision of the future of the country is wide enough, so they can attract a variety of different people. On the second day, we walk them through the understanding of how power functions in society, and what society-driven change is, as opposed to elite-driven change. It is also important how this building of the government stands on pillars and institutions like the police, the military, etc. We teach them how to analyse these pillars, but also how to analyse the main dynamics in non-violent struggle, which is *pulling* people out to your side as opposed to hard power, which is *pushing*. The goal is not to *push* people in order to destroy these institutions, but *pulling* them out in order to convert them to your side. They also



learn about strategy, campaigns, and tactics. They learn to evaluate tactics and to understand that there are reasons why some tactics work in some societies and some tactics do not. They also understand the rationale behind tactics in terms of credibility and making more people join the movement. They learn how to [apply] the right tactics in order to escalate towards the strategy. Then we talk about propaganda and communication symbols and colours in terms of the message of the movement and why it is important that the message is caught, so people join the movement. How do you shift something that is absolutely off meaning being into politics in places like Italy or Slovenia because “all of the politicians are corrupt, blah, blah, blah...”—you have all the explanations—into, “Ok, let’s get into politics and show these assholes that we are right and they are wrong? How do you shift this mindset into something very cool? On the last day, we work on a thing called planning format, which consists of putting on the plan for a real campaign and filling in all the things they have learnt. We also talk about several topics, including how to overcome fear or how to operate when you are probably under surveillance. If you go through the book you will see everything. We call it “Non-violent Struggle for Dummies”<sup>14</sup>.

In these courses, they get a very clear picture of what nonviolent struggle is and what it is not, and what are the skills you need in order to mobilise people to create a successful movement, whatever your vision of tomorrow is. If your vision of tomorrow is bringing down the mayor of Maribor, that is super. If your vision of tomorrow is bringing down Putin, that is super too. I do not care about the size of the goal.

**C.G.V.: Beyond political elites: What if my vision of tomorrow is a country without banks?**

S.P.: You have to understand from the very beginning, that your movement is not about anti-something, but changing an existing something into a new something.

**C.G.V.: Would you assist, for instance, a communist group?**

S.P.: If they are committed to non-violent struggle, absolutely. I would not have a problem in working with communists. When we have turned a group down it was because they were somehow related to violent groups. We turned down a few groups from Middle East because they were related to Hezbollah. The first trick they learn is that the less extreme they are in their requests, the better the

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<sup>14</sup> Srđa Popović, Andrej Milovojević and Slobodan Đinović, *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points* (Belgrade: CANVAS, 2007)

chances there are that they will win, because the way you win in a non-violent struggle is engaging with the people who do not think as you do. Martin Luther King's struggle for human rights did not become successful when all black people were following him; it was when all normal white people understood that race and segregation was an absolutely anti-civilisational thing that should be abolished.

**C.G.V.: If the goal of a movement in Spain is, for instance, to end the presence of US military bases, would you support them?**

S.P.: Absolutely. I hate military bases anywhere. We have more foreign soldiers in our territory than you have. The biggest military base in this part of Europe is in the temporarily occupied territory of Kosovo.

**C.G.V.: If you supported a movement like that in Spain, do you think you would have less financial support from the United States?**

S.P.: We do not get financial support from governments.

**C.G.V.: And from organisations that are linked in a certain way to governments?**

S.P.: We are 100% financially independent. We do not get anything from governments.

**C.G.V.: When you mention governments, do you include the International Republican Institute?**

S.P.: The fact that we have done two workshops with the International Republican Institute does not make us republicans. I have done an equal number of workshops with the Yes Men, who are probably the leftmost organisation in the world. These are the organisations we partner with. Our funds are 100% private, which keeps us independent to decide what to do.

**C.G.V.: From where do most of the funds come?**

S.P.: The biggest part comes through the chair of CANVAS, Slobodan Đinović, CEO of the second biggest Serbian telephone company. He finds individuals who give individual donations.

**C.G.V.: Does Đinović fund one hundred percent of the CANVAS budget?**



S.P.: No, but the majority.

**C.G.V.: What percentage?**

S.P.: He personally funds a little bit more than a half. And he finds the rest of the money.

**C.G.V.: Do you know from where the rest of the money comes?**

S.P.: Absolutely. Individuals.

**C.G.V.: Are they from Serbia or from abroad?**

S.P.: Different individuals.

**C.G.V.: What should I do if I want to contribute?**

S.P.: You go to our website and you can contribute directly. There are so many people contributing...Sometimes students give me small donations.

**C.G.V.: When I started to study post-electoral revolutions, I noticed that you supported several movements in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, but only the movements that held US support at that moment were the ones that succeeded. I'm thinking of, for instance, the case of Azerbaijan, a country which was an important US ally. In 2005, they had elections and they tried to imitate the Georgians. They not only failed, but were repressed.**

S.P.: It is an absolutely internal question. I think you are looking in the wrong direction. The group in Azerbaijan, for example, instead of staying an independent group and gaining the authority that independence would have provided them, they turned into a political party before the elections and lost.

**C.G.V.: Did you have contact with them before that?**

S.P.: We know some Azeri. In particular, we know the Yox! movement. At the beginning, they built credibility as people not standing for office, but instead of continuing in this way and using this credibility in their struggle, they shifted into a political party. It is always about the mistake of the group, not about foreign support. The biggest foreign support in the world would not bring you change if the

group makes mistakes. Whether the government is supported by the West or not, it will fall if the group is successful. There was no bigger fan of the US than Mubarak. He was receiving \$1.6 billion a year from the US, but he still fell. He did not fall because the US decided not to support him; he fell because the movement was capable of gaining numbers and recognising the key pillars of society.

There were so many mistakes in the case of Azerbaijan...You do not copy-paste a revolution. You do not search in Georgia and then take a picture and say, "Let's go to the streets and protest." You need to unify people around ideas; you need to build a movement. Even when it looks like a blitzkrieg, this needs years of preparation.

When you look at Syria, they only took what the Egyptians had done and, because it did not work in the first six months, they shifted to violence. This is not the way it works. You do not see it on TV and say, "Ok, let's go".

**C.G.V.: A good example of unity was, in fact, your case in Serbia. Still, US mediation was important for political forces to gather around.**

S.P.: It took eight years of understanding what our mistakes were. When you look at the past you can put some of these groups in a timeline. In 1992, we were in our *indignados* occupied space. We occupied the university campus during the first student protests. We were so happy that all the cool people were there, while the "rednecks" were outside. But, guess what? "Rednecks" were a majority. They had elected Milošević. He was unchallenged and engaged in wars in Croatia and Bosnia, while we were singing "give peace a chance." He was so happy that we were in this little zoo to which he could send journalists and say, "Look, this is democracy." In 1996-1997, we achieved partial unity of the opposition and decided we needed to pick a ballot we could win, so we picked the local elections and we won. He made a mistake and stole them. Then we understood that that was his vulnerability, because if he steals the elections, thousands become millions. When you are robbed of your vote, it is not a question between political parties, but a personal issue between the state and you. This is what we learnt. After that, we learnt to protest for 100 days. And after, we learnt to combine the pressure from inside with the pressure from outside. We learnt a million tactics. Once we won, Milošević recognised local elections. We won 28 city councils, which is very important because, once there were opposition mayors, we had access to local media.

It would take three months for the Serbian opposition to fall apart. This is exactly what happened in September 1997, when Đinđić was replaced as the first opposition major of Belgrade. Milošević was capable of using the principle of "divide

and rule.” After that, we needed a presidential candidate who was a weak leader. Elections had to be a referendum between Milošević and us. Not between Milošević and Koštunica, but for and against Milošević. Black and white. It took us ten years to realise this. We were stupid; we should have read more books rather than trying and failing.

It took the Venezuelan opposition only six years to understand that corrupt elites who opposed Chávez in 2006 should be wiped out, that it was time for a new generation of opposition leaders, and that they should challenge Chávez united. This is the point where they are now. They are neck and neck with Maduro, and they will probably win the next elections, because they are learning from these lessons. The way you do it in non-violent struggle is learning from mistakes, and it is always cheaper if you can learn from somebody else's mistakes.

**C.G.V.: Are you currently in contact with people from the opposition in Venezuela?**

S.P.: I am at all times in contact with people around the world. But I met few Venezuelans recently, at a big conference in Oslo, which drew dissidents from all around the world<sup>15</sup>.

**C.G.V.: Where do CANVAS's workshops take place?**

S.P.: It depends. Wherever it is cheapest and safest. If it is cheap and safe to go to the country, we go there. If it is not really safe, we go to a neighbouring country. If it is convenient, we do it here in Belgrade.

**C.G.V.: How do you establish contact with movements you work with?**

S.P.: Movements are the ones that start the contact. We never go into countries; we are always invited. After that, we do a security check on the group in order to see who these guys are, what they stand for, are they crazy, are they going to start burning buildings...

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<sup>15</sup> The conference was the 2013 Oslo Freedom Forum, which brought together public intellectuals and activists from different parts of the world: “2013 Oslo Freedom Forum,” *Oslo Freedom Forum*, <https://oslofreedomforum.com/events/2013-oslo-freedom-forum>, Accessed July 1, 2017

**C.G.V.: How do you do this security check?**

S.P.: It is very easy. When you are working in oppressed societies, activists are known by others. If you want to check on something in Venezuela, if you know a few Venezuelans who will tell you, you will know. That is easy. These groups are public student groups, so you can also check their websites to see what they stand for.

In Venezuela, we worked with a group of students back in the early 2000s. We met with several groups and we basically worked on the strategic evaluation of the situation. Some of these people entered into active politics, while some others stayed as student leaders. We are in occasional contact. We do not consult with groups. We go [through] the process of workshops with them, they finish their documents, and then we observe the struggle. But we are not consultants in terms of they will call us and ask us what to do

**C.G.V.: I would like to ask you about the Arab Spring. In Western media, the Tunisian revolution appeared as something unexpected, which started just after a guy got pissed off and burnt himself.**

S.P.: That is like explaining the First World War based on the fact that a Serb killed Franz Ferdinand. The First World War was about colonies; we just made it happen faster, unfortunately.

Media only showed the final stage. They said that there were a million people on the streets and that they just got pissed off today with Mubarak. It is ridiculous. Why didn't they just get pissed off with Mubarak yesterday? Western media made a really wrong judgement of this situation. This comes a little bit behind media, from opinion makers, think tanks, etc. People who are doing the decision-making are still living in the Cold War when there were superpowers behind everything, when it was either evil Russians or evil Americans who were secretly building their groups. This is intellectual laziness, which does not have anything to do with reality but seems like a very convenient way to explain the things you do not understand.

**C.G.V.: What happened in the case of Tunisia?**

S.P.: Twenty-nine years of Ben Ali. The revolution happened after every single company in the country was owned by the family of his hated wife. When you look at these dictatorships, there are sometimes very effective and surprising political protests. The problem with the Venezuelan government is not its ideological orientation, but the fact that one party controls the state, the corruption, the ineffi-

ciency of the economic system, which suffers from fuel and food shortages in a country which is the biggest oil exporter in the world. This shows that the majority of the money is in corruption. When you have a system like that, the space for the non-violent movement is basically to build on this basis.

You can look at these everyday issues in Tunisia and you understand why the guy became a symbol. He comes from school, he can't find a job, he sells fruit on the street, and he gets beaten by a female policeman. He immediately became the face of the revolution, but it was the stupid reaction of the government trying to suppress the protest that made it really widespread.

**C.G.V.: Were you in contact with people from the Tunisian opposition before the revolution?**

S.P.: We met some people from the opposition before, yes. Not the key people who organised the revolution. We met with the people who left the country after 2006-2007.

**C.G.V.: Were you in contact with people from Egypt before the revolution?**

S.P.: Absolutely. We worked with groups called April 6 and Kefaya. You can go to YouTube and find a documentary called *Seeds of Change* by Al-Jazeera<sup>16</sup>.

**C.G.V.: In the case of Tunisia, do you think the revolution would have started if this guy hadn't chosen self-immolation?**

S.P.: It is hard to say. But what I know is that a huge popular protest would have happened in Egypt in August 2011 even if there had been no Tunisia. Because Tunisia happened, it ignited earlier in Egypt. They were planning a huge protest for the time of succession. They were looking strategically at Mubarak's movements and understood that his weakness would be succession when he was supposed to give power to his son Gamal. They also understood that Gamal was very unpopular, and very unpopular also in front of the military, which is the key pillar of the system, so they would start working on the military;<sup>17</sup> they also would start working in the business community.

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<sup>16</sup> Al Jazeera English, "People & Power–Egypt: Seeds of Change," *YouTube*, February 9, 2011, accessed July 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrNz0dZggN8>

<sup>17</sup> Popović is referring to information contained in William J Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy* (London: Harvill Secker, 2012), 183