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Pre-Congress, 17th World Congress

Combine anti-imperialism with support for popular struggles for democracy and social justice

- Fourth International resolutions - World Congresses - 17th World Congress - 2018 - 17th World Congress discussion -
Publication date: Wednesday 14 March 2018

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Since the last World Congress of the Fourth International, one of the major upheavals in the world has been the popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa region, which we have defined as a long-term revolutionary process in the part of the world that had been the most blocked in its aspirations for nearly 40 years. This process provoked in return counterrevolutionary offensives of different kinds but all of an unprecedented ferocity, which trapped and suffocated in large part the working classes of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria ... Only the Tunisian people have been able to limit up to now the ultraviolence of these counter-offensives of the regimes, ultrareactionary jihadist currents and foreign imperialist or regional powers. The massive upsurge of the Maghreb and Middle East popular layers in the political arena and the backlash they suffered, with the intervention of the various world and regional powers deserve in-depth analysis from several angles.

But it has also been a test of the practical utility of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and revolutionary Marxist activists in the present period. Without mentioning those who tried to act on the spot in their country, the structural presence of revolutionary Marxist currents in Europe and North America gave them particular responsibilities to build militant links, incarnating international solidarity against all the oppressors, and supporting the struggles in the South and East of the Mediterranean for freedom, social justice and dignity. We must note that these links and this solidarity were not up to par. In addition, there was strong opposition between the currents that focused primarily on Western imperialist interventions, deducting very partial and unilateral tasks far removed from the sectors fighting on the ground, and those who wanted to maintain as a guideline the defence of the unconditional struggle of the oppressed, taking into account the contradictions of these struggles without invalidating them, in a context of renewed and unstable conflict between capitalist forces.

The texts presented for the World Congress attempt to address these issues. The document presented by the International Committee "[Capitalist globalization, imperialisms, geopolitical chaos and their implications](#)" sets out to present the complexity of the dynamics at work to guide our action in future years. Chapters IX and X stress the importance of active international solidarity in the face of increasing oppression, manipulation and clashes between imperialist powers and regional powers. It resolutely engages in the struggle for anti-imperialism, which is obviously indispensable, but absolutely avoids "campist" poison. Conversely, the text "[Let's seize the opportunities, and build an international for revolution and communism](#)", presented as an alternative by the "Platform for a Revolutionary International", seems to us (in part IV-B, in particular) to reduce enormously the meaning of the right of peoples to self-determination, to winning democratic rights, and caricatures the strategic importance of class independence. In the name of clarification of the anti-imperialist struggle, it totally ignores the concrete conditions in which peoples struggle for their rights, and the importance of international solidarity with the oppressed. It seems to us open the slide towards simplism and paternalism that in recent years have led the comrades of Socialist Action in the US for example to very detrimental political mistakes on Syria, and also on Libya and Ukraine.

How not to "seize the opportunities ..." on the uprisings in the Middle East

In their text for the World Congress, the comrades who signed the text "Let's seize the opportunities..." affirm two principles that we share globally: "Anti-imperialism should be a central focus of our propaganda and activity. We are against all imperialist interventions and for the withdrawal of all imperialist troops," and "We defend the peoples' right to self-determination,". This should go alongside support for the mobilizations of the oppressed peoples. But how can this support be concretized, when comrades pile up taboos, especially on the Middle East? Their real priority concern is the fight against the illusions that the masses can have:

"That is why we do not endorse calls to action that ask our government to provide weapons to the Kurds. We do not

foster the illusion that our bourgeoisie could defend the peoples of the region.

Facing our own imperialism, it is not our role to create illusions on the theme: arms, not bombs."

"But we do not follow the leadership of any national bourgeoisie, even if it comes from an oppressed nation. In the oppressed nations we support a balance between the democratic fight for the right to self-determination and the fight for a society without classes. It means that, according to our strategy, the struggle for national freedom can be useful for working class emancipation only when led by the working class itself."

Far from being unconditional, support for the right of peoples to self-determination and national emancipation becomes for the comrades in practice very conditional, so they take their distance from most unitary campaigns - in which the challenge to national bourgeoisies are rarely made in advance, but most often during the process! They do not seem to take into account either the articulation of democratic and social demands, or the dialectic of situations in the complexity of the world. They maintain an ambiguity between our strategic goals, and the real conditions of the struggles in which the tactics and demonstrations must be practical and determined in advance for those who fight concretely in terrible conditions. Without waiting for the working class "for itself" to lead the struggle, the progressives and revolutionaries of the Middle East and Maghreb must move forward according to the timescales, obstacles, tactical setbacks and qualitative leaps that make abstract lessons appear counter-productive.

On Syria, what does the policy of comrades who oppose the texts proposed by the International Committee mean? The organized working class as such did not lead the extraordinary uprising of the Syrian people against the Assad regime in 2011. Classically, it was an interclassist movement where the democratic, social and national independence intertwined. Faced with the terrible repression and massive desertions of soldiers who refused the role of butcher assigned to them, the movement developing its self-organization had to militarize if it wanted to continue, as Gilbert Achcar has said many times. The military equipment seized from the regime remaining insufficient and the liberated areas increasing under the management of pluralist local councils, the constant threat of bombardment by the regime led the people to demonstrate massively to demand international aid, both humanitarian and military. Clearly, for the comrades, the rebellious Syrian people, who had not formalized their workers' leadership and spoke indiscriminately to "civil societies" and imperialist and regional states to break their isolation, showed, whatever their courage, illusions that could only make them lose – or agendas that do not really concern us. The stake would be essentially propagandist ... for the survivors. The comrades extend this vision to Kurds led by the PKK / PYD.

This is an old discussion of the dialectical development of the concrete struggle of the oppressed peoples, about which revolutionary Marxists, from Leon Trotsky on, have written scathing comments. The anti-capitalist, minority revolutionaries must be the most determined to get rid of the oppressors if they want to claim to concretely reveal the illusions. They must constantly make demands on the powers that "technically" have the means to reduce the suffering of the people and do not do so. Like for the Palestinian people and others, countering the influence of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist currents to build movements based on class independence and all oppressive currents implies that it is at the heart of the struggles, of self-organization and international solidarity that revolutionary Marxists can gain prestige and influence, and not in the prediction of betrayals and defeats to come.

In the Syrian case, one option was to go in the same direction as the regime and its allies, who denied the importance of revolt and popular self-organization, describing the people as being manipulated by jihadists, Gulf monarchies, Turkey, the Western imperialists - and in so doing betraying them while pushing them towards these regional powers and Islamic fundamentalist movements, since the imperialist states were just speech-making (or, like the United States, opposed to sending anti-aircraft weapons). Our choice was to denounce Western imperialism as false friends of the Syrian people, at the same time as accompanying the Syrian revolutionaries in their struggle by mobilizing international solidarity people to people, refusing the damaging direct military interventions of the imperialists – but to ensure that the struggling people did not remain defenceless, it was necessary to defend the

idea that the people should have the necessary means – including military – to prevent the bombings and attacks of the Assad regime and its allies, and those of Daesh, and jihadist and Salafist currents. It was then easy to discuss the inconsistency of the leadership of the Syrian opposition abroad under the cross-influence of all the reactionary powers, easy to discuss the criminal policies of Obama, Hollande or Macron - but also obviously that, even worse in this situation, of Putin. Alas, given the evolution of the balance of power, malicious predictions have become self-fulfilling!

The errors of Socialist Action

The inoperative orientation on the ongoing processes in the Middle East and Maghreb that appears in the text of the "Platform for a Revolutionary International" takes on a truly deplorable character in the documents from one of its main forces, Socialist Action US, from its obsession with "opposing its own imperialism". Indeed, it appears that for Jeff Mackler, his leader and candidate in the last US presidential election:

« the false designation of Russia and China as imperialist states is a convenient cover to excuse western aggression. It promotes passivity, including on the radical left, towards the regime-change wars fostered by the west in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and beyond.. »

(Quoted by Socialist Action Canada in the 2016 Socialism Report - Crisis and Change Conference May 20-22, 2016).

In his text "The war of US imperialism in Syria: acid test for the antiwar movement" (November 16, 2016), Jeff Mackler could not be further from the reality and political dynamics in Syria concerning American imperialism, and plunges into the campism according to which any apparent enemy of the American government has the legitimate right to be helped:

"Few, if any, informed sources doubt that the U.S. government is central to the organization, arming, financing, directing, and perpetuating the war in Syria to remove the Syrian government. It has been so since early 2012 – that is, shortly after the entirely justified mass demonstrations against the Assad dictatorship's imposition of neo-liberal "reforms" that cut deep into the well-being of Syrian farmers and outraged democratically-minded forces. Tragically, in short order, and especially with the Assad government's firing on and arresting en masse peaceful demonstrators, the extremely limited and virtually leaderless mobilizations devolved into a U.S.-abetted "regime change" war, almost immediately involving massive ISIS and Al Qaida forces. (...)

"The intervention of Russia, as well as others invited by the Syrian government to intervene on its behalf (Iran and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah) have been central to the present and often heated polemics issuing from currents on the U.S. left who reject any characterization of the war as a U.S. imperialist onslaught. Instead, these currents stand firmly opposed to united front mass action mobilizations that demand "U.S. Out Now!" and "Self-determination for Syria!"» (...). « In our view, the right to self-determination necessarily includes the right of oppressed nations to request intervention from other nations – in the case of Syria, the intervention of Russia, Iran, and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah. "

Thus, the legitimacy of the Syrian regime is superior to that of the insurgents, the interests of capitalist Russia and the atrocious character of the Assad regime (which it does not deny), as well as the aspirations and the struggle of the Syrian people, are pushed behind abstract geopolitical logic! This position was also adopted by some sections of the left and anti-war movements, notably in the United Kingdom and the United States, who refused to act in solidarity with the Syrian uprising on the grounds that "the main enemy is a home", even if this meant implicitly supporting the Assad regime or the Russian state. It is a form of primary campism, a choice of a block ... This is

particularly absurd given that close analysis shows that the Obama administration – learning from the debacle of its policy in Iraq – made every effort to intervene as little as possible in Syria, and mainly against Daesh, aiming for the most limited possible change at the head while maintaining the structures intact, of a regime whose crimes had made it a pariah.

Among these sections of the left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that “the enemy is at home,” a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria–Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views. From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity with the oppressed. Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class’s push for war by “cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists.”

To defend their unilateral orientation, Jeff Mackler and SA have not hesitated to join the campaign of disinformation fuelled by "independent journalist" Eva Bartlett:

“At meetings initiated by the newly formed Hands Off Syria Coalition (HOSC), independent Canadian journalist Eva Bartlett reported on her several trips to Syria, including most recently to Aleppo in late November. Bartlett toured the U.S. in mid-December addressing packed meetings in New York City and other East Coast venues as well as standing-room-only public forums in Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

More than 600 activists attended her meetings, which included lengthy question and answer periods. Her slide show and video presentation debunked the U.S. corporate media’s characterization of the events in Syria as a civil war between democratic-minded Syrian “rebels” and the government of President Bashar Assad. Instead, Bartlett, while noting the legitimacy of the early mass protests for democracy in 2011, asserted that this brief movement had long ago given way to a U.S.-backed, NATO and Gulf State Arab monarchy abetted imperialist and terrorist war aimed at “regime change” in Syria. Based on two key points of unity, “No U.S. Intervention in Syria!” and Self-determination for Syria!” the Hands Off Syria Coalition was formed last year at the initiative of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) and the U.S. Peace Council.

Security and transportation for Bartlett’s most recent visit to Aleppo was provided by the Syrian government and included interviews with President Assad.”

[Socialist Action 1 February 2017](#)

Bartlett mainly relayed the propaganda of the Syrian regime, appeared on its television channels, not to mention that she worked for Russia Today which relays the propaganda of the Putin regime and conspiracy sites like SOTT.net, The Duran, MintPress and Globalresearch.ca ... So in terms of political independence, we do better!

There is obviously no question of denying the rise of Islamic fundamentalist currents in Syria, but this benefited from the direct complicity of the Assad regime at the beginning of the process (more than that of the USA, by the way), then of regional powers while the democratic components of the uprising that tried to resist (and continue to exist!) were abandoned by all. Only Kurdish affiliated members of the PKK have received a little firm support from the US - should they be even more denounced by the revolutionary left?

Socialist Action has in fact turned its back on working with the truly progressive Syrian progressives, who are fighting the Assad regime, Islamist and jihadist fundamentalism in its various forms, and attempts to seize Syria by a foreign country, in particular Russia and Iran. An acid test for the "Platform for a Revolutionary International" for which practical international solidarity is the last priority, is also shown in the lack of involvement from comrades of Anticapitalism and Revolution, dominant current of the NPA youth sector for many years, in mobilizations in the

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Maghreb and the Middle East. Conversely, the FI comrades in the region, the resolutions and press releases of the International Committee, the organizations in the rest of the world, have tried to combine united mobilizations against all oppressions, class independence, and links of international solidarity.

This type of support has and could take different forms: support for progressive organizations in the region; public conferences, rallies and demonstrations in solidarity with the liberation struggles of the region; publications of articles on local resistance and political dynamics in relation to the region; campaigns of solidarity, visits to the populations facing and fighting against oppression; financial support.

We also support the self-determination and various forms of popular resistance of the oppressed peoples of the region such as Palestine and Kurdistan. In support of the liberation of the Palestinian people, support for the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign is very important, for example. While fighting against our own ruling classes who bear a heavy responsibility in the world situation, we must give an internationalist colour to our struggles and daily activities.

It is a fundamental question for internationalist solidarity based on the idea that we are all linked in our struggles for the emancipation of our societies.