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Morocco

Some elements of the political situation

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Morocco is increasingly subject to the imperialist policies of the European Union and the USA and their world institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It is committed to an overall restructuring of its economy to the benefit of the multinationals and local big capital dominated by the royal holding.

The grip of foreign capital and the monarchy on the economy

The European Union is Morocco's main trading partner and its companies are increasingly relocating segments of their production there. The implantation of European enterprises in Morocco (especially those from France and Spain) is growing and covers all areas of activity: agro-alimentary, cars, aeronautics, banks, insurance, the pharmaceutical industry, telecommunications, electrical and electronic equipment and so on. The holding of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Marrakesh was the opportunity to attract more investment in the areas of the environment and energy. US enterprises are trying to make up for lost time in relation to those of the EU. They also face competition from Chinese enterprises that are extending their areas of intervention in the country.

One of the main attractions of Morocco is a cheap and flexible labour force. But the country has also made significant public investments to develop its road and rail network and its airports and ports. The signature of a series of free trade agreements (with more than 55 countries) has strengthened the penetration of foreign capital and commodities. Morocco is the only African country with which the USA is linked by a free trade agreement. The EU is negotiating a new free trade agreement with Morocco (DCFTA) which completes and deepens the already existing agreement so as to integrate other more profitable areas, homogenise Moroccan regulation with European standards and ensure legal protection for investors.

Foreign investment follows the old strategy of big capital of relocating niches of production towards low cost countries. This is the case with the assembly factories of the big car and air constructors who have established themselves in the free trade areas of Tangiers or Casablanca. They do not contribute any strong added value at export and do not permit any transfer of technology. It is rather investment of portfolios and sub-contracting linked to the privatisation of public enterprises and services and transfers in the context of public sectoral strategies. On the other hand, the process of production of the country is very dependent on imported industrial and technological inputs which constitute nearly half of its intermediary consumption. Morocco is increasingly constrained by the industrialised countries in the context of the international division of labour to continue to export primary products (phosphates, sea products, tomatoes and citrus fruits) and manufactured products at weak added value, while also importing industrial products at high added value, high tech and food products. Its structural dependency is growing, as is its trade deficit. The repatriation of profits on foreign investment and capital flight increases inexorably. The external and internal public debt is also growing.

The royal holding dominates several sectors of the Moroccan economy, notably real estate, construction, banking (Attijari Wafa Bank is the biggest banking and financial group in the Maghreb and indeed Africa), telecoms, energy, industry, large scale distribution, mining extraction, agriculture, newspapers, radio, tourism and so on. The king's business affairs are intertwined with those of the multinationals and the Western powers promote the stability of the regime as exceptional in the Arab region and in Africa to grease the machine of business.

At the international level, the monarchy continues its role as political ally of imperialism, offering its services to NATO and the USA in the "war on terror" and collaborating with the Gulf States to defeat the struggles of the peoples of the region. The question of the Sahara is an essential element in the country's foreign policy. The monarchy is waging an intense diplomatic offensive which goes hand in hand with the efforts to consolidate its economic and political position at the Africa-wide level. Morocco is trying to play the role of platform of imperialism for the different regions of Africa in terms of trade, investment and conquest of resources of African countries.

The monarchy underpins a system of nepotism and corruption for the benefit of a minority of families who profit from their grip on the cogs of the state to increase their fortunes. They try to seize the context of neoliberal transformations to extend their monopoly situation. The other layers of the bourgeoisie suffer from this favouritism benefiting the royal clan and its acolytes. They demand transparency in business contracts, tax breaks and financial facilities. But at the political level, their initiatives are very weak and they remain historically attached to the monarchy as guarantor of political stability to ensure their profit shares before the threat of a violent social explosion. The anger of some layers of the petty bourgeoisie, above all in the informal sector, finds however its expression in the variants of Islamist fundamentalism radically opposed to the monarchy.

Legitimacy of monarchy strengthened

The death of Hassan II has allowed the monarchy to acquire a new breath, placing culpability for repression on him and intelligently giving way on a certain number of important problems: family code, the past of repression, the Amazigh (Berber) question and so on. It has co-opted the main women's and Amazigh organisations active on these questions. This "transition" has been facilitated by the consensus of the political parties and the historic bourgeois opposition and trade union bureaucracies. The new king is trying to directly initiate social programmes like the so-called Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain (INDH - National Initiative for Human Development) which is intended to improve popular living conditions through the development of social infrastructures and incentives for the creation of small projects generating income for young people and women in particular. There is also the royal initiative "a million satchels" to encourage the education of children from poor families, royal food aid to the most deprived during Ramadan and so on. The media and institutional opposition parties eulogise these various royal initiatives. The associative network has largely become a partner and a transmission belt for the cooption of local élites.

The current context in most countries in the Arab region, the support of the imperialist powers and the decline of the February 20th movement (M20) is allowing the monarchy to consolidate its legitimacy. The parliamentary elections of October 7, 2016 attest to the stability of the representative institutions set up by the monarchy to the political forces accepting participation in its democratic game. They were won by the Islamists of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) who obtained 32% of the seats. The parties of the palace scored 47% in total, led by the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), set up in 2008 by the king's closest friend and official councillor, Fouad Ali El hima, which scored 26%. The rate of abstention was certainly high, with only 43% participating, and this reflects the broad distrust felt by many citizens with respect to this game, although this discontent lacks concrete political expressions. The PJD is a political channel to control a fringe of the Islamist movement and integrate it with the political mechanism of the monarchy as supreme religious authority (King as commander of the faithful). In government for nearly five years, the PJD was the instrument for the passage of violent measures dictated by the imperialists. The monarchy will promote it more to assume this role for a new mandate. The context of the world crisis of capitalism and the outward-orientated nature of the Moroccan economy requires going further in the application of neoliberal policies. The latter involve reducing the cost of labour and increasing incentives and tax breaks for companies. The employment code follows the rules of flexibility and a draft law which would end the right to strike is being passed. The repayment of the public debt requires more austerity: dismantling of the compensation fund, pension systems, generalisation of fixed term contracts in the public sector and privatisation of public services (health, teaching, distribution of water and electricity, urban transport and so on). All these measures lead to a

deepening of poverty and unemployment and increasingly precarious living conditions for the majority of the population.

The offensive is also being waged on the front of civil liberties (right of association, expression, demonstrations, sit-in and so on) with increasingly strong repression of any form of protest. But social opposition continues, although it remains fragmented and without a dynamic of unity and solidarity. The organisations of struggle are weak and do not offer credible horizons.

The crisis of the trade union movement and the radical left

The Moroccan working class is afflicted by a low rate of trade union membership. In the private sector production is dominated by small and medium enterprises which are in crisis and fiercely opposed to trades unionism. The same spirit reigns in the big private groups, which are increasingly commonly found in the free trade zones, aided by the trade union bureaucracies and authorities who are there to defend a social peace which will encourage investment.

As to the public sector, which was historically linked to the bastions of Moroccan trades unionism, union work is increasingly threatened by the violent reforms of the civil service including fixed term contracts, attacks on pensions, redeployments, voluntary retirement and so on. And more generally, the series of attacks on the rights and conquests of the working class pursued since the structural adjustment programme of the 1980s has profoundly undermined the credibility of the trade unions.

The trade union movement is very divided, with more than twenty unions. The union bureaucracies have allowed the main measures dictated by the international commercial and financial institutions to pass and have strengthened their attachment to the monarchy. They are all opposed to the broad movement of popular revolts and struggles which broke out in 2011 around M20. They supported the new Constitution granted by the monarchy in July 2011, which was a superficial concession whereby the king continues to hold all his prerogatives as absolute monarch by divine right.

They coordinate their efforts to neutralise any combative trade union tendencies which could develop the *résistance* in an explosive social situation. The big mobilisations of M20 pushed a large part of the trade union rank and file to seek other areas of expression and alternative initiatives to the bureaucratic stifling which reigns in the existing union organisations. Democratic trade union currents have emerged, the most significant being a split from the Union Marocaine du Travail (UMT - Moroccan Union of Labour) in spring 2012. This affected three federations, those of agriculture, teaching and local government - and they created a national coordination, the Democratic Current, with the civil service trade union. This current criticizes the lack of democracy in the UMT and the capitulation of the UMT leadership, calling for broad mobilizations as sole means of defending gains. It organised two marches in February 2013 and February 2014 and participated in various social mobilisations. The Democratic Current is growing and embodies the hope for a combative trades unionism.

Two broad orientations dominated internal discussions:

- ▶ One wishes to deepen this objective need of several trade union sectors for a fighting trade union alternative, building the Democratic Current as a rallying of democratic trades unionists from all unions, and preparing for an organisational break with the UMT. This was the position of our revolutionary Marxist current, *Al Mounadil-a*, supported indirectly by other small radical left currents.
- ▶ The other vision, defended by *Voie démocratique* (VD - Democratic Road), the main component of the radical

left, argued there should not be a break with the UMT and the conditions for an honourable return to the union should be negotiated with the bureaucracy. The VD used its majority in the bodies of the Democratic Current to impose its line, as well as using undemocratic methods. From early 2015, the Democratic Current negotiated with the general secretariat of the UMT through the federations in agriculture and local government which had not left the union. The teaching federation, which had set up an independent union, remained out of the process with a majority which rejected any idea of negotiation with the UMT bureaucracy or any return to this union. By stifling the discussions inside the bodies of the Democratic Current the VD undermined the bases of a counterweight to the bureaucracy, which demanded the simple liquidation of this current, alignment on the official positions of the union leadership and respect for the existing organisational functioning. The 11th national congress of the UMT in March 2015 strengthened the bureaucracy and weakened the Democratic Current, leaving the teaching federation to fight alone. Its most recent congress in April 2016 reflected this situation of impasse and the pressures of the VD activists to return to the UMT. This union is now experiencing great erosion and waves of resignation in its combative sections.

The Democratic Current inside the UMT has practically been liquidated. This has led to great disappointment in the broad union vanguard. The experiences of democratic currents, above all in the second biggest union, the Confédération démocratique du travail (CDT - Democratic Confederation of Labour) have been stillborn. This union is also undergoing a worrying evolution, and its leadership has completely capitulated.

Our current, Al-Mounadil-a, tried to fight this abdication of the VD in the meetings of the Democratic Current. It issued open letters explaining our point of view. We stressed the need to continue the fight to build a democratic and combative trade union pole which would constitute a concrete tool of struggle. We invoked the broad outlines of an action programme meeting the aspirations of the working class to mobilise against the class offensive and against the union bureaucracy's policies of compromise and social peace. We believe the context of the M20 has created real possibilities to initiate democratic currents for unity of struggle in all the union organisations. But we are not strong enough to advance concrete initiatives despite our implantation in some regional sections and also in a national fishing trade union.

The perspectives for a fighting trade union current are today very obscure. Several struggles are developing outside the unions: the national coordination against pension reform, the struggles of interns against the separation of training and hiring, the different categories of students (doctors, nurses, engineers and so on) and unemployed graduates, and so on. The challenges lie in the reunification of this résistance to build a relationship of forces which can challenge the bourgeois offensive. The radical left has certainly missed a political opportunity to build a credible union alternative. Some time will be needed, but we will continue our efforts to intervene in the dynamic of current struggles and initiate concrete co-ordinations on the ground of the class struggle.

The fight for global justice

The institutional opposition parties and trade union bureaucracies justify capitalist globalisation and accept the diktats of the international financial institutions and the governments of the imperialist countries while adopting the neoliberal programme. The associations affiliated to the regime have kept their grip on many initiatives such as the Moroccan social forum and those related to migration, women, climate change and so on.

Voie démocratique consider themselves as anti-imperialists and opposed to neoliberal globalisation. But their actions leave much to be desired. They do not give enough importance to the campaigns against free trade agreements and the problem of the debt, above all since the capitulation of Syriza in Greece with whom VD had tried to build alliances. VD has not been able to maintain its own association which it had created after failing to impose its control over Attac Maroc during the early years of its existence (2000-2005). The fight for global justice in Morocco remains practically the province of the Al Mounadil-a current through the association ATTAC-CADTM-Maroc, which continues

its own initiatives against the policies of the international institutions and for the cancellation of the debt, and is involved in the various global mobilisations against capitalist globalisation with an internationalist spirit.

The danger of the fundamentalist forces

The fundamentalist Islamist organisations continue to attract many radicalised youth as well as broad popular sectors of the deprived, above all in the suburbs of the big cities and the small urban centres. The Justice and Beneficence Organisation (Al Adl Wa Ihssane), not legally recognised, constitutes the main political religious organisation and has considerable organisational strength. Its radical opposition to the monarchy places it in a good position to potentially benefit from any social explosion in Morocco. Al Adl left the M20 at a crucial time. It is now trying to regain credibility through involvement in social mobilisations (unemployed graduates, co-ordinations of trainee teachers and so on) and also in certain trade unions. If their Islamist approach facilitates contact with the rank and file, their rather conciliatory practice limits their audience in the struggles. The various forms of workers' and popular struggles initiated by the M20 continue and show the real possibilities of a retaking of initiative by the radical left. But the most important component of this left -the VD - is currently consolidating its alliance with Al Adl.

The VD considers that the world context marked by the re-emergence of imperialist wars of intervention means that Islamist oppositions are objectively in opposition to imperialism in several countries. They argue that the role of the radical left is to help the transformation of these oppositions which reject globalisation for religious reasons into currents which oppose the capitalist and imperialist globalisation which threaten our identity. Political Islam has become a dominant force and has a strong attraction among popular layers. The alliance of the left with its currents which are independent of imperialism and the monarchy, and which do not employ violence, could deepen their contradictions and develop these parties towards positions of popular struggle. The democratic transition in Tunisia illustrates this alliance of the left with the Islamists, they claim. Voie démocratique has heightened its alliance with Al Adl, with the participation of its leaders in the former's internal activities and the organization of public debates and common dialogues.

Al Mounadil-a considers this alliance dangerous, since it mixes banners and conceals the fact that the fundamentalists are class enemies. We could participate with them in struggles, but what counts is to develop a critique of their project and dispute their hegemony by a programme of clear transitional demands. It is a debate which concerns all the currents of the radical left and our region and elsewhere and which requires special attention.

A mediocre bourgeois opposition under the monarchy's thumb

The historic bourgeois opposition - the Istiqlal Party (IP) and the Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP - Socialist Union of Popular Forces) - is fully allied to the monarchy. It is integrated in the institutions and government and is completely discredited. The failure of the USFP as a social democratic opposition and its complete social-liberal transformation has left space for parties who wish to occupy the space it has vacated. These are the Parti socialiste unifié (PSU - United Socialist Party) and the Parti de l'avant-garde démocratique (PADS - Party of the Democratic Vanguard), who have set up an electoral alliance called Fédération de la gauche démocratique (FGD - Federation of the Democratic Left). The FGD elected two deputies at the last parliamentary elections of October 2017. But their political line is neoliberal and their political influence is limited. The breakup of the CDT and its total capitulation is one of the worst consequences of the integration of the USFP.

Social protest continues

In late 2015 and early 2016 there was a rise of social protest affecting all social categories: unemployed graduates, students, rural dwellers, judges, women, urban youth the Amazigh movement, human rights activists, political prisoners and so on. They took different forms: sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, street meetings, hunger strikes and so on. The ministry of the interior says that there are 50 demonstrations a day in Morocco. These include:

- ▶ Protests against the cost of living in northern Morocco. In October 2015 the "revolution of the candles" began in Tangiers and other towns in the north of Morocco against the French company Amendis, a subsidiary of the Véolia group, which since January 2002 has been responsible for managing waste disposal and water and electricity distribution in the area. The inhabitants received very high bills and went en masse onto the streets for some days demanding the removal of the company. The government intervened to calm spirits without resolving the basis of the problem.
- ▶ Medical student protests. Also in October, thousands of medical students demonstrated in Rabat against a draft law instituting an obligatory medical service of two years in rural areas after the end of their studies, without any guarantee of a job in the public sector. The state promised to review the draft.
- ▶ Trainee teachers have demonstrated in their thousands since 2015 in Rabat and other towns to demand the withdrawal of two decrees from the ministry of education seeking to end their automatic integration in the state sector (introducing a competition for places instead) and reducing their monthly payment by half.
- ▶ Nurses demonstrate against unemployment. Unemployed nurses demonstrated in February 2016 in front of the health ministry to demand the creation of more posts and their employment in hospitals which are cruelly understaffed.
- ▶ The struggles of the various categories of unemployed graduates. The latter have been in the streets on a virtually daily basis to demand the right to work despite the crisis of the student movement in general. Since the early 1990s, the struggles of unemployed graduates have been organised by the Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc (ANDCM - National Association of Unemployed Graduates in Morocco) which was very combative and had a real presence in most of the country's towns and villages. In the late 1990s other co-ordinations appeared according to categories (doctorate, masters, licence and so on). This movement was however at the margin of the workers' movement, and suffered from repression and a lack of premises, financial resources and solidarity.
- ▶ Social protests for basic infrastructures (dispensaries, schools, roads and so on) and for a decent living minimum standard are spreading in different marginal localities of Morocco. The inhabitants of the big cities also protest to demand more security and protection against the rise in crime, rapes and theft.
- ▶ Co-ordinations against the cost of living, which spread to most towns in 2008, have had a somewhat meagre balance sheet, showing the persistent contradiction between the real and objective potential of the mass struggles and the inability of the radical and revolutionary left to construct activist social movements.

We can see that submission and acceptance of the status quo is no longer the rule, social mobilisation is taking place against the various offensives. In this general context, the February 20th Movement has been the catalyst for more than a year, forcing the regime to make major concessions. The objective situation is now more promising than in the past for the construction of a radical alternative. The essential factors underlying the revolutionary process in the region persist: deterioration of social, economic and cultural conditions, an offensive against political liberties and so on.

The capacity of the radical left to influence the struggles remains weak. We are part of this weakness. And despite the difficulties, we continue our efforts to convince the vanguards of the social struggles by a revolutionary project of society. Which will take place through a deep involvement in the workers' and popular everyday struggles, a strengthening of trade union organisations, and the defence of a class struggle perspective. But also through the initiation of forms of organisation of women and youth in the various teaching and university institutions.

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