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Arab revolution/Libya

Latin America and the Arab revolution: the bankruptcy of Chavism?

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In Europe, governments are trying to prevent contagion and solidarity between European workers and the Arab masses in revolt by brandishing the scarecrow of Islamism. In Latin America, it is the Venezuelan and Cuban progressive leaders themselves who are trying to isolate these rising revolutions by affirming the supposedly “anti-imperialist” character of the despotic Libyan, Syrian and Iranian regimes, which are also being destabilized by the rising wave of peoples in struggle.

The Arab revolution constitutes a litmus test for imperialism, but also for the Cuban and Chavist leaderships. However, if the latter were also completely taken by surprise by the upsurge of the Arab masses, they seem at present to be still unable to grasp the nature, the depth and the unity of the revolutionary process that is underway in the entire region. They do not seem to understand at all the powerful thirst for real democracy, for social justice, for independence and sovereignty which motivate the Arab masses and the formidable opportunity that their struggles offer to profoundly modify the relationships of forces between capital and labour on a world scale, and with imperialism.

The attitude of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez concerning the events in Libya is particularly shocking. In a manner that is less pronounced in the case of the first and pretty consistent in the case of the second, they imply that the revolt of the Libyan people is the result of manipulation, of an imperialist plot aimed at overthrowing an enemy regime. Curiously, this “thesis” does not take up the official version of the Libyan regime itself, according to which it is on the contrary Al-Qaeda which is behind the “riots”! However, far from all these delirious conspiracy theories, there is nothing “singular” or “particular” about the revolution in Libya, no foreign plot directed by the CIA or Bin Laden; on the contrary, it is an integral part of the process of the Arab revolution which is breaking out throughout the region. Furthermore, this is not happening by chance, since the dictatorial Libyan regime is precisely geographically wedged between the Tunisian revolution and the Egyptian revolution.

In spite of everything, Fidel Castro has declared that it “will be necessary to wait as long as we have to in order to really know what is truth and what is lies or half-truths in what we are being told about the chaotic situation (sic) in Libya”. However, he draws an immediate conclusion from it: “The worst thing now would be to be silent about the crime that NATO is on the point of committing against the Libyan people. For the leaders of this warmongering organization, it is urgent. It must be denounced.” The difficulty is that, as Santiago Alba Rico and Alma Allende point out, it is not the planes of NATO which are today machine-gunning the Libyan people, it is the planes of the Gaddafi regime! Thus, according to Fidel, it is not urgent to denounce the carnage committed by Gaddafi against his people and to choose the camp of the popular uprising, it is urgent to demonstrate against the future and hypothetical intervention of NATO. So in the name of the threat of a crime that remains a vague possibility, we should “be silent” about a real crime that is actually taking place.

Still according to this purely “campist” conception (“the enemies of my enemies are my friends”), on February 25 President Hugo Chavez has just, like Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, given his “support to the Libyan government”, at the moment when it is massacring its people with heavy weapons. Admittedly, there is no doubt that imperialism is lying in wait and hopes to take advantage of the slightest opportunity. Admittedly, we have to denounce the double morality of imperialism, which condemns civilian victims in Libya, but not in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine. But that does not at all justify support for a bloody tyrant, who is precisely giving imperialism a wonderful opportunity to regain its balance and who, in spite of his verbal outpourings about the so-called “green revolution”, is at the head of a system of exploitation and a corrupt regime which is part and parcel of the imperialist network for plundering of the area and its resources.

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In Venezuela, revolutionary organizations such as Marea Socialista have taken a clear decision in favour of the Libyan people and against the dictator Gaddafi. We can only hope that the Venezuelan and Cuban workers will be more capable of understanding what is at stake than their leaders are. But, even if he comes to his senses and corrects his position, there is no doubt that the catastrophic declarations of Chavez will immediately and lastingly ruin the immense prestige which he has up to now enjoyed among the Arab masses. This popularity came from his declared opposition to the war and the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, as well as Israel's aggression against Lebanon in 2006. It reached its culminating point in January 2009, when he decided to expel the Israeli ambassador part of the embassy staff to protest against the massacre perpetrated by the Zionist state against the population of Gaza, thus marking his "unqualified solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people". What is most serious is that, in the person of Chavez, it is the prestige of an alternative that is identified as progressive and seeking to build the "socialism of the twenty-first century" which is in danger of being deeply discredited in the Arab world.

This attitude constitutes a godsend for the reactionary and imperialist forces who, at present disorientated by the scale of what is happening, are trying at all costs to take the situation in hand, to control or to stop the Arab revolution. Moreover, by lining up shamefully alongside the Libyan tyrant, the Chavist leadership is shooting itself in the foot by offering ammunition to its own adversaries and detractors, who constantly make unfounded accusations about its "dictatorial" nature.

In Europe, in Latin America, in the United States and in Asia, the Arab people – who are today in the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle - must receive the unreserved support of the progressive forces of the world. This is the only way to effectively contest the hypocritical claim of imperialism to represent the democratic interests of peoples and to counter effectively any threat, real or intentionally brandished, of a military intervention.

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