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Syria

Resolution on Syria

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This resolution on support for and solidarity with the Syrian people's uprising was adopted by an overwhelming majority at the International Committee meeting of the Fourth International on 25 February 2014.

The ongoing uprising against the Assad dictatorship, which started in March 2011, is a movement for democratic, social and economic rights similar to that which erupted in Tunisia and Egypt at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. It is part of the "Arab Uprisings".

The uprising in Syria is a revolutionary process for political change, democracy, social justice and against religious sectarianism. This political revolution has undoubtedly a mass base, demonstrated by the fact that the Assad regime, after nearly three years, has been unable to defeat the opposition militarily or politically. There are areas of the country that are free from the regime's control.

The repression by the regime in the face of this revolt has been horrendous. Nearly three years on, there are over 130,000 dead, 4.5 million internally displaced and more than 3 million refugees from a country of 24 million.

The social and economic background is similar to others in the region: after 40 years of the Assad family in power there is massive unemployment, poverty and corruption. Extensive nationalizations took place in the 1960s, but since the 1990s there has been economic liberalization and privatization. This has led to dramatic wealth inequality and impoverishment of the population. At the outset of the uprising, growth and development had stagnated, inflation had soared to over 100% per annum, and unemployment was probably 30%. Half of the unemployed are educated and skilled youth under 24 with aspirations to a better life.

The repressive regime in Syria has ruled since 1970 when Hafiz al-Assad took power in a coup. Despite its secular claims, the Syrian regime adopted sectarian and kinship-based favouritism to consolidate its rule.

Since the 1970s the regime has encouraged conservative Islam in order to add to its own legitimacy including by making large contributions Islamic schools and propagating Islam in the media. In 1973, following protests from some Sunni religious personalities, Hafiz Al Assad introduced an amendment to a new constitution, which declared that "the religion of the president is Islam". This article has been kept in the "new" constitution adopted by the current regime in March 2012; which added a new clause: "Islamic jurisprudence is a source of all legislation". Bachar Al Assad is continuing these policies and increasing collaboration with religious associations as well as accelerating neoliberal policies. These measures are accompanied by censorship, and the promotion of religious literature and Islamicization of higher education.

The regime has enforced a harsh grip over the Alawite community, driving many of its most impoverished youth towards the army. They have tried to eliminate dissenting voices inside the Alawi community and to transform it into a political sect linked to their clan, although they have not succeeded in this.

The Alawi community has not benefited from any specific economic policies favouring them. The Alawi Mountain is the second most impoverished region after the North Eastern, populated mostly by Kurdish people. The region and the Alawi community have suffered just like others in the country from economic liberalization, the end of subsidies and high inflation.

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The Syrian regime employs sectarianism in a conscious and deliberate way, especially in handpicking of the praetorian guard of the repressive apparatus around Assad.

The imperialist occupation of Iraq and the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran have also contributed to the development of religious fundamentalism in the region. So too has the failure of much of the anti-war movement internationally to support the revolution in Syria.

Despite painting itself as “socialist”, nationalist and non-aligned, the Assad regime has been a useful ally to imperialism. It has maintained a peaceful coexistence with Israel, repressed the Palestinians (it entered Lebanon in 1976 to help crush the PLO), in 1990 participated in the US-led Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, and has allowed its prisons to be used by the US for torture as part of the war against terror.

Imperialism is prepared to see Assad go in the face of the uprising but is desperate to maintain the infrastructure of the regime and the state. The US has learnt from the catastrophe in Iraq where the result has been, despite a military victory, that the US and UK have been unable to achieve their political objectives.

Imperialism now wants a “Yemeni” solution, whereby the figurehead of the regime goes, but the regime itself stays. This means trying to force the opposition to accept a form of power sharing with the Syrian Baath party. The worst fear for imperialism is a victory of the popular uprising against Assad, which could re-energize the Arab uprisings that have stalled in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere. This is reflected by its legitimization of the Assad regime through the Russian-brokered agreement to remove and destroy its chemical weapons that also undermined the insurgency whilst ignoring the use of other equally destructive weapons. The current peace talks are also an attempt to split the opposition and force the FSA/SNC into power sharing with the Assad regime to fight “terrorism”.

Russia, along with Iran, is Assad's main backer, providing all the weapons necessary to inflict a defeat on the opposition. Russia's only naval base outside the former USSR is in Syria, and it needs allies in the region who can help with its geo-strategic interests. The people of Syria should be free to determine their own future, free from all foreign intervention, not just that of US/UK imperialism but also that of Russian imperialism.

The political character of the forces that oppose the regime is extremely diverse and contradictory. There is a small but significant leftist, progressive and democratic element, organised mainly within the local co-ordinating committees. This element is seeing a modest growth.

The Islamist forces, backed by different external forces (primarily Qatar and the Saudi kingdom) are warring amongst themselves – militarily as well as politically. One of the most positive developments over recent months has been the resistance of large parts of the population to these Islamist forces.

Women have been a significant part of the uprising including on the front line against fundamentalist forces that seek to restrict women's rights even further.

But fundamentalist Islamists are a lot stronger now than at the beginning of the war. They have received money and resources from Gulf States, giving them an increased military advantage and they are therefore able to attract volunteers. Despite the hypocritical claims by US imperialism that it supports the opposition, it has prevented the delivery to the Syrian National Council of the weapons that they asked for to defend themselves against Assad's army.

The conflict in Syria is posing an ideological dilemma for imperialism. The war against terror has been the ideological

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glue it has used to win hearts and minds for its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to impose western approved democracy to replace disloyal local tyrants. This dilemma reinforces imperialism's intention to have a "Yemeni" solution to the conflict. Imperialism therefore does not want the conflict to go beyond certain limits. A victory for the opposition and the downfall of the Assad regime would be yet another blow for imperialism and give hope to the millions that the revolutionary process of the Arab Uprisings is unfinished.

While now claiming to be appalled at the crimes of Assad, imperialism is actively limiting direct humanitarian aid and military support to the Syrian people's uprising.

There can be no silence about the crimes of the Assad regime, and we cannot be neutral in this conflict. We need to argue firmly against those on the left who have adopted a "campist" attitude towards the Assad regime. For revolutionary Marxists, the choice is clear: solidarity with the people of Syria in their fight for democracy, social justice and against religious sectarianism until the fall of the Assad regime.

As revolutionary Marxists, we stand for:

1. Down with Assad. Solidarity with the uprising, and in particular with all progressive, democratic secular forces.
2. Support the right of the people of Syria to fight for their democratic rights and for social and economic justice. Solidarity with Syrian women fighting for their rights.
3. Oppose all direct foreign military intervention, whether it is from western imperialist countries, Russia, regional powers or Hezbollah.
4. Support the right of the people of Syria to determine the future of their country free from all foreign intervention.
5. Support the right of the people of Syria to take up arms to defend themselves against Assad, and to obtain those from wherever they choose.
6. For the political civil and cultural rights for the Kurdish people.
7. An immediate massive programme of humanitarian aid to the refugees.
8. Open the borders in Europe to provide shelter and assistance to refugees wherever they want to settle.
9. Defend democratic rights in Europe and oppose any attack on civil rights in the name of the "war on terror". No criminalisation of those fighting against Assad.
10. Condemnation of all indiscriminate attacks on civilians and for the trial of all those involved in war crimes.

We should aim to create campaigns of solidarity with those opposing Assad and fighting for democracy. The basis of such campaigns is a tactical decision depending on local circumstances and the political forces involved. We should aim to get the broad movement including trade unions, the peace movement and anti-war campaigns, to support these campaigns.

25th February 2014