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Seeing the women in revolutionary Syria

29 April 2014, by Razan Ghazzawi

“They brought us by bus. We were a large group of female and male comrades. I recall that we were shackled, and an increasing sense of fear overwhelmed me about reaching that place, the expected interrogation, from facing Mudar whom I thought was there, and seeing all the comrades. Mixed feelings of fear and anticipation and desire and ... But it all began to disappear en route and as I am approaching the city that I loved and still do, I did not feel the length of the road or the time that had passed by .. Damascus was looming in front of us.”

- Amira Huweija, member of the Communist Labour Party, from her time in Douma prison between 1987-1991.

This account will try to give an overview of the role of grassroots women in the Syrian uprising in an attempt to highlight angles not widely covered by the mainstream media, in Arabic or internationally. Nor is this well represented in the narratives of the Syrian political opposition abroad. In fact in all these narratives, women are rather systematically excluded from any account of political decision-making regarding this country in such a historic phase. Women and youth have very little representation in the ranks of either the local councils or the Syrian National Coalition. So how is it that women in Syria have played an essential role throughout the phases of the uprising, a role that has shifted over time in response to the increased violence and rapid developments on the ground?

No political rights, no women’s rights

Studying the women’s situation in Syria, whether now or before the outbreak of revolution, without taking into consideration the government’s political structure, based on its intelligence personnel and tens of hidden security apparatuses, is a dead end if we wish to understand how women’s rights are directly affected by the government’s internal policies.

As a woman who lived most of her adult life in Syria, I would not dare to launch a women’s magazine, for example, in my university, without it being under the supervision of a government institution. The Baath ruling party had a National Students Union (NSU) set up in each university, which not only hijacked any daring independent initiatives coming from students, but also served as an intelligence body that watched and monitored closely any student who tried to lobby or organize any activity on such causes as the war in Iraq or the conflict over Palestine – even though the government boasted that it was the lone defender of Palestinian rights and was constantly attacking the US invasion of Iraq. Yet the regime understood perfectly well, that any improvised initiative, even in support of Palestine or Iraq, might pave the way for a lobbying closer to home and the organizing of active groups.

I am reminding the reader that we are talking about a government that owned and occupied the public space of a country, and everything that this entailed, for more than forty years. Citizens were cultured into not initiating, not thinking or even daring to dream about challenging a system that was tightly structured on political, social, military and economic levels. Not forgetting too, that the government had widely disseminated a culture of fear among its citizens with massacres like the Hama

massacre of 1982 and several arrest campaigns in later years of intellectuals, leftists and Islamists, of Syrians and Palestinians, which resulted in 20 years in jail for a dissident, with no access to lawyers or visits from family members. So one should be clear, that the major obstacle towards securing and enhancing women's rights in Syria, was simply the absence of democracy. Failing to support the people's attempts at revolution, on the official level or in the decisions of international human rights groups, is in fact a clear statement of support for human rights' abuses as a whole and not just those of women.

The political and the patriarchal

The regime boasts about being the champion of women's rights in Syria whereas several examples rather suggest its hypocrisy. To name a few, Bashar's rule was strengthened through an alliance with the conservative upper-class, Qubaysiyyat women in Damascus, which according to the Al-Hayat newspaper report, resulted in building 80 schools in Damascus alone, hosting more than 75,000 girls. But the regime failed to reform the personal status laws and insisted on appointing female ministers to insignificant positions. A perfect example, one might add, of how intersectionality can be deployed as the path to address a groups' human rights abuses, is afforded by looking at the government institution, the General Women's Union. The government body, for instance, did not raise "honor-killings" as an urgent national scandal to be addressed, instead calling for punishment of the murderer for a minimum of six months, as stated in article 548 of the penal code – terminology adapted from the French code of 1810. Many young girls were killed in the name of "honor" based in this article. Ironically, it was only after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions broke out in 2011, that Bashar Al-Assad himself issued the first legislative decree of 2011 to replace this with a maximum punishment for the killer of five years in prison.

Such a decree was seen by many Syrians around me at the time as a pathetic attempt to appear as the protector and saviour of 'the women's interest', especially on such a fashionable subject for the west as women.

Because change in Syria could only happen through the ruling government, specifically through the president himself and the close circles around him, there was absolutely no opportunity for the people to practise their right to self-determination.

The revolution and new spaces

It is always important to remind the reader that the first person ever to dare publicly to ask president Bashar Al-Assad to step down was in fact a woman, and from the minority community: the Druze. Muntaha Al-Atrash, daughter of Sultan Atrash, the leader of the so-called "Great Syrian Revolution" of 1925. On April 12, 2011 when out of fear, the protests in Syria were mainly asking for reforms and not for the toppling for the regime, Atrash, in a phone interview with Al-Shark Al-Awsat newspaper, called Assad to step down in response to peaceful protests.

In 2011, Razan Zaitounah was among many others, one of the main sources updating people on the protests in Damascus and its suburbs. Women started to take to the streets along with their male comrades and were detained in the process: Doha Hassan who is a Palestinian, Nura Al-Ghamian, Hanadi Zahlout, Rima Flehan, Mai Skaf, Lina Mohammad and many others in Syria I cannot name for their protection. It is important to stress here, that even though men are more targeted than women by the regime in their mass raids and detention, being in detention and prison for women is often harder than it is for men. Although women mostly avoid as tough a treatment as male comrades in jail, jailing women often imposes a social stigma on them, not to mention the issue of sexual abuse.

Nevertheless in time, women started organizing themselves in women's groups, like the Syrian Women for the Syrian Intifada – SANAD , two members of which I was privileged to meet. The group's main activities are to support the martyrs' families as well as the detainees'. SANAD's activities broadened later on to support grassroots' activists for those who lost their jobs because either they were fired for their political stances, or forced to go into hiding when they learnt that they were wanted by the regime. The regime often arrests people from their workplaces. The group would raise funds from close circles and support activists to continue their work in aid, media or securing medicine.

Not many groups were as well-formed and structured as the one mentioned above. In fact, SANAD was particularly successful in forming a vision, goals and specific activities, because its members were older and more experienced in organizing. Unlike other groups of enthusiastic younger generation activists, who in time vanished due to their inability to sustain the many activities they tried to maintain under the watchful eye of state intelligence. Nevertheless, the emergence of groups like SANAD would not have been possible without the revolution and the space it provided for citizens who were denied the right to organize – but who did so in secret over the past forty years.

To give another example, most of the neighbourhoods that revolted against the regime were of the rural and working classes. They usually are conservative and women in these areas usually work with strange men only if they are doctors, nurses or old women. Covered and uncovered female activists who come from different conventional communities, also from the upper classes, worked hand in hand with the male leaders of these working class communities: in organizing protests, in securing banners, printing banners and flags (since they were all handmade) and securing medicine and equipment such as smart phones or internet 3G.

Such social interaction, outside the common clerk-client relationships in government institutions, was a real innovation and resulted in

undermining and clearing up some stereotypical images in those communities. Similar interaction occurred heavily between Palestinians and Syrians during the uprising. Yarmouk camp in 2012 was the main host for many internally displaced families and was a vital collection point for securing medicine for other neighbouring cities. I remember vividly the Palestinian mother who was given her early training on first aid in case the camp faced shelling. It was actually the revolution that provided the space for citizens from different nationalities, ethnic, conventional communities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to unite, interact and organize a grassroots movement in the face of one common enemy: the regime.

However, such new spaces that came into existence in the first couple of years in the uprising, gradually started to reduce with the increase of regime brutality on its people which resulted in the increased militarization of the revolution. Women revolutionaries, who basically were working on the peaceful and non-violent front, started to face a new reality, war. They had to come up with new techniques fast in order to react to this and to preserve the freedom of voice that had emerged in and because of the uprising.

The militarized front of the revolution and the women's role

2012 in my view was the peak for women's essential role in the revolution. This was due to the regime's systematic raids and arrests targeting especially male peaceful revolutionaries. As a result, women revolutionaries had to organize themselves in cells to fill in the gap and used to good effect the sexist view of them as a "weaker gender" to pass regime checkpoints in order to smuggle medicine, food, and also first-aid workers into besieged and shelled neighbourhoods. In fact, revolutionary women from minority traditional communities also used the sectarian classification of them by regime checkpoints in order to smuggle in aid into besieged neighborhoods. In time, some regime checkpoints discovered some of these networks and started checking IDs and to this very day, search cars driven by any woman who was not covered and also from a minority community.

This peak of the women's active and essential role in sustaining relief, among other activities, in besieged neighbourhoods in Damascus and its suburbs in 2012, started to minimize in 2013 with the regime's increased brutality, the sheer amount of massacres and the lack of human capital among the revolutionaries capable of responding to the humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, the belief among young men, even among some peaceful revolutionaries, was that the only way to topple the regime was with an increase in arms. This conclusion played a big role in strengthening the militarized front of the uprising. And this development directly affected the women's role in the uprising.

Revolutionary women who used to visit other cities to train amateur media workers and to cover untold human stories under shelling, are now facing more obstacles apart from the regime's shelling and checkpoints, in areas – mostly shelled and besieged ones – that are rapidly changing into male-hegemonic spaces. Yet, women, both traditional activists and local women residing in "liberated" areas, are undermining such male spaces by their very existence: women like Marcel Shehwaro , a woman blogger in Aleppo, Razan Zeitounah and Samira Khalil in Douma, and other traditional women activists I cannot name here for the sake of their own security. The very existence of these women and the work they are doing in these areas poses a direct challenge to the growing male hegemony that was developed during the war.

Such female interference with war dynamics is equally evident amongst local women in liberated areas, such as Om Khaled in Kafranbel and many of her like in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. Om Khaled founded the first women's centre not only in Kafranbel, but the first in Idlib. The centre is called Mazaya and was launched due to the urgent need for women in Kafranbel to meet and discuss their situation in war. The centre gives free workshops in first aid, hairdressing, knitting and also free courses in English. The centre also owns a huge library that lends women books. Again, Om Khaled is a shining example of how local women are reclaiming their voices due to the spaces produced by the popular uprising. Despite the growing militarizing front of the uprising and the growing male-hegemony, women are still able to reclaim their voice and the role that was long-ago stolen by the regime.

Razan Zeitounah: institutionalizing human rights

In the mainstream coverage of Syrian women today, one cannot help but get the impression that women must either have been "raped," "sexually abused," or "displaced." The necessity to document all sort of violations committed against citizens, is unquestionable. The lack of similar effort, however, in portraying women in Syria on the ground as active participants in the revolution as writers, human rights lawyers, doctors, teachers and politicians, when they are heavily engaged in such activities, is indeed perverse, especially when this constructed image of Syrian women hasn't changed one iota over the past three years.

Razan Zaitounah is a name that has become famous in the past three years. Zaitounah is currently still forcefully disappeared and kidnapped by an unknown armed group in Douma suburbs of Damascus along with her husband, Wael Hammada and two of her colleagues at the Violation Documentation Center (VDC), Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi . Zaitounah is the co-founder of the Local Coordination Committee (LCC), a revolutionary secular news agency that emerged in 2011 to update the world on mass protests across Syria. The group's importance comes first and foremost from being a network of

women, and then for being the first revolutionary semi-organization to launch as a somewhat professional, credible and sustainable news agency regularly quoted and cited by international and regional media outlets. Zaitounah is also the co-founder of VDC which is the only platform inside Syria that documents a list of Syrian martyrs, detainees, kidnapped civilians as well as documenting violations coming from all the armed groups alongside the army of the regime.

As a lawyer, Zaitounah has been defending political prisoners under the Assads, father and son, for more than ten years. I once met her when she was on her way to visit a political prisoner's family in 2010. Not many lawyers dared to follow Zaitounah's path in fear of regime consequences. She used to visit detainees' families, and defend them in court – which many Syrians at the time did not dare to attend. Zeitouna would issue statements to the public informing them about the detainee's situation and the lack of transparency of the Syrian juridical systems. Zaitounah was banned from traveling in 2002 and received several threats by the security apparatus for her work on human rights long before the uprising started. Ever since the revolution in Syria broke out, Razan worked underground for two years in Damascus, changing homes and places, to then settle in a "liberated area" in Douma, only to be kidnapped with her colleagues by an armed group there, due also to her work in human rights.

Despite living under constant shelling, a survivor of chemical attacks and despite these extraordinary circumstances, Zeitounah faced life underground for two whole years. Her efforts in co-founding and developing LCC as a credible news agency, and VDC as a transparent documentation centre of human rights violations as well as other groups inside Douma today to support local women and to secure jobs for citizens there, are determined attempts to institutionalize revolutionary work in Syria, and to secure sustainable and professional results.

Zeitounah, who is an experienced human rights lawyer due to her work prior to the revolution, understands very well that in order for a country to reach peace-building and transitional justice, human rights advocates should document transparently what is happening. On this basis there is a chance of rebuilding the state in the future. Even though Zeitounah is kidnapped today, the work of both organizations, LCC and VDC, continues still. This is the legacy of her efforts in creating a decentralized institution rather than being centralized under her sole supervision. Such efforts are rare among revolutionary groups today.

Conclusion

This must serve as one overview of the women's role in the revolution that takes into consideration the historical and political obstacles faced by women and their male comrades alike. We cannot possibly hope to cover fairly the amount of work women in Syria have done in the past three years. I am one of many women in Syria who have different point of views and takes on this topic. But I sincerely hope that my fellow women comrades are also given the chance to express and document their views on this too.

8 April 2014

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Permanent revolutions and counter-revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century – our tasks

26 April 2014, by Christian Babel

This introduction to the debate on the world situation at the 2014 International Committee is situated in continuity with that of the three previous years: we remain in the period opened between 2008 and 2011, of open crisis at the financial and economic, ecological and social levels; a period of global instability, profound destabilisation of institutions, impressive mass movements going as far as a revolutionary process in the Arab region... and at the same time, a period where a crystallised progressive political opening is dramatically lacking. Obviously there are developments and questions to consider in more detail with more detachment. These questions are dealt with here in three parts:

1. The dynamics, paradoxes and contradictions of the economic crisis of capitalism;

2. The different aspects of the upheavals underway which are provoked by this crisis;

3. What is at stake for us as a political current: how to intervene in the current transformations of the class struggle, in the processes of mass revolt indeed revolution on the one hand, but also faced with an overall process of weakening of the organised workers' movement, confronted like the exploited masses as a whole with the rise of mechanisms of counter-revolution and the destruction of social and environmental tissues?

1. The world economic crisis – where are we?

1.1 Characteristics of the crisis

In February 2011, François Sabado asked at this same International Committee, on the crisis which broke out in 2007-2008: "Is it a financial episode analogous to all those that capitalism has known in the past, followed by temporary recessions? Or is it a systemic crisis at two levels: because the regime of financial accumulation developed over more than thirty years is exhausted, and because world capitalism has reached a limit linked to the finite nature of the planet and its natural resources." And in the case of the second hypothesis, to deduce from it the urgency of measures attacking the roots of the problems: anti-capitalist measures of overall reorganisation of production and society, to satisfy the basic needs of peoples plunged into this spiral of crises.

Three years later and with a little more hindsight, both our more or less impressionistic vision and the more profound Marxist discussions like those recently at the Economic Seminar of the IIRE, go in the direction of the definition of a systemic crisis of capitalism. And there are few bourgeois economists who advocate the opposite, in a return to optimism!

There are many ways to define the current crisis as systemic in nature. I will rest on those of the economists that we are close to: Michel Husson, basing himself on Mandel to define the limits of the "productive order" [1], or Isaac Joshua who speaks of a "crisis of capitalist overproduction of the third type" [2]. In caricaturing a little the history of crises:

– The crises of the 19th century, those of competitive regulation, resolved by the brutal lowering of the cost of raw materials, prices and the purge of debts and above all wages which mis bout à bout, and after significant destruction of capital allowed the recovery of profits, resting on one, or on several motor sectors of production. These crises were intense but short.

– The crisis of 1929 was very intense and very long. Capitalism entered into the period of the dominant wage earner. Hence, at the time of overproduction crises there is no longer any dilution of the t cumulative collapse of production and consumption in an environment of small production. The initial impact is demultiplied and exit from crisis by competition becomes impossible. The latter is no longer endogenous to economic functioning but essentially due to political factors – concretely, it was the war and its outcome which allowed the overall recommencement of capitalist accumulation.

– The current crisis appears comparatively less intense... but its length aboutit also to convulsions whose end cannot be foreseen!

What are the bases of the current systemic crisis? So as to avoid a new paroxysmal crisis like that of the 1930s and 1940s, the response assumed by capitalism in the second half of the 20th century has been commonly called "Fordism" with a constant and generalised economic intervention of the state in the wage relation, and in the regulation of markets and currencies. And when profits fell in the mid 1960s, crystallising a new form of crisis of capitalism in the 1970s, Fordist regulation effectively protected the system from the violence of previous crises, but at the price of a limit to the lasting restoration of profits.

The phase of "neoliberalism" from 1980 onwards relaunched the capitalist offensive by resting on mass unemployment and the sophistication of financial globalisation. Placed before the need to significantly increase the rate of exploitation of the proletariat, capitalist competition has for more than 30 years, exacerbated by transnationals, globalised financialisation to ensure the reproduction of capital. Financial capital has attained an extraordinary predatory power in relation to human beings and nature. This power accumulates new dimensions of wage slavery in the globalised enterprises of industry, agriculture and services, an "accumulation by dispossession" in the dominated economies, and a penetration of the most peripheral societies for the grabbing of land and its monopolisation for export, with a new stage in the destruction of the conditions of survival of entire populations.

The liberalisation of the world economy is much more intense in certain aspects than at the end of the 19th century, when elements of industrial and commercial protectionism were very significant. But the role of states is not comparable (the share of public expenditure in GDP was, in 1913, at less than 9% in the USA and in France, against, respectively, more than 30% and more than 50% today). It remains specific in the current convulsions with in particular the voluntarist action of the central banks, which constitutes an essential difference, it should be stressed above, between the current | "neoliberalism" and the classical period of 19th century liberalism.

This neoliberalism has functioned to restore the rate of exploitation, structurally and geographically extend the space of the commodity, and profits have gone upwards. However the efficacy of the capital invested has not followed, none of the innovations, however rapid and numerous, have taken on the motor significance of railways, electricity or cars. From this viewpoint, let us remember the paradox enunciated by the US economist Solow: "You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics". This characteristic lack of efficacy partly explains the difficulty in the increases in profit resulting in an overall investment dynamic, and thus accumulation for a real exit from crisis.

The credit economy allowed for a time a rate of growth sufficient to give the impression that the crisis could be overcome, but the growth differentials between the big economic zones of the world have increased. And finally, globalization has also had the effect of extending more rapidly the dynamics of economic destabilisation! The contradictions are thus sharpened. As

Isaac Joshua puts it, "state intervention on the one hand, and weak flexibility of wages and prices on the other, both reduce the breadth of the current crises ... Globalisation of productive capital and financialisation of the real economy, on the contrary, increase instability."

The strong pressure on wages having a negative effect on consumption, the ultra-sophisticated credit economy and the extension of the capitalist area have for while compensated for this effect on production outlets. But we now know that the current crisis was preceded by a turnaround in profit rates. At the end of 2007, the credit economy and generalised speculation had reached their limits, and led to the explosion of the financial bubble starting from the famous "toxic credits". Since then, the transfer of losses from banks to public finances, justified by governments to "save the economy" has allowed the bourgeoisie to retake the initiative by leading the assault against public deficits.

This orientation has led to very tough austerity plans everywhere, but most especially traumatising in Europe. These aspects have already been largely dealt with. We have then concluded that behind the initial big spending, the balance of the dominant bourgeois ideology remains firmly anchored in néolibéralism and is not at all shifting towards Keynesianism. Thus, the reforms of banking regulation against speculation appear very limited, while banking concentration becomes astonishing: the value of assets managed by the biggest US investment group, Black Rock, approaches the GDP of Germany; those (in descending order) of the banks Mitsubishi, Deustsche Bank, Crédit agricole or BNP-Paribas approach the GDP of France.

So what results in 2013, what perspectives in 2014?

The year of 2013 was still one of weak economic growth or more or less deep recession according to the country. Yet the debt crisis seems for now contained, and perspectives of slow resumption of growth are made for this year, but with what solidity? A question is then posed: will the debt crisis portend a new deep fragilisation of the system, or finally a necessary evil from the viewpoint of capital which will reconsolidated on the basis of this purge? Several elements should be taken into account.

1.2 Very diverse situations according to the role of the dominant central banks

– In the USA, the Federal Reserve has an expansionist role to counter the recession (massive buyout of financial securities, in addition to very low so called "director" interest rates for loans), which after the crash of 2009 has led to a resumption around 3.5 to 4% in growth this year, but with notable fragilities: new bubbles - property or internet – appear menacing.

In China, the central bank has incessantly used monetary creation to reflate its economy and growth is again high (7-8%). But with new fragilities: banking and property, rampant corruption, loss of competitiveness. Still more than for the USA, there is fear of bank failures with unknown consequences.

– Europe is globally the "sick man" of capitalism: the Euro zone is the most threatened by the fragility of the institutional edifice bringing together heterogeneous capitalisms, and by a monetary and credit policy which has amplified the crisis to an unexpected length. The differences in development of GDP reach a record level (Northern Europe +3% in relation to 2007, against -9% in the South). Even if they have not been reduced since 2007, public and private debt seem however well straitjacketed by the European Central Bank and the new tools of regulation (European Financial Stability Facility, European Stability Mechanism), which reduce tensions on interest rates for borrowing, with a monetary policy which remains restrictive. The countries stigmatised as "PIIGS", Southern Europe and Ireland will be under control in return for drastic "purges". Germany and Northern Europe are doing well enough, but France is experiencing social attacks unprecedented since the mid 20th century and the pressure of fiscal competition is strengthened everywhere. After a year of stagnation in 2013, will we see the beginning of a capitalist solution, all profit for the employers? Or at least a shock, the precipitation of a real deflation (a fall in prices and wages with compression of the economy) for a new phase of the crisis?

– The policies of the big central banks have effects on the other economic blocs, old (Japan) or "emergent" (East Asia, India, Brazil and Latin America, Russia, Turkey): rather than winners, will they not be victims of the beginning of US and Chinese recovery and big monetary discrepancies? The money markets indeed show a great feverishness, and some of these economies like Argentina, India or Russia were locked in a vice in early 2014 by the dynamics of the USA or Europe, with monetary and financial flights which destabilize them.

1.3 Jobs, unemployment and profits

The elements of the economic crisis in each country are used to justify the offensive of the dominant classes. The battles for competitiveness, against rights and social gains, for the commodification of the environment reform the state rules which still serve neoliberal deregulation.

– This offensive rests on **mass unemployment**, which continues to increase (more than 200 million worldwide), and is at the maximum in Europe: 26 million in the EU or 11% of the active population (6% in Germany as against 20% in the countries of the south of the continent). And there is a general rise of **precariousness in employment**. In these areas, women are the most affected, as well as youth, because these are the two categories first experimented with for all the techniques of precarity.

– Competition for international investment and **relocations** between continents, countries and even inside each country are used increasingly visibly to strengthen wage slavery...but also end up in a numerical growth of wage earners. These wage earners are increasingly subject to precarity, with the articulation inside them of global segments of production and also inside each enterprise of secure

workers and poorer more precarious workers who are frozen in this situation. We note that it is first this "halo of employment" which reacts when the economy revives.

– Profits: the transnationals continue their movement of concentration and strengthen their power in relation to the states. But if the stock exchange indices return to their levels of before 2008, profits, complex to analyse for Marxist economists, do not seem overall to have recovered until now, because of an still weak efficacy of capital invested (or productivity of capital) despite the increased rate of exploitation. Hence profits continue to orient towards a rentier distribution to shareholders rather than productive investment. We should specify our analysis per sector, and for example study more precisely the cars sector, which has returned to its pre-crisis level of production, for its pivotal place in capitalist production.

Conclusion: the deployment of the current economic crisis has been global, but unequal according to the part of the world. For now, we cannot speak globally of an exit from the crisis, more than 6 years after its explosion: profits are not consolidated, the economic "recovery" is fragile and the elements of destabilisation are very significant.

Capitalism continues to function, protected by its sophisticated organisation and its great flexibility. But the economic convulsions and dizzying growth of inequalities prevent a solid restoration of its legitimacy, in a world where access to information is without precedent, allowing for example the demonstrative fact that: "the 85 richest people possess as much as half of the world population" (Oxfam report 2014), to be broadcast everywhere.

2. Destabilisation and growing socio-political crises

2.1 The dynamics of inter-imperialist competition

Even if they remain the two biggest capitalist and imperialist blocs, the positions of the USA and still more Europe are weakened, to the benefit, first, but not only, of a shift of power towards Asia, primarily China. Hence the inter-imperialist struggle to recover or acquire positions of geopolitical domination is exacerbated.

– The neoconservative counter-offensive of the Bush era USA has been a clear failure. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have proved disastrous, and Obama's attempt to adopt a less aggressive basis in the context of the Arab revolutions is no longer convincing. The desire of the USA to concern itself first with the Far East, with the EU taking the initiative elsewhere is not really working. Thus we see attempts to develop a "pax Americana" with Iran on the one hand, and Israel on the other… with little success! And the credibility of the US government in the world suffers from the Wikileaks or Snowden/NSA affairs. At the same time, the governance of Obama is weakened by his difficulties in imposing his domestic policy: budget "shutdown", limits of Obamacare. At the same time, the USA remains the biggest capitalist power, which tries constantly to push its advantages. Thus it convinced the EU governments in 2013 to enter final – and secret – negotiations for a new free trade treaty for a big transatlantic market (TAFTA), which will open to unrestrained competition entire layers of European economies (public services and contracts, social, cultural and environmental protection and so on) and would thus give big private groups extravagant rights to exploit peoples and nature.

– The European Union, which structures the convergence of neoliberal capitalist interests, manifests at the same time very little political unity. Whereas the foreign policy of the EU is inconsistent, British and above all French imperialism try to play their own hand with few consolidated results: no grip on Libya after Western interventionism; growing destabilisation of the Sahelian area in Africa; return to the saddle of Russia in the Middle East starting from the Syrian conflict. Hollande and Cameron attempts to resume the traditional polices of their imperialisms in "projecting" themselves outside Europe have weakened their governments, while that of the union around Merkel benefits from "centre-periphery" relations inside Europe. Finally, the rise of centrifugal forces inside certain states is confirmed: in the Spanish state, Britain, Belgium and so on.

– Structural adjustment polices and the modes of imperialist intervention in Africa dislocate numerous state structures. The economic growth which can be noted in some countries for the moment leads only to increased inequality, the destruction of food crop economies and despair. The installation of China as a new imperialist actor, the France-USA rivalries ; the eruption of opportunist religious fundamentalisms as new ideological actors, as well as the reactions of the Western imperialisms (interventions in Mali and in the Central African Republic) continue to push this continent into war, chaos and humanitarian disaster. After South Sudan, is it Cameroon's turn, or somebody else's?

– In the Far East, we have for several years witnessed a rise of inter-imperialist tensions between Japan, China, the USA as protector of ASEAN, in particular for the control of the China sea, but also with North Korea. In early 2014, other tensions sharpened in eastern Europe as Putin rejected any new weakening of the Russian grip on its neighbours, like Ukraine. With the exacerbation of economic competition and the renewal of the use of chauvinism as derivative of the social and political problems internal to each country, the risks of an increased degree of confrontation between states are real and growing.

2.2. Ecological disasters, commodification of the environment and displacements of populations

The consequences of climate change only begin to manifest themselves in the entire world- but are felt first in the tropical zones. We see already the current damage (droughts and floods), but also the disasters that can be attributed to this change, like the exceptional storms which pose the

question of raising the level of humanitarian solidarity and reconstruction, in a period where states and international institutions are increasingly ineffective at this level (see the balance sheet of Haiti). The development of our specific response to disasters is the subject of a specific contribution in this session, starting from the typhoons in the Philippines and the experiences of solidarity that the Fourth International has been involved in there.

Faced with these perils for humanity, the capitalists assume the role of vultures in relation to the environmental crises, and in particular the climate and energy crises, to create new sources of profits ("green capitalism", carbon stock markets, and so on). Whatever the ecological awareness of the populations, the threats to the environments are still massive and degrade the living conditions in numerous areas and places: accelerated deforestation in particular in the equatorial zones; pollution of maritime and river waters and seizure of fresh water; predatory mining operations, the scandal of shale gas, dangers and price of nuclear power (thus the consequences of the catastrophe at Fukushima are far from being settled) and so on. At the same time the transnationals continue pressure for the appropriation of land, agricultural inputs and the patentability of the living. All these actions are today detonators of essential struggles.

Finally, neoliberal globalisation, the social, environmental and political crises multiply armed conflicts and the forced displacements of population, which together have a terrible human cost. While the countries of the North and in the first place Europe are transformed into inaccessible fortresses which literally push back into the sea migrants and refugees, millions of human beings are left in makeshift camps in the countries of the South. These phenomena have re-emerged in Africa or Asia, and now around the Syrian conflict. The abandonment of the refugees will be an increasing source of scandal and destabilisation of the world situation.

2.3 The explosion of mass movements against different aspects of the crisis

The mass movements which continue to emerge have economic, social, institutional and ecological dimensions. Faced with the degradation of their situation and the absence of a future for youth, the mass revolts articulate these dimensions in a renewed manner, mostly apart from the old workers' movement which is integrated into the dominant policies, or broadly outmoded.

– There is the **revolutionary process in the Arab region**: after the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, we see the continuation of the mass movements up until the fall of the succeeding governments and in particular the Islamist governments, and the crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood has reached Turkey. The mass revolts have subsided in some countries (Morocco, Jordan and so on) but continue or emerge elsewhere (Sudan and even Saudi Arabia, for example). However as the Syrian people experienced in a heroic but terrible fashion, the counter-offensive of the state apparatuses and the fascistic religious currents broadens. And the weakness of socialist perspectives is increasingly problematic. Gilbert Achcar provides us with essential tools for understanding the process in its complexity and its probable continuation over a long period, with advances and partial retreats, and to help it to develop.

– There are socio-political explosions which emerge from **urban crises and the fight against corruption**, which shake some countries which had been believed to be stabilised for the dominant classes: in mid-2013, we have seen at the same time a revolt in Turkey based on the defence of Gezi park and Taksim square, and one in Brazil based on opposition to transport prices and the conditions of the soccer World Cup. Aspirations to democracy and social justice constitute ferments of revolt in numerous emergent countries which are only waiting to explode.

– We also see **new specifically proletarian revolts in East Asia**, with political representation sometimes very weak or disjointed: Bangladesh, Cambodia and so on .These are new areas for the search for radical alternatives to capitalist globalisation.

– **In southern Europe and the Balkans**, faced with an unprecedented degradation of living conditions, social setbacks, the revolts and mass mobilisations are structural, renewing or spreading, even if the victories are rare, even without defeating austerity, even without political outlet: Greece, Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, and now Bosnia – while the old worker's movement is dying, what potential do the new social movements have? The fate of the situation in Greece thus takes on an especial importance.

– **In the ex-USSR**, the opposition to the "democratures" as specific regimes of the security services, oligarchs and corruption manifested itself strongly in Russia in 2012-2013. In early 2014 the impressive movement around "Maïdan » in Ukraine overthrew the ruling clan through mass activity. This is the approach that is needed: despite a very high level of repression, beyond the manoeuvres of Western imperialism, and with an extreme political confusion, the popular movements seek their path!

– **In Latin America**, the limits of extractivist neo-developmentalism in its diverse varieties have been reached, from its most anti-imperialist (Venezuela), up to the most integrated in neo-liberalism (Brazil), via intermediary forms (Argentina). New mass movements appear, but the reactionary right is also lying in wait.

Despite their frequent confusion but because of their just demands, we support virtually all these extraordinary street revolts. Rare exceptions are Thailand and Venezuela, since from what we know of them they are structured from A to Z by ultra-reactionary sectors. And we see last that without a progressive outlet in the medium term, mass movements can be transformed into destructive communal riots, and be more globally defeated by counter-offensives of the dominant classes mobilising counter-revolutionary

instruments.

2.4 The counter-revolutions advance

With the sharpening of the economic crisis, counter revolutionary tendencies crystallise on the basis of the previous offensives of the dominant classes: with the organisation of social regression intrinsic to neoliberalism, development of the "war on terror" apparatus by governments on the one hand, rise of ultra-reactionary activist currents on the other, which combine.

- The dominant political forces are deeply shaken, reacting by state apparatuses challenging democratic rights in the name of the defence of national interests: generalised electronic surveillance, from the USA to China; new laws threatening the freedoms of association and activists; perfecting and brutality of anti-demonstration devices. Numerous recent affairs have shown that no continent escapes the criminalisation of working class, democratic, cultural activity: in Europe (Spain, France, Russia), Asia (Pakistan, China), Africa (South Africa, Egypt) and Latin America (Argentina).

- Including in Europe, where democratic gains were most stabilised, we see democratic rights reduced at all levels: parliamentary functioning challenged by the "Troika"» (European Commission-ECB-IMF), anti-activist laws and legal decisions, inflated security and police apparatuses and equipment, including private ones;

- Ultra-reactionary and fascistic currents intervene increasingly effectively on the public scene everywhere in the world, under very varied forms and sometimes combined, criminalising the rights of women, lesbians, gays, bi-, inter- and transsexual (LGBTI), challenging social public services:

â€¢ the Tea Party in the USA, "Manif pour tous" in France ;

â€¢ racist populist movements in Europe, against Arabs and Muslims, black people and in a still more generalised manner against Roma ;

â€¢ far right populism in power in Hungary and perhaps soon in India;

â€¢ neo-Nazi movements in Greece or in eastern Europe, sometimes very much present inside cross-class movements of democratic opposition;

â€¢ fundamentalists of all religions, on the march everywhere, who threaten the right to education, women's or LGBTI rights, the rights to artistic expression, and which increasingly go as far as murder; and religious fundamentalisms which divert and attempt to crush popular liberation movements;

â€¢ jihadists who carry out armed operations as far as veritable military conflicts, which worsen in a good part of Africa and Asia.

- In this context, we should stress the violence and reactionary determination with which women's rights are everywhere attacked in all areas, and threatened in a broad manner at the institutional level, as in Spain in relation to abortion rights.

Conclusion:

We are faced with several counter-revolutions, which pose old but renewed tactical problems:

â€¢ What level of political alliance is possible against them?

â€¢ How to deal with fascistic or fundamentalist currents which infiltrate movements of popular anger?

3. Permanent revolutions and counter-revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century – our tasks

We must act in a very contradictory situation, with many paradoxes (happily we think dialectically!): there is on the one hand a numerical growth of the working class at the world level and of mass struggles; on the other hand there is a crisis of capitalism which is becoming exhausted, and notable counter-revolutionary offensives, in a context of loss of structuring of the workers' movement and of socialist perspective. But an essential thing is that the fear of confrontation with the established powers has decisively decreased in very many situations.

- Revolts and revolutions (in the objectivist sense of Lenin) are very powerful and determined, invent new forms of struggle, but have a limited self-organisation, and formulate little alternative of power – and they do not succeed in obtaining or consolidating conquests. Hence, they are only partially "examples" and continue in great confusion. How to advance, in particular at the level of consciousness?

- The impossibility of capitalism satisfying the aspirations of the broad masses prevents it from stabilising situations by the methods of bourgeois democracy. That frees spaces for more directly counter-revolutionary instruments. But why so many difficulties for the redeployment of the workers' movement and its revolutionary component?

- The crisis of the old workers' movement continues: ever closer integration of social democracy into the bourgeois apparatuses (grand coalition governments in 16 European countries, the Hollande presidency in France and so on), and integration of the big trade union confederations. Social democracy is no more than a form of bourgeois alternation, with a historic left culture "for the gallery". Neo-reformism, incarnated by the old CPs or the new left coalition parties, has trouble in developing the spaces to the left of social democracy that it has been able to recreate. They come up against the difficulty of developing dynamic perspectives, sometimes advocate new protectionist impasses, and often have a "campist" vision of relations between the big powers which has led them to repudiate mass uprisings for liberty, like those of the Syrian or Ukrainian peoples. It is also necessary to analyse the evolution of nationalist movements of progressive origin, faced with a multiform world

capitalist crisis which places them before decisive challenges of orientation.

Finally, what balance sheet can we draw of the wave around the global justice movement, now in reflux as an attempt to overcome these crises?

– The revolutionary and anti-capitalist left seeks to emerge from marginality in the new mass movements. It still intervenes in the social movements, sometimes obtaining significant electoral results, superior to its real influence. But it does not find sufficient points of support to present a credible progressive political opening, and fragments.

– Our current, the Fourth International has come to position itself in an irreplaceable manner: seeking the self-organisation of the masses, of unity to win essential essential social and democratic demands; fight against imperialism and reject campism, formulation of anticapitalist and ecologist programmes, feminist and internationalist, adapted to the new situation of convulsions and transitional towards socialism, starting with the expropriation of the banks and socialisation of the big groups like those of energy which destroy humanity and the planet. But at this stage of strong rejection of the "political apparatuses" that is not enough to gain significant influence! We need to find bridges between the level of organisation of the masses in struggle and the organisation of political parties for the victory of the proletariat against all exploitation. And we must follow closely the new experiences of regroupment of the radical or revolutionary left, in their specificities: in the Spanish state, in Britain, in Argentina and so on.

– We are more or less present, we intervene to the extent of our forces in many countries, but there are some who are at this time particularly emblematic of the responsibilities of our current, like Greece, Syria, Bosnia, Venezuela, on which we should reflect in our international contribution.

The central issue is for us to found new international articulations between exploited classes, between the various forms of struggle against oppression. How to revive international solidarity and political struggle? Because failing that, the tendencies towards reactionary fragmentation of society could triumph!

February 22, 2014

Footnotes

[1] Michel Husson : La théorie des ondes longues et la crise du capitalisme contemporain, December 2013

[2] Isaac Joshua : "De 1825 à 1929 puis 2008: une crise du troisième type - « une création historique originale »" . Novermber 18, 2013,.

40 years after the Carnation Revolution

24 April 2014, by Jorge Costa

The hegemony of the New State (*Estado Novo*) , which brought together the different expressions of the Portuguese right, as these developed throughout the century, through the civil war in Spain , the Second World War and the liberation struggles of the colonized peoples, was eroded by the effects of the colonial war and political emergence of a sector of the bourgeoisie whose "developmentalism" was less and less in tune with the regime of corporate representation (integrating both the employers' guilds and the loyal trade unions) with its control over industry that kept an iron grip on all aspects of production. Even the monopoly groups, although still dependent on colonial extraction, from the sixties became increasingly interested in European markets, and pushed for reforms that deepened the cracks in the regime's political base.

Since the late 1960s, Portugal had experienced a growing wave of struggles. The universities were paralysed or closed; the repression affected hundreds of high school students. Independent forms of union organization took shape and gave birth to the *Intersindical* (later the CGTP). In the last six months alone of the dictatorship, a hundred thousand workers in industry and services took strike action. The order of the Estado Novo had become highly unstable. Those on "top", like those "below", felt the end was coming.

The intensification of the war, with the extension of its fronts, led to a huge expansion of the army, which required the promotion to middle officer rank of young people called up under conscription, and coming straight from radicalizing student milieux. These soldiers were to play their part in preparing the 25 April, and in the struggles that followed.

In 1973, the Socialist Party was formed, around Mario Soares, in anticipation of the end of the regime, determined to exploit the possibilities opened up by its relations with foreign powers. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which of all the CPs in western Europe was the most closely aligned with the USSR, remained the main point of reference for the underground resistance; it was able to bring together a broad range of political sectors, for example around the fronts set up to take part in the dictatorship's tightly controlled elections. In the last decade of the dictatorship, the PCP found itself facing myriad formations to its left, coming out of the student mobilizations and able to dialogue with the working-class radicalization.

Despite being a "pressure cooker", in

the words of Fernando Rosas, Portugal in 1973 and early 1974 was not experiencing a pre-insurrectionary situation. It would be the military coup that, largely unwittingly, would transform the way the people took part in the process. The last attempts to bolster state authority came from within the regime, resulting in the formation of a federalist political alliance with neo-colonial pretentions, strong relations with the Western powers and a disposition towards European integration. General Spinola was at the centre of this project, which was represented in the dictatorship's parliament by figures who would later found the parties of the post-25 April right, the CDS and the PSD. The Prime Minister, Marcello Caetano, who had replaced Oliveira Salazar in 1968 with the promise of a political opening, ended up aligning himself with the African colonialist interests and the ultra-right, marginalizing the "liberalizing" sector.

A number of middle-ranking military officers, exhausted by the war effort, organized the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), initially based on essentially corporate demands. On the eve of the coup, they sought political support at the top of the hierarchy and received it – from the Chief of the Armed Forces, Costa Gomes, and his deputy, Antonio Spinola, a former governor of Guinea.

Year One

The military uprising of April 25 encountered no serious resistance – those who did not support it, did not fight against it either (except at the headquarters of the political police, where shots were fired at civilians in the centre of Lisbon). General Spinola was handed power by Marcello Caetano, who went into exile. In the capital, a few hours after the tanks moved into the Lower City, the only movement was that of people celebrating with their carnations; it was the first sign of disobedience towards the new power, which had instructed the population not to leave their homes.

After removing from the MFA's programme the self-determination of the peoples of the colonies, Spinola emphasized in his speech to the nation that the first task of the new power would be "to ensure the survival of the nation and its sovereignty across several continents". However, the first few weeks after the 25 April soon revealed the failure of attempts to keep the apparatus of political repression functioning and assert any kind of stable bourgeois leadership over the political process underway. The new power spoke with many voices; it was divided between the Junta of National Salvation (where Spinola presided over the remains of the old military hierarchy) and the Council of State, which included the officers of the MFA. Spinola made an attempt to maintain social order (with the suppression of the postal strike) and quickly to consolidate his support base (the big bourgeois families formed the Movement for the Development of Enterprise and Society, with a promise to create immediately a hundred thousand jobs). But the new power lacked political coherence and the force of arms it needed to ensure that the weak movements of economic groups could lead to any kind of normality.

This almost total absence of repression and the signs of support from some sectors of the MFA itself for the mass movement opened the floodgates of popular initiative and triggered the Portuguese revolution. In the colonies, fighting ceased and the colonial troops and liberation forces began to fraternize. In the metropolis, new democratic rights were won in practice much more quickly than they could be formally recognized. This was the case with the right to strike, the minimum wage, reduced working hours, holidays and the purging from workplaces of those still loyal to the fallen regime or seeking to sabotage the changes underway. With no state force behind him, and increasingly dependent on the turbulent MFA Assembly, Spinola made his final political gesture with an appeal, in September 1974, to the "silent majority" to mobilize. Its failure only increased popular confidence for the next cycle. The sectors favouring continuity with the old hierarchy and the intervention of the armed forces in the process of class struggle were marginalized. The general with the monocle soon joined Marcello Caetano in Brazil .

Two conflicting paths

The revolution was to last nineteen months, from April 1974 to November 1975, and would leave lasting marks on Portuguese democracy, both in terms of its constitutional shape and its practical exercise of political freedoms.

Two conflicting paths collided, crossed and combined in those months. One, centred on the MFA, involved a permanent attempt to rehabilitate a minimally efficient centre of state power. Throughout almost the entire revolutionary period, the main forces of the left, the PCP and the SP, followed this path, seeking to influence the development of the new power and, in particular, a portion of this. In seeking such institutional respectability, the PCP even tried to demobilize what it considered "wild-cat" strikes, and insisted that leaving NATO was not a political priority. At the same time, fearing that general elections in a country like Portugal could produce unfavourable results, it emphasised the "institutionalization" of the MFA as a legitimate state body, alongside the still-to-be elected Constituent Assembly. As for the Socialist Party, it prepared for elections, as the key to rebuilding a state power capable of subduing the popular dynamic. Soares combined proclamations of socialism (which were shared right across the political spectrum) with the slogan "Europe is with Us", banking on integration into the European Common Market, whose most powerful members provided significant support.

The other path was that of real democracy, the direct popular involvement and self-organization of the masses, who confronted their immediate needs and the pressure of the crisis (this was shortly after the oil shock of 1973) by creating their own political culture and structures of intervention. This was a broad torrent that far overflowed the banks of state authority, taking on myriad forms: the squatter movements of those crammed into slums, initiatives by people to

build their own neighbourhoods, social services, schools, health centres and community organizations, as well as businesses under workers' self-management and producer cooperatives on occupied farmlands. Each of these initiatives experienced contradictions, dilemmas and conflicts, as well as achievements of profound and lasting significance. They represented a dramatic awakening of important parts of a backward and depoliticised society, where self -organization of the working class had been practically invisible for four decades; in a matter of days and weeks they learnt to carry out a revolution, taking charge right from the start of the heart of the system - property, be it in land, real estate, or industry.

This sudden change in all dimensions of social life was the great historical trauma that the Portuguese bourgeoisie would never overcome. The climax came after 11 March 1975, the date of a failed military putsch, also involving General Spinola, which led to an acceleration of the revolutionary process. Many business leaders were charged with economic sabotage and imprisoned or sent into exile. Decrees were adopted on land reform and the nationalization of the banks (the latter measure, seen as essential to keep the financial system operating, was passed with the votes of even the PSD, on the right). With the dissolution of several far-right groups, networks of anti-communist terrorists developed across the border in the Spanish state, supported by sectors of the Portuguese Catholic hierarchy; these carried out hundreds of attacks against activists and offices of the PCP and the radical left, and even some murders.

The split in the MFA and the preparation of 25 November

These two paths were to coexist for a whole year, a year that profoundly transformed the country. But it was especially after the elections on 25 April 1975 that the economic and political impasses of the Portuguese revolution opened up the split between two conflicting political camps.

In these first elections, on a very high turnout, the Socialist Party won most votes (38 %). If you take into account the votes for the communist parties (PCP + MDP, 16.5%) and the radical left (4 %), the right-wing parties (PSD + CDS, 34 %) lagged well behind. But the political alignments that developed following the elections took a different form, based primarily on the nature of the state power that for six months was negotiated between the MFA and the parties represented in the Constituent Assembly and the government.

The MFA's role as intermediary between the weakened authority of the state and the mass movement had reached its limit. The clash between different camps in the class struggle was reflected in the different components of the military movement – the "Spinolistas" (on the right), the "group of nine" (aligned with the SP), the "gonçalvistas" (aligned with the PCP), the Continental Operational Command (COPCON, led by Otelo). The "Hot Summer" of 1975 was one of confrontation between two opposing political camps.

On the one hand, there was the political role of the mobilized sectors of society, which went as far as experimenting with forms of "dual power" (in June 1975, for example, the first popular assembly was held in Lisbon, at the military engineers' regiment, bringing together more than fifty neighbourhood committees and 26 workers' councils); this accentuated the crisis of command in the military, with the formation of "Soldiers United Will Win" (SUV) groups and because of the action of COPCON itself.

The latter was closely linked to the most advanced mass actions. These reached their climax with the occupation of military installations and a number of demonstrations called by the SUV: on 10 September in Porto, when a march of forty thousand people was headed by two thousand soldiers; on 25 September, when another march about a hundred thousand strong included hundreds of soldiers in uniform from fifteen different units. At the end of the demonstration, dozens of buses were diverted to take the protesters to the Trafaria prison, where they released soldiers who had been imprisoned for belonging to the SUV. But despite its growing momentum, this broad movement was still a long way from producing a revolutionary political leadership able to develop a social and political alliance which enjoyed majority support and expressed the independent initiative of the people.

On the other hand, the ones who did unite and develop alliances were precisely those who, under a variety of banners, sought to preserve and restore that bastion of order, the authority of the State. This was after all the only sector that, as Francisco Louçã says, "had power and fought for power" (*Rehearsal for a Revolution*, 1984).

The outcome of this confrontation came on 25 November, the date of the military revolt that brought together the political and military components of the right and the SP under the command of Eanes ("the group of nine"), who would become president with the support of these same sectors. From then on, the PCP would be oil in the wheels of a negotiated democracy. In its texts, the party explains clearly which side it was not on during the critical moments of the Portuguese revolution: "the Central Committee of the PC draws attention to the idealistic illusions that have led some sectors to see in these forms of popular organization the future bodies of State power. It also draws attention to the abstract theorizing about 'people's power', which creates the illusion of the existence of a popular political power in opposition to the military and governmental power" (*Avante!*, 16/12/1975). Already defeated, this sector based on "idealistic illusions", nonetheless won 16.5% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1976, for its candidate, Lt. Col. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (more than double the vote achieved by the PCP's candidate, Octavio Pato). [1]

The State remakes the Portuguese bourgeoisie

The years following the revolutionary period saw the reorganization of production conditions, within the framework of a balance of forces reshaped during the revolution and the implementation in law of some of the "achievements" of the process. The winds of April would also blow through the field of social rights, with the development of Social Security and the National Health Service, as well as advances in the freedom and social status of women. The nationalizations of 1975 left a public sector made up of more than eighty companies and another 140 with state participation; it included 90% of banking and most of the transport, communications and energy sectors – in all about a quarter of GDP. Land reform, which in 1975 took over 1.2 million hectares and affected over forty thousand agricultural workers (and many more indirectly), lasted for another decade, even though it was concentrated in the southern region of Alentejo. Not until 1977 was the first fall in real wages recorded.

For over a decade and a half, the economy would continue to be characterized by strong state intervention, with a ruling class that remained weak and incapable, politically and financially, of taking possession of the main public companies. The State continued to manage the economic system and assumed its historical role as incubator and protector of the Portuguese bourgeoisie. It was under state direction that the power of the bourgeoisie was rebuilt.

This period of transition came to an end when Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986. Throughout the eighties, foreign dependence increased and the model of low wages and specialization in labour-intensive, low-tech sectors was consolidated. This remains true, even with the massive expansion of universities and education in general (illiteracy was 40% in 1974). The rapid economic growth between 1974 and 2004 (3.5% per year) was based mainly on mobilizing more labour, especially that of women.

European integration and absolute majorities for the right (with the governments of Cavaco Silva and the PSD), created the conditions for a new cycle, one of privatizations, with the necessary constitutional amendments to overturn the legally "irreversible" nationalizations. The Right, and later the SP, handed over control of much of the banking system to the old capitalist families of dictatorship (Champalimaud, Espírito Santo, Mello). This was the key to controlling the subsequent phase of privatizations. The privatized banks became the basis for the huge debts of both old and new economic groups (Sonae, Amorim, Jerónimo Martins, construction) that piled into the major business sectors of the turn of the century: the monopoly income from energy and telecommunications, mass distribution and retail, and real estate.

It was precisely real estate and construction that supported domestic demand during this long period of wage squeeze. The latter was offset by making it easier for households to borrow from private domestic banks, while these borrowed from the European banking system. Between 1991 and 2010, the number of dwellings in Portugal grew at an average of 80,000 new homes a year, the equivalent of a city the size of Coimbra. This whole model hinged on substantial public investment, mainly in infrastructure and inflated spending, for example on football stadiums.

The neoliberal strategy imposed from Europe, reduced the capacity of the Portuguese economy, which became increasingly dependent on capital, with more and more debts and less and less autonomy. The ability to export was compromised by the conditions of accession to the single currency, while foreign investment was limited to assembly lines with little value added. The ruling class sought its comfort zone in an economy that was highly vulnerable to recession, and which collapsed under the impact of the 2008 financial crisis and international speculation in Portuguese public debt.

The rest of the story is well known: the 2011 external intervention triggered a social counter -revolution of unimagined proportions and a process of transfer of wealth unprecedented in the country's history. The protected sectors of the economy continue to produce growing fortunes, while compared with the situation in 2009, the percentage of population living below the poverty line increased from 18% to 25%. The period of the troika saw the most intense cycle of privatizations since the revolution, handing over to foreign capital the airports, control of the energy system, a third of the insurance market and the post office. And the list of privatizations planned for 2014 extends from air travel to suburban railway lines and the treatment of solid waste in the cities.

The unemployment figures are barely disguised by state initiatives that remove a significant portion of the unemployed from the statistics, and especially by the forced exodus of over one hundred thousand Portuguese per year. At the same time, more than half of those who still had a job received the minimum wage (485 Euros) or suffered pay cuts of 23%. In Portugal there are 5.5 million people able to work. 1.2 million are unemployed or have emigrated. Nearly one million work less than ten hours a week. One million work more than forty hours a week.

"All that is solid" …

The Portuguese experience over the last 40 years conjures up the bitter memory of the "irreversibility" of the popular conquests included in the 1976 Constitution. The huge fright suffered by the Portuguese oligarchy during that short period was the result of a "hot" democratic transition (unlike the "cold" one in the Spanish state). Within that, after the masses first erupted on the social and political stage in April and May 1974, there appeared signs of the "old mole" of socialist revolution at work, with forays into private property and control over both territory and businesses. But the order of the State itself was never lost (however many of

its parts seemed to have been "lost" at one point or another). Slowly, patiently, absorbing partial victories and historic advances, it was able to restore consensus, that is, the full control of the ruling class.

With the number of people leaving Portugal now back to the level of the sixties (when malnutrition and war forced hundreds of thousands of Portuguese to flee their country), the current Portuguese tragedy finally puts paid to the gradualist illusions of some on the left. Those who thought the pre-revolutionary crisis of 1974-75 might be the beginning of a democratic and social modernization of the country, in line with the PCP's doctrine of the sixties on the tasks of the democratic, anti-monopolistic revolution, can today see exactly what an "advanced democracy" under the sway of capital looks like.

For those on the left who today struggle for a majority of society to break with the blackmail of the creditors, who advocate nationalizing the banks and the strategic sectors of the economy to achieve economic self-determination and to break with the mechanisms that constrain democracy – like the European treaties and NATO's militarism - the experience of the pre - revolutionary crisis of 1974-75 continues to be an absolutely fundamental lesson about the nature of the power of the bourgeoisie, and its ability to survive, adapt and restructure.

In those nineteen months that were so unique in Portuguese history, because of the scale of mass involvement in the revolutionary process, the people won a dignity they had never had before, and changed the face of the country. That is why, even in the dark times that workers face today – or especially in these times – the streets of Portugal continue to reverberate with the song that, in the early hours of April 25, gave the signal to the rebels to leave their barracks, José Afonso's "Grândola, Vila Morena".

Footnotes

[1] On the issue of decolonization, which is not dealt with in this text, we repeat a passage from the book, *O Socialismo, a Transição e o Caso Português* (1976), in which Joao Martins Pereira explains why his own analysis gives so little space to the topic: "the problem of decolonization and Portugal's geo-strategic position were hugely important factors in the 'party game' (...) But how could Portuguese workers understand 'the class struggle on a world scale', when these parties concealed from them what was really going on in the ex-colonies, constrained as they were by what they believed to be (or really were) the U.S., Russian or Chinese strategies for those parts of the world? (In the everyday political turmoil of revolution), who could have realized the part that would be played in preparing the 25 November, by the *returnees* (half a million Portuguese inhabitants of the former colonies disembarked in Lisbon in the course of 1975), and by the 'high-level talks' on recognition of the MPLA government in Angola."

Forty years later: the grandeur and the limits of the Portuguese Revolution

24 April 2014, by Ugo Palheta

From April 1974 to November 1975, the Portuguese working class sought to break the state apparatus inherited from the Salazar regime and to invent roads towards a democratic socialism in the conditions of economic backwardness and political repression bequeathed by a dictatorship that had held power for over forty years. Rooted partly on the terrain of contradictions specific to Portuguese colonialism, the revolution began on April 25, 1974 by a revolt of captains organized in the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), before becoming radicalized by leaps and bounds - through increasing self-organization in the workplaces and the neighborhoods, among the soldiers and the peasants - in response to the successive attempts of the ruling class to stop its forward march.

It took all the counter-revolutionary determination of the bourgeoisie, based on conservative factions of the army and on the ideological power of the Church, to push back popular militancy and the rise of a broad anti-capitalist consciousness. The responsibility also lies with the two major parties of the Portuguese Left, each in its own way: whereas the Socialist Party (PSP) fully assumed the task of managing loyally the interests of the bourgeoisie and maintaining the structures of the capitalist state, the Communist Party (PCP) devoted much of its energy to diverting the proletariat from any autonomous political action and to limiting the objectives of the struggle, seeking to undermine the growing audience of the far-left groups (Maoists and Trotskyists).

A revolution with deep roots

A revolution is never a flash of lightning in a clear blue sky; it announces its coming through multiple warning signs that most often only become legible as such after the fact, once the popular uprising has begun.

This difficulty in interpreting the silent modification of the balance of forces and the convulsions of popular anger explains why genuinely revolutionary organizations rarely take the initiative during the early stages of a revolution and may have the greatest difficulty in conquering influence within mass movements, especially when they are faced with more structured parties that have superior financial resources, regular access to the mainstream media and an audience that has been won over many years.

The Portuguese Revolution plunged its roots in the crisis of the Salazar regime. A fascist dictatorship based on a reactionary ideology which would serve as inspiration for the Vichy regime, the *Estado novo* ("New State") presents original features in comparison with the fascist regimes of Mussolini and Hitler, features that help to explain both its longevity and its weakness at the moment of its crisis in the early 1970s.

If the regime founded in 1933 by Salazar [1] lasted so long, it is because it succeeded in uniting the various factions of the Portuguese ruling class around a political project based on the repression of any trade-union and political opposition [2], ensuring the super-exploitation of the proletariat and the defence of big landed property, but also on the continuation of a particularly brutal colonial rule.

Nevertheless, unlike the dictatorships of Mussolini and Hitler, the advent and the installation of this dictatorship was not the product of a political radicalization of the petty bourgeoisie or a fraction of the bourgeoisie, expressed in mass fascist parties fighting the organizations of the working class. It was only once the state apparatus had been put in place by Salazar that he deemed it appropriate to develop a single party - the National Union, which later became the National People's Action - which never had the vigour and the autonomy of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) in Germany.

Not only did the regime not really succeed in inspiring mass support for its policies, but the bourgeoisie remained incapable of structuring itself in an autonomous way in the political sphere. This partly explains its stupefaction in the period following April 25, 1974, unable as it was to find a capitalist solution to the political crisis triggered by the revolt of the captains.

But it was essentially the colonial wars, which began in 1961, that were going to upset the internal equilibriums of the *Estado novo*, by becoming intertwined with the crisis of the regime opened up by the candidacy of General Humberto Delgado in the presidential election of 1958. Delgado succeeded in uniting around his name the antifascist opposition, restructured and revitalized after the Second World War, but the election was characterized by massive electoral fraud and was followed by the assassination of Delgado in 1965.

At that point the regime revealed itself to everyone in its true light: a violent dictatorship, repressing by murder, imprisonment or exile any hint of opposition or autonomy. In relation to the size of the country, the wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau would cost in lives and money twice as much as did the Vietnam War for the United States, [