

Morocco: The hidden face of the Kingdom

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The Moroccan regime seems an exception to the sombre general picture of the Arab region. Although known at the time of Hassan II as an autocratic and medieval regime symbolized by the terrible prison at Tazmamart, Hassan had, right before his death in 1999, released the majority of political prisoners, in particular Abraham Serfaty, and signed a compromise with the opposition in the form of a government, 38 years after having expelled this opposition from the government.

This government, known as the government “of alternation”, was chaired by the secretary general of the Socialist Union of the Popular Forces (USFP), the biggest recognized opposition party.

The current king continues to mask tyranny by measures without any political or economic cost: minor revision of the family code, creation of the so-called “Equity and Reconciliation Body” to turn the page on repression (aided by a team of Stalinist veterans converted to liberalism and monarchy), dismissal of Driss Basri, minister of the Interior under Hassan II, permission for the press to exhume the dictatorial past and to discuss some taboos. In addition, the current king has made slight concessions to the Amazigh movement, in particular with the creation of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) and the teaching of this language which was banned for centuries.

These measures, whose resonance was inflated by the local media and the voices of the pro-Moroccan regime imperialist forces, are the basis of its reputation among the similar autocratic systems of the region.

There is, of course, a characteristic of the Moroccan system since official independence 52 years ago: it involves the existence of parties and trade unions and a more or less reduced margin of freedoms according to the situation. This characteristic is not a gift but the result of a relationship of forces: the monarchy for example, even if it monopolized power, could not prohibit the Istiqlal Party or the Moroccan Union of Labour (UMT - trade union) which were the two biggest organizations which had contributed to the national struggle.

There is no doubt that the heavy heritage of the Hassan II regime as regards attacks on freedoms

and repression of the opposition, and also at the level of impoverishment, illiteracy and backwardness, is the principal reason for the efforts by the new king to embellish the image of the regime and to absorb the growing popular discontent, while preserving its autocratic essence and continuing the implementation of neoliberal policies and the tasks entrusted to it by the imperialist forces.

Imperialist domination

The principal factor which determines the political situation in Morocco is imperialist domination which is consolidated through to the co-operation of the monarchy and part of the dominant classes. This domination is reinforced by the mechanism of the debt and free trade (the so-called partnership with the European Union rests mainly on the historical interests of European imperialism in the area, the free trade agreements with the United States also express imperial ambitions for a greater presence). The goal of this domination is to perpetuate and promote the interests of the multinationals and the creditor countries through plundering - by taking possession of part of the economy (privatization) - and the exhaustion of natural resources.

The economic presence of the old colonial power - France - continues and is reinforced, as shown by its share in foreign direct investment, whose annual average over the period 2001-2006 was 1.16 billion euros, or approximately 60% of total foreign investment in Morocco. Spain comes second with 15% over the same period.

The problem of the state foreign debt continues: while it fell from 21.3 billion dollars in 1992 to 12.4 billion in 2005, over the same period Morocco paid 36 billion dollars in debt servicing.

This fall in foreign debt is accompanied by an important rise in domestic debt. At the end of 2007, the national debt was 386.4 billion dirhams (approximately 50 billion dollars), including 122.3 billion dirhams for state foreign debt and 264.1 billion dirhams for internal debt. Debt servicing constituted 43% of the total state budget in 2007.

As for the free trade agreements, they lead only to catastrophes. The best example lies in the trade deficit with the European Union, which went from 12 billion dirhams in 2000 to 27.7 billion in 2006.

The mechanism of the debt is not only used to draw profit, but makes it possible to control the economic policy of the country by a systematic submission of development and public investment to the priority of payment and an adaptation to the division of international production: to specialize in the export of basic products to the detriment of production for the domestic market and to practise a total commercial opening which turns the country into a simple raw material and agricultural exporter as well as a privileged place for subcontracting. Shortly after its appointment, with the elections of September 2007, the current government received a new World Bank report which will serve as its roadmap.

After more than a quarter century of World Bank and IMF policies, the roads to development remain blocked: weak economic growth (a rate of 3% per annum), dependence on external financing (loans and direct foreign investment), and the country remains deeply affected by climatic conditions [the growth rate dropped in 2007 to 2% because of the lack of rain], without forgetting the failure of the gamble made on exports because of growing difficulties on the foreign markets due to the cancellation of entry privileges and to the reinforcement of competition from Southeast Asia, China and Eastern Europe.

With regard to the domestic market, it has atrophied because of the reduction in state expenditure

and impoverishment (the Moroccan market is the equivalent of that of a European city of 1.5 million people whereas the population of the country is more than 34 million) in spite of the great part played by funds from Moroccans residing abroad (a source of subsistence for most of the population and the biggest currency import).

Moreover, we can expect that the current policy of opening will lead to the destruction of most of the economic fabric (two thirds of the industrial companies export less than 10% of their production). That will do nothing but exacerbate the problem of unemployment and the explosion of the social situation in general. Free trade and privatization will result in reinforcing the financial crisis of the State which will attempt to resolve it by reaching into the pockets of the citizens.

In the light of these deep changes resulting from the economic policy imposed by the imperialist institutions, the interests of sections of the local bourgeoisie have been affected. Big capital, to adapt, has tried to re-orientate its activities and to concentrate them while seeking partnerships with world capital.

In the absence of real economic development, the weight of the drugs economy increases. Thus, the production of Kif has become the principal source of income for broad layers of working people in the area of the Rif and represents a response to a social problem in this sensitive region for the system (repressed in 1958 and 1984). This drug economy has become a source of financing for other branches of the economy, as well as both the government (which makes use of it to finance slush funds) and gangsters, who use Morocco as an international base to promote other types of drugs (the airport at Casablanca).

At the level of foreign politics, after the abrupt change of the world situation following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its system, the role of the monarchy in the subordination of the area to imperialism (the fight against Communism and so on) has changed.

The monarchy committed itself to the new imperialist project for the area (the fight against terrorism, the project of the Greater Middle East). It thus sent 2,000 Moroccan troops within the framework of the war in Iraq in 1991, and supported the policies of the imperialists in several areas (Bosnia, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Congo and so on).

The role of the Moroccan regime in the service of the "war on terror" increased, mainly due to the significant role of Moroccans in the Al-Qaida's global networks, in particular in Europe. This is accompanied by the reinforcement of the imperialist military presence in the area (by regional military exercises with NATO and a military base close to Tan-Tan) and the attribution by European imperialism to the monarchy of a new role of frontier guard in relation to the waves by immigration of the victims of neoliberal policies in Africa.

The question of the Sahara

Mohammed VI inherited a conflict which goes back a quarter of a century and which was used to control the internal situation, in particular by uniting around the regime the parties originating from the national movement. This conflict constitutes a significant burden for the economy and has created an unstable regional political situation. It constitutes an embarrassment for the "new era" at the level of human rights because of the policy of assassinations and crimes against the people of the Sahara who support the Polisario Front.

After the death of Hassan II, the regime sought a solution involving Polisario (or parts of the latter) without calling into question what is referred to as "territorial integrity", and faced the emergence

of a movement of protest proclaiming independence within the Sahara. This movement still remains weak in terms of expansion and popular base, being made up mainly of young people, and has been reduced by repression and the policy of privileges. The preceding generation does not take part in it (it is still feeling the effects of the terrible atrocities of the Hassan II years). This oppositional movement emerged following the revolt of Laayoune in 1999 on the basis of social demands and constituted a political outlet for the Polisario Front after the cease-fire.

For its part, the Polisario Front is experiencing a situation of weakness after 15 years of an end to war and following the collapse of the Eastern bloc (an important loss of political and financial support). The tough living conditions of its popular base in the camps contribute to this weakening. All this is located in a context of social transformation represented by the passage of the Sahrawi people to a situation of relative stability, which explains the temptation to accept the offers of the regime and to end their support for Saharan independence.

The situation of hundreds of thousands of Sahrawi refugees in the desert, under very difficult conditions, and the birth of a new generation which is cultivated and open to the external world, also represent factors of pressure on the Polisario Front to find a solution. The latter has experienced an ideological adaptation after the fall of the Eastern bloc (the fundamental principles of the Constitution rest on recourse to private and liberal initiative, and there is an absence of any anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist and anti-reactionary basis).

The Moroccan regime continues to exploit the region economically (in particular the exploitation of phosphate in collaboration with Spanish imperialism which gained 35% of the phosphate of Bokraa at the tripartite Convention in Madrid 32 years ago; the exploitation of maritime wealth in co-operation with the European Union in particular). This exploitation will increase with the strong probability of the existence of oil. The Moroccan regime has created a new situation by the transfer of population to the Sahara for the referendum and the mass exodus caused by the high rate of unemployment in Morocco.

The Moroccan regime benefits, in its search to find a solution to the conflict in the Sahara, from the full support of French imperialism and the position of Spanish imperialism which has changed in its favour. The future of the conflict will depend on the attitude of US imperialism, which currently invests more economic interests in the Algerian regime than in Morocco. In any case, imperialism has no interest in resolving the conflict in the Sahara in a way which could lead to the fall of the monarchy, a good servant of its historical interests and a guarantor of stability.

The offer of autonomy suggested by the Moroccan regime will clarify the objectives of imperialism. It should also clarify those of the leaders of Polisario, because any formula of autonomy within the framework of the royal autocracy does not answer the aspirations of the masses which support it but constitutes an occasion for it to accept the offers and privileges that monarchy is ready to grant an elite.

The new plans of US imperialism in the area could push the conflict in the Sahara to the foreground of questions of domestic policy, in particular after the breathlessness of the organization of the referendum, the Baker plan and the success of the Polisario Front in transferring the political battle inside the Sahara after 15 years of cease-fire. Imperialism can use this question to push the Moroccan regime to serve its goals still more: normalization of relations with Israel as well as services on various fronts.

The revolutionary communist position is based on defence of the right of the population of the Sahara to self-determination, defence of the liberation of all the peoples of the area and their unity, as precondition and essential framework for the construction of a socialist society.

Monarchical despotism

Since “independence”, the monarchy has controlled the country with an iron hand, monopolizing power, guaranteeing the interests of imperialism and using its position to reinforce the bourgeois class and to weave alliances with a part of the latter. The monarchy is the guarantor of the general interest of the bourgeoisie (it secures the conditions for the exploitation and repression of the workers) and governs in its place. Like other autocratic regimes, it directs the country with two governments, the first, effective, with the king at its head, is made up of the people of the seraglio, whereas the second is a front government within the framework of a constitution and phoney institutions.

This regime was stabilized in the middle of the 1970s, after having emerged intact from risings of the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, as well as after the eradication by repression of the radical left whereas a part of the bourgeois opposition had adopted a policy of unanimity on the Sahara.

The two decades until the death of Hassan II were characterized by an absolute power masked by “elected” institutions, corruption and enrichment by plundering.

The coming to power of Mohammed VI constitutes continuity with the Hassan II era on all levels: monopoly of power and reinforcement of the economic role of monarchy. The only innovations are at a symbolic level (the return of Abraham Serfaty, the lifting of Sheik Yassin’s house arrest, the dismissal of Driss Basri and so on).

In essence, the monarchy continued to use two governments, royal commissions, the royal funds and the powers, as well as the constitution of 1996 which created a system with two chambers without precedent in the world, intended to control the structure of the institutions. The falsification of elections continued as well as the imposition of a political map by the limitation of the electoral strength of the Justice and Development party.

The so-called “new era” started in fact during the latter years of the reign of Hassan II, with the aim of ensuring a transition from the Mohammed VI regime and of intensifying the neoliberal attack which had been led by the “left” (the parties with influence on the trade union and popular movement).

The new king inherited an unstable situation. He tried to calm the situation without calling into question socio-economic choices and the reduction of freedoms. He tackled problems with a strong symbolic impact which were inexpensive to deal with, like the attempt to turn the page on the crimes of liquidation of the opposition through the so-called “equity and reconciliation body” and the effort to resolve the conflict on the personal status code. He has also tried to absorb most of the Amazigh elite by the creation of the Royal Institute for Amazigh culture and, more generally, to attract the elites, in particular those of left origin, towards his institutions (human rights, audio-visual and so on).

The liberal enslavement

The end of the 1980s represented a turning point in the relations between the bourgeois opposition and monarchy. After having accepted the conditions of “democratic” participation which introduced these parties within the institutions camouflaging absolute power, within the framework of the regrouping around the monarchy (national union around the Sahara), the opposition demanded the

widening of the space granted to it. These demands came within an international context marked by the wave of democratic demands which brought down many authoritative regimes and by the pressures exerted by the imperialist forces.

This political landscape (so-called motion of censure, strike of December 1990, motions to modify the Constitution, constitution of the so-called “democratic bloc” and so on) ran up against the will of the king to keep all his powers and ended in the total submission of the “government of transition”.

All the plans of monarchy were accepted. In addition to the inability to modify by one iota its absolute nature, this is due to the class nature of the so-called democratic forces. These forces expressed the interests of the bourgeoisie aspiring to progress, i.e. within a more structured and more stable legal framework, with respect for the law and Constitution and with the guarantee of a minimum of political freedoms. But this is a middle-class which fears democracy and the mass movements more than it fears the reactionary force. This is what explains its tendency to make concessions, compromises and to defend the Makhzen [the governing elite around the king].

The neoliberal offensive has harmed the interests of a section of the propertied classes (that depending on the domestic market and state investment), however they try to adapt instead of resisting. Their parties fear the Salafist current and a social explosion, which encourages them to provide all their services to the monarchy without conditions. That has led to the erosion of the traditional parties of the palace (the so-called “parties of the administration”). The liberal opposition constructs a new national union around the regime against what it regards as a danger to the country: the Salafist upsurge which made the “Justice and Benevolence” party the strongest from the organisational point of view.

The conflict in the liberal camp concerning the evaluation of the political situation and tactics gave birth to a minority represented by the United Socialist Party which clings to the demand for a constitutional reform, joined by other non-partisan voices which have emerged - in the press in particular - and form the current liberal opposition.

The Salafist threat

The rise of the Salafist movement of all tendencies (Justice and Benevolence, Justice and Development party and Salafiya Jihadiya) represents the result of the socio-economic crisis combined with the historical failure of the left.

The major component of the Salafist movement crystallized at the end of the 1960s and the other at the end of the 1970s and expanded at the beginning of the 1990s, when it eliminated the left from the universities by violence.

The collapse of Eastern Europe reduced still further the forces of left, which made it possible for the Salafists to be reinforced, the regional situation helping: Iran, Afghanistan, the situation in Palestine, Al-Qaida, Hezbollah. These forces also profited from massive politicization after the second Gulf war, which coincided with an additional decline of the left.

The social base of the Salafist movement is among the educated popular classes, in particular dissatisfied young people, the commercial lower middle class and the informal sectors. This movement is also built by using social assistance.

The current activity of largest of the Salafist forces, “Justice and Benevolence”, is limited to propaganda, the accumulation of forces and the rejection of the political game of the regime. On the

other hand, the "Justice and Development" party has joined the democratic pseudo-institutions, while steadily following the imperialist political line in the country, being characterized by its call for an Islamic moral order. This party represents the spare wheel of the governmental game of the regime. It is a tool which can be used against any real left project.

The widening of the social base of the Salafists constitutes an obstacle for the work of revolutionaries among the working masses, in particular young people. The revolutionary socialist project will not advance without a political battle with the Salafists.

The Amazigh movement

After the media and organisational expansion (national and local associations) of the movement in the early 1990s and its emergence in the universities, which enabled it to extend its base among the elites and among educated youth, the regime succeeded in attracting most of its leadership to the Royal Institute for Amazigh culture and corrupting most of these elements by "initiatives of development".

This movement was quickly dominated by its right wing, which gathered around the palace, presented as the defender of the Amazighs in relation to the political parties, all considered as Arabist.

A trade union movement under the supervision of the bourgeoisie

The principal characteristic of the trade union movement in Morocco is the political absence of independence, seven decades after its birth. The bourgeois national movement succeeded in structuring the trade union movement at the expense of the Moroccan Stalinists, who had played a key part in the construction of this trade union movement under the occupation. The installation of Ben Seddik as head of the UMP trade union since its foundation was a symbol of the political relation of supervision exerted historically by the bourgeois national movement over the workers.

The bourgeois opposition has succeeded in controlling part of the trade union movement by founding the Democratic Confederation of Labour (CDT) at the end of the 1970s. The CDT was rebuilt then, after repression in 1979 and 1981, by sweeping the Moroccan Union of Labour out of its historic sites (mines, rail and so on).

The liberal opposition used the trade unions on the one hand to slow down the combativeness of the workers in the service of social peace and, on the other hand, to make pressure on the regime according to its political needs. The bourgeois parties use the trade unions for their political needs, when the latter change the trade-union tactics change. The political domination of the bourgeoisie over the trade union movement is based on the absence of an independent trade-union press and on the diffusion of the ideology of the democratic ally (by inviting it to vote for it at elections) and not only on bureaucratic control.

The Moroccan Union of Labour (UMT) continues to be integrated more and more into the regime. It is made up of a corrupted bureaucracy; its leaders are obscenely rich and ignore any national struggle.

After the total submission of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), the most dynamic part of the trade union movement entered a new phase, leading to the split of the Party of National Congress, Ittihadi, which remained faithful to the political vision of the old USFP (to persuade the

workers of the need for making sacrifices today to gain tomorrow: to guarantee the social peace which protects the stability of labour). This tendency to class collaboration is subject to the fluctuations of the trade-union bureaucracy which needs to ensure social peace at the same time as preserving the basis of the trade union.

The trade union movement is going through a difficult period, following the bourgeois attack combined with the pressure of unemployment and an internal crisis (organisational retreat, splits, sectoral work, co-operation of the leaderships with the State and the employers). Working class resistance is at the last lines of defence in particular in the private sector where strikes and sit-ins are limited to defending the right to work against collective redundancies and closures of factory and defence of the right to form a union.

The trade union movement has accumulated many defeats through the collusion of the bureaucracy in pushing through the projects of the employers and their State: the labour code, Social Security cover, retirement, voluntary redundancy, the Charter of education. The other face of this degradation is illustrated in bureaucratic arbitrariness.

The elements of a new rebirth of the trade union movement appeared at the time of the strike in road transport in March and April 2007, when the draft highway code was at the origin of the explosion of a working class militant force in a sector super-exploiting workers. The rebirth also appeared in the vast movement of enrolment of agricultural workers in the Souss, in the south of Morocco, and in the democratic movement of struggle within the CDT in the local communities. But all these elements suffer nevertheless from the catastrophic situation of the trade unions in general and the weakness of the forces of the combative trade-union left.

New popular protests

The strict application of the policy of impoverishment and austerity in welfare expenditure since the beginning of the 1980s has led to social explosions (June 1981, January 1984, December 1990) where energies in struggle were dissipated because of the absence of political prospects. The regime controlled the explosive situation by bringing the trade unions to heel and repression of the embryos of organization and struggle. It succeeded in intensifying its attacks in all fields (by privatising all that had been public). The popular masses began to protest against the results of neoliberal policies: the mobilization of the population of Yacoub el Mansour in Rabat against the Redal company and the inhabitants of Tétouan against the Amandis company are examples. Villagers also started to protest against poor social conditions (basic infrastructures) and to resist abuses : plundering of collective lands, imposition of tariffs for hospitalization, plundering of money from rural communes (Has Bilal, Imlchil, Itzer, Tata, Ifni, Boumalen Dades, Oulmès, Tamasint, Lakhwalka, Douar Beggara in the area of Larache and so on).

These popular uprisings represented a qualitative change in the rural areas which were since the end of the colonial era passive zones (except for the emergence of the Army of Liberation which did not survive for a long time). The regime succeeded in choking the demand for land reform and distributed the lands of the former colonists to reinforce its alliances. It also strengthened police repression in the rural areas compared to the majority of the cities (going as far as harassing the bourgeois opposition there).

These demonstrations were born from a context of abandonment of their role by the trade unions, the retreat of human rights associations, abstention from the traditional left and the weakness of the radical left.

The popular protest against the effects of the privatization of water and electricity represented an opportunity for the construction of a mass movement against capitalist globalization, but that failed because of the organisational crisis of Attac-Morocco since its constitution.

The popular response to the high cost of living, and the success of some coordinations of organisations protesting against it, shows the possibilities of advancing in the construction of a popular activist movement.

The movement of young people

The response of students to the application of the neoliberal Education Charter was limited because it was fragmented, taking place in the absence of a minimum of organization, considering that the student union continues to exist in name only, a quarter century after its last congress and campaigns to uproot it.

The liberal left contributed to the implementation of the reform including on the administration boards of the universities. The radical left remains weak and suffers from the absence of program, part of its student current is unstructured and completely disorganized and it contributes to the persistence of the crisis of the student movement by its sectarianism and the excessive use of violence against other currents, in particular against revolutionary Marxists.

The most serious rivals are the Salafists, who are armed with a program of society capable of indoctrinating dissatisfied students, in a general regional political context characterized by the decline of the left.

The movement of unemployed graduates and the fight against unemployment

The movement of young unemployed graduates is in total isolation (even if the trade unions, associations, reformist parties and the radical left reaffirm their support in principle). The left, dominant within it, continues to be a barrier to its struggles. This movement is in unprecedented crisis.

The accentuation of the degradation of social condition gives a great importance to the struggle of the movement of the unemployed because the fight against unemployment directly challenges the state and poses the need for global alternatives. The National Association of Unemployed Graduates of Morocco (ANDCM) reinforces the trade union and popular movement while giving life to the traditions of struggle and the creation of other organizations; its influence is increasing in its popular and working class environment, including in the most remote areas of the country, without forgetting its role in the structuring of a young rank and file which is seeing a first experience of struggle. The existence of a movement of the organized jobless without revolutionaries working at its centre constitutes a direct danger to the working class (interim, training courses, training for integration and so on)

The crisis of the subjective factor

The incipient Marxist left, from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, suffered from repression and political inadequacy. Repression largely limited its possibilities of working openly in the working class and popular milieus. The context of the radicalisation of youth gave opportunities

which were lost because of the leftist nature of this radical left (substituting itself for the masses). It entered a lasting crisis. The collapse of the Eastern bloc stimulated a rightist deviation, which led a great part of it to give up the central character of the working class struggle and to turn to liberal positions.

The attempt at regroupment in the 1990s led the majority to line up behind the liberal left (United Socialist Party), but also to the constitution of the movement "the Democratic Way": this current is characterized by a verbal radicalism which in practice does not have any impact inside the popular organizations. It is obsessed by the institutions within the framework of the mass movements and has contempt for the use of the elections in its political struggle. Its political alliances (Rally of the Democratic Left) limit its actions within the trade unions.

All this has marked its functioning by a truce with the bureaucracy and the disarmament of the rank and file of the trade unions. Sometimes it has become an instrument of the bureaucracy, as within the National Agriculture Union with regard to the privatization of the agricultural development company (SODEA) and the agricultural land management company (SOGETA). Some of its leaders behave as representatives of the bureaucracy in organizations such as the social security and the Commission created by the regime to push through the World Bank reform of pension systems.

Conclusion

Imperialism continues gradually but firmly to apply neoliberal policies, with the support of all the political forces, which raises an unprecedented degree of hostility. These policies will be widened and deepened after the elections.

The situation can develop in the direction of a possible Salafist scenario, given the general climate of the region, Islamization of society and reinforcement of the Salafist forces. That could in particular occur if "Justice and Benevolence" decided to transcend its current work of propaganda and accumulation of forces to direct itself towards a political intervention with clear objectives. On the other hand the "Justice and Development" party can only play the part of a pillar of the system and it is intensifying its activity against a progressive democratic alternative.

The current situation bears possibilities of spontaneous social explosions, in response to the deterioration of the living conditions of most Moroccans. These explosions will be the subject of repression, as was the case with Sefrou in September 2007 and Sidi Ifni currently. The current situation shows that the remainder of the radical left will have a limited role in the fights to come, the so-called "rally of the democratic left" will remain in the margin of the social struggles after its failure to act on the political terrain apart from agreements to run candidates at the elections.

This situation gives all the more responsibilities to revolutionary Marxists.

P.S.

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