

The heartbeat of the Arab revolutions

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Much has been written already about the revolutions in the Maghreb and the Arab world and their historical significance. Less emphasis has been placed, however, on the relevance they have for the European left.

The first important question we face is precisely that of the return of the idea of revolution. “Always anachronistic, outdated, untimely, the revolution comes from the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’, never to the point, never timely. Punctuality is not its forte. It likes improvisation and surprises. It can only happen, and this is not its least paradox, if unexpected”, said Daniel Bensaid. The unforeseen events in Tunisia and Egypt are situated in the collective imagination of the idea that collective action is useful, that you can achieve things through social mobilization and broaden the horizon of the possible. That their impact on the minds of European workers is limited is clear, because of the political and cultural distance. But, even so, they are a counter-example to the everyday experience of social struggles in our country. A message of hope before resignation and discouragement after decades of setbacks and defeats.

The developments in the Maghreb and the Arab world must serve us, also, in combating a rising xenophobia, the association between immigration of Muslim origin and religious fundamentalism. The protests and the revolutions in motion in favour of democracy, social justice, the improvement of the status of women and so on highlight the fallacy of the “clash of civilizations” and cultural prejudices

The political ferment in the region also causes a growing politicization of the immigrant population, creating a better scenario for the confluence between it and the “native” left. A strategic gain in dealing with neo-liberalism and the attempts to make all of us pay for the crisis.

Strengthened international solidarity with the process under way should be a priority for the social movements here. To do that we need to focus on what is happening. First, we should ignore the conspiracy theories that see the hand of the CIA behind the revolts. No doubt conspiracies exist, but we cannot interpret history in terms of conspiracy. It seems that the very notion of revolution has weakened so much that it is not just believed and non-existent plots are seen where there are only explosions of anger and rage against injustice!

Second, there should be no confusion in the Libyan case. The defence of Gaddafi in the name of anti-imperialism mounted by some sectors of the left, in particular under the leadership of Hugo Chavez, is a serious mistake which only serves to mislead the international solidarity movement. In Libya, however, another (complex) dilemma is posed where the European left must not fail: the need to oppose the military intervention of NATO which, far from defending the democratic aspirations of the Libyan people, aims to control the post-Gaddafi stage and the exploitation of oil. International political and economic isolation of the regime and the unconditional provision of weapons to the rebels are an internationalist and solidarity-based alternative to military intervention.

Despite all the difficulties, the rise of protests in countries such as Syria shows that the dynamic initiated in Tunisia has not vanished. We should not romantically beautify the processes underway or ignore their shortcomings, nor should we dismiss them because they are not yet “true revolutions”

that have managed to overturn the economic and social order. The great political, organizational and cultural weakness of the left in the region is one of their Achilles heels. These first “revolutions of the 21st century” are contradictory and limited, do not follow a predetermined model and their result is open and uncertain. The challenge is to precisely go all the way with all the consequences of that, so that the hope for change does not remain frustrated and, finally, “everything changes so that things remain the same”.

The strength of the unexpected winds blowing in the Maghreb and the Arab world in the past few months not only electrify the region but give new hope to the social movements here, rich in losses and disappointments but lacking in victories.

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