



**Protest
Movements
in Morocco
and the Role
of the Political Left
in Mobilization against
Neoliberal Policies**



**ROSA
LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG**

مكتب شمال إفريقيا
North Africa Office

Ali Aznague

member of Attac Maroc

Capitalism is witnessing violent economic shocks since 2008. For some liberal analysts, these amount to no more than a temporary recession that can be overcome with time through few reforms. Such analysts herald an improvement of the international economy and periods of prosperity in the foreseeable future. Eight years after a multifaceted crisis: social, environmental, financial, agrarian, and energy-related, the realization of such optimism has long been awaited.

Others, hostile to capitalist globalization, see in the unfolding economic crises the outcome of structural imbalances characteristic of the capitalist system. Such imbalances will take more serious dimensions; their effect will impact all economic entities, whether industrialist imperialist with a solid economic base or dependent and vulnerable countries.

Efforts to save world capitalism from collapse have produced dangerous social atrocities and very costly harm. This is the outcome of measures promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to save countries facing eminent collapse (structural adjustment programs in southern countries, financial bail-out plans in Greece, etc.).

The above-mentioned measures deepened a crisis-ridden situation, thus furthering inequality, pushing whole population segments towards total bankruptcy, creating desperation for the majority and privileges for the minority.¹ Add to this the spreading of ethnic strife in Africa and the new rise of racism in some European countries.

As a counterpart to the extremism of financial institutions' conditions, extremism in forms of confrontation and manifestations of the crisis has emerged.

1 Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order (Global Research, 2003)*, 2nd edition, p. 19.

Hence the emergence of reactionary fundamentalist movements, as well as the strengthening security grip and the suppression of freedoms.²

The world seemingly witnesses a decline towards social chaos due to the tragic situation of huge numbers of people combined with the lack of an elaborate alternative capturing the attention of working masses. Neoliberalism thus becomes, according to Bourdieu, "a tendency devoid of the social and historical dimensions, a tendency based on the systematic destruction of all that is social".³ The largest share of responsibility for social polarization at the world level clearly falls upon the capitalist system and its world financial institutions (such as the Paris Club, the IMF and the World Bank), as well as other international institutions such as the European Union, the World Trade Organization and the Davos Forum. The widespread repression and corruption in the apparatuses of underdeveloped countries contribute to this state of affairs, without neglecting the role of world imperialisms in supporting and sustaining regimes aiming at preserving the status quo and clamping down on popular uprisings (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Greece...).

The impact of this deepening crisis is reflected in the condition of millions of our planet's inhabitants: declining purchasing power, mass unemployment, bankruptcy of small and medium enterprises, collective layoff of workers, deteriorating conditions for small peasants, and the blockage of prospects for the youth. Such conditions constitute part and

2 Pierre Rousset, "Capitalist globalization, imperialisms, geopolitical chaos and their implications", *International Viewpoint*, 19 October 2014 (<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3669>).

3 Abd al-Rehim al-Atari, *Al-Harakat al-egtema'iya bel-Maghreb: mo'asherat al-ehtekan wa moqademat al-sokht al-sha'bi (Social Movements in Morocco: Indicators of Tension and Beginnings of Popular Discontent)*, *Dafater Weghat Nazar*, No 14, p. 38.

parcel of the deep causes for the shocks, even revolts, occurring in several parts of the world, the Arab region being at the forefront since 2010. The Moroccan monarchy, which claims to constitute an exception in this regard, is certainly no less vulnerable to unprecedented social resistance movements that might be moving in the same direction.

The political situation and the confrontation between the state and protest movements

Moroccan youth participated in movements all over the region since 2010 against despotism and the IMF- and World Bank-imposed austerity policies, as huge masses erupted calling for social justice (public freedoms, democracy, just distribution of wealth, employment, dignity...).

Those who then stormed into the Moroccan political arena adopted the name "20 February Movement". Mass marches were organized in which thousands of protestors in different cities participated. The vociferous movement has only lasted four months, however, since its inception on 20 February 2011. It declined since then due to a number of factors, including the following:

First, the regime's outmanoeuvring of the movement through significant concessions in different social files. This included the provision of jobs for more than four thousand unemployed university graduates assembled in the capital; wage increases for state and public sector employees; raising the minimum wage in the private sector; regularization of temporary employees after years of demanding it; and the state's turning of a blind eye on unauthorized construction and on street vendors occupying sidewalks and streets. There were political

concessions as well, most prominently enacting the 2011 Constitution stipulating the nomination of the prime minister from the election-winning party, the officialization of the Amazigh language, the principle of gender parity, etc.), conducting early elections, and installing a government headed by the Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP). Such concessions were presented as a positive state response to the demands of the 20 February Movement.

Second, the political weakness of the movement. In fact, the demand for a parliamentary monarchy was confined to a small minority of youth, with little roots among the rank and file. This revealed that decades of severe political repression and efforts to conceal despotism are still having their toll on the conscience of the wider population.

Third, well-dosed repression of the 20 February Movement. This was calculated as to avoid any counter-results in terms of escalation; meanwhile, it contributed significantly to limiting the extension of the movement and its radicalization.

Fourth, the impact of developments in the region (Libya, Syria, and later Egypt). With the rise of fundamentalist movements and the defeat of uprisings calling for improving living conditions under the hammers of counterrevolution (massacres, wars, repression...), the protests of the Moroccan street retracted.

The Moroccan regime thus managed to temporarily weather the storm of protest. Having made the above-mentioned concessions, the regime furthered its neoliberal measures (privatization of the retirement schemes, slashing the compensation fund for consumer-price subsidies, restructuring civil service, etc) once the 20 February Movement has disappeared from the political arena.

Yet, the decline in the social struggle embodied by the 20 February Movement does not usher in the end of social movements rejecting state austerity policies. Instead, forces of popular and labour struggle have surfaced once again from the depths of society; sectorial in nature, they defend previous minute gains. Current popular protests are merely an expression of discontent towards corruption and mass unemployment. They are also responses by the poor who bear the brunt of neoliberal austerity policies sustained by the JDP government since it came to office in 2011.

While the JDP government projected itself as a shield against social shocks, claiming that its *raison d'être* is the restoration of state prestige and the consolidation of social stability as a Moroccan exception in an inflammatory regional milieu, the uniqueness of the exception, contrary to the JDP's claims, is rather the product of a balance of forces between the rulers and those below them.

Moroccan democracy under the JDP government

Since its inception, the JDP assumed the role of reactionary opposition in the Moroccan parliament (opposition to the national plan to integrate women in development, for instance). It was finally allowed to participate in government following change in the political climate, as country rulers found themselves compelled by utter necessity to change the rules of the game under pressure from the street.

It has to be recalled, however, that the JDP had not confined itself to its oppositional role. The party had also infiltrated civil service, one of the strongholds of trade unionism in Morocco, through its trade union arm, the *National Labour Union*

of Morocco (Union Nationale Marocaine du Travail, UNMT). It nurtured, as well, philanthropy and charitable activities in order to gain a wide popular base, until the moment came to fill the vacuum as the party led by Abdelilah Benkirane came in first place in the 2011 parliamentary elections, winning 107 seats.

Little distinguishes the JDP from other Moroccan political parties. It is a reactionary party keen on sustaining the monarchy in which it sees a guarantor for social stability.⁴ The developments of 2011, however, could deceive observers from afar into seeing in them a "democratic" transformation; transitioning from the consensual alternation⁵ government led by the *Socialist Union of Popular Forces* (Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires, USFP) in 1998 to liberal and technocratic governments followed by an Islamist government indeed gives the impression of alternation of power in a regional milieu notoriously characterized by naked despotism.

It is certain though that Morocco does not constitute a spot of light in the region's utter darkness. The apparent alternation in power is nothing but a concealment of the despotic character of government under the banner of the so-called "democratic transition". Keen to sustain their political game, holders of power have internally and externally marketed a democratic façade, while the real rulers are unaccountable.

The Ministry of Interior had hitherto manipulated the keys of elections, crudely interfering in results by means of fraud. The aim was to avoid the UNMT's

⁴ See declaration by Abdelilah Benkirane at the Council of Advisors in 2016 on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hmq2JexKmfM>.

⁵ Alternation (Arabic: at-Tanawoub). "Alternation government" describes the outcome of the national elections of March 1998 that instituted a peaceful rotation of power, including the political opposition.

acquisition of a level of representation deemed too high. In its calculated skirmishes with the regime, the latter would move its trade union base forward, thus intensifying fears that it overpasses its set limits. Once the UNMT submitted totally and participated in the alternation government, presiding over passing measures it used to oppose, the need for crude fraud was no longer there. The monarch has hence established its hegemony over the last remnants of its liberal opponents by attracting them into its own game.

In its turn, the JDP presides over social and political attacks promoted by imperialist institutions, as well as the repression of social resistance and the curtailment of public freedoms.⁶ This is the context for restrictions on the activities of the *Moroccan Association for Human Rights* (Association marocaine des droits humains, AMDH) and the *National Association of Unemployed Graduates in Morocco* (Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc, ANDCM), in addition to the clamp-down on the activities of the anti-neoliberal *Attac Morocco Association* and the different forms of harassment directed against forces outside the political game such as the radical leftist *Democratic Path Party and the Islamist Society for Justice and Charity* (Adl wa Ihssan, referred to as AWI).

The official political game is thus animated by forces among which no disagreement exists on the essence of applied policies (fulfilling commitments to creditors and international financial institutions, and hence sustaining the implementation of the neoliberal program). Opposition from within the dominant institutional setting

⁶ Morocco: Persistent Restrictions on Rights Group, Human Rights Watch, 8 April 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/08/morocco-persistent-restrictions-rights-group>.

does not challenge this policy; it does not seek to be a political forum expressing the social anger evident in frequent protest movements.

Social protests: a collective response to neoliberal attacks

Since the structural adjustment policy of 1983, neoliberal reforms all fall in one and the same framework, that of sustaining the payments for debt servicing in adherence to the writ of international financial institutions. They include legislative reforms aimed at adjusting domestic laws to the requirements of foreign and domestic private capital, i.e. guaranteeing the adaptation of legislation to the requirements of profit.⁷ Through the provision of taxation incentives allowing the opening of the internal market to foreign commodities and investments⁸ and easing the flight of expertise and the transfer of profits, such reforms endanger national sovereignty.

By eroding previous social gains, these reforms were detrimental to the social conditions of the vast majority of popular groups. A significant rise in consumer bills followed the delegation to the private sector of parts of the water and electricity sectors. The health sector witnessed an expansion in non-free public services since the enactment of a decree in March 1999. A package of education “reforms” in recent years (the National Charter of Education and Training, the Emergency Plan, the Strategic Vision, etc.) extended the neoliberal privatization of education to public schools. Meanwhile, the

⁷ Omar Azbaki, Qanun al-maliyya birasm sana 2016: tagsid lel-kheyarat al-neoliberaliya le-daman arbah al-ra'smaleyin 'ala hesam al-ojara' wal-fe'at al-sha'beyya (Finance Law of 2016: Embodying Neoliberal Choices to Guarantee the Profits of Capitalists at the Expense of Wage-Labourers and Popular Groups), Attac Morocco's site, <http://attacmaroc.org/?p=3716>.

⁸ See Attac Morocco, Etefaqat al-tabadol al-hor, etefaqat este'mariyya did al-sho'oub (Free Exchange Agreements: Colonial Agreements), June 2015.

authorities were keen on decreasing employment in the public sector under the pretext of keeping wages within the limits of 11 per cent of GDP.

Such neoliberal attacks combined with the mediocrity of the services provided pushed negatively affected groups to the streets in defence of their daily livelihood. Unconscious of the origin of all calamities, however, such protests tend to retreat as the state interferes to relieve harm with inadequate temporary remedies (equipping a local hospital, the transfer of an official, freezing the effects of certain legislation, private solutions to collective problems, etc.).

A. Ways of deceiving the workers

With the blatant consolidation of social inequality, big donors seek to extinguish the anger of the poor and limit protest movements by subsidizing and financing civil and cooperative associations. The latter witnessed a pandemic expansion throughout the country, with their numbers exceeding 116,000 associations.⁹

In the context of outmanoeuvring social gains, neutralizing a significant part of the oppressed (small peasants, unemployed ...) and concealing the real causes of poverty, the National Human Development Initiative (Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain, INDH) Project of 2005 came to remedy the disastrous consequences of IMF-inspired reforms:

Since the late 1980s, 'poverty alleviation' has become a 'conditionality' of World Bank loan agreements. 'Poverty alleviation' supports the objective of debt-servicing: 'sustainable poverty reduction', under the dominion of the

9 Al-Qods al-'Arabi, Al-Dakhiliya al-Maghrabiyya : 'Adad monazamat al-mogtama' al-madani balagh 116 alfan (Moroccan Interior Ministry: the Number of Civil Society Organizations Reached 116 Thousand, [http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=271337\\$](http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=271337$)).

Bretton Woods institutions, is predicated on slashing social-sector budgets and redirecting expenditure on a selective and token basis 'in favour of the poor'. The 'Social Emergency Fund' (established on the Bolivia-Ghana model) is intent on providing 'a flexible mechanism' for 'managing poverty' while, at the same time, dismantling the state's public finances. The poor are defined in this framework as 'target groups'.

The Social Emergency Fund (SEF) requires a social engineering approach, a policy framework for 'managing poverty' and attenuating social unrest at minimal cost to the creditors. So-called 'targeted programs' earmarked 'to help the poor' combined with 'cost recovery' and the 'privatization' of health and educational services are said to constitute 'a more efficient' way of delivering social programs. The state withdraws and many programs under the jurisdiction of line ministries will henceforth be managed by the organizations of civil society under the umbrella of the SEF.¹⁰

This initiative is part of measures imposed by the World Bank on states willing to benefit from its financial assistance in order to avoid the danger of social explosion. In Morocco, the process was marred by corruption and wasting public money on spurious projects with little relevance to the targeted goals.¹¹

Social safety nets are ineffective in the context of the acceleration of neoliberal measures, the dominance of the market economy, and the debt trap grabbing the country. Add to this the illusionary character of such safety nets, whose purpose is to conceal attacks by the state on meagre social gains under the cover of combating poverty and vulnerability.

Hence the miserable failure of attempts to conceal the impact of neoliberal

10 Michel Chossudovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

11 Maymoun Rahmani, Al-Maghreb al-balad al-sades wates'oun faqran fil-alam (Morocco is the 96st Poorest Country in the World), Attac Morocco's site, <http://attacmaroc.org/?p=1895>.

policies on people's livelihoods, despite the sums of money allocated for that purpose. This failure is accompanied by thousands of the marginalized taking to the streets, raising demands and defending their livelihoods. Despite the common motives and targets of such moves (health, education, employment, housing, infrastructure, etc.), however, they remained dispersed and isolated.

As was mentioned above, the retraction of the 20 February Movement was followed by the rise of others. These are non-politically-loaded movements raising social and economic demands (roads, education, electricity, potable water, health, employment, housing, etc.). They are more militant but with less momentum and less mobilization capacity than the 20 February Movement. Add to this the fact that they extend geographically to villages and cities. We will hereafter focus on some such movements, chosen because they encompass the sectors mostly damaged by the state's neoliberal onslaught.

B. Diverse protest and advocacy movements

■ Medical students: the suddenness of an initially successful social movement

Persistent attacks on health services occur within the framework of a comprehensive review of public spending in the health sector at the levels of equipment, functioning and financing, etc. Targeting the health sector started with the structural adjustment agreement of 1983, as the state outlined a new neoliberal conception of health services and employment in the health sector.

The Moroccan state betted on accelerating the dismantling of the health sector in the context of the defeat of the street mobilization of 2011 and under a

yet-to-be-examined government in office. The militant response of medical students led however to the failure of this gamble. Having lost the battle in front of a militant and organized struggle, the government had to retreat.

In November, the Health Minister in the JDP government was forced to withdraw the draft law of the so-called "mandatory civil service project" requiring medicine graduates to work for two years in remote areas of Morocco, while not counting this two-year period as part of the years of service (seniority). The project does not guarantee permanent employment in the public sector. Retreat came under pressure from medical students and in response to their organized struggle. They achieved an initial victory embodied in freezing the decision. It is noteworthy that protests of medical students suddenly erupted in September 2015 while the street was witnessing a retreat in militancy. To express their rejection of the project, students boycotted theoretical and practical lessons in provincial hospitals and public clinics.

Families supported the struggle of their children and their demands. With the increased ferocity of neoliberal attacks and the blockage in prospects of thousands of youth, middle income families suffered in their turn from current reforms (education, health, employment, etc.).

The successful students' struggle was led by general assemblies, the most democratic of forms allowing the resort to collective discussion in all decision-making. Opinions and ideas of all sorts were solicited. Note also the scale of mobilization, with the participation of almost ten thousand female and male students. Protests extended as well to a wide geographic area, including all

cities with medicine faculties: Marrakech, Casablanca, Oujda and Rabat. It is equally noteworthy that these struggles took place away from the historical student organization, the National Moroccan Student Union, due to its persistent organizational crisis and calcification over more than three decades.

Following their long strike and the resulting disruption of work at public hospitals, the state negotiated with medical students. It provided formal concessions that did not touch the essence of the reform and its devastating effect on health. The freezing of the ministerial decision was followed by lifting the strike in November 2015.

■ Tangier inhabitants' protest wave against the French company *Amendis*

Consumer bills have been hugely rising ever since the French company

was awarded a concession to run the water and electricity sectors in the city of Tangier. This merely reflects the greed of international companies and their eagerness to squeeze profits from the pockets of popular groups.

Amendis is an affiliate of France's *Veolia*, which has been working since 2002 in the delegated management of waste water and the distribution of potable water, with a turnover of MAD (Moroccan Dirham) 1,414,000,000 in 2010.¹²

Amendis is not dissimilar from other companies operating on the basis of delegated management. Profits are being transferred to foreign banks following the destruction of the national economic fabric, with serious social consequences. Such companies are thus an extension of old colonialism in new form. Contrary to the claims propagated

¹² So'ad Kanoun, *Intifadat al-mowatenin did Amendis (The Citizen's Uprising Against Amendis)*, Attac Morocco's site, <http://attacmaroc.org/?p=3607>.

by these companies and their hangers on in Morocco regarding their contribution to economic development and high-quality services, their effect is to further sink the country in backwardness, the accumulation of excessively high interest debts, and the deepening of financial crisis.

In October 2015, multitudes of the poor erupted in anger against *Amendis*, protesting against high prices of water and electricity. Huge crowds stormed into the calmness of the city raising social demands and chanting the slogan: "*Amendis*, go home, Tangier is not yours!" The movement was led by popular neighborhood associations which played a significant role in mobilization, while attempts at repression (use of water hoses, batons, etc.) and the gathering of massive amounts of policemen as well as thugs and criminals to intimidate protestors miserably failed.

The state then interfered to calm down the situation. The Interior Minister personally came the city on 1 November 2015 to de-escalate the protests which had started to extend to the suburbs of Tangier such as Al Mediq and Tetouan. Formal concessions were also provided (allowing the payment in instalments, etc.).

These concessions managed to temporarily defuse the anger of protestors and contain the crisis. Yet, it appears that the company is adamant to plunder the dirhams of the popular groups, even as it changes certain managers. It should not be forgotten that *Amendis* is a company with a tradition of looting the country's resources. It is indeed responsible for the management of the service sector in several cities that witnessed the same scenario as Tangier, in further proof that its purpose solely consists in seizing profits.

■ Trainee teachers: in defense of public schools and civil service

In July 2015, i.e. in the summer break, the cabinet council ratified two decrees of the *Ministry of National Education and Professional Training* regarding trainee teachers in provincial centers for the professions of education and training.

One of the two decrees (No 2/15/589) stipulates the reduction of the basic salary of trainee teachers from MAD 2450 to 1200 monthly. The other decree (No 2/15/588) separates training from recruitment, which entails that the state's disengagement from guaranteeing jobs to students; hence the supply of abundant and cheap labour to the commercial education sector.

Meanwhile, harsh exploitation in the private sector, together with abhorrent living conditions and livelihood for the youth, make the latter's attachment to civil service a question of life and death. The public sector provides acquired rights inexistent in the private sector (wage level, retirement and health insurance, defined working hours and trade union rights, etc.), which explains teachers' keenness to work in the public sector.

Trainee teachers have named their organizations "coordination committees". These consist of a network of local committees made of representatives of different training disciplines, within a national framework containing delegated members of the *National Coordinating Committee for Teacher Trainees*.

The national organization of teacher trainees did not adhere to any trade union organization, thus consolidating a certain hostility towards existing trade union organizations on the part of the youth. For the latter, such organizations are remote from their concerns and excessively

hierarchical. In fact, there has not even been a mere discussion (at least publicly) of possible adherence to a trade union.

In the face of demands calling for the abolition of the two ministerial decrees, and restoring the basic salary to its full value, the state has offered nothing but the stick. Coercive interference alone is put forward to resolve a pending social problem.

Trainee teachers showed a stubborn resistance. The current generation benefited from the experience of some of its field leaders through years of struggle in the context of the battle of "substitute teachers and informal education". The latter are a group of contractual teachers who fought in their turn to obtain the regularization of thousands of them from a reluctant state. They provided a strong network of field activists committed to the success of the experience of trainee teachers. The majority of leaders are former militants of the student movement or the association of the unemployed.

The battle lasted more than five months. Due to the lack, or weakness, of tools of labour struggles, we witnessed the intervention of what was now known as civil society activities in an intermediary role aiming at resolving this file. The role of civil society amounted to mending the political gap between the two sides of the struggle through the creation of "communication" bridges. This entailed concealing the political nature of the struggle by presenting it as a mere "problem of communication". Liberal personalities (and trade union leaders) engaged in the mediation in a way that gave a pleading dimension to the struggle of teachers.

Mediation did, however, achieve some measure of success, as it coincided with a desire on the part of the government to

reach a solution. Here, the governmental motivation was twofold: Morocco was on the eve of elections, and the date was looming for the country's hosting of the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP22) on Climate Change.

Teachers' militancy contributed to the achievement of a historic victory over the government and its allies among donors. The government retreated from applying the two decrees for the current season (2015-2016) and engaged to appoint at once the trainee teachers.

■ Street vendors: daily persecution of a section of the marginalized

Vendors on street sidewalks in urban areas are made of varying groups of men and women who were prevented by the backwardness of the Moroccan economy from access to permanent and stable employment.

Selling on the sidewalk is also a temporary solution for a large labour force predominantly made of youth. Awaiting an improvement in conditions and the "development of an enterprise", most of those vending in the street see themselves as temporarily engaged in the profession.

Sidewalk commerce in some Moroccan cities generate enough (or almost enough) profit to provide a livelihood, especially with the prevalence of cheap Chinese goods. This is eased by the fact that such strata are also free from certain standard burdens for merchants such as paying taxes, rent and so on.

In this context, as conditions got harsher in the countryside (consecutive years of drought, rising prices, peasant bankruptcy due to the development of capitalist agriculture as well as the seizure by French colonists of the best lands

(Chaouia, Doukkala, Abda, Chiadma, Tadla etc.), waves of migration to the cities occurred seeking settlement in suburbs.¹³ Descendants of these areas were driven towards sidewalk vending and other marginal jobs. By 2011, their numbers amounted to around 276,000.

The state turned a blind eye on them, sitting out the 20 February Movement's storm. Another factor that increased their visibility is the breaking of the fear barrier as everyone witnessed the fall of tyrants in the region. Authorities were promising street vendors to stop harassing them provided they did not join the marches of the 20 February Movement.

With the retreat of the 2011 tide, however, security forces started to engage with hundreds of street vendors, seizing their equipment under the pretext of occupying the public domain. Harassment campaigns appeared then in cities such as Casablanca, home to thousands of vendors (around 128,000).

In response, peddlers organized themselves in local organizations and national networks led by the *National Coordinating Committee of Peddlers and Sidewalk Merchants*.

It is noteworthy that street vendors are not wage labourers; their economic situation differs from that of other protesting groups: they own small amounts of capital freeing them from selling their labour power, i.e. they are self-employed; but they suffer from economic marginalisation.

Hence the difference in response between their protests and those of wage labourers. Incapable of striking or stopping the

¹³ See the book by Naguib Taqi, *Jawaneb men Zakerat Karyan Central: Al-hay al-Mohamadi bel-Dear al-Bayda' fil-qarn al-'eshrin: mohawalat fil-tawthiq* (Aspects of the Memory of Karyan Central: the Mohamadi Neighborhood in Casablanca in the Twentieth Century: an Attempt at Documentation), *Jam'iyat al-Dar al-Bayda' zakera*, First Edition, 2012, p. 15-38.

machinery of production, their protests take the form of organized marches in major cities, demanding the provision of shops guaranteeing their stability.

As economic calamities intensify and pressure on those social strata increases, some of them have resorted to self-immolation. But demands are achieved through collective conscious struggle only. Dramatic acts such as these are direct results from a lack of organised direction.

■ The unemployed

Recent years witnessed a marked decline in the presence of the unemployed in arenas of struggle in Rabat in order to raise their voice against the state's employment policy. During the 20 February militant wave, four thousand unemployed were absorbed at once in the civil service in order to weaken the struggle. This pre-emptive measure had a negative impact on the movement of the unemployed.

Unemployed cadres are university graduates often with doctoral or master degrees. Engaged in movements fighting unemployment, their main asset is their resilience despite severe daily repression on the capital's streets.

Despite increase in numbers and protests calling for the right to work, the movement ultimately suffered fatigue, isolation and temporary defeat. The state contributed to weakening organizations of the unemployed by restricting their militant struggles through coercion and denying legality to the *National Association of Unemployed Graduates of Morocco*.

The unemployed waged militant battles involving the organization of marches, the occupation of parties' headquarters and blocking trains. Due to increasing desperation with a stubborn

state, collective struggle gave way to individualist forms of protest embodied in self-emulation and poisoning, as a reflection of the despair of the youth aspiring to a safe and stable life.

As the crisis deepened with the absence of alternatives to public sector employment, movements of the unemployed witnessed a recent rebirth with the creation of the *National Union of the Unemployed*. Streets of Rabat and other cities saw protests once again, leading to violent security clampdown and detentions.

■ Labour and other social protests

Morocco is boiling. The intensity of exploitation, pillage and corruption is the product of a comprehensive and deep capitalist attack impoverishing the persecuted majority. The trap of indebtedness, transfer of profits abroad, and austerity are grabbing the country. The grievances and violations suffered by the masses push sections of workers, students and villagers (women, small peasants, etc.) to take to the streets demanding clear social rights (paved roads to end isolation, schools, hospitals, potable water, bridges, etc.), providing clear signs of a wide social explosion in the foreseeable future.

In this context, a series of different strikes and protests took place. Workers went on strike at the multinational Karwan for Metallic Canning in Agadir; strikes occurred among locked out workers at the DOHA company, workers of Al-Maghrabia for iron, miners at Jabal Awam, as well as workers at the only oil refinery in Morocco (Samir) in the aftermath of its sale to a Saudi businessman who indulged in pillaging it. To this one has to add the movement of women of collective lands (*Soulaliyates*) demanding their rights in common lands, the struggle of inhabitants of the mining village Imider,

and the battle of Douar Chlihat against pillaging the town's resources and the destruction of the environment.¹⁴

The political weight of social movements

The state as well as its affiliate organizations strive at containing all that would disturb the smooth working of harsh neoliberal policies. Coercion, the imprisonment of demonstrators, and the co-option of trade union leaders in order to preserve social stability are all what the state has to offer in terms of solutions to pending social calamities.

In contrast, the momentum of protest movements seems devoid of political content. No political entity exists that expresses the demands of social movements, either within elected institutions or as an actor on the ground unifying forms of protest within a comprehensive vision carrying an alternative. By this we mean an effective political force capable of influencing the balance of forces; the forces of the radical left are yet to reach such a level.

Social movements in Morocco are youthful in character, thus allowing progressive organizations to communicate with those young generations through a militant literature and a media capable of keeping abreast of events. The young vanguards hostile to state policies constitute a real gain for militant organizations; they will prove useful in the future as they accumulate direct experience in the resistance to attacks and the realization of significant victories thanks to their confrontational stance and will power. To this should be added the intense participation of women in all militant causes with no exception, something also explaining the endurance of these battles and their perseverance in seeking gains.

Yet, basic weaknesses keep such militant movements within narrow confines, thus allowing the state to outmanoeuvre and seek pretexts for its attacks on the youth. One of the most significant of those weaknesses is that the movements remain defensive in perspective, with little political consciousness of the comprehensive nature of the neoliberal onslaught on all aspects of life, the causes of the onslaught, as well as its class aims. One of the most significant tools of struggle, embodied in trade union organizations, is under the dominance of social strata benefiting from the status quo and keen on preserving it; conscious as they are of dangers begetting their interests, such strata are reluctant to express any solidarity with protesters. Nonetheless, the solidarity role exercised by some rank and file branches of trade unions in support of popular protests, as was expressed for instance in the aftermath of the barbaric intervention against trainee teachers, is a source of hope regarding the future role of trade unions in social struggle.

On the other hand, organizations conscious of the interests of workers carry out a laudable but insufficient role, due to the limits of their subjective forces and energies. *Attac Morocco* is one such example, striving as it is to record attacks and raise popular consciousness of their content, in addition to the effort exerted on the terrain in solidarity with victims of neoliberalism. Some branches of the *Moroccan Association for Human Rights* have also played an eminent role in motivating struggle and framing it.

Another basic weakness of protest movements also lies in their dispersion and sectionalism. Movements are hence still unable to form their popular committees capable of unifying the different movements and their demands,

¹⁴ See *Attac Morocco's site*, attamaroc.org.

and establishing popular control over production as well as the state in general. It is impossible to overcome such dispersion and isolation of the different movements in the absence of a progressive alternative hostile to the policies of a dependent capitalist state. Attac Morocco and other anti-capitalist organizations are constantly striving to provide such an alternative.

Social movement leaders and their relationship to the left

Social struggles are at the core of the concerns of the left due to the economic and social demands they carry and the direct clash they embody with the patron of the interests of world capitalist institutions, i.e. the state. The militant left has been at the centre of these battles (participation, solidarity, follow-up, etc.), a method of struggle distinguishing it from fundamentalist movements. The latter either mobilize their bases away from current social files (towards national issues from a religious perspective) or confine them to mere participation in a mass movement without seeking to lead it to victory.

The *Society for Justice and Charity* (Adl wa Ihssan, referred to as AWI) played a central role in the 20 February Movement. It mobilized its resources in street battles as the protests spread and their geographic scope extended. With the decline of the Movement following state concessions, AWI withdrew from it by the end of 2011¹⁵ in order to avoid a direct clash with the regime.

The same is true for liberal parties. They are remote from the issues of the workers

¹⁵ Bayan, Jama'a al-Adl wal-Ihssan toqarer tauquif mosharakateha fi haraka 20 febrayer (Communiqué, the Justice and Beneficence Association Decides to Stop its Participation in the 20 February Movement), date of publication: Monday 19 December 2011, on the link: <http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/document/51003.shtml>.

and their defence. All their concern is focused on participation in elections as well as in formal governments. They are keen on preserving their privileges and supporting the state in waging neoliberal attacks.

As to the Moroccan left with all its variations, it has no systemic unified intervention in the struggle of protest movements. Its involvement in the dynamics of struggles against austerity and neoliberal policies is but a result of direct action by its militants, which means that there is no leftist plan for the interaction with collective responses of the workers.

During the popular upheaval of 2011, the limits of the intervention of the anti-capitalist left appeared clearly. While the Movement's demands were close to the program defended by leftists (social justice, constituent assembly, etc.), the role of the militant left remained marginal due to constraints it faced over decades, in addition to the behavior of a section of the liberal left in presiding over the attacks of 1998 in the alternation government led by the USFP. Another weakness of the Moroccan left is also the lack of credibility of its social project since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Today, the crisis of the left is deepening due to current international developments. In Europe, the Greek party Syriza implemented austerity reforms, while Latin America witnessed the limits of its development model and faced a predicament with the fall of oil prices (and those of other raw materials) globally and the repercussions of the global economic crisis.

For these reasons and others, the contribution of the militant left to protest movements remains limited despite its efforts. Accumulated experiences in the

social struggle are not being invested in restoring the credibility of the leftist program and recruiting energies of struggle for the alternative globalization project. This is one of the difficult tasks ahead of the anti-neoliberal globalization left.

Left-wing spectrums: participation in social movements and elections

The Moroccan left consists of various tendencies, each with its own perspective of social change. On the one hand, there is a liberal left contributing to the passing of all sorts of economic attacks during its participation in government. This leftist spectrum suffered its share of harassment. A section of it boycotted some constitutional referendums in the past, until it reconciled itself with the unique Moroccan democratic project. The Party of Progress and Socialism (formerly, the *Communist Party*) and the *Socialist Union of Popular Forces* (USFP) constitute its main components.

There is, on the other hand, a reformist non-governmental left. Its main characteristic is that part of it descends from radical organizations destroyed by repression and prison. As remaining members renounced their former convictions, they seek integration with the politics of the regime under the condition of the enactment of constitutional reforms. They aspire, in other words, to participate in official state institutions and to practice opposition from within them. The essence of their disagreement with the state is political *par excellence*. This reformist spectrum is represented by the *Federation of the Democratic Left (the Unified Socialist Party (USP), the National Ittihad Congress Party, and the Vanguard Party)*.

Variants of the left do not end here. There is also a variety of radical organizations

and parties with different militant visions for the emancipation from capitalism and dependency to imperialist powers. The most eminent is probably the *Democratic Path Party*.

From such deep variations among components of the left emanate different political practices:

■ **The Socialist Union of Popular Forces: a liberal governmental left remote from the aspirations of working masses**

The USFP enjoyed popular support initially. It achieved significant electoral victories in a number of Moroccan cities, based on a leftist discourse appealing to voters combined with its hegemony over the *Democratic Confederation of Labour* allowing it to mobilize its organized workers in skirmishes with the government, until the party was allowed to participate in power in 1998 through the alternation government to save Morocco from “heart attack”, i.e. to save the country from a social crisis.

Immediately after it reached power with large mass support, however, the USFP led the strongest neoliberal attacks in the sectors of health, education and others, thus serving the directions of the IMF and the World Bank. It played no noteworthy role in the 20 February Movement.

■ **The Unified Socialist Party: reforms without militant mobilization among the labour and popular rank and file**

The party participates in elections as part of the *Federation of the Democratic Left*, but its stand in the heart of protest movements is modest in comparison to analyses and hopes expressed in its reference papers.¹⁶ The USP’s aspirations to support protest movements remain

¹⁶ Review the reference papers of the USP published in its blog (a non-official website), <https://niddal.wordpress.com/> /الوثيقة-المرجعية-لحزب-اليسار-الاشترا

confined in local branches and in initiatives of individual militants keen on providing visions and analyses to neoliberal attacks and their impact on the Moroccan social fabric, in addition to the solidarity of its militants with protestors.

The USP also failed to develop a militant program in line with the political and economic reforms it aspires to. It does not constitute a significant political force capable of creating a labour and popular balance of power. Indeed, the party confines itself to the political sealing of a “parliamentary monarchy”, i.e. the partition of authority with the monarchy within the institutional setting. This is the same sealing it put as a slogan for its youth’s actions within the 20 February Movement.

The party remains without a mass force; its trade union and popular roots are weak, while it enjoys stronger appeal amongst educated middle strata. There is no essential difference between its perspective and that of its forerunner, the USFP, as well as the whole “democratic bloc”, regarding the need for constitutional reforms and conciliation with the monarchical establishment.

■ The Democratic Path Party: involvement in protest movements and boycott of elections

The Democratic Path Party belongs to the radical left. It supports the demands of protest movements and participates in mobilizing for them. It participated in the marches of the 20 February Movement in a number of cities. The DPP was involved earlier in solidarity action with several popular uprisings (Sefrou, Sidi Ifni etc.), as well as in the movement against the price rises in 2006-2007. Its militants play an effective role in support of advocacy movements through their roots in branches of the *Moroccan Association for Human Rights*.

On the trade union front, militants of the DPP play a significant role in the struggles of some sectors of civil service, in regional organizations of the *Moroccan Labour Union*, as well as continuous solidarity with other social movements.

In addition, the DPP does not link its involvement in social struggle to any electoral ambitions. It does not conceive elections as its means to implement change; it rejects participation in them arguing that representative institutions are fraudulent and based on a non-democratic constitution. It also notes that elections are organized by the Interior Ministry, with its historically bad reputation in this arena.

The DPP is thus subject, due to its stands against capitalism and dependency, to harassment by the authorities. It is banned from using public headquarters and suffers from other forms of restrictions on oppositionists.

The left and the future of the social alternative

Some forces of the Moroccan left participate in protests throughout the country without the elaboration of sufficient social analysis to help reach an accurate understanding of on-going policies in the context of decades of neoliberalism. In fact, privatization, delegated management, job precarity and other such policies have challenged all leftist discourses. Neoliberal measures all over the world require the provision of relevant visions and new programs, discourses and practices. The radical left had to evolve its organizational forms as a result.

One must add that the provision of a social alternative requires more than a simple critique of capitalism. It has become conditional upon following up

and criticising all concrete developments in capitalism in the aftermath of the cold war division into a western and an eastern bloc. Meanwhile, much of the left we are dealing with here is unconcerned with primary issues such as debts as a new tool of pillage, as well as the global division of roles between big financial institutions in the North and the South (neo-colonialism), with all the resulting environmental, financial and food-related calamities.

It is, hence, aspired that the militant left presents much more than it does today. The social alternative defended by this left suffers from a crisis of legitimacy; it has long been unable to achieve popular mobilization in the context of a world characterised by the collapse of the eastern bloc and the dominance of a new US-led world order. Therefore, the Moroccan's left involvement in battles and engagement with issues created by capitalism in its globalized phase has become urgently necessary in order to develop an alternative capable of gathering social movements around it.

At another level, religious movements constitute a strong and surly rival to the left, whether in Morocco or in other countries in the region. Their approach to questions of debt, environment, women, and others is in fact compatible with neoliberal alternatives. This state of affairs potentially allows forces of the left a wide arena for building on several fronts of social struggle in which reactionary movements are not only absent, but often engaged in fighting those championing emancipatory struggles, especially in women's issues.

In this context, *Attac Maroc* leads a pioneering experience in the Maghreb and the Arab region. It is concerned with current issues such as debt and the environment; it strives to contribute

to analysis and critique of economic policies implemented in Morocco, thus providing an invaluable service to militants championing the demands of popular groups. *Attac Maroc* also seeks to translate, print and publish anti-neoliberal literature. It is involved in international committees aspiring to the cancellation of debt, and provides through its website constant updates on developments domestically and globally.

Political prospects of the militant left

During the uprisings that erupted at the regional level, it became evident that there is an absence of an alternative to neoliberal policies capable of putting forward and defending a social program appealing to the scores of angry and revolting masses assembled in streets and squares. The absence of an alternative movement is certainly the product of the weakness of progressive militant organizations that had been subjected to ferocious repression by dictatorial regimes in the region. It is also an absence partly due to competition from religious movements that have been promoted by the same dictatorships in preparation for coming uprisings.

Here we are witnessing the fiasco of religious movements once they reached power. They adhered to the will of the IMF and other financial institutions to pillage the peoples' resources through the debt mechanism and the protection of the transfer of profits abroad. On their back, dictatorial forces have come to power through bloodbaths; these formed repressive regimes no better than their precedents.

The blockage of perspective raises an urgent question: what is the third alternative?

Throughout the Maghreb and Arab

regions, the left is weak and dispersed due to the above-mentioned factors. Despite this weakness and dispersal, there is no doubt that the left's strive to establish itself as a third alternative is of the outmost necessity and actuality. This, however, is conditioned by putting forward a social program that is: hostile to the existing regimes, surpassing reactionary religious movements, characterized by a clear strategic vision, and concerned with social issues (debt, health, education, housing and public services, etc.).

In Morocco, the experience of the 20 February Movement indicated that the left faces real dilemmas. Some of its currents refused to get involved in the Movement due to the presence of obscurantist forces, while other currents drew closer to the obscurantists themselves under the pretext of their opposition to despotism. This confusion reflects the difficulty of engaging in common leftist action in the framework of social fronts of resistance to neoliberal attacks.

The stakes of the 20 February Movement clearly revealed the extent of political prospects of the Moroccan left. The independence of leftist action from religious movements is of outmost importance. Without such independence, the left would be putting itself in the same camp with proponents of capitalism and enemies of women's liberation. The record of the JDP in power confirms religious movements' identification with the rich and powerful and their submission to the interests of big donors.

Today, Morocco witnesses the spread of social resistances throughout the country. These are characterized by combativeness and resilience, but they suffer from dispersion, the partiality of their demands, and the lack of a common thread linking them. To this should be

added their organizational looseness and utter isolation from one another. Due to decades of absence of the anti-capitalist left, such movements fell prey for political backwardness. It is clear, however, that protest movements are on the increase due to the scale of ongoing attacks, the effects of which being partially as yet unapparent, such as plots against retirement schemes aiming at restructuring them along neoliberal lines.

On the other side, the state strives to restrict any resistance to its attacks. It does so either by co-opting trade union leaders and neutralizing the organized part of the working class away from the struggle, or by interference in the political arena through parties loyal to it. The state also restricts militant political trends and associations through coercion as well as anti-liberty legislation (the press law, the notion of "nationalist fundamentals", draft laws on strikes and the establishment of trade unions, etc.).

This situation puts huge tasks before militant organizations. There is a need to surpass the state of dispersion through the organization of rallying campaigns nationally and internationally against the enactment of imperialist treaties such as those promoting free trade, due to their detrimental effect on the national economy. Equally important are the common initiatives of citizenship, such as committees auditing debts and calling for cancelling them, due to their illegitimate and unsustainable nature.

Attac Maroc, a member of the *Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt*, strives to provide a democratic and internationalist alternative to capitalism, one based on serving the majority and protecting its rights. It aspires to establishing a national committee of militant forces (trade unions, associations, etc.) to carry out an audit of Moroccan debts, declare a moratorium on the payment of debt until the appearance of the results of the audit, and bringing to account all those involved in sinking the country into debt. It calls for collective struggle to abolish policies of structural adjustment and privatization of public services in the interest of capitalists.

Attac Maroc also works for the elaboration of alternatives to neoliberal globalization, with its destruction of the environment and pillage of peoples' resources. It does so through direct contribution to the birth of a movement for an alternative globalization, in addition to the struggle for the creation of an informative educational front under the slogan: *understanding in order to confront*.

The content of the publication represents the opinion of the author and not necessarily the position of RLS.

**Rosa Luxemburg Fondation
North africa office**

23, Jugurtha street, 1082 Tunis

infotunis@rosalux.org