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Palestine Solidarity

Current challenges for the solidarity movement

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The reaction in Europe to the recent Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip has revealed many steps forward in Europe, but also many problems and difficult tasks either for the “specific” solidarity movement with Palestine, or for the social movement more generally.

The good news

It has been a long time in Europe since there was such a mobilisation for Palestine and above all, a mobilisation where Palestine was the sole subject of this mobilisation.

A second positive characteristic is the rapidity with which this mobilisation was set up and also its continuity. Both aspects were neither easy nor obvious, above all taking into account the fact that all the countries in Europe were involved.

Third step forwards, the systematic circulation of information, analyses and also the coordination, not always matched, of the mobilisations. In addition, the circulation of information allowed a certain breaking of the incredible network of support given to the Israeli thesis that this was a “defensive attack”. Everywhere in Europe, but with some completely scandalous cases like Italy, there was a total collapse of the media, including the left media, with at least in Italy a single exception. In this situation, not only in Italy, the daily circulation of information was much more effective in relation above all to the dimensions of the mobilisations, but also their quality.

Fourth positive note: the role played by Jewish people who mobilised against this aggression. This role was important in terms of combating all those who said, and say, that Israel's policies and its colonial project represent all the world's Jews.

Another positive thing has been, and will be in future, the basis for extracting any interpretation of the conflict in Palestine from the religious cage.

The fifth plus point is that the mobilisations saw a massive presence of immigrant communities, not only Palestinians but Arabs more generally (whether originating from the Maghreb or the Mashreq). Obviously the implications of this massive mobilisation of immigrants, with all the conditions of their life in European countries and the frustrations accumulated by these communities in recent years have a direct link with the reaction to yet another massacre suffered by the Palestinian people. But this reaction is also linked to the factors which we mentioned above, to the corrupted climate of nearly unanimous support for Israel, while, beyond any political consideration, the simple number of victims on the Palestinian side and the Israeli side offered the framework of a premeditated massacre, with the goal of devastating, punishing, and terrorising.

The sixth remarkable aspect was the effort to “hear” the voices from inside Palestine/Israel arriving in Europe. Also this fact was a sort of “novelty”.

Seventh positive point: obviously the broad mobilisation had positive resonations in breaking the isolation of the Palestinians, but also the small layers of Israeli Jews who mobilised inside Israel, defying the massive consensus in favour of the aggression.

Elements to think about

This mobilisation also represents a “capital” which should not be wasted and a sort of major challenge for the implications that it has in the social, cultural and political struggles which have already broken out in Europe. Either because of the global economic crisis, or because the last nine years have seen a great deal of change in the social movement.

It is not saying anything new to say that the dominant culture, above all in relation to the profound troubles which have affected the Middle Eastern left, either at the institutional level, or in terms of what is defined as “radical”.

After having reached its height in 2003 with the mobilisation against the war and occupation in Iraq, the movement against the war faced the emergence of a well dispersed resistance in the Middle East characterised by the supremacy of the Islamic political formations.

I stress this element to try to understand the importance that this phenomenon has had for the social and anti-war movement in Europe.

Today we are faced with, as we have already stressed, a powerful reaction of Arab communities and also with second generation immigration, the descendants of immigrants who are born in Europe and who have not found, in their great majority, anything other than Islamic organisations to express their aspirations for emancipation.

In addition, and this is nothing new, against the Islamophobia which has swept the West the discovery of Islam by the new generations of “European Arabs” has been, and is, a denied element of identity

It is obvious that this element is not for us a surprise or a scandal. It is a feature which, on the contrary we cannot ignore.

To give you a concrete example. On all the European mobilisations there were many religious slogans, in Italy this was also the case, which made a lot of noise, Muslims who at the big demonstration on January 3, 2009 in Milan prayed opposite the Duomo in Milan. A challenge? A danger? A simple coincidence of where the cortège had arrived at the time of prayer?

In my opinion, it wasn't planned, and of course we have defended these men and women from vulgar attacks which portrayed them all as terrorists because they dared to pray. We said very clearly that we were on their side, That was the only way of not cutting off essential links with these people, while defending the rights also of all those who don't pray, whether Arab or not.

The boycott is a struggle which unites

In this sense the battle for a general boycott against Israel is essential. Because this battle crosses all frontiers in relation to the goal. For the boycott of Israel to become a widespread and common battle is not easy: because Israel is not perceived in the same way as South Africa at the time of generalised and declared apartheid. It is obvious that there are differences, sometimes very profound, among European countries.

It is also obvious that according to the country you put the accent on the B or D or S in BDS.

Current challenges for the solidarity movement

We are very involved in this battle, obviously while keeping in mind the different levels of its effectiveness. Where it is more difficult to render it widespread we should fight so that it becomes a structural basis for the more general struggle alongside the Palestinian people and also Israeli anti-colonialists.

To make it as widespread and effective as possible it is essential to involve all the trade unions who are available not only to participate but also to discuss the means of realising it. Starting from the situations where this has already happened.

In addition the fight for the boycott and also for sanctions has a unifying value with the broader social opposition, because we can put back on the agenda the fight against military expenditure and more broadly the question of NATO.

It is clear that the general attitude of European governments in approaching the global economic crisis is to cut the spending they consider "superfluous", namely health, education, and so on, while deeming military expenditure "essential".

Indeed, if we can render common the idea that to boycott military agreements, and not only those with Israel, is a way of solidarising with the Palestinians, but also with ourselves, and not only from an economic but quite simply "human" viewpoint that would mean we have made a great step forward.

From this viewpoint it is essential to link the battle for the University for all, for example, with the boycott by students, but also by lecturers of any agreement with Israeli universities.

That means spreading the idea that no military research agreement is ever suitable, either from a "simply" ethical or an economic viewpoint.

In conclusion: we have to identify these points of conjuncture/interaction between the Palestinian "specificity" and the regional and broader global contexts.

If we don't do this there is the risk that the contradictions which emerge from such a complex situation will weaken solidarity because if there is no understanding of the dynamics at work there cannot be a mobilisation which is broad but also conscious that what is at stake does not concern only the peoples involved in the contingent events.

On this terrain, unhappily, in Europe the struggle of the Palestinian people is a classic case. Throughout the years when the Palestinian resistance was defined in a nationalist framework, beyond the contingent forms that it assumed, there has been the bad habit of seeking some Palestinian organisation which corresponds to our hopes and desires (definitively to console us for our own defeats) which we could "marry". Except, if we don't find it we abandon the field, until the next massacre.

In this sense, it is essential also that we demand the right to an open discussion, always respectful and never one of substitution.