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Space for Notes



Dear David:

Many thanks for your letter of January 26th. Sorry for the delay in responding --it was due to other obligations, not a lack of interest I assure you. I was in fact very interested in your project and in the paper you sent me. Your paper on Tunisia, Morocco and the Sudan was very useful and your proposal for *World Cities in Revolt* outlines what should be an extremely interesting and useful book. I would be delighted to "correspond and discuss" your work with you as it develops. Let us begin.

As you can tell from my *Capital & Class* article --which prompted you to write to me-- my problem with the radical literature on the debt crisis has been the degree to which it has laid the blame (and thus the credit) for the crisis on capital and ignored the popular struggles which precipitated the crisis and have prolonged it --struggles which, it seems to me, provide the only possible point of departure for future opposition to austerity and source of alternative policies. Your proposal seems accented on the uprisings with which people have responded to the austerity measures capital has used to respond to the debt crisis. As the description stands, you don't emphasize the struggles which lay behind the debt crisis and the need for austerity --something which seems to me to be essential in order to understand the revolts themselves. On the other hand, your paper on Tunisia, Morocco & Sudan does address both issues --at least to a degree.

After demonstrating in the first part of the paper that the revolts were indeed essentially spontaneous uprisings by those most hurt by the austerity measures (rather than the results of plotting by political sects), you turn in section 6 (p. 38+) to the question of the reasons which lay behind the austerity increases in food prices in each of the countries. In the case of **Tunisia** you point (along with government confidence it could get away with austerity) to economic difficulties: drop in export income & tourist receipts, slower industrial growth, stagnating agriculture & rising food imports. What I think needs to be done at this point in the analysis is to examine these "economic" difficulties in class terms, i.e., in terms of previous and on-going class struggles.

The drop in export prices (oil and phosphate) was presumably due to the global recession (or at least the European recession if most Tunisian exports go to Europe) which, as I have argued in the *C&C* piece, was due to the global attack on inflation (i.e. wages) led by the United States whose tight money policies precipitated the recession. While there may be other factors particular to Tunisia (e.g., inability to protect export markets by lowering prices {as the Japanese did in the US during this period} due to struggles of workers in mining -?-), we can at least explain this aspect of Tunisia's economic difficulties in terms of the international cycle of struggles which led to global anti-inflationary policies. To what degree Tunisian workers were participants in that cycle needs to be made clear.

The drop in tourist receipts may well be due to the same factor: the recession in Europe. But there are other reasons which have at various times and places resulted in a drop in tourism --such as tourist perceptions of political instability and danger. Was such the case in Tunisia? Was it the case in North Africa more generally such that Tunisia might have been affected --say because of perceptions of "terrorism"? I don't know, but I would look.

And to what do we attribute the slow down in industrial growth? Probably at least in part, again to European recession, assuming Europe is Tunisia's major export market and exports are an important part of its industrial production. But perhaps also to workers struggles in industry which drove up wages and cut profits? Or simply reduced the incentive to invest? You mention the strikes in 1977-78 which led to the general strike of January 1978 --did that wave of struggles undermine industrial development through raising costs and risk or through concessions gained? And this last could be due to more general social conflicts, not just inside industry, that increased the perceived risk of investment?

Stagnating agriculture? To what degree is this due to government policies which while keeping down the price of food to more powerful urban workers have decreased production incentives to less powerful rural farmers? To what degree to government resistance to seeing income flow into discontented agricultural regions in the South and Southwest? You mention the seizure of Gafsa by dissidents -- what was the source of disaffection? What is the role of the 60,000 Tunisians who work in Libya? The point here is not whether the uprisings were the work of such outside influences --you have addressed that issue-- but whether the government's economic policies which led to stagnation in agriculture can be at least partially explained by previous struggles in this area.

Rising food imports? Presumably these are a response both to the sources of agricultural stagnation at home and to the struggles of urban workers for real wages. Those struggles have presumably resulted in both subsidized prices and greater availability than would otherwise be the case (at the lower prices). Sounds a lot like Egypt before its explosion in 1977.

You also mention the "tacit acceptance of organised labour" --namely that the government had cut a deal with the union bureaucrats that their workers would be protected from price increases by wage increases. This would measure the relative power of such (industrial?) workers in the hierarchy of the working class as a whole --and reflect their past struggles. Such divisions and playing off of one group against others is standard in capitalism of course --divide and rule is the name of the game-- but the particular divisions always need to be explained as well as the degree to which they are effective or ineffective. If such concessions to industrial workers were also undermining investment in industry, then despite the costs to the poor in terms of the loss of an ally, they were hardly wise from the point of view of Tunisian capital as a whole.

In the case of **Morocco** you again locate the source of austerity in the country's economic difficulties: declining export prices (phosphates again), rising import prices (latter '70s), rising food imports, drop in tourist and immigrant worker remittances, "increasing Common Market competition," and "protectionism" and the cost of the war.

With respect to export price drops, increasing food imports, and the drop in tourist receipts, I would ask again all the questions raised above about Tunisia. With respect to your juxtaposition of rising import prices (late 70s) and falling export prices I wonder if those were coincident or not? Global inflation in the 70s (driven

by workers' struggles) certainly was pushing up import prices in the Third World. But what about the early 1980s, didn't the same recession that drove down export prices also reduce import prices? At least in general? What about Tunisia? If not, what forces were keeping import (say grain) prices up during the global recession?

The case of immigrant worker remittances is an interesting one. What was the source of the drop? Cutbacks in Europe date back to the early 1970s, I can imagine that this was accelerated in the recession of the early '80s. The consideration of immigrants also raises the issue of the impact of Moroccan immigration on workers struggles in Morocco. Along with the well known view of such immigration as safety valve must go a less well recognized phenomenon of the international circulation of class struggle between Europe and North Africa. I'm enclosing for your interest my translation of a paper by Yann Moulrier that raises this issue. (I translated this article for the 3rd issue of *Zerowork* which was never published, today I use it in one of my classes) To what degree has this played a role in the development of struggles in Morocco? (Speaking of *Zerowork*, did you ever see my article in the 2nd issue on "Food, Famine and International Crisis? --if not I'll be happy to send you a copy-- it deals with a number of issues relevant to our discussions and your book). This is also an interesting question to pose about students/professors --to what degree are the student struggles in these countries connected to the experience of study in Europe? What experiences of struggle have been circulated from Europe to North Africa by students as well as by workers? (And of course not only in Morocco but also in the other countries.)

Since you don't spell out what you mean by "increasing Common Market competition" or "protectionism" I'm not sure what questions to ask. But if the competition is price competition deriving from lower cost production, then what markets are we talking about. In general the explanation for shifts in competition can be sought in the changing class relations within competing units (be they firms or countries) and of course in general the greater power of European workers have forced capital to employ far more relative surplus value strategies [i.e., those raising productivity and permitting a reorganization of the work force that gives business more control] than in the Third World. But I think you need to clarify what you mean here.

As to the expenditures on the war, well certainly that war and the government's role in it is susceptible to a class analysis and hence to a grounding of that aspect of the government budgetary deficit in the dynamics of class struggle. Have you thought about this? Done it somewhere?

All of the above presumably explains the recourse made by Moroccan capital to external borrowing and the rise of its international debt --as well as the applicability of the typical IMF conditions to its 1983 agreement.

The wage increases to organized labour need to be explained just as in the case of Tunisia --discussed above. Presumably again a case of attempting to buy stability by giving in to the strongest of the working class groups and accentuating the hierarchy of the waged and unwaged.

And what of the students who helped ignite the explosion? Who are the students? Who are their teachers? What has been going on in the schools and in the relation between the schools and the larger social context? There have been a great many student struggles in the 80s around the world from Mexico to Spain to France to Burma and China. To understand them we need an analysis of the class composition of the student body as well as the location of the students within the larger class composition. You suggest that the most vocal students were from the middle class,

reacting to political repression and reduced employment opportunities in the crisis. So they went into the streets instead of into the libraries to compete for fewer jobs. But what was the role of students in bringing about the reduction of employment opportunities and the political repression? It would be good to know both sides.

In the case of the **Sudan**, you give us a lot less material to think about, but emphasize growing trade deficits and rowing external borrowing/debt in a way which suggests the former explains the later. As to trade deficits you refer to "liberal export-oriented economic policies" (p. 45) but also to Sudanese policies which "effectively starved the export sector." (p. 44) Your exposition of the origins of the trade crisis here are somewhat unclear to say the least.

You also mention the stagnation of agriculture --the collapse of the breadbasket dream. All the previous questions raised about agricultural policies and food import policies in Tunisia and Morocco could be repeated here. And to them must be added an issue which you barely mention --the growing conflict between the north and the south and the role of the SPLA/SPLM. How much of the stagnation of agriculture was due to government refusal to invest in hostile areas? (You mention how lax Numeiry was to ask for food aid --was that just the last move in a much longer history of refusal to help those in the South?) How much was the hostility due to the refusal to invest? How much of the trade/bal.of.pay. deficit was due to military imports to fight the southern dissidents? You skip another key issue in the divide and conquer story in the Sudan: the race issue, the white Arab north versus the black dissident south, clearly a fundamental issue in the class struggles of the area --especially given the history since 1985, a history of horror and political starvation.

You mention the rounding up of the homeless and unemployed --what was their political role prior to the revolts? To what degree do they occupy an identifiable space (informal sector or what not) and constitute an autonomous force within the class struggle, as they do in some places in Latin America?

In the case of the Sudan, as well as those of the other countries, an important part of the story would seem to be what foreign monies were used for when they were borrowed --especially in the Sudan and Morocco which both built up sizable foreign debt. That "money trail" I often find reveals much about the class composition and the nature of the class struggle.

A fundamental difference in the outcome of the revolts in the Sudan as opposed to Morocco and Tunisia, at least initially, was the role of the military and police. What was the class composition of those two bodies in the Sudan? Why did they abandon the government while their counterparts elsewhere did not? Whatever we think of subsequent military rule in the Sudan, this is a fundamental issue in evaluating the outcome of the revolts. Have you thought about this? Written anything about it?

Finally, a last question: are you planning on updating this piece for the book? To take into account the subsequent history? The war in the Sudan, the 1987 overthrow of Bourguiba by Ben Ali (and his raising of wages in Tunisia in response to the uprising in Algeria in October '88) and his Zinestroika? Not to mention the evolution of the debt crisis? Since most of the conditions you analyze with respect to the uprisings in 1984-85 remain true for all three countries, and have been accentuated in some cases, it wouldn't necessarily be a major project and would make the discussion more contemporary. Especially if you want to say something about the implications for future struggles.

I hope the above comments are helpful. I would, of course, love to hear what you think about the issues raised. As I said at the outset I like your project and your work

--I hope you find my part of the discussion useful.

Now I want to request something from you: the footnotes to the piece you sent me. Also if, as I gather you do, you have the piece on a computer, could you send me a single-spaced version, preferably with the footnotes at the bottom of the page? (This is easy to do on my Mac, if you can't don't worry about it) I am already using your piece in a class of mine --Political Economy of International Crisis-- which includes a section on food crises, but I would like to be able to give the students the footnotes, and I would like to reduce the length to reduce the cost to them (thus the single-spaced request). Plus, of course, I would like to have the footnotes for my own edification and research.

Moreover, I would love to see any other material you have prepared for the book and would be happy to send you comments in return. Do you want me to correspond with you alone? Or if you send me the addresses of the other authors as well -- I can easily send them copies of my comments for their consideration.

Given that *Capital & Class* published my piece on the debt crisis, you might consider sending them something from your book --it would be a nice complement and might generate some more correspondents.

Enough for the moment, thanks again for writing. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Harry Cleaver