

Will the West Ever Learn?

The XI World Social Forum was about to take place in Dakar. This was the second time that it was being held in Africa (the first was in 2007, in Nairobi), revealing the interest of organizers in calling attention to African problems and the impact those problems will have on the world. The organizers could not have imagined that, at the Forum, North Africa would be the primary focus of reports by news agencies from all over the world, nor that the social protests against the economic crisis and the Western-backed dictatorships could be so vigorous, so contagious and so assertive of one of the basic principles of the WSF: the radicalization of democracy as an instrument of social transformation.

The solidarity of the WSF with the social struggle in North Africa has roots and reasons that are either ignored by Western media or reported in a way that reveals the double difficulty in the West of learning from the experiences of the world and giving justice to the principles and values which it proclaims to be guarding. Since the beginning, the WSF has warned about the economic, social, political, energy and environmental unsustainability of the current neoliberal economic model, dominated as it is by unregulated financial capital, and about the fact that the global costs of their decisions are not restricted to the less developed countries. The social movement in North Africa has one of its roots in the deep economic crisis that the region is suffering from. The social protests in Egypt cannot be understood without the series of strikes in the clothing sector over the last three years that, although violently repressed,

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did not catch the attention of the Western press. Ten years after the WSF alerted the world to the situation, the World Economic Forum (WEF), in a meeting early this year in Davos, declared that deepening social disparity is the most urgent problem (even worse than environmental degradation) the world needs to face in the coming decades. What the WEF did not say is that the problem exists precisely because of the economic policies defended by that Forum over the last decade. Like a rich man's club, they are capable of pangs of guilt, but cannot admit that the cause is their own scandalous accumulation of wealth.

Seen from the WSF, the North African crisis is a collapse on the second frontier of Europe. The first is constituted by Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland. With two borders in crisis, the centre becomes fragile and the German-French axis can soon turn from steel to plastic. More deeply, history shows us that stability and prosperity in Europe starts and ends at the Mediterranean. Why is it that the West (Europe and North America) cannot learn from history and the facts? For the WSF, the West will only learn when whatever happens in the periphery is similar to what happens in the centre. If it takes too long, the problem will be that it is already too late to learn the lesson.

Solidarity in the WSF with North Africa has another root: the unconditional respect for democratic aspirations. In this respect, Western hypocrisy has no limits. Its objectives are to guarantee the peaceful transition from a pro-American, pro-Israel dictatorship, pro-colonial occupation of Palestine by Israel, anti-Iranian, pro-free circulation of petrol, pro-blocking of the Gaza Strip, anti-Hamas, pro-Fatah/Hamas division, into a democracy with the same characteristics. That is the only way to explain the obsession in naming the fundamentalists participating in protests and in falsifying the political and social nature of the Islamic Brotherhood. The interests of Israel and of petrol do not allow the West to act coherently in this part of the world with the principles it proclaims. The West did not learn from the 100,000 dead as a result of cancelling the democratic victory of the enthusiastically-supported Islamic Salvation Front in the elections of Algeria in 1991. Nor did it learn from the conversion of the Gaza Strip into one of the most repugnant concentration camps as a result of the non-recognition of the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006.

Is the West going to learn only when it becomes post-Western?

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This article was translated into English by Christopher Reid and Luciano Dalcol-Viana.