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The people's movement desperately needs working class solidarity

Zaher Baher

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For the last four decades we have seen either no support or very little from the working class, especially the industrialised sections and big companies to people's movement.

It is easy to see this phenomenon in the Iranian green movement in June 2008, last year, 2018, and in the countries of the "Arab spring". We have seen it too In Jordan, Bahrain, in Turkey's Taksim Gezi Park in 2013, in France in 2005 and in whole parts of Iraq including Kurdistan since 2005 until the most recent protests and demonstrations in Basra in July and September of 2018. There was also no lack of protests in parts of the former communist bloc and, more obviously and importantly, was the very recent movement of Yellow Vests protesters in France.

Advanced technologies and globalisation developed the quantity and quality of the working class, at least in industrialised countries, in this century, and were supposed to take us towards the socialist revolution or at least supporting the movements I mentioned

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above. Alas what we have seen for the last four decades is not enough support offered. I noted the current industrial condition, advanced technologies and globalisation as developments which were supposed to be some sort of preparation for the revolution.

So, the problem here is not just that the revolution has not happened but also the working-class movement in most of the countries does not exist. The current situation of the working class extended to the level of keeping its distance from the people's movement. With all the above factors, why is there still no revolution? I am not trying to answer the question as I have touched on it in my previous articles. However, here I try to analyse the situation that surrounds the working class to show some facts according to my knowledge and experience.

I believe the current attitude of the working class that is not offering solidarity to the people's movement is strongly connected with globalisation. It is very clear that since the expansion and strengthening of globalisation and which has reached more countries, the working class has become weaker and weaker.

So when did globalisation begin? In other words, when did the working class become weaker and weaker?

There is no a broad agreement between economists and historians about the commencement of globalisation. Some of them think it began in the nineteenth century. Others suggest the 16th and 17th centuries when, firstly, the Portuguese and Spanish and, later, the Dutch and British Empires started colonizing countries. They believe it began in the 17th century following the establishment of the first multinational corporation called the British East India Company, founded in 1600.

However, many scholars agree that modern globalisation started after the 2nd World War when Industrialization allowed for the cheap production of household items that, more or less, developed the economy a step further.

After the 2nd world war capitalism stepped into a new period and helped globalisation. This was the beginning of the found-

ing of several international institutions based in the United States and Europe including the United Nations, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), World Trade Organization (WTO), finally, the European Union (EU). All have been facilitated by advances in technology which have reduced the costs of trade, eliminating or reducing tariffs and barriers and the creation of free trade zones.

The worldwide exchange of new developments in science, technology, products and mass media, alongside the development and growth of international transport, telecommunications and electronic communication played a decisive role in modern globalization.

Why did globalisation make the working class passive instead of active?

The points I mentioned above both advantage and disadvantage the working class. In my opinion they benefited capital and capitalism more than the working class.

In answering the above question, I will refer to a couple of important factors. Firstly, modern globalisation changed the entire structure of the working class wherever it reached. What remained common between sections of the working class were just the name and selling their physical or intellectual labour and nothing more. We can see this phenomenon in the United Kingdom (UK) very clearly. It has divided the working class into different categories with different terms and conditions of work. No longer is there working-class unity even in the same company, factory, supermarket, hospital or local authority when so many different sections have been set up; IT, production department, marketing and sales, advertising, Human Resources, administration, retail cashiers, porters, cleaners and buildings and services maintenance. Workers and others have different job descriptions, terms and conditions of work and salaries. This is the reason why we hardly ever see workers and staff in a company or other place of work unite to strike together in support of a particular section of their colleagues.

There is no doubt that these divisions have played a big role as workers, in even a small company, can be spread over different unions. One might say anti-union law in the UK made workers passive. In fact had the workers been strong, united and engaged in serious action when Mrs Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, implemented the anti-union law, she would not have succeeded. She did because the working class was weak, divided, demoralised and became strangers to themselves with the help of the unions and Labour Party.

The history of the working class in the 18th, 19th and even the first half of the 20th century shows that the working class was more active and united at the time. This was because, at that time, capitalism was relatively undeveloped and modern globalisation did not exist. With advanced technologies and a good quality and quantity of working class, many revolutionary leaders, including Karl Marx, believed sufficient conditions existed for the revolution to take place. So why did this not happen? I leave the answer for the readers themselves.

Secondly, globalisation created additional developments, including more middle managers and robots and growing sectors in retail, travel and tourism and leisure and hospitality. Reports estimate that over 26% of the UK workforce are employed in these sectors. According to a recent Trade Union Congress report, only about 2.6 million people across the UK work in manufacturing. Manufacturing has become a smaller part of the UK economy since the 1970s. Furthermore globalisation has created mass unemployment, a huge number of refugees, migrants, poor people and workers on low or very low wages with no security. Almost everywhere, and not just in Europe, the United States and other developed, industrialised countries, globalisation has pushed so many people to the very bottom of society, marginalising them.

The marginalised people, who I call proletarians, include the unemployed, pensioners, students, single parents whether working or on benefits, the disabled and people with special needs, people

on benefits, some small self-employed and, of course, workers. The vast majority live in poverty and some of them in absolute poverty. We can find many countries in different parts of the world where almost half of the population earn only \$1 or \$2 a day. These people, economically, socially and financially, are much worse off than workers who have got a, more or less, better-paid, stable job and most of them live in secure accommodation. We can see that, everywhere, proletarians are the vast majority. They are the people whose lives deteriorate day by day and they are struggling. They suffer a lot and are between a slow death and a struggle to survive. Luckily, many of them go for a different choice and struggle against the state and system. While the vast majority of people in any country are proletarians, I believe that either there is no revolution or it will be a social revolution, a people's revolution and not just a working class revolution.

Having said that, it does not mean that the working class has little role in the socialist revolution. In fact, without involving the working class whose participation and solidarity are essential, either the movement or uprising can be transformed into civil war, dominated by fundamentalist right wing groups, or contained by authoritarian Islamic groups as we have seen during the "Arab Spring" or takes so long leaving people tired, disappointed, demoralised and defeated by the state.