

Letter from a Syrian reader: “There is a new sentiment of solidarity in the ranks of the poor people”

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The WSWS has received the following correspondence from a reader and supporter in Damascus on the situation in Syria after six years of a civil war instigated and abetted by the major imperialist powers.

We are now in the seventh year of a bloody nightmare. But until now we haven't seen any signs of the end of a very complex battle.

Life goes on. On the streets of the old city of Damascus restaurants and cafes are full, especially at night. Despite all the difficulties of everyday life, the situation is manageable compared with the situation in Aleppo.

Syria has been destroyed. Material losses have been estimated at more than \$300 billion, an astronomical sum for a country like Syria with a pre-war population of 22 million.

One of the most important dimensions of the Syrian crisis is demographic. The change in the population, with hundreds of thousands of deaths, countless numbers disabled and the emigration of a great many young people, will shape the coming period of reconstruction. Social and health programs have suffered the loss of many highly experienced people. Health organisations in both the public and private sectors are all deeply damaged.

During the decade prior to 2010, the health public sector made great progress thanks to the two five-year plans. In 2010, there were more than 1,700 public-sector health care centres covering most of the country and providing free health care services, including dental services. The national pharmaceutical industry was prosperous and used to provide more than 95 percent of the country's needs.

But during the six years of the fighting, the health care sector lost an important part of its human resources. Hospitals and health care services centres were favourite targets for the armed rebels' attacks. In many regions, such as al-Hassakeh, Deir el-Zur, Idlib and the Aleppo and Damascus countryside, the health care infrastructure has been destroyed. Pharmaceutical factories have been destroyed or looted, leading to many categories of medical drugs not being available.

The situation is similar in the education sector, with thousands of schools destroyed or damaged.

The main achievement of the regime of the previous

president, Hafez Al-Assad, was self-sufficiency in the agriculture sector, with cultivation of all sorts of fruits, vegetables and, most importantly, the production of about 4 million tons of cereals, with a strategic stockpile of wheat. But now, the agricultural sector faces big problems because much of the agricultural lands are unsafe.

The reduction in electricity generation and the shortage of petrol have deprived the sector of one of its mainstays—irrigation, which used to include millions of private water pumps. The use of fertilizers and pesticides is in decline. Agricultural production is in free-fall. The cost of transporting the crops to the main commercial centres has become incredibly high, putting the price of many foodstuffs out of reach of many families.

The animal production sector faces additional difficulties. The Syrian interior used to provide grazing pasture for millions of sheep whose high quality meat was highly prized in the Gulf States. There were strict regulations to protect the livestock and its value, with annual quotas for export. Most Syrians ate imported meat. The transformation of the pastoral regions into battlefields has changed the situation dramatically.

These are the horrendous conditions that have driven millions of Syrians to seek refuge in government-controlled areas. In fact, the majority of Syrians live in the conurbations where the government provides public services and security and pays regularly the salaries for both working and retired public sector workers.

Inflation has a direct and heavy impact on the standard of living. In 2011, a US dollar was equal to 50 Syrian pounds. Now, a US dollar buys 530 Syrian pounds.

Going on seven years of the systematic destruction of the land has demonstrated that the events in Dara'a, and what followed in March 2011, had nothing to do with “revolution.” Now, many Syrians believe that CIA agents were running the events of 2011 from their office in Jordan. They had already provided the weapons and cash needed to fuel the flames of an armed rebellion in Syria. With enough money and weapons, you can start a rebellion anywhere in the world. Syria had to be made to pay for its political opposition to Washington.

But this simplistic point of view cannot explain the bloody

fighting and the language of sectarian hatred.

We have to admit that the systematic destruction has realized the main goal—depriving Syria of its strength.

The economic reforms adopted in the last decades were, in fact, indicated by a new orientation that tore up many decades of protectionist policies by which national production was insulated. The import of luxury products had been severely limited. The policy of open doors resulted in the collapse of thousands of small factories and left hundreds of thousands of workers without a job.

The succession of dry seasons in eastern regions drove more than 200,000 peasants with their families to the relatively prosperous cities. They found refuge in the miserable outskirts of the principal cities. These deprived young people found a sort of compensation in the mosques and received subsidies from so-called charitable associations, financed by Wahhabi networks. The situation was ideal to be manipulated by the secret services, which provided all sorts of provocative false propaganda.

The decline and collapse of many of the production and service sectors had adverse effects on everyday life. The poorest of the population had to change their diet. The exorbitant price of fruit and meat forced them to subsist on vegetables. But millions of people could not have survived without assistance from charities.

The crisis has redistributed the national wealth to criminals. A new rich layer has emerged thanks to corruption and the black market. The armed rebel groups' administration was a failure and they have no popular support.

My hope comes from a positive development among young people living in the country. One could speak of a general disillusionment about the position of Western countries, and especially the USA, France and Germany. Many Syrian youth use to be fascinated by the Western model. But the years of crisis have made them aware that the situation in those countries is so far from the picture given out by the mass media.

They adopt a critical position toward both the government and the opposition and refuse to accept the simplified answers that describe the situation in black and white. The traditional parties and the newly formed parties fail to attract them.

They don't trust the old generation. They believe in the responsibility of the whole generation that has failed to build a Motherland for the residents of this country.

Because of the crisis, Damascus hosts nearly 6 millions citizens, one third of all Syrians remaining in the country. The 3 million additional inhabitants are displaced people who have felt the horror of armed groups. For more than four years they have had to face the same problems and risks: exorbitant prices, housing crises, transport difficulties, shortages of electricity and potable water.

The crisis was like a giant furnace that melted the heterogeneous social groups. The situation could be channelled

to produce a good result and consolidate the social fabric. I think the everyday suffering has created a new sort of solidarity. There is a new sentiment of solidarity growing up in the ranks of the poor people. Syrians say that the homeland belongs to the rich, while the poor's share in it is patriotism: they have to defend it. I think that the new generation and the youth will shape the new Syria.

Concerning the *World Socialist Web Site*, I have a long acquaintance with the mysterious Leon Trotsky since my attending a Trotskyist meeting in Lyon, France in 1976. At that time, I was a member of the Syrian Communist Party, which was a very Stalinist one. I wanted to know more about the man who played a principal role in the October revolution. First I read *Literature and Revolution*, then *The Revolution Betrayed*. I discovered another Trotsky that I appreciated.

In 1982, I read the trilogy written by Isaac Deutscher about Trotsky and I read his biography of Stalin. I discovered that Stalinism was a vulgarized version of Marxism and that the idea of the permanent revolution is more cohesive than the nationalist orientation. We didn't have in Syria a Trotskyist movement, but some thinkers were influenced by him. But this was something limited to intellectual discussions.

I discovered the WSWS by chance three or four years ago. I used some of the information as the basis of many articles. I shared some articles on my Facebook account. The reaction of my friends was encouraging. I noticed that the Arabic translations were so modest compared with the others. So I took the initiative to contact the site with the suggestion to translate some articles into Arabic.

I registered for the lectures on the Russian Revolution because I am convinced of the importance of this event.

The building of an international anti-war movement for me means the fight against the conditions that pave the way for wars. The idea has reinforced my hope that the fight is not over, and knowing that the idea of the permanent revolution is still alive is a good sign. A fight must be permanent. That is right on both the national and international level.



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