

Tunisia: “What type of revolution?”

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What is the situation in Tunisia? What is at stake? What are the obstacles to the continuation of the revolutionary process? Alhem Belladj dealt with some of these questions in her contribution at the NPA summer University in Port Leucate (28-30 August 2011).

In Tunisia, the Council for the Protection of the Revolution has been replaced by the High Instance for the Protection of the Revolution and Democratic Transition which has been set up to break the revolutionary dynamic. It replaces not just the Council but also the January 14 Front. The Constituent Assembly elections were scheduled for July 24, but nothing was done so that they would be on time, so they have been put back to October 23.

There are urgent popular and democratic demands, notably at the level of the courts, the economy and the media. The demand for a trial of the old regime is present. For this a profound reform of the judiciary is needed. Until now this has been entirely insufficient. During the trials, ministers have been acquitted, Ben Ali has been sentenced for drug trafficking, and general Serati for forging passports. That is the reality, there have been no trials worthy of the name. The media remains under the monopoly of dirty money, several television channels are directly linked to the former regime.

The economy is also the right to a job, a dignified life, and there is nothing. The small successes are the movements of employees in some sectors. Success in preventing major exploitation in subcontracting for example, or improvements for civil servants. But at the level of political choices there is nothing. Life is increasingly expensive, the measures for the young unemployed are insufficient. There is above all a strengthening of links with international imperialism. For example, payments on the Tunisian debt have gone straight into the pockets of corruption. And the agreements, in particular with the European Union, are completely unfavourable to Tunisia and do not challenge the old relations, on the contrary.

Women have participated a great deal in the revolutionary process. There are today two aspects. One is the advancement of their rights. Parity has been imposed in the High Instance. But on specific questions, the situation remains difficult, notably for abolishing discriminatory laws. The question of personal status inherited from 1956 has been posed to the parties. Before pressure from feminists, women and some parties, the government has dealt with the question of elimination of all forms of violence.

What type of revolution is the Tunisian revolution? A democratic revolution? Socialist? It is a classic debate inside the Tunisian left. So far as self-organisation is concerned, the regional and local councils for the protection of the revolution remain, but their coordination does not really emerge and it is not up to the level of the expectations to counteract the march of the counter revolution. There have been very few committees of self-organisation, essentially after the revolution, in certain enterprises which belonged to families who had abandoned them. There have been some initiatives, occupations, above all in the farms, in the context of the agrarian reform.

Since the revolution the UGTT has become very proactive, unlike at the beginning, where it wished to hide and control the social struggles while waiting to ensure the democratic transition through the constituent Assembly.

The January 14 Front brought together the revolutionary and radical forces. But its charter was not very clear, notably concerning the type of government desired. The revolutionary forces were weak, but they would have been able to ally with social forces to go towards a popular and workers' government. But this has not been a slogan inside the Front because for some it was necessary to realise the democratic stage before the social and revolutionary phase. The Front also included nationalists who had no real place there. It rapidly broke up, first because of the High Instance, but also because of the alliances for the preparation of the Constituent Assembly.

The Essebsi government control everything, despite the independent bodies which organise the future elections. The media, political money, the absence of left unity will essentially favour the Islamists and the liberals. The RCD has been kicked out the door, but it has come back through the window. Despite the High Instance, money is uncontrollable: a party that nobody knows can be present everywhere on the television, in the street, at the airport, because it has money, even if it has no social base or project of society.

The Workers' Left League was present everywhere during the revolutionary process: we were the essential coordinators in the mobilisations in the Casbah, we were very present at the trade union level, and among youth. We have more leaders than base for the moment, because we are in the process of constructing the latter. We have debated participation or not in the Constituent Assembly. We decided to participate while denouncing what is happening and working on the illusions on the Constitution considered as a solution for the oppressed.

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P.S.

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