

Tunis: Birth of a Common Front of Political Organisations Against Debt

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The first Mediterranean coordination against debt, austerity policies and foreign domination, and for a free, united, democratic, social, feminist and environmentally responsible Mediterranean region took place in Tunis on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 March in the build up to the World Social Forum.

A score of political formations, coming from the Mediterranean perimeter gathered in response to a call by the Popular Front (a coalition of 11 radical left-wing political parties, associations and independent personalities, one of whom was Chokri Belaid, who was assassinated on 6 February 2013). Among those represented were the French parties, Front de Gauche (Left Front) and NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party); from Spain came Izquierda Unida (United Left) and Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-Capitalist Left); others were Sortu from the Basque country, CUP from Catalonia, OKDE from Greece, the Left Block from Portugal, Sinistra Critica from Italy, Al Mounadil from Morocco; also taking part were representatives of organisations from other Mediterranean countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. Organisations from Belgium (LCR), Haiti, Venezuela (Marea Socialista) and a number of other countries were also present. This is the first time that political parties and organisations get together in the Mediterranean area in order to cancel illegitimate debt.

This gathering was followed by a public meeting attended by over a thousand people, including many representatives of political parties from the Mediterranean region and beyond, a large number of whom were women and youths (although it is to be regretted that among the twenty or so speakers only three were women). The mood was electric, animated by slogans in Arabic, charged with passion, anger, joy and collective feeling, each affirming the ardent will of his or her party to work on the issue of the debt, to resist the dictatorship of the creditors, wipe out the capitalist system and struggle for the emancipation of the peoples by laying the foundations of a New World Order.

Numerous tributes were paid to different leaders, revolutionaries or progressive activists. Emotion was high during a film in homage to Chokri Belaid, who remains a popular personality and inspiration in the Tunisian revolution. Homage was also paid to Hugo Chavez and his commitment to the social transformations needed by his people.

For over 3 hours a number of different speakers hailed the Tunisian revolution and more largely the "Arab Spring" that led to the overthrow of the dictators Ben Ali and Mubarak. These historic events take on an international significance. The Tunisian revolution is, for several generations, the demonstration that revolution is not an idle word and that a people can choose their destiny. The public meeting was brought to a vibrant end by Hama Hammami who developed an analysis of the debt that is entirely convergent with that of CADTM.

As mentioned in the preamble of the declaration of this Mediterranean reunion against debt, the fall of Ben Ali "has permitted the disarmament of the local capitalist structure without going so far as overthrowing it. The social regime, which is the historical result of foreign domination and, more

recently, of the restructuring of worldwide capitalist globalisation, is still standing. The revolutionary crisis opened by the insurrection is still active. The victory of the Tunisian democratic and social revolution remains possible.” [1]

In this context the debt, which remains a central tool for the domination and oppression of the peoples must be cancelled. A real instrument for the transfer of riches and of political domination, this issue was at the heart of the debate. The speakers have affirmed the necessity of liberating ourselves from the dictatorship of the creditors and the international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank and the IMF. Several speakers mentioned as examples, Argentina, Ecuador and Iceland to demonstrate the possibility of resisting creditors so as to implement policies that favour the population. Public debt audits were also presented as possible strategies permitting the identification and cancellation of odious and illegitimate debts, with the stress on the need to mobilise on this question. This is the first time that such a common front has arisen. It is undoubtedly a historic step forward in the struggle against the debt, echoing the call made 26 years earlier by then President of Burkina Faso Thomas Sankara in Addis Abeba in 1987, “The debt cannot be repaid because if we do not pay the lenders will not die, that is certain,. On the other hand, if we do pay; it is we who will die. That is equally certain.” The groups gathered in Tunis have decided to create a follow-up commission and to meet again in Spain some time in 2013 or 2014.

Pauline Imbach (CADTM)

Footnotes

[1] The final declaration will soon be published.