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‘Without revolution in Arab world, Tunisia can’t go beyond bourgeois democracy’

Sunday 27 February 2011, by [GUIGA Wafa](#), [HJORT Linn](#) (Date first published: 25 January 2011).

The Tunisian trade union federation, the UGTT, which was the only trade union allowed until very recently, played a key role in the massive protests.

***I think that the most important thing is that the revolution will spread in all countries in the region, or it could abort. Therefore it is really important to support revolutionary movements in other countries,** says Wafa Guiga, Tunisian who has lived in Paris for the last eight years.*

Since last December, when the revolt started in Tunisia, she has demonstrated and worked to spread information about the situation.



At the beginning there was little news about the uprising and how it was spreading.

- I heard that there was a revolt, but I thought it was limited to Sidi Bouzid. Then my sister told me that it was spreading to all the western regions of the country. I attended the demonstrations in Paris and also started a Facebook account in order to be able to get updated and reliable news, and to keep NPA comrades informed.

In the middle of December, trade unions, the NPA and the Left Front - Front Gauche, which consists of a number of political organizations including the French Communist Party - and Tunisian organizations got together in the Collectif Sidi Bouzid in Paris. Several demonstrations were held and gatherings took place on almost a daily basis. But these solidarity activities are not limited to Paris. Several other towns across France held such actions, and these are still continuing.

- I think that it is important to continue spreading information about what happens in Tunisia, since the French media has stopped doing that. But I think the most important thing for those of us in France to do is to fight our employers here. In fact they are the same here and in Tunisia.

- There are around 1250 French companies in Tunisia, so we have the same employers in the two countries. As trade union members and as political parties here in France, we have to denounce what they are doing here and in Tunisia.

- For example, I think it could be interesting to organize strikes together for workers here and in

Tunisia. It would send a very strong message to the employers!

The protests in Tunisia have become smaller since president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali left the country on the 14th January, but people are still gathering on the streets in towns around the country and continue to make demands on the new government. Currently the government is being headed by Mohammed Ghannouchi, a former prime minister under Ben Ali. A big majority of the new government were members of Ben Ali's party, the RCD.

According to Wafa Guiga, it is hard to expect anything positive from the new government - both when it comes to the economy and to human rights - since the old and the new governments are overlapping.

- Mohammed Ghannouchi was responsible for the privatizations in Tunisia. The fact that he is still prime minister means that nothing will change, economically speaking.
- The people who continue the movement, the demonstrations and the strikes are the unemployed and working people who say that this revolution has not changed anything for them economically.

Some of the continuing protests are organized by the 14th January movement, which consists of the Tunisian Workers Communist Party (PCOT), some small leftwing organizations and some nationalist groups. They demand that the new government and all state institutions with remnants from the old regime be dissolved, as well as the RCD party. Jobs must be created and an unemployment insurance instituted. The coalition also calls for freedom to demonstrate and organize, freedom of expression and the press, freedom of belief, and a declaration of general amnesty. All resources and companies that were privatized under Ben Ali and the International Monetary Fund must be nationalized.

The Tunisian trade union federation, the UGTT, which was the only trade union allowed until very recently, played a key role in the massive protests.

- At the beginning of the revolt, there were demonstrations everywhere in the country, but these demonstrations were spontaneous. When the UGTT decided to be really involved in the movement and decided to organize strikes and demonstrations, the protests became the biggest ever seen in Tunisia, and led to toppling the Ben Ali regime. But at the end of January the UGTT proclaimed its support for the new government, even though they themselves decided not to take part in it.
- As a result it was not possible to continue deepening the revolutionary process through the UGTT. Thus the 14th January coalition was formed. All the members of the coalition are also trade union members, so they can continue mobilizing through the union.

But how strong is this coalition and other progressive organizations?

- As Tunisia was a dictatorship, it was not possible to express political ideas openly. This is a new period, in which political parties and the Islamists will put forth their ideas. In this new period activists don't know how strong they are, and it will take some months to find out!
- Political activists of today's Tunisia have placed demands for gender equality on the agenda, and they support the women's organizations when they organize demonstrations and meetings, although they continue to criticize what they did in the past.

What kind of Tunisia would you like to emerge from this situation?

- I would like to see a country where the workers have the power to make decisions over themselves

and their future. But it is impossible to do that only in Tunisia. If the revolution is limited to Tunisia, the best we can obtain is a bourgeois democracy.

- In order to deepen this process even in Tunisia it is necessary to spread this revolt to the other Arab countries.



Wafa Guiga interviewed by Linn Hjort

Wafa Guiga, an engineer by occupation, came to France in 2002 to write her PhD, and stayed in Paris after completing it. In Tunisia she was close to, although never a formal member of, the Human Rights League. In France she became a member of the LCR, Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, and joined the New Anti-capitalist Party, the NPA, when it formed.

P.S.

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* Born in Sweden, Linn Hjort has lived in South Africa for many years where she studied and worked. She has a Master in Political Studies from University of Cape Town and is currently completing a degree in Media and Communication at Stockholm University. After many years as a freelance journalist and researcher in South Africa, she returned to Sweden to work as chief editor of Stockholm-based weekly, *Internationalen* before resuming studying and freelancing for various left-wing newspapers. She has a keen interest in feminist issues, racism and class struggles. She writes a lot on issues concerning the African continent.