

A breath of the 2011 resistance in Syrian protest movement

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Large protests have been taking place in Syria since mid-August 2023 in the governorate of Sweida, populated mainly by the Druze minority. The protesters blocked the main roads connecting the towns and villages of the countryside, creating disruptions in access to the capital, Damascus.

A general strike was also called in the governorate, with the forced closure of all state institutions, except those classified as essential services. Other cities and regions under the control of the Syrian regime, including the governorates of Daraa and rural Damascus, have also witnessed forms of protest, albeit on a much smaller scale.

Political and economic demands

Although the trigger for the latest protests is linked to the economic decisions taken by the Syrian government that have caused a further deterioration in the living conditions of the popular classes, it is the entire Syrian regime that is being called into question. This is symbolized by the now historic slogan chanted by the demonstrators – “The people want the fall of the regime” – and the destruction of large banners and portraits of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.

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While the resilience and courage of the Sweida demonstrators are to be welcomed, only an extension of the protest movement to other regions can allow it to continue and represent a real challenge to the regime. Arrest campaigns have taken place in different cities, such as Latakia and Aleppo, since the beginning of the protests in Sweida. The regime’s security services fear that the protest movement will spread.

Minimum wage at \$100, release of political prisoners

If the mobilization remains limited to the governorate of Sweida, the regime will most likely bet on stalemate, the fatigue of the demonstrators and the economic difficulties resulting from the closure of economic activities. The region depends on the regime in terms of providing food, fuel and

services.

Attempts to create new political collectives have also taken place in recent weeks, for example the August 10 Movement. Its main objective, as stated in its initial statement, is to address the socio-economic and political suffering of the Syrian population while emphasizing peaceful and non-sectarian resistance. It also demands, among other things, an increase in the minimum wage to \$100 per month, the release of all political prisoners, the departure of all foreign occupation forces and the implementation of UN Resolution 2254 and so on. These new collectives claim to have thousands of members, mostly young, in areas controlled by the regime, and organizes in a decentralized and online way. However, the movement has so far refrained from calling for demonstrations, waiting to reach a critical mass of popular support and fearing violent repression.

These new groups, however, remain quite small and do not yet represent a challenge for the regime at the national level. The ability of the popular classes to self-organize and act collectively is still very limited by the state. Nevertheless, this breath of popular resistance, which reminds everyone of the 2011 uprising, shows that the revolutionary process is still open, against all odds.

JOSEPH DAHER

P.S.

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