

TUNISIA AND THE ARAB REVOLUTION

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After 40 days of mobilisation and with over a hundred people dead, we are witnessing the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia. It's not just the fall of a family dictatorship, but the breakdown of a political regime and potentially a social system. It is also the beginning of a far-reaching revolutionary process in the Maghreb and throughout the Middle East. Imed Trabelsi was the nephew of Tunisia's former first lady and he grew rich under the shadow of dictatorship, but he was assassinated ...by his own bodyguard! The residence of Belhassen Trabelsi, brother of Ben Ali's wife Leila Trabelsi, was looted in the city of Sokra, so was the house of Hemi Trabelsi. The fall of Ben Ali and his family (his wife, Imelda Marcos-style, fled the country taking, not thousands of shoes like her Filipino inspiration, but half a ton of gold, over sixty million dollars) was the direct product of a palace coup, influenced by popular revolt, when the military chief not only refused to repress the people on the street, but also showed Ben Ali the back door. This led the former president to flee to Saudi Arabia, after being rejected by his ungrateful French and Italian sponsors. Ben Ali had recently been re-elected with record vote in "a country which enjoyed the highest living standard of the region, and had also wiped out the Islamists", according to the comment of the surprised "mainstream media".

During Ben Ali's last days, the police, which could not cope with the mobilized masses, also faced army units. The new self-appointed government (consisting of dignitaries from the deposed regime along with the incorporation of three ministers from the "opposition") was temporary in character (it promised to hold elections in six months). Despite that, it did not diffuse, but rather strengthened a popular mobilization which began to demand the complete extinction of the regime and the dissolution of the ruling "party" (the RCD, Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique, a true mafia). It continued more than ever on the street, now supported by the indefinite general strike from various sectors (in particular, teachers): "Neither a police state, nor a military state" was the more modulated slogan. The fall of Ben Ali is almost equivalent to the dismantling of the State, in a country where the national army has less than 30,000 men against the 1,60,000 members of the "security forces"(police), responsible for the protection of the ruling Mafia. The neighbours began to defend their neighbourhoods on their own against the thugs, and the regime's Mafia-like Praetorian Guard deposed: the working class in Tunisia has begun to arm itself with what little they have, to protect their neighbourhoods and to establish self-defence committees, creating embryos of workers' power centres.

Tunisian Dictatorship

The Neo-Destour Party (New Constitution) (NDP), led by Habib Bourguiba, was formed in 1934. This formally marked the beginning of the Tunisian struggle for independence. In 1955 Tunisia achieved self-governance and, in 1957, independence as a constitutional monarchy. In 1957, the monarchy was overthrown and a republic was proclaimed, with Bourguiba as president. Despite Tunisia's independence, France maintained its military presence through a naval base in Bizerte till 1963. In that year, after a blockade by the Tunisian navy, the French were forced to leave the country. During the 1970s, the government run by the Destourien Socialist Party (renamed as Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique in 1988) opened up the economy to foreign investment in all sectors, and allowed the development of the capitalist private sector.

Tunisia then was considered a "model country" by the Maghreb, the "Islamic" countries, and across Africa. It was praised by the IMF chairman, the French "socialist" Dominique Strauss-

Kahn (now “the Commissioner’s Horse” for the upcoming French presidential elections). A free trade area took shape in 2001 among Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan. In 2001 the EU signed agreements with Tunisia to control “illegal immigration”, which materialised in the 5+5 Group in 2002 (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya).

Ben Ali, a despot, thief and torturer, is (or was) a prominent, and not just decorative, member of the “Socialist International”. In late 1995, the “socialist” Spanish president Felipe Gonzales travelled to Tunisia, during a period of complete repression of the “socialist” Tunisians, to sign a treaty of friendship and bilateral cooperation. He did not denounce the repression in public, and only gave his fellow Socialists a few minutes, standing at the reception hosted at the residence of Spain’s ambassador. Fifteen years later, the Foreign Ministry denied visas to several Tunisian activists to participate in a meeting in Madrid.

The Ben Alis are the direct owners of much of the Tunisian financial sector, with the Mediobanca and Zitouna banks (owned by Sakhr el Matri, Ben Ali’s son), the MAS for the governance of the capital’s airport services (owned by Slim Zarrouk, another son), the Cactus, which owns 60% of the national radio and TV (owned by Néji Mhiri, chairman of the Central Bank) and Dar Assabah Group, which publishes the daily Assabah and Le Temps (also owned by Sakhr el Matri). The Ennakl has a monopoly over transportation, and the Société Le Moteur has the licenses for Mercedes and Fiat. Ben Ali’s family also owns Trabelsi airlines and Frip Karthago Airlines, as well as the administration of almost all urban real estate and vast land holdings.

The Arab International Bank of Tunisia went to the Mabruks, allies of Ben Ali. Leila’s sister Belhan Trabelsi controlled the Tunisian Bank and conferred the bank’s directorship upon the wife of Abdelwahab Abdallah, a provost of the regime. The family owns countless real-estate properties, tourist resorts and houses purchased with Euro. The import of alcoholic beverages in the country, the sugar company Bizerte, tuna fishery, monopoly over fishing in the lake bordering the capital, are other interests of the Trabelsis, the Mabruks and three or four other families under Ben Ali’s leadership.

In this way, this “socialist” continued to usurp, with his criminal partners and with the complicity of European governments (in the first place, French), even “left” and foreign capitalist monopolies, almost the entire “Tunisian” sector of national economy, which was 80% immediately after the independence granted by France in 1957. The president’s family and his wife (a former hairdresser, second wife of “the leader of the nation”) pillaged Sidi Bou Said and Carthage, treasured archaeological cities, on behalf of museums and collectors in Europe and North America. During the period 1987-2009, the ruling family’s overseas transfers (to banks and tax havens) are estimated at 18 billion dollars, an amount equal to the country’s external debt. To end with, the aforementioned (and now presumed as dead) Imed Trabelsi, and his brother Moaz, nephews of Ben Ali’s wife were burglars denounced in international forums (including charges for stealing yachts of rich European tourists). They also managed the highly profitable business of trafficking and prostitution of minors. Personalised and power-hungry nationalism inevitably ends in the “clan economy” and social and moral degeneration. This historical trend reached its ultimate consequences in Tunisia.

Tunisia and Imperialism

Foreign monopolies happily became partners of this criminal economy, exploiting it to the end to get monstrous super-profits. French monopolies occupy first place in the list, in the tourism sector (Fram, Accor, Club Med, Nouvelles Frontières: all of them repatriated “the necessity” of their tourists), finance (BNP Paribas, Société Générale, BPCE, Groupe Caisse d'Epargne),

distribution (Carrefour, Casino), telecommunications (Orange and Teleperformance), insurance (Groupama) and industry (Valeo, Faurecia, Sagem, Air Liquide, Danone, Renault, PSA, Sanofi Aventis, Total, Colas Rail, Alstom and General Electric France), with its Tunisian subsidiaries often chaired by members of the three major Mafia families in the country (Mabrouk, Trabelsi – related to the wife of the former president – and Ben Ali). Expropriation is waiting: not only the Tunisian criminals, but also their international sponsors, should be brought before an independent criminal court and made to pay for their crimes against the Arab people and Tunisia. Let’s not forget the EU (European Union), which profited from Tunisia, with a free trade agreement implemented in 2008. Due to low wages and labour flexibility in the Maghreb the EU increasingly moved its industrial production to Tunisia and Morocco in recent decades. EU’s support to the clans of the north west African dictators is not a “political blindness”. Rather, it is a requirement of the European, including the German bourgeoisie, as a whole. As Michel Camau noted, Tunisia was almost “the twenty-eighth member of the EU”.

Even then, with its ten and a half million inhabitants, an economy “modern and liberal”, praised and supported by the IMF and the World Bank, the service sector occupying 54% of GDP (tourism employs more than 4,00,000 people), an advanced medical sector (not for the people, but cosmetic surgery, aimed first and foremost at the French and Italian customers with highly competitive prices in relation to the metropolis, in which liposuction, botox, silicone implants for breasts and the bottom, and other artificial extension of the capitalist illusion of “eternal youth” are not, and justifiably so, reimbursed by social security) and an “advanced” charter of freedom for women in relation to other “Islamic countries” (women do not use veil or burqa if they so desire; “the status of women is incomparably superior to that of neighbouring countries” said Juan Goytisolo), Tunisia was considered the “(imperial) pearl of the Mediterranean”, as Cuba was once (before the 1959 revolution) the imperial “pearl”(brothel) in the Caribbean.

The post-independence (1957) “development” was uneven. The regions of south and north (initial centres of the revolt) are poor and backward, with the “wealth” concentrated in the west (hilly region), with phosphates (world’s second largest exporter), and on the coast, with a few industries and tourism. In recent times, however, Tunisia held a 5% annual growth, the highest in the region. But the crisis brought down the house of cards, highlighting the low wages and unemployment rates, officially (that is, below real levels) between 20% and 30%, in a population in which 75% are young, under 30 years (analysts estimate that the youth unemployment will reach 60%).

The precise fact for the masses taking to the streets (provoked by the repressive action against street vendors) since last December, prompted by the suicide of an unemployed youth, reveals the development of a desperate social situation. The protests began spontaneously on the afternoon of 17th December, when Mohamed Bouazizi- an unemployed young man- despite his college diploma, blew himself up with fire to protest the confiscation of fruits and vegetables being sold at a street stall. Bouazizi's gesture was later imitated in many countries, from Egypt to Mauritania. As the anthropologist Hosham Dawod noted, self-immolation is not, in these cases, a religious act, but a political, even anti-religious one- “The symbolic use of fire wishes to tell the world: hell is here”.

Women have played a key role in this struggle, not due to the liberty of the rotten regime, but against it. Even before the outbreak of the revolt of 17th December in the town of Sidi Bouzid, there were a handful of women on the frontline. Among the best known are the lawyer Radhia Nasraoui, president of the Tunisian Association for the Struggle against Torture. Soon after learning about the Sidi Bouzid revolt, Nasraoui created a committee to support its inhabitants. Tunisian women had every reason to hate Ben Ali’s family dictatorship, and the entire regime. In 1993 Sihem Bensedrine, spokesperson of the National Committee for Liberties in Tunisia was

the victim of a particular type of attack by the political police. They superimposed her face on that of a pornographic actress and distributed thousands of copies of the photo-montage. In 2003, Radhia Nasraoui did not take a bite for 57 days to protest against repression, while the “Western democracies” looked the other way.

In Tunisia the main source of employment is (or, perhaps, was) tourism, especially sexual (once again, like in pre-revolutionary Cuba). This “modern and unprejudiced” tourism is organised by thriving companies like Club Med, founded and headed by a modern “May 68 veteran” and targeted at the abundant (and spectacularly stupid) French middle class. That class is “liberally” prepared to repeat the African sexual exploits of their paedophile literary idol André Gide, constantly and with predetermined and prepaid prices. Hence, the much-praised pseudo-freedom of women and youth (in a country with no freedom), is the “freedom” necessary for the commercial transformation of their bodies. A couple of decades ago the award-winning Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun wrote a story in *Le Monde*, dramatising this exploitation against the backdrop of a Tunisian subsidiary of Club Med. That provoked an angry reaction from frightened readers (surely also customers of the disgusting “tourist” trade).

The Revolt and the European Debacle

The same Tahar Ben Jelloun now writes that “the events of Tunisia have a historical significance for the entire Arab world. They signify a shock wave that can arouse the masses of Algeria, Cairo, Damascus and other countries with authoritarian and unpopular regimes”. Morocco banned solidarity demonstrations with the Tunisian revolt, but the people in Egypt and Algeria ruled the streets chanting “Tunisia shows the way”. All the people and the Arab world are with Tunisia. This nation has risen to shake the crap of imperial and neo-colonial exploitation accumulated over decades (and centuries), aided, in recent decades, by “nationalist” complicity. The Lebanese Government has just suffered an electoral defeat to the benefit of Hezbollah. The Lebanese left-wing daily *As Safir* argued that “this is the first popular Arabic revolution of the 21st century and it’s a model for a long-awaited change in the Arab world.” In Jordan hundreds of protesters gathered outside the parliament demanding the government’s resignation. In Egypt, a key Middle Eastern country, the masses ruled the streets shouting “we neither want Mubarak nor his son” ...

In the early days of the Tunisian mobilisation, the French foreign minister, Michelle Alliot-Marie (called MAM...) offered Ben Ali the know-how of the French police to combat street demonstrations (literally, France “proposes that Tunisia use our Police know-how to manage their security issues”). The French press now criticizes that gesture as a test of political stupidity. MAM, however, only expressed the conscience (admittedly idiotic) of an entire social class, accustomed to regard the former colonies (Tunisia was a French colony for 75 years) as the backyard of the metropolis. On 28th April, 2008, during his travels to Tunisia, President Sarkozy declared: “Your country is engaged in the promotion of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.” A few months later, the IMF managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn said in the capital of Tunis, Ben Ali's regime was “the best model for many emerging countries”.

A passing mention needs to be made to the other French ministers, such as Bruno Le Maire (Agriculture) and the very expressive Frédéric Mitterrand (Culture), nephew of the former “socialist” president, and now serving the current right-wing president). They expressed themselves in terms similar to MAM. On the contrary, *L'Express* (this magazine is for the ultra-decadent French imperialism what *The Economist* is for the Anglo-American empire) made no mistake in devoting their cover issue to the Tunisian rebellion and titling it “Arab revolution” in alarm. MAM realised the same thing when she travelled to Gaza (Palestine) to engage in a bit of

“democratic” demagoguery using the oppressed Palestinians who, in response (and aware of the offer to Ben Ali) pelted her convoy with eggs.

Later, Sarkozy commented on Tunisia: “We were not able to see their despair,” but this was a huge pile of shit. The French history is long. In 1997, the “socialist” (former "Trotskyist") prime minister Lionel Jospin met Ben Ali and eulogized him (now left to be explained). This was nothing strange; they were "partners" in the “Socialist International”.

Vis-à-vis the debacle of European diplomacy (not only French but also Spanish and Italian) the US, considered the possibility of entering foreign territory and “welcomed”, along with Barack Obama, “the courage and dignity of the Tunisian people” (of course they did not make this gesture to the people of Honduras in similar circumstances). A few days before the fall of Ben Ali, the Tunisian army top-brass contacted the US embassy and urged them not to intervene in the repression. Much earlier the US and then the EU had detected the impending catastrophe of Ben Ali’s regime and maneuvered to differentiate itself from the the old regime.

Obama finally “applauded” the Tunisian people, but only after the fall of Ben Ali. Having reported daily on incidents in Iran after the elections last year, and constantly insisted on the murder of Neda, one of the few victims of the mullahs in those incidents, the media of the imperialist countries looked the other way while the youth was massacred in Tunisia (and later in Algeria). Both the US and the EU remained silent until the last moment, because they considered the pro-imperialist Ben Ali, who was even subservient to Zionism, useful to their interests. France also fears a mass revolutionary victory in North Africa, because it could motivate the Beurs (the youth of North African origin born in France), who have been the recent rebels in the suburbs of France and a new round of insurrection. The population factor is another link that unites the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Global Crisis and Revolution

The initial spark of the Tunisian revolution had its roots in the world capitalist crisis, which instigated, as in 2008, a strong speculation on raw materials, especially on grains. In India the prices of staple foods rose by 18%, in China by 12%. According to the official figures of the FAO, 29 countries are in emergency situation for food crisis.

In the Maghreb countries such price-rise reached 30% average in the main ingredients, bread (wheat), oil, sugar and semolina: the cost of flour and oil doubled in recent months, reaching record prices, while a kilogram of sugar, which cost 70 dinars or about 0.7 Euros just a few months ago, has risen to 150 dinars or 1.5 Euros. Governments carried out successive devaluations to balance budgets ravaged by the concessions made to big capital (domestic and foreign). This contributed to the catastrophe of Maghreb.

In Algeria, an oil country (OPEC member), with nearly \$ 160 billion stacked in foreign bank reserves “the youngsters are infuriated with the regime. They do not understand why a rich country is unable to offer jobs, homes and a decent life to its people”. The rebellion initially left two dead and 320 injured and dozens of police injured by popular anger. The revolt, which began in Oran, western Algeria's capital, spread to 18 of the 48 provinces of Algeria. According to El Watan, the protests reached the towns of Dejlfá, Ouargla and other regions. Young Azzedine Lebza tried to penetrate the headquarters of the prefecture in M'sila with other protesters. He was shot dead. Popular revolt turned directly against the centres of political power. After its inception, the “food riot” transformed rapidly to political rebellion against the government.

These incidents are of nationalist origin (Destour party, Tunisia) and are even “revolutionary”, along with the Algerian FLN, National Liberation Front, founded in 1954 and main protagonist in the armed struggle for independence (1954-1962), in which more than 1.5 million Algerians

died (Algerian independence was declared on 5th July, 1962). Nevertheless, the bureaucratic dictatorships are extremely corrupt (Algerian military; the official internal documents of the US revealed by Wiki-leaks, in turn, defined the Tunisian government as a “Mafia”, based on crony capitalism, capitalism of associates) and allied to imperialism: in Tunisia, the “President-elect” Ben Ali (with almost 90% votes, an authentic “Lula index”) ruled for 24 years (his predecessor, Bourguiba, ruled for 30 years, with Ben Ali as his “minister of security” in the 1980's. They are the only two presidents of independent Tunisia.)

It is worth remembering that Ben Ali climbed to power in 1987 through a mini-coup against the senile Bourguiba. It was a crisis prevention policy, a coup orchestrated by the Italian government run by “socialist” Bettino Craxi (hence the good relationship between Ben Ali and the Socialist International). At that time, a spokesman for the Italian “services” revealed that Craxi Andreotti, the head of Sismi Martini and the head of dell'Eni Reviglio gave birth to the successful Tunisian coup. They were the cream of the Italian (criminal) state.

The fall of Ben Ali and the “National Union”

Vis-à-vis the protests, Ben Ali reformed his Cabinet (dismissing, among others, the interior minister who was responsible for repressing the people and the media). On 12th January, he was desperate and ordered the release of all those arrested during the unrest. He also created a special committee “to investigate corruption”. The “tolerant opposition” (PDP) attempted a “recovery from the rebellion” (criticising government sectors, but not intending the government to fall). But the masses remained in the streets, shouting slogans against “the executioners of the people” and spontaneously swarmed the premises of the UGTT (General Union of the Workers of Tunisia, the principal trade union).

Ben Ali promised 3, 00,000 new jobs on the television. The popular response was “We don’t care about unemployment; we want Ben Ali’s arrest”. Even the lawyers joined the protests against the repression of the unemployed youth (“The strike is a clear message that we do not accept unwarranted attacks against lawyers,” said the president of the Tunisian Bar Association, who said that 95% of 8,000 Tunisian lawyers supported the strike), making it clear that the entire country was against the political regime.

In Algeria, the minister of trade, Mustafa Benben, announced a special inter-ministerial council dedicated to examining how to tackle the rising price of staple food. At that time, the people in the street were proceeding to “test” him. The president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika (another “life-timer”), also promised one million dollars to build new houses before 2014. Aspirin for cancer! The post-colonial nationalism in the former French colony has been unable to uplift their country’s fortunes, even the most basic issues, of late, in Tunisia, the basic food depends on annual imports of 1, 00, 000 tons of grain; in Algeria, 3, 50, 000. Hunger (immediate) and unemployment (historical) provoked rebellion with clearly revolutionary overtones. “The entire Maghreb seems to be under the influence of a rebellion,” said the Italian financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore*, alarmed by events in the two countries lying on the side-walks of the Mediterranean (Algeria and Tunisia are the African countries most directly linked to Europe). But he was wrong about the arena, because it includes the entire Middle East and Arab countries.

The Algerian regime responded to the demonstrations with brutal repression. Five people died and nearly 900 were wounded, but events had to be reversed due to the danger of an eventual popular revolt. This is what happened in Tunisia. The government announced subsidies and repealed certain taxes, which would result in a 40% decline in food prices. The government also designed a new housing plan for 2014, which led to a decline in the protests. However, the split between large segments of the population- particularly among young workers - and the government was complete.

The Islamic clerical hierarchy, both in Tunisia and Algeria, called for calm, to which the population did not pay any attention. On Saturday, the 8th January, police and RCD militia launched a veritable slaughter of the demonstrators. But on the 4th January, the militant currents of the UGTT took on the pro-reconciliation management of the trade union, in its plenary session. From 11th January, regional factories were free to launch general strikes. Six trade union federations (teachers, postal services, telephone, medical services, pharmaceutical sector, and government servants) called a general strike and street demonstrations. After decades of repression, the working class emerged as the potential leader of popular rebellion.

Sudan also was affected by student demonstrations in the capital. These took place in protest against price increase when the government abolished subsidies on petroleum products and sugar. However, the demonstrations in this country are marked by an overall policy crisis. The Moroccan government, meanwhile, prevented a solidarity protest at the Embassy of Tunisia fearing that the demonstrations could start in their own territory. The regime of Mohamed VI has its own crisis at home; just a few months ago he unleashed a ferocious repression against the Saharawi people to curb self-determination of the people and to maintain control over the region. Zapatero, the Spanish “socialist” openly supported it.

On the 14th January there were mass demonstrations in Tunisia across the country. It was the cry of “permanent rebellion, say no to Ben Ali”. Slogans like “Some bread, some water, yes, but not Ben Ali”, and “Ben Ali, assassin. Ben Ali should leave” were also chanted. After a failed attempt at declaring a state of emergency against an unstoppable movement, Ben Ali resigned and fled to Saudi Arabia. With the fall of Ben Ali, a substitute government was formed, led by Mohamed Ghannouchi (Prime Minister of Ben Ali since 1999), with the participation of (former) “opposition” Najib Chebbi, of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), and Ahmed Ibrahim, of the Communist Party, Ettajdid. After designating three ministers in this government, UGTT refused to recognize or support it. Popular pressure and pressure from the working-class elementarily sustained the independence of class vis-à-vis the pseudo-democratizing manoeuvre.

A Revolutionary Crisis

Ghannouchi, hated by the people, was forced to resign by the Constitutional Council, 16 hours after taking over reign. Required by law to call elections within 60 days, Fuad Mebaza, head of the Parliament relieved him. The new government had to release all those detained previously. However, at the same time, a commando kidnapped Hamma Hammami, leader of the PCOT (Communist Workers Party of Tunisia). There were riots and fires in the prisons of Gafsa and Kaserin regions (center-west) and those of Bizerta and Mornaguia (north). The “7th of November Square” (date of Ben Ali’s rise to power in 1987) was renamed “Martyrs' Square”. the awareness of independent historical action was present in the entire population.

The new “unity government”, commissioned by Fuad Mebaza, retained the four major ministries of the former Executive: Defense, Finance, Foreign Affairs and Interior, the latter appointed a week before Ben Ali’s fall. 12 of the 20 new ministers are members of the deposed president’s party: “The members of Ben Ali’s party belonging to the government were not connected to the repression and corruption. They are technocrats who have not soiled their hands,” justified Seddik Umayyad , a member of the PDP leadership. The former “opposition” took secondary charges: Health, Regional Development and Higher Education. On the streets, shouting activists attacked Ahmed Ibrahim, leader of Ettajdid, one of the ‘opposition’ parties. Ben Ali had given him authority and had made him part of the government.

One need not be too intelligent to perceive the trap that Tunisia has fallen into, after the revolution. For Fathi Chamkhi, a member of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, the composition of the Cabinet is “deplorable”: “The problems are deeper than anger against a

family. This regime of theatre actors would have us believe that the Tunisians just hated Ben Ali and Trabelsi, and now everything is fine. What people want is work. The new government is the counter-revolution.” “Ali Baba is gone! Now the 40 thieves must go!”- chanted the demonstrators protesting the permanence of Ministers of the former regime.

The three ministers from UGTT (Anouar Ben Gueddour, Abdeljelil Bedoui and Houssine Dimassi, who had assumed the Ministry of Labour), and leader of the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties resigned. After joining it they refused to further recognise the new government (knowing, of course, its composition of continuing nature). The union's general secretary made it clear that this action was being taken in “response to the demands of the people in streets”. He reported that they were also withdrawing their representatives from the Parliament and the Economic and Social Council. The crisis was complete, and its base is the continuation and radicalisation of the working-class and popular movement. Even the police was changing its tune- “The Police says no to dictatorship”, “the town has let off the police” are slogans written on the streets. The state agents claimed the right to create a trade-union, wage increases and swore at the Chief Inspector Ali Mansur: “We just obeyed orders. Now we need protection.” “We have also been victims of the regime.”

However, the “Communist” and Islamic bourgeois opposition claimed two things from the government in continuation - “an agreement with the real opposition” and organization of a democratic political process. The left-wing and the followers of “radical” nationalism claimed, at most, the expropriation of the assets of Ben Ali and his family (the major portion of these are held with foreign banks) or, as in the case of Tunisian CP, a constituent assembly convened by the “government of national unity”, rather than the complete destruction of the old regime. They also wanted a control by workers and the people over every production (mainly of foreign monopolies), the exchange control and the nationalization of the financial system as basic measures for safeguarding the national and popular economy.

The Arab Revolt

2011 is a year of elections in Africa and therefore prone to political crisis. There will be elections in Nigeria, Benin, Chad and Congo. But the explosion in Egypt is the inevitable next step in the Arab revolution, with implications for the entire Middle East and world politics. A joke going around in Cairo gives an idea of the issue: “Ben Ali's plane stopped in Sharm-El-Sheikh (where lies the residence of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak) to take more passengers.” The 82-year old dictator with the approval of imperialism has been ruling Egypt for over 30 years under an Emergency Act. Now he is in the spotlight since his Tunisian counterpart boarded an aircraft: imperialism is preparing for its own replacement.

The Nile country with a population of 85 million people (one third of the Arab population) of which almost half live below the poverty line, has seen real riots in the streets when the price of bread increased. In the last year prices of basic commodities shot up - the prices of Meat and poultry increased by 28.7%, milk products 8.1%, fruit and vegetables 16.2% and sugar 16.3%.

In Egypt, the state provides subsidised bread to a large number of Egyptians whose diet does not constitute of any meat due to its short supply. The price of meat is 75 Egyptian pounds (10 Euros) a kilo, while a teacher's salary is 1,000 pounds (133 Euros) per month. As a palliative measure, Egypt annually buys an average of eight million tonnes of wheat to produce bread. In 2008 fifty people lost their lives in fights ensuing in queues formed near the bakeries. But now the mobilisation in Egypt is directly political, against the dictatorial, repressive and corrupt regime. “Listen to the Tunisians, now it is up to the Egyptians,” chanted the demonstrators.

Tunisia’s path shines in contrast to the imperialist “exercise of democracy” in Iraq. Egyptian masses have begun to flock to the street. Opposition movements such as Kifaya, the 6th of April Youth or We Are All Khaled Said (a young man tortured to death by police in 2009) are trying to organize a popular uprising to end the government of the President. They have changed their profile pictures in Facebook, with an image that merges the Egyptian and Tunisian flag and are preparing for an international outcry against Tunisian embassies abroad. The imperialist looters (in Iraq and Lebanon) of the great Arab civilization and its lackeys; kings, sheiks, emirs (Gulf countries), dictators (in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Sudan and Libya) and bureaucrats (of Palestine): all tremble. In Israel, the deputy Prime Minister (Shalom) stated that the Tunisian events constitute a threat to the Zionist state...

The revolution in Tunisia is a mass response to the effects of international capitalist bankruptcy. This is happening in a continent where the economic growth figures translate into a major exploitation of the territory by the imperialist powers and in a worsening of mass living conditions. The social, political and humanitarian crisis throughout Africa is the consequence of centuries of brutal exploitation and plunders by the imperialist powers. They had used the African continent according to their own tastes and needs, as nowhere else. This historical trend can only be intensified in the context of the capitalist crisis, which exacerbates the old and new contradictions. The Tunisian dictatorship had been running for more than a quarter of a century. The process of a working-class and popular response to the crisis that toppled such a dictatorship has begun. It lays open the prospect of an emergence from the abyss.

As stated by the DIP (Initiative for a Revolutionary Workers Party) from Turkey: “The Tunisian revolution is, by far the most important consequence in this zone of the class struggle of the great depression that shook the world since 2008. The immediate cause of the long months of struggle that culminated in the revolution was the rise in unemployment to an unbearable level, as a result of the blow given to the tourism industry by the economic crisis that has spread around the world and rocked Europe, Tunisia’s rich neighbor and the main source of income for the Tunisian economy. Moreover, the harsh measures imposed by the EU to prevent the immigration of workers in the context of the crisis has destroyed the hope of the youth of North Africa in individual salvation. In this regard, the Tunisian revolution has been marked by the same dynamics that led to the rebellion in Greece in 2008 and formidable class struggle in this country in 2010, Tekel’s struggle in Turkey in 2010, general strikes and students’ rebellions in France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and Britain throughout 2010. Echoing the accumulated contradictions and traditions of the class struggle of the European countries of the Mediterranean coast, the poor, the unemployed and the working class of northern Africa now rise up. The Mediterranean is becoming a basin of revolution.”

Frightened by the Tunisian revolution, the Arab League came to play the role of fire-fighter, pooling two billion dollars to help the “poorest countries”. “The Tunisian revolution is not far,” said its secretary general, Amr Moussa. All the mechanisms for political co-optation and policies for class-based collaboration will be implemented to neutralize the Arab revolution.

The terrorism of a religious matrix has achieved spectacular feats. Despite them, we have seen its political failure for over a decade, not to mention the complete haziness of its objectives. The independence of class, the constitution of a revolutionary character and proletarian internationalism now constitute the key Arab victory, more than ever. The ongoing revolution will change political coordinates in every continent, in a shorter period than expected.

2011 26th January

Chronology

17th December. Bouazizi Mohamed, an unemployed 26-year-old sets himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid in protest against the crisis. Bouazizi dies in hospital on 5th January.

24th December. The first two protesters are killed as a result of Police shooting in a demonstration at Bouzayane Menzel, a town in the mid-west.

2nd January. Anonymous, a group of hackers announces Operation Tunisia in solidarity with the demonstrations. The Websites of the Tunisian Government collapse due to a series of attacks on the internet.

4th January. Announcements are made for a general strike to protest the government’s repression. Tunisian workers mobilize against the bureaucracy that runs the country’s labour confederation, the UGTT. It is aligned with the government and after weeks of demonstrations against its bureaucracy, it has to call the general strike.

7th January. Ben Ali's government launches a major repressive operation and arrests dozens of journalists and activists. The opposition claims several people as missing.

8th January. The trade-union UGTT calls the strike. Six demonstrators are killed and six others are seriously injured during the protests at Tala. Three other people die in clashes with the Police in the region of Kasserine.

10th January. In a televised speech, Ben Ali seeks to “soothe spirits” and promises 300,000 jobs.

11th January. The government acknowledges 18 deaths in clashes while trade-unions claim more than 50. Protests continue and Ben Ali decrees a curfew in Beja, Gafsa, Kasserine and Telab.

12th January. The curfew extends to the capital, taken over by armoured vehicles. Prime Minister Mohamed Ghanouchi dismisses Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem and announces that some detainees will be released.

13th January. President Ben Ali announces his retirement in 2014 and promises a "comprehensive and profound political change." The protests on the street do not cease and there are 13 more deaths.

14th January. Thousands of people demonstrate in the capital, shouting “Out with Ben Ali!”. The president dismisses the government and decrees a state of emergency. Then he flees Tunisia. The Prime Minister (Ghannouchi) assumes the interim presidency of the country.

15th January. Ghannouchi, hated in the streets, is forced to resign. As required by the law, Fuad Mebaza, Head of the Parliament, is obliged to convene elections within 60 days. The new government frees detainees.

16th to 24th January. The Tunisian government declares three days of national mourning to commemorate the victims of the repression. The events continue in the Tunisian territory, from the capital to the remote southern town of Tataouine. Owner of the only private TV channel in Tunisia is detained and charged with "treason" for promoting violence against the popular uprising.

25th January. The Egyptian people swarm the streets of Cairo and other cities, demanding an end to the government of Hosni Mubarak and his family dynasty. “Tunisian” Demonstrations increase in all Arab countries.

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