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Tunisia

"I know now that revolution is possible"

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Description:

Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson for the Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste was in Tunisia earlier this week to find out about the revolution happening there. Here are his impressions.

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Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson for the Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste was in Tunisia earlier this week to find out about the revolution happening there. Here are his impressions.

How did this trip to Tunisia come about?

It's something I've never seen before. I'm part of that generation of revolutionaries which has never lived the experience. It's the first time I've been through something like that in real life. I saw it with my own eyes. I love this collective enthusiasm, it's contagious and intoxicating. As I'm speaking to you there are still thousands of citizens on the streets, in clusters, hundreds of people who are describing the events on Facebook and Twitter, trade unionists who are mobilised to demand the resignation of the "new" government. The revolution is continuing here.

What is your feeling about this popular uprising?

Revolution is a complex process which moves ahead little by little and creates its own path. The revolution is continuing because it has only one goal: to get rid of this charade of a government. At the moment the Tunisian oligarchy still has the country in its grip; the police are also controlled by them as is every sector of the economy and that suits no one here. The opposition wants to convene a constituent assembly to change the institutions and move along a new road.

So, revolution isn't a crazy dream? Does that give you any ideas?

Yes. I'm absolutely filled with hope (laughter). I know now that revolution is possible, it's there, under my eyes. No revolution resembles another. There is no model. When people have tried to copy it has often ended badly. I'm here to learn and to understand. I'm noting things about organisation, the structure of the movement and it's thrilling. We too really need a social-democratic revolution.

You've met some of the opposition. Do you think they are ready to take power?

I'm not there to speak in the name of the Tunisian people - it has proved that it does not need anyone for that - but one of the first things they said was "it's our revolution and we don't want anyone to steal it from us". They didn't expect that it would spread across borders.

And you?

I'd answer by quoting Ken Loach: "revolutions are always contagious." What happened in Egypt yesterday and has been happening for a few days in Algeria is extremely important.

Do you hope to go Egypt in the next few days?

I'm not a revolutionary tourist (laughter) and am not on a pilgrimage. I came to Tunisia at the request of my comrades whom I've been in touch with since the start of the movement. We had simply agreed that I would visit at an appropriate time. I'm in touch with people in Egypt of course. We'll see what attitude we should take. However our job

in France is to fight against our own government and our own imperialism. It's obviously not the right that's going to do that.

And the left?

The Socialist Party won't do anything anymore. Let me remind you that a few days ago Ben Ali was part of the Socialist International and that it was the present government which covered his regime.

What do people in Tunisia think of France's attitude?

They are very angry. Sarkozy's excuses are waffle. No one here believes him. I've explained that not everyone in France supported the government and all its actions. I've heard the French media criticise the government's hesitancy but it's much worse than that - it is active, concrete, economic and financial complicity.

And are they asking anything from France?

They don't have any intention of living in a dictatorship, that's for sure. They are not expecting anything from the French government. They have been disappointed and will ask for nothing