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Tunisia:

A common front of political organisations against the debt is born

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Ahead of the World Social Forum (WSF) in Tunis, on Saturday March 23 and Sunday March 24, 2013 the first Mediterranean meeting against the debt, austerity policies and foreign domination, and for a Mediterranean which is free, democratic, social, solidarity based, feminist and respectful of the environment, was held.

Organised at the call of the Popular Front (a coalition comprising left radical political parties, associations and independent personalities in Tunisia, one of whose leaders, Chokri Belaïd, was assassinated on February 6, 2013), this meeting brought together around twenty political formations from the Mediterranean including the Front de Gauche and NPA (France); Izquierda Unida and Izquierda anticapitalista from the Spanish state, Sortu from the Basque country, CUP from Catalonia; from Greece, the OKDE ; from Portugal, the Left Bloc; from Italy, Sinistra Critica ; Al Mounadil from Morocco and political formations from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria and Palestine. There were also organisations present from Belgium, Haiti and Venezuela. It is the first time that these parties and political organisations have met at the scale of the Mediterranean region to struggle for the cancellation of the illegitimate debt.

This gathering ended with a big meeting of representatives of the political parties in an electric and passionate atmosphere of anger, joy and collective force with each affirming the will to work around the debt, against the dictatorship of the creditors and for the emancipation of the peoples.

More than 1000 people were present, including many young people and women. The speeches were interspersed with slogans chanted in Arabic (although it was unfortunate that only three women spoke). The activists in the room displayed their determination to sweep away the capitalist system and to found a new world order in the service of the peoples.

Tributes were paid to different leaders, revolutionaries or progressive activists. A film tribute to Chokri Belaïd was shown. Chokri remains a very popular figure of the Tunisian revolution, a source of inspiration for many. Later another short film paid tribute to Hugo Chavez. For more than three hours, speakers hailed the Tunisian revolution and more broadly the Arab spring which overthrew the dictatorships of Ben Ali and Mubarak. At this historic turning point, it is necessary to add an international dimension. The Tunisian revolution is, for several generations, the concrete demonstration that revolution is far from being a rhetorical formula and the people can take their destiny in hand. The public meeting ended with a vibrant intervention from the spokesperson of the Popular Front, Hama Hammami, who has developed a position on the debt aligned with that of the CADTM.

As stressed by the preamble to the declaration of this meeting, the fall of Ben Ali “allowed the disarming of the local neoliberal capitalist order without however overthrowing it. The social regime, which is the historic product of foreign domination and more recently of world neoliberal capitalist restructuring, is still there. But the revolutionary crisis opened up by the insurrection remains active. The victory of the social and democratic revolution remains possible in Tunisia”.

In this context, it is necessary to get rid of the debt which remains a central tool of the domination and oppression of the peoples. An instrument for the transfer of wealth and political domination, this question was at the heart of the debate. The participants affirmed the need for freedom from the diktat of the creditors and the international financial institutions, the IMF and World Bank in particular. Several speakers cited the examples of Argentina, Ecuador or Iceland to show that it is possible to disobey the creditors so as to follow policies in favour of the population. The audit of the public debt was also posed as one of the possible strategies to identify and cancel illegitimate and odious debt, while the importance of mobilisation on this question was stressed.

A common front of political organisations against the debt is born

It is the first time that a common front has emerged, and it is undoubtedly a historic advance in the struggle against the debt. This meeting echoed the call launched in 1987 in Addis Ababa by president Thomas Sankara, and concretised 26 years later by the creation of a common front against the debt: "the debt cannot be repaid because if we do not pay, the financiers will not die, be sure of it. On the contrary if we pay, it is us, who will die, we are equally sure of it". The parties who met in Tunis decided to set up a monitoring committee and meet again in Spain in 2013 or 2014.