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Tunisia

The "national dialogue" at the sickbed of the Tunisian regime

- IV Online magazine - 2013 - IV467 - December 2013 -

Publication date: Sunday 8 December 2013

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October 5 marked the start of the "national congress for dialogue" on the basis of a "roadmap" prepared by the Quartet which is sponsoring this dialogue. What is really happening is the relaunching of the "national dialogue" launched by the Quartet in May, which had been suspended following the assassination of the MP and leader of the Popular Front (FP) Mohamed Brahmi.

Only political parties represented in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) are accepted in this dialogue. Their tasks are to complete the writing of the Constitution, promulgate a new electoral law, establish the Independent Election Commission, set the election date and reach agreement on a new government "of competence" with wide powers, over which "an independent person" should preside. All within a month.

The FP, as such, was left out of the dialogue. Only three parties among its 14 components participate, alongside twenty other parties. The eventual goal is to get Tunisia out of the crisis and to complete its "democratic transition".

This "dialogue" goes against the hundreds of demonstrations, sit-ins and strikes that have mobilized, across the country, hundreds of thousands of people to impose the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) and all the institutions of power which emanate from it, including the transitional government. This revolutionary movement accuses the Islamists and their allies of having betrayed the revolution and of being responsible for the worsening crisis and the deteriorating security situation in the country. This means purely and simply the cancellation of the electoral mandate, and the end of the legitimacy to govern that follows from it.

During the last quarter century, the local economy has been deconstructed, refocused on the external market and its revenues largely appropriated by the forces of neoliberal capitalist globalization. The consequence of this neocolonial holdup is a phenomenal extension of precariousness, exclusion and poverty. A repressive political authority was necessary for the system to maintain itself for such a long period.

By breaking the relationship of forces which allowed the rich minority to exploit violently the poor majority, thanks to the revolutionary uprising, the oppressed classes managed to oust the dictator and to create the political conditions for breaking all the chains that condemn them to poverty and subject them to oppression.

However, the revolutionary process is still faced with many obstacles. On the one hand, the hesitations and ambiguities, and even the opportunism, of the left parties and their lack of confidence in themselves, the working class and the youth. On the other hand, the passing over of part of the democratic movement to the counter-revolutionary bloc. Finally, the stubborn refusal of the dominant minority, which still holds all the economic and political power, to meet the most urgent demands of the working classes, its determination in its headlong rush towards neoliberal capitalism, the hardening of its austerity policy, its deceit and its multifaceted reactionary ideology.

All this is combined with the colossal pressure exerted by the imperialist forces on the principal social and political organizations, which gives an idea of the resilience of the counter-revolution that is attempting to block the path of emancipation and freedom to the working classes and the youth. This revolutionary crisis is accelerating the transformation of the social crisis into an economic, financial, political, security and environmental crisis.

By continuing along the path of Ben Ali, while accelerating the neoliberal capitalist liberalization of the economy and accentuating the measures of social austerity, Ennahdha is only sawing off the branch on which it sits. The religious

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mask, which facilitated its access to power, has fallen away! Unmasked, its bourgeois, corrupt and reactionary nature appears in broad daylight.

We must maintain the pressure against Ennahdha, by continuing popular mobilizations to further isolate it, reduce the harmful impact of its ideology, limit the political and social damage it can cause and drive it from power in order to give fresh impetus to the revolutionary process. Instead, the leadership of the Popular Front, which has managed to place itself at the head of the revolutionary movement, allowed itself to be led in the wrong direction by the bourgeois parties, which joined with it in the National Salvation Front (NSF); the direction of the "national dialogue", which is a real life-saver for Ennahdha, coming just in time to help the Islamists keep their heads above water.

However, saving the Islamist party is the least of the concerns of the regime in power. The objective of the counter-revolution is to defeat the revolution! All the nice speeches about "the supreme interest of Tunisia," "the democratic transition", "national salvation" and the "national consensus", etc., are petty-bourgeois rhetoric, designed to conceal this objective from the masses. In 1987, Ben Ali, his sponsors and his associates concealed from the Tunisian people what the coup d'état was really about, under a heap of fine speeches and slogans that were intended to lull Tunisians to sleep.

The counter-revolutionary task of the Islamist party is not finished; the system still needs its cooperation to defeat the revolutionary movement. Ennahdha knows that it has failed miserably in power; it could not suppress social protest and impose a new bourgeois order. At the same time, because of the betrayal of the hopes that part of the population had put into it, Ennahdha has lost much of the confidence that it enjoyed among the popular classes before it came to power.

The legitimacy that came from the elections is exhausted, and the powers that derived from it have been eroded. The counter-revolution needs a new project to overcome social resistance. The Islamists are aware of this, but they are paralyzed by the dramatic reversal of the situation in Egypt, and fear that a similar fate awaits them when they move away from power.

The assassination of Belaïd in February, then Brahmi in July created real electroshocks. Ennahdha succeeded, in the absence of an adequate response from the Popular Front, to absorb the shock of the first murder. But at present it is still suffering the effects of the assassination of Brahmi. The political crisis, which is the most obvious expression of this, continues, despite the start of the "national dialogue". The economic and social situation is quite catastrophic; the deteriorating security situation, because, in particular, of the proliferation of jihadist and terrorist groups, as well as the numerous mistakes and incompetence of the Islamists in power, is an important part of the problem. But the energetic and very appropriate reaction of the leadership of the PF in response to the murder, which was to issue a call for the Tunisian people to mobilize, to drive the Islamists from power, also contributed to weakening and isolating Ennahdha.

The call of the FP had a broad echo. The mobilization had a rising momentum in Tunis, as it did everywhere in the country, and it culminated in the huge demonstrations on 6 and 13 August in Tunis. Parallel to the extension and radicalization of the revolutionary movement, the pressure on the leadership of the FP from the bourgeois parties and the embassies of the imperialist states, as well as the leadership of the trade union confederation and the employers' organization, have increased, seeking to direct it on to the road of the "national dialogue". From the beginning, Nida Tounes, the main bourgeois party, latched on to the PF in the framework of the NSF, which emerged just hours after the PF had launched the famous "call to the people."

The objective of Nida Tounes, a modernist version of Ennahdha, is clear: on the one hand stop the rise of the FP, deflect it from its revolutionary line; and on the other get Ennahdha to tone down its behaviour, in order to force it to normalize its relations with Nida Tounes and to form around them a broad political coalition whose main task will be

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political support to the new government, and whose objective is to implement the agreement reached on June 7 with the IMF. As for the elections, they depend on the ability of the government and the political coalition supporting it to carry out the policy of austerity as well as paving the way for elections which will aim to consolidate the victory of the counter-revolution. But we are not there yet! Far from it.

The leadership of the Popular Front is making a mistake when it agrees to dialogue with bandits, while for the last three years the masses have been taking a fairly obvious anti-imperialist and anticapitalist orientation. It is also mistaken when it favours dialogue with the product of the degeneration of the propertied classes, instead of the path of revolution traced by the revolutionary insurrection that began on December 17, 2010. Whatever the reasons for this rightward shift, the consequences will be disastrous for the revolutionary process, unless this leadership quickly corrects its line, while there is still time to do so.

The FP has a lot of work on its plate! It has a revolutionary process that it must lead to the end. It must, in addition to the need to correct its present orientation, engage, without delay, the battle against the harsher austerity policy and the deepening capitalist liberalization which is dictated by the agreements with the European Union, the IMF and the World Bank. It must pursue the mobilization in order to sweep away the institutions and the authorities that came from the elections of 23 October, and it must continue the struggle for the defence of fundamental freedoms. It must arm itself with clear tasks and perspectives, and help the working classes to participate consciously in their self-liberation. To have a better chance of succeeding in these heavy tasks, the FP has an interest in continuing to build its organization, which it has abandoned in recent months in favour of the structures of the NSF.

Tunis, 13 October 2013