

Tunisian popular revolt exposes France's middle-class 'left'

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Mass protests that forced out Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali have dealt a major blow to the pretensions of the so-called "far left" in France, the former colonial power in Tunisia. Forces such as Olivier Besancenot's New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) are scrambling to cover up their links to the Tunisian regime.

Their main political patron, France's Socialist Party (PS), was affiliated to Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) in the social democratic Socialist International. In line with its anti-worker policies at home, the PS backed Ben Ali as his police-state government cut jobs and social spending in line with the demands of the International Monetary Fund.

Top Socialist personnel played a critical role in elaborating such policies, as the IMF is led by the PS's Dominique Strauss-Kahn. A top contender for nomination as the PS's 2012 presidential candidate, Strauss-Kahn has led the IMF drive for social cuts—notably in Greece, Ireland, and Spain—during the European debt crisis. To reward his past and future services to the financial aristocracy, in 2008 Ben Ali decorated Strauss-Kahn as a Grand Officer of the Order of the Tunisian Republic.

None of this discouraged the NPA from supporting the PS. As Ben Ali fled Tunis on January 14, the "far left" party co-signed an empty PS statement calling for the Ben Ali regime to implement a "true democratic transition."

Popular protests continued, however, against the "democratic transition" envisaged by the PS and NPA—one where Ben Ali's assistants like Mohamed

Ghannouchi or Fouad Mebazza continued to rule, while official "oppositional" figures and union functionaries were brought in to occupy minor posts.

The French "left" establishment then moved to paper over its ties to the former dictator's state machine. On January 18, four days after Ben Ali fled Tunis, the PS requested that the RCD be expelled from the Second International.

The NPA did an about-turn, denouncing the very forces they had called upon to lead the "democratic transition" only a few days before. Praising the "democratic revolution" that it claimed had taken place, it wrote: "The Tunisian people cannot let its revolution be stolen."

It proposed that the Tunisian judicial system move against the Ben Ali regime: "The members of the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan must be tried for all their exactions and their goods must be confiscated, and the different police forces loyal to the dictator must be dissolved. Those responsible for massacres must appear before a court."

As the NPA itself noted, however, this is a pipe dream. The identity of the prime minister—Ghannouchi, a Ben Ali regime official who had kept his post—does not "suggest that these measures would be taken." Having admitted this, the NPA lamely added: "Vigilance and mobilization must continue."

The NPA is trying to deceive its readers, pretending that what is needed to obtain justice is to win over the courts and the Tunisian government with a few well-timed anti-Ben Ali protests.

Ben Ali's old cronies are mobilizing riot police to crush continuing mass protests, while the dictator and his in-laws, the Trabelsis, hide in Saudi Arabia—with 1.5 tons of gold, according to press accounts, and other loot stolen from the population. This element still has the backing of imperialist politicians in the United States and Europe, who fear an explosion of protests against pro-Western dictatorships throughout the Middle East.

In fighting Mebazza and Ghannouchi and uprooting the entire Tunisian political and economic set-up, the working class must undertake a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the state machine of the Ben Ali dictatorship, and its imperialist backers in Europe and America. Its main ally in that struggle is the world working class—which is also opposed to social cuts and imperialist wars in the Middle East.

In a recent article, *The mass uprising in Tunisia and the perspective of permanent revolution*, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: “The only viable program for the working class and oppressed masses of Tunisia and the entire Maghreb and Middle East is the program of socialist revolution advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Only through the independent struggle of the working class, leading all of the oppressed sections of society against both the native bourgeoisie and imperialism, can democratic and social rights be won and social equality established as the foundation of political life.

“This struggle cannot be conducted simply on a national scale. Trotskyist parties must be built throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East to unite the working masses under the banner of the United Socialist States of the Middle East and the Maghreb, as part of the world socialist revolution.”

The perspective guiding the union functionaries, “human rights” activists, academics, and student careerists that make up the bulk of France's “far left” is entirely different. The outlook motivating these layers—drawn from the more privileged sections of the middle class—was articulated in a January 14 interview by *Le Monde* with Tunisian human rights activist Larbi

Chouikha.

As Ben Ali fled Tunis, Chouikha called for a “velvet revolution,” referring to the 1989 restoration of capitalism in Stalinist-ruled Czechoslovakia, a transition in which the new regime aligned itself closely with the demands of international finance.

Chouikha complained: “The question for us now is: ‘How can we stop this explosion of pillage, which is becoming intolerable?’ It's a breakdown that frightens us. These kids are not only attacking the property of the Trabelsi family, but police stations, and everyone's property.”

With this attack on masses of workers and youth fighting the Ben Ali regime, Chouikha made a valuable admission about the class character of the official or quasi-official Tunisian opposition, and their French “far left” supporters.

They are comfortable property holders, jealous of the Trabelsi family's self-enrichment, but whose fear and hostility towards the working class far outweighs their grievances with the dictatorship. As the Ben Ali dictatorship totters, their first thought is to preserve the regime's police to defend their own fortunes, and to prevent a radicalization that could spread to the Middle East, Europe, and beyond.

This underlies support in the French “far left” for the official Tunisian opposition, and for the deceitful maneuvers of the Socialist Party and its hangers-on.



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