

International finance presses for counter-revolution in Tunisia

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5 May 2011

The political “reforms” undertaken by the interim Tunisian regime aim at removing from power those who, in the eyes of the masses, are too closely associated with the dictator Ben Ali, who was forced from office in January by mass strikes and protests. However, they aim above all to provide political cover for the maintenance of the social conditions against which the Tunisians masses initially revolted, in the interests of the national as well as the international bourgeoisie—notably that of France, the former colonial power.

The Tunisian regime is now proposing to ban from the July 24 elections those who, at some time in the last 10 years, held major posts in ex-president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s party, the Democratic Constitutional Movement (RDC). The RDC is now dissolved. It also involves excluding previous members of the government, their advisors and staff.

These proposals are a reaction to the continuous mobilisation of the Tunisian working class, a belated symbolic attempt by the regime to distance itself from Ben Ali. Chokri Belaid of the Movement of Democratic Patriots (MPD) and Abdellatif el-Mekki, member of the executive committee of the Islamist party Ennahdha, have both refused to associate themselves with this limited decision, warning the government that it was far from sufficient to satisfy the population and that they feared a “new wave of protests”.

Interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, a former RDC member, distanced himself from the proposition. He stated that the ex-RDC members “should not be prevented from standing in these elections, if they have not been convicted by the courts.” He also insisted on the necessity of guaranteeing an “adequate social and economic climate” for these elections.

He is responding to growing pressure from international finance, which is demanding that the exploitation of the Tunisian workers proceed with even greater intensity as

soon as possible. In this context, the Tunisian government is carrying out economic blackmail against its own people, and relying on the support of all the parties that they hope will have a minimum of influence among the masses, be they “left” or Islamist. Essebsi thus expressed his concern at the sit-ins, protests and strikes that are continuing in the country, clearly saying that they are going to reduce business investments. There have been 110 main highway and rail track blockages by protestors over the last months.

The main causes for concern cited by Essebsi are the case of British Gas, which supplies nearly half the national gas consumption, where strikes have multiplied together with a blockading of the plant by local inhabitants demanding jobs; sailors’ blockade of the Sfax port; and riots in the Zarzis region, after the arrest of organisers of a clandestine immigrant network.

International financial institutions are beginning to make their impatience felt. Tunisia has been invited to participate in the next meeting of the G8 economic summit in France (the former colonial power in Tunisia and which is playing a leading role in the imperialist intervention in neighbouring Libya). For Essebsi, this invitation is “a reason for all Tunisians to be proud”.

The character of global financial aristocracy’s demands at the upcoming summit was foreshadowed by those delivered at the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund. (IMF) It described Tunisia as “a good pupil” under Ben Ali, and announced an aid budget of \$500 million for Tunisia, which should “generate \$700 million extra within the framework of a new pro-active approach.” The content of this “pro-active approach” will be to “eliminate all unnecessary formalities for the creation of [economic] activity”—that is to say, more free-market economic policies.

Tunisia will only have 1.3 percent economic growth this

year, according to the IMF and World Bank report on global economic perspectives, compared to 5 percent on average over the last 10 years. The drop in exports to Europe after the economic crisis had already reduced growth to 4.6 percent in 2008 and “between 3 and 4 percent” in 2009-2010, according to the CIA World Factbook.

The IMF anticipates an upturn to 5.6 percent next year but is not satisfied: “The readjustment is not taking place as rapidly as we wish. And there must be more effort to encourage exports, consumption and investment”, declared Olivier Blanchard, chief economist at the IMF.

The IMF summarily dismissed the possibility of increasing wages. Ahmed Masood, director of the MENA department at the IMF declared that an increase in wages could not be part of the solution, which required rapid productivity growth—that is, a rise in profits for the ruling elite.

The French minister of foreign affairs, Alan Juppé, organised a conference at the Arab World Institute in Paris on April 16 on the “the Arab Spring”, the wave of revolutionary struggles that broke out in Tunisia and are now shaking the Arab world. It brought together French ambassadors, researchers and “players” in these revolutions, including representatives of Arab Islamist parties. These parties played practically no role in the initial social movements, but the imperialist powers now consider them as an acceptable means to channel popular discontent—providing they give the imperialists assurances of good behaviour .

Thus, in the conference, Mohamed Ben Salem, the Ennahdha party representative, declared that he “was not seeking hegemony” and pronounced in favour of parity representation for men and women in the elections, echoing the government’s and human rights groups’ wishes.

Nonetheless, the policy that will be implemented with the participation of the Islamists and feminists will be totally hostile to the workers. During the conference, two Tunisian human rights activists, Souhayr Belhassen and Radhia Nasraoui, publicly expressed their concerns about the dangers of “counter-revolution” in their country.

In fact, they have no differences with the government’s policy of economic blackmail. They were concerned at the “incoherence and instability of the democratic process which tends towards the disappearance of the state; economic decline whilst industrial activity and the tourist industry are being slow to revive; and disenchantment. Moreover, certain structures and practices of the political

police seem to be returning.”

That is to say that in order to avoid the counter-revolutionary repression, they demand that the population simply submit to the anti-worker economic and social policies of the interim regime.

A few months after the revolution that deposed Ben Ali, the process of the integration of the new layer of Tunisian petty-bourgeois pseudo-”revolutionaries” into the French imperialist system is underway. This link was clearly apparent on the occasion of Juppé’s “lightning” visit to Tunisia on April 20, to grant a €350 million loan.

Juppé found time for a dinner “with some bloggers who had been the kingpins of the revolution”, according to AFP, then to have breakfast the next morning with top leaders of the new régime, including Yadh Ben Achour, the chairman of the High Commission for Political Reform, known as an expert in civil law and Islamic political theory.

The Tunisian ministers for finance, trade, tourism and transport then went to the Paris head office of the main big business association, the MEDEF, on April 26, to guarantee the continuity of 300 French company bosses’ investments. The Tunisian minister of finance, Jalloul Ayed, declared: “We came to say that Tunisia is changing for the better and that future opportunities will be even more profitable and attractive.”

Essebi summed up his position by saying: “The Tunisian revolution could lead either to civil war or democracy.” That is, if the working class does not submit to continuing the old regime with a few cosmetic changes, and refuses to go back to being exploited as cheap labour as under Ben Ali, the ruling class will contemplate using force.



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