

Revolution revives Tunisian left

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Amid music, poetry and passionate discussions, Fourth International reorganizes itself as Ligue de la Gauche ouvrière (LGO, Left Workers League) at a conference in strikingly beautiful city of Tunis on April 24.

The Left Workers League, or Rabita al-Umal al-Yassaria in Arabic, is a reincarnation of Revolutionary Communist Organisation (OCR). Once a vibrant section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) and an important component of the Tunisian left, the OCR was repressed during the Ben Ali dictatorship.

The activists attending the April 24 conference, only months ago, could engage in clandestine activities alone. Thanks to revolution, not merely the USFI sympathizers have re-grouped, the entire left has given up underground work and is reviving itself.

The day USFI sympathizers met at an artistically beautiful hall, two Maoists groups, Party of the Patriotic Democrats and Movement of Patriotic Democrats, also held a unification conference. Maoism has historically been the strongest left tradition in Tunisia. However, in Tunisia as well as internationally, Party of Communist Workers in Tunisia (PCOT) is widely recognized. The PCOT leader, Hamma Hammami spent years behind the bars under the Ben Ali dictatorship. The PCOT is inspired by Enver Hoxha's Albanian model. It claims to have 2000 members.

The Left Workers League conference began at a solemn note: one minute silence was observed for the activists who laid their lives for revolution. The Left Workers League has roughly a hundred members across the country. Seventy-two of them, including a dozen women, attended the conference. That eleven delegates from eight different countries were also present, mirrored the internationalist character of the conference.



Allen Krivine

Delegates had arrived from Lebanon, Algeria, Pakistan, Brazil, Italy, Switzerland, and France. The French delegation, consisting of New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) members, had strongest presence. Notable among the foreign delegates was former EU MP and former French presidential candidate, Allen Krivine. Before the conference he met the Maoist parties and a day after the conference, he

held talks with PCOT's Hamma Hammami.

The conference was inaugurated by Jalel, a seasoned left activist. After interventions by international delegates, conference document was introduced that led to a passionate discussion. There was an agreement among the delegates that General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) played a key role in delivering the end of Ben Ali dictatorship, however, the UGTT leadership was yet again playing a reactionary role in the post-revolutionary period. The UGTT is the Tunisian version of British Trade Union Congress (TUC). It was also agreed that the dictator is gone but the neo-liberal dictatorship was still in place. It was highlighted that the ruling elite wanted to limit the revolution to democratic demands without addressing the economic crisis. Similarly, there was a consensus over the threat posed by Islamists. Al-Nahda, the largest Islamist party was mentioned over and over again. But Al-Nahda is not the only player. Hizb ul Tehrir is also vying for the conservative and religious constituency. Both have tremendous resources on their disposal enabling them to reach people. On the contrary, the Left Workers League has not yet been able to acquire even a party office. The Party of Patriotic Democrats has just rented a party office in central Tunis. Besides bare minimum furniture in two of the four rooms, the place hardly qualifies for an office. Similarly, the left parties need to set up their press.



These practicalities, however, did not draw much attention at the Left Workers League conference. The delegates were more interested in the future course of action. Despite many agreements on the nature of revolution and threats posed by the counter-revolution, delegates were bitterly divided over the perspectives. For instance, there were calls for election boycott but also appeals to take election seriously. There was an agreement on left unity but the nature of such an alliance was not agreed upon. The first session, peppered with revolutionary poetry, ended at lunch time. The lunch-break was enlivened by Arab music. In the second session, an interim leadership was elected that would organize the first party congress in six-months time.

Though the successful conference and re-emergence of left is a promising sign in changing Tunisia yet paucity of resources is proving an impediment indeed. This is not merely a challenge for Tunisian left, it is a test for the left internationally. The solidarity with Tunisian left should be treated as a revolutionary emergency.

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