

Defensive struggles against authoritarian restoration and social crisis in Tunisia

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Tunisia is undergoing an authoritarian restoration in the form of the personalization of power and the hardening of police repression.

Since the coup of 25 July 2021, President Kaïs Saïed has extended his powers. After ending the parliament, suspending the 2014 constitution that emerged from the revolution and governing by decree-law, he has institutionalised the coup.

The referendum on the new Constitution, held on 25 July 2022 despite calls for a boycott and an abstention of 72.6%, legitimizes ultra-presidential power and the submission of the judiciary to the president.

The new Constitution legally ratifies the end of liberal democracy and calls into question the rights and freedoms contained in the 2014 Constitution.

By defining the country as an “Islamic umma” (a community of Muslims), it justifies the most oppressive, sexist, LGBTphobic and other policies.

It is a reactionary constitution with the aim of putting an end to the emancipatory struggles that accompanied the revolution.

Personalization of power and increased police repression

The referendum on the Constitution was preceded by increased repression against feminist and LGBT activists and organizations.

More broadly, all protest activists, as well as critical journalists and political opponents, are targeted by the repression, which particularly targets those who define themselves as revolutionary.

In addition to the journalist and feminist Arroi Baraket, whose trial has been rescheduled for October, several feminist, LGBT and far-left activists have been charged by the police. Among them are Myriam Bribri, Wael Naouar, Jawaher Channa, Saif Ayadi, Samar Tlili, Anis Harrathi, Hamza Nasri, Ayoub Amara, Mariem Mnaouar, Wajdi Mahouachi, Asrar Ben Jouira, Souhaïel Idoudi, Rania Amdouni, etc.

The police also lash out at football fans in the stadiums and on the fringes of the stadiums. Police repression is a structural phenomenon, but with the coup d'état, the police felt they had to grow wings.

A wider but scattered protest

The repression and the personalization of power have dissipated illusions about Kaïs Saïed. In July 2021, he succeeded in capturing for himself the mobilization against the Ennahda party. He presented himself as the “saviour of the revolution” by promising to put corrupt political elites on trial.

In doing so, he put an end to the protest movement and to the liberal democracy established since the revolution.

However, only a minority of left and far-left activists interpreted the event as a counter-revolutionary coup d'état marking an authoritarian restoration.

Since then, the abolition of the Judicial Council and the dismissal of nearly sixty judges in February 2022, the hardening of police repression and the revelation of the draft constitution in June have shifted the lines.

The denunciation of the “authoritarian drift” brings people together more widely and many defensive struggles take place, but collective actions remain rather scattered and scattered.

An explosive social situation

The authoritarian restoration aims at imposing on the working and middle classes very downgraded material conditions with the austerity imposed by the IMF for a new loan.

The social situation is explosive, with galloping inflation, a shortage of basic foodstuffs (coffee, sugar, etc.), an accelerated disintegration of public services (water and electricity cuts are frequent and increasingly long), etc.

Against the social crisis and the employer's arbitrariness, localized strikes are being organized: that of employees of the French fast-food chain Pomme de pain in Tunis, protesting against the non-payment of their salaries for several months; that of air navigation technicians, etc.

At the moment, resistance is continuing, whether to safeguard the spaces of freedom left over from the revolution and/or to protest against the deterioration of material conditions. They would benefit from being better coordinated and relayed internationally.

P.S.

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