

Tunisian Masses Rising Up!

Statement of the Revolutionary Organization of Labor, USA

January 23, 2011

The former French colony of Tunisia is located on the Mediterranean coast. A just and widespread popular uprising over the last month has engulfed this North African country of 10 million people. Sparking the rebellion was massive unemployment (deepened by the worldwide economic crisis), particularly among young people, rising food prices and shortages, the banning of all political dissent and extensive government corruption including the self enrichment of the ruling families.

Though brutally and repeatedly attacked by the police, leaving over 100 demonstrators killed, the uprisings continued and were victorious in toppling the tyrannical government of Ben Ali after 23 years of power. He fled, with the people at his heels, into the reactionary arms of the Saudi Arabian government. The hated Ben Ali government was supported by the United States for his maintaining "political stability" and as an "ally and partner" in the fight against "terrorism". The Obama government's words of "support" for the "new" Tunisian coalition government are an effort to co-opt and stop the movement in its tracks, limiting it to a change of government faces and players and minor reforms.

However, there are a number of positive developments that give hope that this initial peoples' rebellion has the potential to lead to deeper and more fundamental changes in Tunisia and beyond:

- The General Union of Tunisian Workers was a key organizer of the anti-regime protests, so the *organized working class* played a leading role in the general peoples' revolt. The day Ben Ali fled the country, the union had led a successful general strike!
- Yet, even after the leadership of the union (and other opposition parties) supported the "new" interim coalition (which still contained many leaders of Ben Ali's party, the RCD), protests continued in the streets demanding a thorough ousting of the RCD government. The people wanted no part of a "wolf in sheep's clothing."
- The union leadership had to reverse its decision and withdraw its support for the "new" coalition government when, at a meeting of union workers, the members voted to overturn their leaders' political decision! The workers are more politically advanced and determined than their union officers!
- Based on the continued street protests and withdrawal of the Union's support, the "new" coalition government is virtually in collapse as this statement is being written.
- In response to democratic demands of the popular uprising, outlawed Communist and Islamic parties have been promised legalization and some political prisoners have been released. This opens up political opportunities for genuine proletarian vanguard organization to lead the mass movement from its current stage of just democratic demands to a national

democratic revolution and on to the seizure of working class political power and socialism.

- The Tunisian masses have set an example which is already inspiring the oppressed Arab masses of the region to fight back against the U.S. backed reactionary Arab governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, etc. These countries have been part of U.S. imperialism's "two pillar policy" (one pillar being the settler state of Israel, the other the reactionary Arab repressive regimes) to suppress the Palestinian and Arab masses and control the vast natural resources of the Middle East, centered around oil. (For example Egypt is the second highest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, second only to Israeli.)



- Protests have already begun to spread to other Arab countries. According to the French newspaper Le Monde, in Egypt (which contains the largest and most developed working class in Arabia) demonstrators chanted, "We are next, we are next. Ben Ali tell Mubarak he is next." Simultaneous protests in response to soaring food prices and rampant unemployment have been erupting in Algeria while escalating in Tunisia. According to the Associated Press of January 18, 2011, "Thousands have demonstrated in Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Oman, Libya and Yemen recently over the economic situation in their respective countries, some explicitly in solidarity with the Tunisians." Tunisia may well prove to be the "single spark that starts a prairie fire." (Mao Tse-Tung).

Tunisia is many miles from the U.S. and has a different history, culture and language. But in the USA, we too face unemployment, soaring food prices, corruption, attacks on civil liberties and deepening impoverishment. U.S. workers and oppressed peoples can gain much inspiration from the courage and determination of the Tunisian masses, especially in the heat of the continuing economic crisis, its "jobless recovery" and government dictated cutbacks and austerity programs. We can "fight City Hall", we can "fight Wall Street", we can fight for Power – and with unity and persistence, we can win!

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