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Tunisia in revolt

Reject the 'government of national unity'

WIDESPREAD PROTESTS over unemployment, high food prices and a lack of democratic rights has resulted in a popular uprising in Tunisia and the overthrow of its hated dictator, president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. However, members of the former regime, including prime minister Mohammed Ghannouchi, have declared a 'government of national

unity'. This has further inflamed the mass of Tunisians who do not wish to see their revolution stolen from them. Chahid Gashir, a member of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), reports on the uprising, its international impact and what programme is necessary to take the revolution forward. (for updates see www.socialistworld.net)

A POWERFUL UPRISING of the Tunisian masses has swept away the dictator - president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali - with lightning speed, testimony to the rage that has been accumulated by decades of autocratic rule. A revolution is beginning.

Ben Ali, who was in control (through massive corruption, cronyism and extortion) of huge parts of the wealth and profitable business activities in the country, and his family, became the symbols of the arrogant and corrupt power of the rich Tunisian capitalist class.

"No, no to the Trabelsis who looted the budget!" was one of the popular slogans, targeting Ben Ali's second wife, Leila Trabelsi and her family, who own major stakes in many Tunisian companies.

The epic struggle of Tunisian youth and workers has created a wave of panic among the neighbouring regimes, as well as amongst the governments of their western allies in Europe and the United States.

At a time when governments in most countries around the world are carrying through austerity policies and where rising food prices are affecting everyone, Tunisia can become an example for working people and youth to follow. This movement is the biggest social upheaval that has shaken the Tunisian dictatorship for over a quarter of a century, and probably in the country's entire history.



Angry protesters take to the streets.

All successive attempts made by Ben Ali to try to calm the situation failed lamentably. Ben Ali's ruling clan has irremediably lost any sort of popular support. After having dissolved the entire

government, announced new legislative elections within six months and declared a state of emergency, the hated president finally fled the country, while protesters were jubilantly ripping

down his numerous vast portraits that adorned the facades of the capital.

Shock waves

THE COMMENTS of US president Barack Obama, applauding the "courage and dignity of the Tunisian people", are likely to leave a bitter taste for the many Tunisians who have tirelessly fought against the American-backed government.

Obama is simply celebrating an already accomplished fact in the hope of ensuring a pro-imperialist outcome. He and his cohorts take no initiative to criticise friendly or client regimes; thus Washington said nothing about the blatant rigging of last year's Egyptian elections.

Similarly, the French government's muted response to the protests and repression in its former North African colony has created an outcry of opposition from its strong Maghreb community.

The Tunisian uprising has opened a new chapter of revolutionary developments in the Arab world, which could rapidly trigger a domino effect against neighbouring dictatorship regimes. Not coincidentally, in recent weeks, the governments of Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Libya have all taken measures to decrease food prices, for fear of similar developments taking place in their own countries.

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Wales referendum

Vote Yes on 3 March - Defend public services in Wales

SOCIALIST PARTY Wales is calling for a 'yes' vote in the referendum on more powers for the Welsh Assembly on 3 March.

Dave Reid

The Socialist Party, and its forerunner Militant, has always called for a Welsh parliament with full legislative powers as a basic democratic reform and as a means for working people in Wales to fight to change society and for socialism. We believe that the Welsh Assembly can be put under pressure from the working class - pressure to defend jobs and services and to allow the development of a socialist alternative in Wales.

Already working class people in Wales have won some important concessions compared to England. Tuition fees have been somewhat ameliorated this year by the subsidy to Wales-domiciled students by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

The privatisation of health and the semi-privatisation of education in England through foundation hospitals, GP "consortia" and academies have been resisted. The huge waste of mortgaging public assets through the Private Finance Initiative has been partially reduced.

Further powers to the Assembly would prevent the Westminster

government and Whitehall mandarins from obstructing or delaying Assembly decisions and enable the Assembly to pass laws in Wales.

However support for a 'yes' vote does not mean support for the four main parties in the Yes campaign. We need a new party to fight for the interests of working people in Wales.

The highly paid politicians in all parties in the Assembly have grouped themselves around the Yes For Wales/Ie Dros Cymru campaign headed by Roger Lewis, CEO of the Welsh Rugby Union. Even the Tories in the Assembly who want to cut Welsh public services to shreds support a 'yes' vote.

They all say they want more powers to allow the Assembly to govern Wales "more efficiently". Yet for working people in Wales the real problem has been the Assembly politicians.

Assembly members have awarded themselves generous wages and expenses while all parties agree that "some cuts have to be made" in public services.

One Assembly member even claimed £12,000 a year for a second home in Cardiff despite living near Bridgend, 24 miles from the Assembly. How can these politicians understand what it is like for workers facing pay cuts or the loss of their jobs?

Passing on Con-Dem cutbacks with a shrug of the shoulders is



Protesting at the closure of Newport Passport Office.

photo SP Wales

not acceptable. A campaign of resistance is necessary. WAG has responded to the student demonstrations by pledging to ensure that the university fees of Welsh students are not increased any more. It has retained the Education Maintenance Allowance in Wales but is still intent on forcing through huge cuts.

According to civil service union PCS, 30,000 jobs are at risk as a result of the WAG budget cuts. University courses are being cut and universities being merged, leading to big job losses.

Already public services in Wales are under-funded to the tune of £300 million according to the Holtham

Commission. The neoliberal policies of Tory and New Labour Westminster governments have largely de-industrialised the British economy and created a huge social gulf between rich and poor. The Welsh economy has suffered as manufacturing industry has closed and been only partially replaced by service industries and the public sector.

Radical action, mobilising the working class of Wales, is needed. This action needs to be linked up to action by workers throughout Britain who are resisting the coalition government cuts.

Socialist Party Wales says the Assembly should use its new powers

not to pass on the Con-Dem cuts more efficiently but to fight the cuts. We argue that the Assembly government should propose a budget that meets the needs of working people in Wales - a needs budget, call upon its reserves to prevent any immediate cuts and begin a mass campaign of demonstrations, protests, strikes and civil disobedience to demand the rest.

A socialist WAG would set out a bold programme to defend the Welsh economy, using its new powers to take into public ownership firms threatening redundancies, the utilities and privatised public services. The programme would propose socialist economic policies to put Wales back to work again through an ambitious programme of useful public works and public investment in publicly owned green and high technology industries.

Resisting the cuts and carrying out socialist policies would come up against ferocious opposition from the Con-Dem government in Westminster and big business in Wales and the rest of Britain. It would need a mass campaign, including demonstrations and general strikes in Wales, linking up with similar struggles in the rest of Britain, to win these reforms.

Socialist Party Wales supports a socialist Wales as part of a socialist federation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.