

London, Tunis & Berlin



Tunisia was considered one of the most stable Arab regimes. It was one of the wealthier countries in the region and seemed relatively open to the west being a popular tourist destination.

It was neither a totalitarian dictatorship nor a princely possession. It even had a veneer of democracy, though opposition candidates regularly said that they were “voting for the president.”

Yet that president is now gone, flown away to a Saudi exile, and it was students who led the movement to oust him.

It started weeks ago when protests against unemployment and poverty started in a provincial town.

Soon they spread to the capital, Tunis.

First the regime tried to shoot the protesters off the street. Then they tried making concessions.

The former only fed the fury of the people, the latter just encouraged them.

As with every regime in crisis, each zig and zig took it closer to the edge.

A general strike called by the UGTT trade union federation was followed by a strike by lawyers. Protests and riots spread like wildfire sweeping in both the educated middle classes and the working class.

In the end the only way to stem the tide was for Ben Ali to go,

Tunisia is not Europe. But nor is it far.

It is just across from Italy, and digitally it is only a click away.

Nor are the problems of everyday life a world away either.

Mohamed Bouazizi, whose suicide sparked the protests, was a university graduate reduced to selling vegetables.

But the problems of graduate unemployment is common across Europe.

In this country huge numbers of graduates are reduced to working in call centres. A degree now seems necessary for even the lowliest white collar job.

As the country heads for a double-dip recession students may be able to unite the people against a programme of cuts for which there is no democratic mandate.

The revolution will be televised

Is this the first revolution of the 21st century?

It may be, but it isn't yet.

Ben Ali is gone but the regime still exists. The army and police are still there and so is the government.

The state is still intact, if at the moment paralysed.

The movement needs to go forward and build its strength or else the state will strike back when it has regrouped.

This is what happened after the “Revolution of the Stones” in Algeria twenty years ago. The regime made concessions, even allowing free elections. But when it didn't like the results it staged a military coup.

The movement needs to break the state, or it will be broken by it.



Build a bonfire, build a bonfire

The question that the student movement must ask is how this bonfire can be built. Different kinds of bonfires have different goals and thus different recipes are needed. In order to see what kind of tools we need we must first ask what the purpose of our bonfire is.

The two main goals should be to block the Con Dem policies and to fight for free education, We need to look for the right tools to achieve these two goals.

These fights are going on at both the level of educational institutions and on a broader political level. The movement and its structures must target both in order to be successful. The broadest possible forces must unite and organise in a way that the fights on different fronts at the same time.

The organisational structures need to away from the old far-left tradition of building narrow “party” student societies, towards self-organised, autonomous, anticapitalist networks of students that can take decisions on their own. They must be organised at the university level as well as on regional and national level. The London Student Assembly is a good example of how this can happen.

Why self organised, autonomous and anti-capitalist?

Because we must win!

Self organisation is important because it is only through self-organised structures that the movement can genuinely express itself and be inclusive. It can then learn from its mistakes and use its full power.

Autonomy follows from self organisation. It is a necessary condition for the democratic decision taking both at the university level and at the regional and national levels.

Student groups have to be autonomous but they must also collaborate with each other. The student movement must work with the labour movement, but it must also maintain its independence.

This is exactly the reason why student groups need to be anti-capitalist. An understanding of the capitalist system as a whole helps to identify where the real problems lie and help to link the movement with its real allies.

Self-organised, autonomous anti-capitalist student groups can be the structure that can help organise the resistance against the ConDems, fight for free education and help unite the student movement with other struggles.



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