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We ourselves don't have a people

Nidhal Chamekh

9 August 2021

On July 25th, in the evening of a day of demonstrations, Tunisian President Kais Saied dismissed the prime minister, temporarily suspended parliament, lifted the immunity of its members and announced that he would take a number of decisions by decree, by resorting to article 80 of the Tunisian constitution (also very close to article 16 of the French constitution).

To justify this coup, it was necessary to mobilise the usual and hackneyed propaganda of "imminent peril": young demonstrators from working-class neighborhoods would be paid by officials or opposing parties to take to the streets and sow disorder. No need to look for more details or precisions, the refrain is well known. It is a question of disqualifying the numerous protest movements of recent months, of denying those who demonstrate their own capacity to act and to evacuate all the demands and targets by crushing the debate under the generic question of corruption.

While the editorialists gloss over whether to speak of a coup and wonder what could remain of a "democratic transition", we publish

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the translation of this short but luminous intervention by Nidhal Chamekh of July 28th.

In the midst of all this noise, there is no room for the slightest divergent word, for the slightest point of view outside of the prevailing order. Whenever we were close to a turning point, making it possible, or at the most conceivable, for a larger space to open up, you have sent us back to the same enclosure delimited by power and the system. Every thought or movement that departs from it is deliberately silenced or reduced so that it can be enveloped in liberal wrappings, within the same binary polarisation of the system.

Anyone warning against the worsening authoritarianism of an already fundamentally authoritarian regime and against a return to the cage of dictatorship is immediately categorised as supporting the *Ennahda* [Party], its clique of businessmen and blood suckers, and this by means of police tactics, even though many individuals and groups that have been so targeted have not stopped confronting the regime as a whole, its *nahdaouis* [members or supporters of *Ennahda*], its modernists or its apathetic progressives. For us there is no difference between *Ennahda* and any other representative of this class regime, except in terms of the degree of repression. If this trend was a warning to us, it is because dictatorship is not just a matter of law; because for us the law is ultimately only the extension of the baton, and not a pure, separate intellectual, political or theoretical question. It is the accumulation of experiences, individual and organised dynamics resulting from social conflict.

Feeling warned or cautious is a matter of intuition, because revolutionary politics are more about intuitions than calculations and logical reasoning, even if this must involve an element of exaggeration and disproportion. Because exaggeration and excess are at the heart of all creation.

Knowing how to be cautious, in a time like this, is one of the essential revolutionary tasks of those who speak out, even if this must go against the gregarious reasoning of the majority. You have already served us this type of argument to curb our opposition in the case of Ben Achour,¹ in the name of “the democratic transition”, or to put a stop to the revolutionary movement, in the name of “of the people in jubilation”, “of the first free elections”, as well as during many other episodes where all dissonance was silenced by this argument of the cardboard “people”.

Whoever waits for a solution from above and by means of the law can always wait, and whoever waits for social transformations to come about through political reshuffles will wait.

Material power can only be transformed by material power and societies do not emancipate themselves like that, as they leave work or shops. A society only transforms itself when it begins to transform its own situation, without a guardian, by and for itself.

Others do not even have the chance to benefit from any reforms that improve the conditions of our bondage to capital, to the State of the ruling classes and to the authoritarianism of power. For us libertarians, anti-authoritarians, communists, who lay claim to either Marxism or anarchism, we have cut short this kind of non-sense a long time ago.

Authoritarianism and dictatorial ambitions, this is what characterises all rulers. Even if they could have wings they would not be otherwise, especially when power is concentrated in the hands of one. And even if Bakunin or Che Guevara were in power, even in

¹ In early 2011, after the departure of Ben Ali, various bodies were responsible for ensuring the transition of power by giving it an appearance of legality and in order to maintain the legitimacy of the state. Yahd Ben Achour quickly chaired a commission with this end, then the “High authority for the achievement of the objectives of the revolution, political reform and democratic transition” whose name, juxtaposing terms a priori opposed to each other, suffices to illustrate how much, in appropriating the wording “revolution”, it is first of all a question of maintaining a continuity of power.

the name of the noblest principles, it would still remain a dictatorial project. Freedom and justice are what determines the conflict and around what it revolves.

The sovereign sits in the midst of a gang of murderers, police repression managers and generals and the image is itself disgusting.

The sovereign announces the dismissal of the parliament and of the prime minister (to hell with both) in order to grant “the demands of the people”, without there being any room for questioning or adopting a critical reading. This is a reading that sees that it is less a question of satisfying a demand of the people, and rather a matter of pulling the carpet from under their feet and restraining them by thus granting one political demand before others follow; more radical demands, coming from the most impoverished masses, calling for a fundamental and social transformation or initiating such a transformation themselves.

The sovereign dismisses the politicians of the *Ennahda* party and everyone sees it as a decision that will allow them to be wiped off the map. Here again, there is no room for doubt, no room for another reading, a reading that consists in saying that getting rid of an inert corpse that nothing could bring back to life can provide it with the opportunity of exploiting its status as a victim, and thus revive its ranks and its principles.

As a final farce, the sovereign comes to calm capital, those families and social classes who have seen their wealth increase tenfold at our expense ... And everyone applauds.

The historical experiences lived by libertarians in similar situations, the sacrifices of all those who have been killed, denied or who have risked their lives, offer us something to shed light on our obscurity.

Also the arguments invoking “the will of the people” or any other justification in their name do not concern us. In such arguments, the people are a good excuse, but they are actually despised. They are denied any capacity to act and to organise themselves, just

as they are denied any possibility of action, of political and historical transformation outside this model of an authoritarian regime based on its claim to represent the people. That is, any possibility of the latter’s ability to make political decisions, to organise socially and to decide freely is wrested from them.

We have no people, and we no longer believe in a numerical or fictitious people, nor in the idea of the majority and the herd. Our people are yet to come. They are the masses transforming themselves into a free society and into free individuals and becoming again capable of bringing down, by themselves and for themselves, the whole of the foundations of the system, of politics and of power based on authoritarianism and the class system.

For this, there is no other choice than to join the street, to be part of its most radical fringes, to organise in order to stimulate dynamics, to coordinate, to push demands opening up a broader horizon and towards self-organisation.

Our power against their power.

- Everyone: anyone who can recognise themselves in this
- Us: Idem