

Salah Ben Youssef

Salah Ben Youssef (صالح بن يوسف), born October 11, 1907 in Djerba and killed August 12, 1961 in Frankfurt am Main (Germany), was a Tunisian politician and one of the main leaders of the Tunisian independence movement alongside Farhat Hached and Habib Bourguiba.

Heir Apparent

Born into a family of rich and influential businessmen, he trained as a lawyer and entered politics where his qualities promised a future that would place him in the role of heir apparent to Bourguiba. He began his political career as secretary general of the Neo-Destour, a position in which he played a leading role during the exile of Bourguiba.

In August 1950, he was appointed justice minister in the government of M'hamed Chenik. Charged with delivering to the United Nations, which was meeting in Paris, a complaint from Tunisia in March 1952, he narrowly escaped arrest and deportation. While he traveled around the world for over three years – where he was received by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Jawaharlal Nehru and also Zhou Enlai – agreements with France on internal autonomy were signed.

Confrontation

This achievement was accomplished without him and as he took for "a step backwards and a hindrance" it festered in him. The evacuation of French troops from the whole of Tunisian territory for him was an necessary preliminary to real national independence. From a lieutenant and friend of Bourguiba, who had returned to his country on 1 June 1955, he became his implacable enemy¹. According to Ben Youssef, his opponent was guilty of practicing a "policy of denial and betrayal" in regards to the Tunisian people and the Algerian revolution.

Returning on his part to Tunisia from Cairo on September 13, he implemented a plan of agitation throughout the country.

The proponents of Bourguiba and those of Ben Youssef, the "Bourguibistes" and "Youssefists", then increased their meetings to denounce and demolish the position of the opposing party². Meeting on 8 October, under the presidency of Bourguiba, the Political Bureau of Neo-



Destour decided to hold a conference to request the removal of Ben Youssef and his expulsion from the party. Ousted from office and expelled from the party after the congress held from 15 to 19 November, Ben Youssef continued to campaign in the south where in late November he organized a number of meetings that result in clashes with supporters of Bourguiba ². Nevertheless he remained consistent in his activism until January 1958.

Exile and assassination

On two occasions, in January 1957 and November 1958, Ben Youssef was sentenced to death. But his escape, on 28 January 1956 ², allowed him to escape these two sentences. Tracked, he fled to Tripoli and then to Cairo where he benefited from a quarrel between Bourguiba and Nasser. But his presence soon becomes annoying. Always uncompromising toward Bourguiba who met him one last time in Zurich on March 3, 1961, Ben Youssef, affected by eczema on his legs, settled on June 2, 1961 at a hotel in Wiesbaden, near Frankfurt, in order to undergo thermal treatment ³. On August 12, he is murdered in a hotel in Frankfurt where two compatriots found him.

Some published sources argue that the protagonists of the proposed elimination of Ben Youssef are Bourguiba, his wife Wassila, Mohamed Masmoudi, Hassen Belkhodja, Taieb Mehiri and Bashir Zarg Layoun and ³. The interior minister Mehiri, had sought the aid of two individuals including Zarg Layoun to recruit henchmen able to take action. The plan prepared consisted in making Ben Youssef believe that Tunisian army officers want to see him to inform him and make plans in his presence for coup d'état. Less than twenty days after the end of the crisis of Bizerte and taking advantage of the patriotic euphoria of Tunisians, Bourguiba considered that the time was right to get rid of his main rival political ³. Arriving in Frankfurt, he left his wife Soufia in a café on the Kaiserstrasse and went to the Royal Hotel located in the same street where he was greeted by the two compatriots and rode with them to their room to study the plan. One of them then shot him at close range with a single bullet at 4:30pm ³. It wasn't until three hours later that his wife discovered him in a pool of blood. In a coma, he was taken to the University Hospital in Frankfurt, where he died around 10:45 p.m. without regaining consciousness ³.

He was brought back to Cairo and was buried. His widow would not return to Tunisia until December 22, 1987 after more than 30 years of exile in Cairo. She was received on January 2, 1988 by the Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. In June 2007, the producer Fethi Doghri was preparing a film about the life of Ben Youssef.