

January 26, 1978 (II): Rupture of a strategic alliance

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One cannot grasp the gravity and the range of the crisis of January 26 without looking back on the nature and significance of the strategic alliance which was concluded between Néo-Destour and the UGTT as of the fight for the national independence and which continued after independence in the construction of the modern Tunisian State.

Baccar Gherib

Indeed, it is enough to recall the events of August 5, 1947 in Sfax and the supreme sacrifice, on December 5, 1952, of its leader Farhat Hached, to measure the heavy tribute paid by the Tunisian labour movement in the independence of the country and the formidable weapon which it represented vis-a-vis the occupation. By doing this, it strongly affirmed its double social and national vocation.

Better still, the UGTT was “creditor of Habib Bourguiba in person” ⁽¹⁾ when it took part to ensure him the victory at the expense of the *Youssefist* camp at the time of the congress of Sfax in November 1955. In the same way, while working out in 1956 his famous economic report, the central trade-union brought to the Néo-Destour the economic vision which he lacked and, by giving him its best officers, enabled him to implement the development strategy necessary to the fight against poverty.

However, it is clear that some within the party saw an evil eye in this strong ally, equipped at one and the same time with historical and popular legitimacy. And the first attempt to overcome it took place in the middle of the Sixties and was shown by the detention of Achour and the voluntary exile of Tlili. Thus, the institution of the “professional cells” is another way of fighting, on the ground, against this ally become a burden.

From this point of view, the drama of January 26, 1978 represents a radical attempt to finish not only with the spectre of an improbable workers party but particularly with an organization that had become impossible to circumvent in the strategies of an open fight for the succession.

Thus, as underlined by Mr. Kraiem ⁽²⁾, the party did not hesitate to sacrifice its ally at the end of a long companionship, and by doing this shaking the progressive base of their alliance. Because, “this violent confrontation weakened the two secular and modernistic partners and encouraged the blossoming of the Islamist movement which thought that the hour of historical revenge sounded” ⁽³⁾. And it is undoubtedly not a risk which, contrary to the MDS, the PUP and the PCT, the MTI was at the time the only opposition movement to have shown its solidarity with the UGTT in the terrible ordeal that it went through.

Consequently, and beyond the political and short-term effects of January 26, it would be relevant to analyze their ideological and long-term consequences. This will

undoubtedly provide us with a better understanding the state of the Tunisian society of today.

- 1. According to the expression of Chedli Ayari in his work, the system of Tunisian development, CPU, 2003, p 132.
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- 2. M. Kraiem, ennidhâm elbourguibiy wa alharaka annaqâbiyya : alwifâq almostahîl, in ro'â ommâliyya, UGTT et Friedrich Ebert, 2004, p 153.
- 3. Ibid. p 154.

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