

International round-up: Democracy under threat in Tunisia after coup

Via [Socialist Worker](#)

Tunisia's president Kais Saied has launched a wave of arrests against his political opponents after [launching a coup last month](#).

The coup-backed by the army and the police—is an assault on the democratic gains of the Tunisian revolution of 2010, which sparked the Arab Spring.

Authorities arrested Tunisia's interior minister Anouar Maarouf of the Islamist Ennahda party last Friday and placed him under house arrest.

Several other politicians and officials have also been arrested or told they are under investigation.

Replacing

Meanwhile, Saied is moving to [take direct control](#) of more government departments by replacing ministers with people loyal to him.

It comes after Saied sacked the prime minister Hichem Mechichi, the speaker of parliament and Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi, and suspended parliament.

Saied encouraged popular support for his coup by dressing it up as a challenge to government corruption and a failed -parliamentary system.

Many ordinary people in Tunisia are angry at the government [for betraying the revolution](#).

The revolution that overthrew dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2010 was driven by anger over poverty and unemployment.

But the governments that followed responded to a financial crisis with austerity and privatisation measures in return for loans from the International Monetary Fund.

Now living [standards are worse](#) for many Tunisians. Unemployment is at 18 percent—rising to 36 percent among young people.

Several left wing parties in Tunisia supported Saied's coup, as did the major UGTT union, which hopes its officials will be able to influence his government.

Yet Saied has openly stated he wants to do away with political parties in government entirely. He once told an interviewer that political parties are "destined to become extinct. Their era is over.

"Their death may take some time, but surely in a few years their role will end."

Saied also told the same interviewer he wanted to clamp down on civil society organisations, presumably including trade unions.

"I have a project aimed at ending support for all societies, whether from within Tunisia or from outside because they are used as a means for interfering in our affairs," he said.

Saied's real hope is that doing away with parliamentary democracy will [end the political crisis](#) for Tunisia's ruling class. That's why he was supported by the army and police.

But his biggest problem is that he has less support from other states including the US, which has called on him to reinstate parliament.

The US is happy to support dictatorships, but is worried that

the coup will upset its allies such as Turkey, which backs Ennahda.

Turkey and another US ally, Egypt—which backs Saied—are competing for influence and control over the eastern Mediterranean. This worries the US.

Yet Saied has said there is “no turning back” from his decision to shut down parliament.