



Riot and Rebellion: Political Responses to Economic Crisis in North Africa, Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan

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1. Introduction

1984 began in bloody fashion in north Africa. Violent demonstrations, originating in the impoverished southwest and south of Tunisia at the very end of December and spreading throughout the country during the first week of January, followed the introduction of measures by the Tunisian government to remove food subsidies as part of their 'economic stabilisation' programme approved by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The sudden doubling of bread prices was a crucial factor in the outbreak of mass unrest, although official explanations identified a threat from 'hostile elements' concerned to overthrow the government. Whatever the reality of this supposed threat to the regime of octogenarian President Habib Bourghiba, the state's response to the demonstrations was itself extremely violent. As the unrest spread, security forces opened fire on crowds in several towns, including the capital Tunis; at least 60 people were killed - as many as 120 according to some reports - and many more injured. A state of emergency and a curfew were declared on January 3rd, public gatherings of more than three persons were forbidden, the prime minister Mohammed Mzali appeared on television to appeal for calm, and the state security forces - police, national guard (gendarmarie) and army were visibly and massively poised for further developments. But the demonstrations and street violence continued; on January 4th there were numerous clashes, and on January 5th the army and police fired on 'rioters' in Tunis, moving into the old medina to dislodge snipers. In the morning of January 6th, President Bourghiba appeared on television to rescind the price increases and promise the restoration of food subsidies - an announcement evidently received with pleasure and relief by the crowds in the streets. Three weeks later, after a period of relative calm, the curfew was lifted; and by February it appeared that the immediate crisis was over.

As Tunisia returned, warily, to relative normality, further to the west Morocco was experiencing its own wave of mass demonstrations and street violence. Heavy news censorship prevented earlier publication of details, but over the weekend of January 22nd-23rd, the newspaper of the Istiqlal opposition party, *l'Opinion*, reported that the demonstrations had in fact begun two weeks earlier in the south, where drought conditions were particularly severe, notably in Marrakesh, and that troops from the western Sahara and Sidi Ifni had been brought in to quell the disturbances. In Morocco, as in Tunisia, the demonstrations (although in this case developing out of earlier protests at school and university fee increases were closely connected to official proposals made at the end of December to raise the price of basic commodities, including food, only four months after major increases in August 1983. The proposals for further increases in prices followed the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund, which in September had given its approval to a major programme of 'economic stabilisation' involving, among other measures, the withdrawal of subsidies on basic goods. As social unrest spread through the town of the barren and relatively impoverished north of the country, and broke out even in some of the larger cities of the Moroccan 'heartlands' it was countered by heavy concentrations of state security forces; press reports suggest that at least 100 were killed (as many as 400 according to some sources) and many more

injured and arrested. As in Tunisia, official explanations for the troubles emphasised the role of 'agitators' of various kinds; nevertheless, King Hassan recognised the root cause of the disturbances and appeared on television in the evening of January 22nd to announce that there would be no further increases in the price of basic goods -after all. This public statement by the monarch, together with the repressive measures taken against the demonstrators, ensured that 'law and order' were restored within a few days; and by the end of January it could be said that Morocco, like Tunisia, had returned to 'normal'.

Just over a year later, at the end of March 1985, mass demonstrations in Khartoum initiated a series of events which culminated in the overthrow of President Numeiry's regime and a takeover by the military. What began as popular protest against increases in the price of basic commodities, notably foodstuffs, was transformed within a week into a movement of political opposition which itself forced the military to intervene through a coup d'etat. The violence with which the state met the early street demonstrations was an important factor in the development of an organised-movement of-opposition to the regime, although the 'bread riots' themselves lasted only a few days. and the total number killed was small in comparison with the number in Tunisia and Morocco. As in Tunisia and Morocco, the official response blamed the troubles on agitators but, as in Tunisia and Morocco also, the regime was obliged to recognise after continuing mass demonstrations revealed the popular character of the protest that the removal of food subsidies and resulting increase in prices lay behind the riots, and to offer to rescind the price increases. Unlike the situation in Tunisia and Morocco, however, these offers came too late to have any substantial effect on what had rapidly become a much more orchestrated campaign of political opposition to the regime. 'Law and order' were not restored; a general strike was called and implemented, and eventually a state of 'civil rebellion' was declared. Before the disparate social forces involved in the campaign were able to construct an agreed political platform and programme, the army intervened and seized power. Since the military coup in April 1985, the civilian movement has continued to struggle for the restoration of civilian democracy and civilian rule, so far unsuccessfully.

2. 'Enemies of the people': official explanations for the riots

It is common for governments to identify mass demonstrations of widespread popular anger and resentment as essentially the work of highly organised small groups of agitators - preferably foreigners or at least foreign-inspired and supported; to accept the large numbers of ordinary citizens may be so moved, and so desperate, as to act openly and violently together would be to admit that deep-seated and intractable problems exist.

In the case of Tunisia, although foreign reports on the violent demonstrations that broke out first in the southwest between 29th December and 2nd January suggested that the doubling of the price of bread and other cereal-based products was largely responsible for the outbreak of social unrest among the poor and unemployed in a remote, arid and underprivileged region, official explanations laid emphasis on the role of small groups of organised agitators with political motives. Thus, the governor of Kebili was reported as stating that foreign-inspired agitators were involved in the demonstrations in Kebili, Douz and Souk el Ahad - all small southern towns to the east of the great salt depression of Chott el Djerid and to the south of Gafsa ('capital' of the south); while the governor of Gafsa itself identified Libyan, and Lebanese-trained Tunisians leading the demonstrations. (1) When, late on the evening of 3rd January, the prime minister Mohammed Mzali appeared on television to appeal for calm, he blamed the troubles on the activities of agitators attempting to overthrow the regime. "There has been manipulation", he said,; "The young people have been enticed and misled into demonstrations which appear spontaneous but behind which lies a plan for

destabilisation and elements more or less inspired by certain influences whose declared objective is the overthrow of the regime". (2) "Let these individuals or small groups who think it is easy to topple the regime know that all their efforts are doomed to fail", (3) he declared. Mzali said little in detail regarding the character or origin of these 'influences', but appeared to allude to influences from abroad, probably from Libya. (4) Meanwhile, in Paris, the Tunisian ambassador assured the French television audience that the price increase "has very little to do with the rioting", and blamed 'uncontrolled elements'. (5) A few days later, after President Bourghiba had publicly cancelled the food price rises, Mzali reiterated his conviction that "we found ourselves faced with veritable inurrectionist commandos, well organised and co-ordinated", (6) and that, but for this, the response to the increases in prices would have been far less dramatic. He argued that the economic imperatives behind the removal of subsidies had been explained to the people and proposals for compensation to the most disadvantaged already made public: "Undoubtedly, it was necessary to attack bread, I did it. One must have the courage to tell the people the truth. We did it. But there was this political exploitation".

In Morocco also, official statements tended to lay the blame for the trouble at the door of agitators of various kinds. When King Hassan spoke to the Moroccan people on television in the evening of 22nd January, he referred to three distinct categories of agitators: those influenced by the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian experience (the Muslim fundamentalists), the communists and 'Marxist-Leninists', and the Zionist secret services. In support of these accusations, the King showed pamphlets purportedly seized during the demonstrations which showed the photograph of Khomeini and which spoke of the Moroccan leadership as 'servants of the American and Soviet Satan's; he also indicated pamphlets signed by the banned Marxist-Leninist group *Ilal Amam* (Forward), which criticised 'the war which the criminal Hassan II is waging against our brothers in the western Sahara', (7) and suggested that the demonstrations in Marrakesh, Nador, Al Hoceima, Oujda, Ksar el Kebir, Tetouan and Chaouen had been organised by activists from this group, together with teachers and unemployed workers. In *Le Monde* on 24th January, it was reported that "a Moroccan political personality confirmed to us that the disturbances had been fomented by Islamic fundamentalists, who had exploited the discontent of the young and disadvantaged. For about a fortnight, tracts had been distributed which reflected an Iranian influence - the word 'tahouti', used in Teheran for 'the rich', was frequently employed - and these violently attacked the King, his regime, the decline in morality, and corruption. Contrary to the statements made by the King in his speech on Sunday, 22nd January, this highly placed individual ignored the Marxist-Leninist groups (who in any case were miniscule) and the Zionist secret services. It is unclear why these last should have sought to undermine Hassan II, who maintains unofficial relations with the Israeli leadership". (8)

In Sudan, students referred to as 'ideologists' (an official euphemism for the banned Muslim Brotherhood) were initially blamed for the riots and the authorities issued a list of Muslim Brothers wanted for questioning. Sudanese officials were reported as saying that "the banned Muslim Brotherhood organisation incited job-seekers, many of them from the drought-stricken provinces, to riot on Wednesday and Thursday, after the prices of bread, fuel and other goods rose" (9). It was also announced that the government would 'start forthwith emptying the capital of all elements responsible for sabotage', singling out those identified as 'tramps and vagrants' in particular. Between 1,500 and 2,000 --mainly the homeless and unemployed, and many of them refugees from the countryside-- were arrested between Tuesday 26th and Thursday 28th March 1985. Local residents blamed the rioting on rising food prices after the removal of government subsidies, but the Sudanese press claimed that subsidies had been removed only on sugar-based items, such as soft drinks. (10)

Meetings were held over the last weekend of March to plan a mass rally early in the

following week; such a demonstration had the explicit backing of the organisations representing doctors, lawyers, engineers, bank workers, academics and students, and the president of the students' union stated that "eve the judges' committee has declared its support. The air is quivering". (11) The Sudanese authorities were aware of the danger posed by these meetings and, on Saturday, 30th March, the secretary and acting president of the Union of Academic Staff at the University of Khartoum were arrested at the same time as four leading doctors two of whom were members of the central committee of the Sudan Medical Association. These followed arrests made earlier in the day of thirteen students and four others attending a meeting of the Khartoum University Students' Union - the students, including the president and secretary of K.U.S.U. were accused of producing pamphlets inciting riot. (12)

On Monday, 1st April the authorities announced that the students of K.U.S.U. arrested over the weekend were members of the banned Communist Party. Commenting on the arrests, the secretary of the Sudan "Socialist" Union promised that Communists, Ba'athists and Muslim Brothers would all be hunted out; he also stated that the majority of those involved in demonstrations were found not to be Sudanese. He accused Libya, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union of involvement in anti-government activities taking place in Sudan, and stressed that the doctors arrested at the weekend were graduates of universities in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. (13) Leaders of the Sudan Socialist Union called on their followers to gather in Khartoum. On Tuesday April 2nd, between 2,000 and 3,500 people attended a progovernment rally organised by the Sudan Socialist Union in Khartoum to demonstrate against communists, Ba'athists and Muslim Brothers - the groups identified by the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) as instigators of the opposition to the Numeiry regime., In a message to the crowd, President Numeiry (still in the United States) condemned 'traitors and agents' for the previous week's riots and declared that 'the enemies of the revolution will end up in disgrace and destruction'. (14)

3• Organised op position ...or spontaneous protest? (Tunisia and Morocco)

But if the identification of such elements as scapegoats is not surprising, it must nevertheless be asked whether-- there was any basis for the conception of a threat to the regime from politically motivated and organised groups. For it could be argued that such a threat, if it existed in reality, or even was genuinely perceived to exist, might provide an explanation for the violent response by the state to the demonstrations even at the outset.

In the case of Tunisia, it is significant that the disturbances broke out in a region-where-political-opposition to the regime is known to-exist and has been openly manifested in the recent past. Only four years ago, Libyan-trained Tunisian dissidents attacked and held for over a week the southern town of Gafsa - an action which provoked a crisis in relations between Tunisia and Libya. Since that time, economic cooperation between the two countries has increased significantly and relations are, in general, more cordial. But the fact that the majority of the 60,000 Tunisians who work in Libya come from the south and southwest, together with the evidence of at least tacit support for the dissidents from the inhabitants of Gafsa., undoubtedly accounts to some extent for the government's fear of political subversion in this region. Furthermore, there is little doubt that Colonel Qaddafi's attitude towards the Tunisian regime under Bourghiba is equivocal to say the least; certainly, during the January troubles Qaddaffi's public statements were generally critical of the Tunisian government's heavy use of state security forces to quell the disturbances. Also, it is known that Libya disapproved of the haven provided by Tunisia for the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, against whom it had sent brigades to fight in north Lebanon; was it

simply coincidence that the troubles began on the evening of the return to Tunis of the PLO leader? On the other hand, Qaddafi was at some pains to assure the Tunisian regime that he had no part in the organisation of the demonstrations in the south; after a telephone conversation with Mzali, it was announced by the Libyan press agency JANA, Colonel Qaddafi decided to send a delegation to Tunis to emphasise the point and to encourage "co-ordination and co-operation aimed at overcoming the present situation". (15) But concern about possible Libyan connections was reinforced when a pipeline carrying oil from Algeria to Tunisia was blown up on 7th January, apparently by a four-man commando group from Libya.

In the case of Morocco, the north - and particularly the north east where the disturbances were most violent and most prolonged - has been regarded virtually since independence as as potentially volatile, partly because of the long-standing connections between this region and western Algeria, and the undoubted political influence emanating from there, and partly because of the more recent experience of social unrest. King Hassan certainly recalls the revolts of 1958 and 1959 in the vicinity of A1 Hoceima and Nador which eventually he himself as Crown Prince put down brutally with the aid of 20,000 troops and full air support in January 1960 (16) and he may even bear in mind the early republicanism of the northern mountain regions under the rebel Abdel Krim during the 1920s. But there was no suggestion officially of any influence, direct or indirect, from Algeria on this occasion; and this, combined with the total lack of any evidence of Israeli involvement, removes the basis for any suggestion of a direct foreign influence on the course of events in Morocco.

In both Tunisia and Morocco, observers - both foreign and indigenous - remarked on the evidence for agitation by Muslim fundamentalist groups. King Hassan referred to them in his public television appearance and others claimed their involvement in the Moroccan disturbances. But the Muslim fundamentalists in Morocco are very divided - they number as many as twenty different groups - and their capacity to orchestrate large scale demonstrations of the kind experienced in January must be extremely questionable. In Tunisia also, some commentators have suggested that growing Islamic fundamentalism in Tunisia enabled groups of agitators to encourage violence against property representing 'the symbols of luxury, corruption and foreign influence' and to adopt slogans such as " There is but one God and Boughiba is the enemy of God" (17). It was observed that the "tactics used by the demonstrators in Tunis were reminiscent of those used in Teheran in 1978-79 before the overthrow of the Shah. The pressure of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Tunisia has been growing since then. Last year, for the first time, a group of junior army officers stood trial on charges of propagating religious ideas in the armed forces, while another group of young fundamentalists were imprisoned for allegedly planning to blow up foreign cultural centres in Tunis" (18): But this, albeit significant in general terms as regards the growth of Muslim fundamentalism in Tunisia, is circumstantial evidence as far as the January disturbances are concerned. The only direct indication of the involvement of Muslim fundamentalist groups, apart from the existence of some pamphlets and use of certain slogans, was the fact that the minarets of mosques were used, particularly in Tunis, to chant 'Allah I Akbar' (God is Great) and other religious declarations during the course of the demonstrations. In neither Tunisia nor Morocco is there reliable evidence that Muslim fundamentalists were significant in orchestrating the demonstrations, although there is little doubt that they, were involved and active. Certainly, in the south of Tunisia, where the earliest disturbances broke out, most local sources appear to agree that the role of Muslim fundamentalists and indeed, of pro-Libyan or other political groups was in fact extremely limited. (19)

Finally, despite King Hassan's reference to Marxist-Leninists, there is little evidence that the parties or tendencies of the far left were behind the demonstrations in Morocco. In Tunisia, the *Mouvement d'Opposition Nationale Tunisien* (MONT) claimed

responsibility - from Brussels - for the demonstrations, and denounced "the repression by the Tunisian security forces of the 'hunger ,rioters' (*les insurges de la faim*)";(20) but the recognised left-wing parties clearly intervened only after the early outbreak of mass protest, and then only to call on the government to resolve the crisis. The Tunisian communist party, for example, wrote to prime minister Mzali demanding that there should be 'consultations' with all national forces to find a solution to the situation, and otherwise confined itself to condemning the violence (21). The *Mouvement des Democratres Socialistes* (MDS) and the communist party both criticised the state's recourse to the army and laid the responsibility for the troubles at the feet of the government; both called for a postponement of the measures which had increased prices and referred to the lessons to be learned from other countries where subsidies on basic goods had been removed on the advice of the International Monetary Fund (22).

There is little doubt that, despite the flimsy evidence, in both Tunisia and Morocco, the regime perceived a dangerous threat from small groups of organised militants. During and immediately after the street violence a systematic programme of arrest and interrogation of known activists was initiated in both countries. In Morocco, not only the left-wing revolutionary groups like *Ilal Amam* were targets but even the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) was suspect - and twenty-one of its members arrested - despite the fact that the party adhered officially to the 'sacred unity' established in the context of the war in the Sahara and that its leader, Abderrahim Bouabid, was a member of the King's cabinet. The communist party, in particular, was harassed and its newspaper *A1 Bayane* seized on several days running. In Tunisia, known activists from both Muslim fundamentalist and left-wing groups were taken in for questioning; 30 or so militants of the *Mouvement de Tendence Islamique* - which prior to the troubles was seeking to obtain recognition as a political party - were interrogated, as were numerous communist party activists. Nevertheless, despite the fear of a threat from organised political groups, and the undoubted involvement of political activists in the demonstrations, there is little concrete support for the notion that these played a key role in _orchestrating to social unrest and the mass demonstrations; it would seem, rather, that they - like so many others - were taken by surprise by what was essentially a popular uprising, and sought simply to join in.

Even the trade unions - which in Tunisia had organised numerous strikes in 1977-78 culminating in the violence following the general strike of January 1978, when the army intervened and large numbers (estimates vary between 46 and 200) (23) were killed, and in Morocco in 1981 had certainly orchestrated the strikes and public rallies which preceded the bloody riots in Casablanca - were not evidently involved this time. Certainly, in Tunisia, the UGTT foresaw the economic and social problems that might arise as a result of a dramatic and rapid price increase, and had sought to negotiate concessions for the poor, and a wage review, before prices were put up (24) - but their discussions were with the government at top level and did not involve the union rank and file, let alone the organisation of rallies and strikes to back up their position. A meeting was in fact held on 5th January, after mass demonstrations had taken place throughout the country, between the president and secretary-general of the UGTT and government ministers, which produced what the president of UGTT described as "good and positive results" (25). The next day, President Bourghiba announced that the price increases would be rescinded; but it is not at all clear what influence, if any, the discussions with the union leadership had on the decision to reverse the removal of food subsidies. Mention of a possible general strike was made, but events had gone beyond this threat and it was not taken (possibly not even made) seriously. In Morocco, it is not clear whether the trade unions played any part, even at the level of discussions with government ministers as in Tunisia, in increasing the pressure on the government to reverse the decision to raise prices again; certainly, there is no good evidence that they did. On the other hand, it was remarkable that in Casablanca and Mohammedia industrial centres with the greatest concentration of organised labour in the country -

there was little sign of disturbances, despite the fact that unemployment runs particularly high among the skilled and semi-skilled manual workers (47 per cent of all unemployed but only a quarter of the labour force) (28) who tend to be concentrated in such centres; had the unions already worked out a compromise with the government?

One social category that was clearly and importantly involved in the demonstrations in both Tunisia and Morocco - as it has been in the past during similar outbreaks of social unrest - was that of the students, from high schools and from universities. In Morocco, it was school strikes that helped generate the open protest that gradually transformed the generally growing social unrest into overt opposition to the governments' economic and social policies, and in particular against further price increases. In Tunisia, particularly in the north of the country, students were actively involved in large numbers in the demonstrations. By 3rd January, students in Tunis were throwing stones at buses, shouting anti-government slogans and marching in the streets in solidarity with the demonstrators in the south (27); during the next few days, as the students took to the streets, the authorities closed down the schools and university. It is interesting to note that those most vocal in their criticisms of the regime during the demonstrations were these children of the middle classes whose standard of living has generally been maintained as a result of the economic policies of the past decade or so. But graduate unemployment, combined with the effective suppression of political opposition to the regime, ensure that significant numbers of the young, even from the relatively privileged social strata upon whom the regime so crucially depends, are disaffected and highly critical. (28)

Clearly, then, the social elements involved in the demonstrations of January 1984 in the Maghreb were various and diverse; equally clearly, no mass protest or social revolt that continues over a period of even a week can be sustained entirely through totally 'spontaneous' action. It must be recognised, furthermore, that in all such essentially popular movements there is a 'band-wagon effect'. In the case of Tunisia, Godfrey Morrison argued in *The Times*: "as the unrest continued, other organised--or semiorganised political forces, ranging from the far left through Muslim fundamentalists to the well-organised trade unions, all tried to leap on the band-waggon". But, he continued, "the interesting thing about last week's disturbances, however, is that they were caused mainly by the young unemployed, a section of society who until now have been largely ignored by both President Bourghiba's government and political analysts". For Morrison, "right until the moment when President Bourghiba made his volte face, cancelling the increases, it was the rage of the unemployed which dominated the protest, and it was they who alarmed the government". (29)

In both countries, the specific immediate causes of the demonstrations - increased school fees, dramatic price rises basic commodities (particularly foodstuffs), and perhaps a degree of political agitation - served to open up deep feelings of resentment and anger that stemmed from the underlying problems that are characteristic of contemporary Tunisia and Morocco: inequality, unemployment and poverty, and a sense of political and social marginalisation and impotence. The social unrest that broke out in January 1984 had its roots in disadvantage and deprivation and - as far as any such process can be so identified - was essentially 'spontaneous'; as such, it appears significantly different from the organised rallies and strikes of 1977-78 in Tunisia and 1979 and of 1981 in Morocco, and indicates how widespread and deep-seated are the fundamental contradictions of Tunisian and Moroccan economy and society today.

Despite the emphasis in public announcements by the officials in Tunisia and Morocco on the role of politically-motivated agitators, it is undoubtedly the case that the government and heads of state in both countries recognised the massive threat represented by the upsurge of social protest to the stability of their regime. In both countries, after a week or so of widespread violence and an attempt simply to suppress

the unrest by the use of state security forces, both heads of state were obliged to recognise their inability to contain the problem in this way and to announce publicly the restoration of the status quo as far as basic commodity prices were concerned. When President Bourghiba cancelled the increases, he stressed that he was concerned at the effects on the poor: "I do not want the poor to pay", he declared (30). And even before this public statement of 'concern', the government had asked the governors of some of the poorer provinces in the south to open public work sites for the unemployed; it was also reported that cash was sent to these provinces "to help the poorer members of the community and the unemployed" (31). King Hassan simply stated that, after having received the results of social investigations he had ordered carried out on 1st January throughout the country, he had decided that there would be no further increases in the price of basic necessities (32).

If the government in Tunisia and Morocco recognised implicitly the crucial role of price increases in triggering widespread popular protest, the various opposition parties and movements were more explicit. In Morocco, the Parti Socialistes condemned the state repression and observed that 'the serious troubles which have affected several cities ... reveal the frustration of a section of the Moroccan people in the face of a deterioration of their living conditions' (33). In Tunisia, the *Mouvement d'Opposition Nationale Tunisien* denounced the repression of the 'hunger rioters' by the security forces and argued that the laissez faire economic policies of Mzali had impoverished the deprived and enriched the privileged (34). The *Mouvement des Democraties Socialistes* and the Communist Party both condemned state repression and, in particular, the use of the army and assigned the responsibility for the disturbances to the government; the MDS provided a more elaborated critique of government policy which they argued was largely responsible for the 'spontaneous popular revolt' (35).

4. Organised opposition.-or spontaneous protest? (Sudan)

In Sudan, the riots that took place between the 26th and 28th March appear to have also been essentially a form of 'spontaneous protest'; but, by contrast with the disturbances in Tunisia and Morocco, they gave rise very soon to a more organised and orchestrated movement of political opposition to the Numeiry regime. On Tuesday, 26th March, 1985, the day before the departure of President Numeiry for the USA for a personal medical check-up and talks on aid for Sudan's ailing economy, there were demonstrations in the streets of Kartoum. These were directly related to the increase in the price of bread and sugar-based commodities over the previous few days, following a 75% rise in fuel prices a couple of weeks before. On Wednesday students and predominantly young unemployed persons clashed with riot police as mass demonstrations were met with heavy security forces. The disturbances began around nine in the morning, when students congregated near the University shouting anti-government and anti-Numeiry slogans. The demonstration attracted increasing numbers- as it moved towards the city centre and rapidly grew to well over, one thousand. Shop windows and car windscreens were smashed, vehicles overturned and set on fire, and the streets blocked with chunks of concrete and other heavy objects. Three buildings suffered particularly heavy damage: a branch office of the official Sudanese Socialist Union (the only party permitted under Numeiry), the Faisal Islamic Bank (preserve of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the luxury Meridian Hotel. While students chanted 'we will not be ruled by the World Bank, we will not be ruled by the IMF', the unemployed urban poor in the crowd protested at the increasing cost of living. Truck loads of riot police eventually arrived on the scene, firing tear gas and making sorties into the crowd (36). Sources in contact with hospitals reported that more than six and perhaps as many as eighteen rioters were killed by police gun fire. Several hundreds were arrested and the government set up special tribunals immediately to try rioters (37).

On Thursday, continued violence in the streets resulted from the confrontation between demonstrators and state security forces. Troops and police used batons, tear gas and gunfire to put down 'the third outbreak of anti-government rioting in Khartoum in three days' (38). Shops and government offices were shut and part of the city centre closed down as windows were smashed, vehicles set on fire and some offices - notably those of the Sudanese Socialist Union-- sacked. Major clashes took place near the University and around the railway station, while troops posted outside the United States embassy fired tear gas and live rounds to disperse a crowd, variously reported as one hundred and two thousand strong, marching on the embassy building (39). At least five people were reported killed in Khartoum. There were also reports of rioting in the west of Sudan, in Nyala, El Fasher and el Geneina Atbara in the north and Port Sudan in the east were also the scene of demonstrations (42). One doctor said that, "The riot police did not even try to disperse people with sticks. They just used guns". Some of the cases brought to the hospital had been shot at close range and more than fifty people had been shot; eight were received dead on arrival (43). On Friday, 29th March, hospital doctors, now on strike, distributed leaflets on the streets of Khartoum describing the Numeiry regime as 'a regime of hunger' and accusing the president of 'insulting the people of Sudan'; those who had died in the three days of rioting were referred to as 'martyrs' (44). During the course of Friday, while troops maintained heavy security in the streets outside, a secret meeting took place of the heads of organisations representing doctors, lawyers, engineers, academics and students; this meeting decided to call on other professionals and workers' bodies to join them in a total stoppage or general strike and campaign of civil disobedience from the following Monday (45).

Over the weekend, government troops maintained a state of alert and were deployed around strategic buildings, government offices and in the main streets of Khartoum. Security police announced that all those on the streets of the capital should carry identity cards at all times and suggested that there were as many as 60,000 'vagrants' in the city who would need to register for deportation to the provinces (46). The number of those arrested during the previous week was reported as 2,642, of whom 851 had been sentenced and the remainder (the majority of whom were from the western Sudan provinces) detained with a view to deportation back home (47).

In the meanwhile, leaflets distributed secretly in Khartoum in the name of the outlawed police officers' association indicated that some sections of the police force were prepared to join actively in measures to bring down the regime. The leaflets argued that 'the police have been a tool in the hands of the dictator, Numeiry' and stated that 'from now onwards, the Association of Police Officers will do all it can to disobey any order to use force against the people of Sudan the police will work to bring down this dictatorial regime with all legal and illegal means'; they concluded 'we say "No" to Numeiry and "Ioo" to dictatorship. The spirit of October is still alive' (48). The reference was to the popular uprising of October, 1964, when a national strike led to the downfall of the military government and a restoration of democracy - until 1969 when Numeiry came to power. At the same time, a statement by the Free Army Officers' Organisation was distributed to foreign news agencies in Khartoum. This declared that 'the Sudan Armed Forces side with the popular revolt against hunger, ignorance and misrule, and for social justice and equality'. It condemned the existence of what it referred to as the rich, the war-profiteers and the opportunists inside the armed forces, and argued that the duty of the armed forces was the protection of the Sudanese people from foreign aggression. It called on the people to demonstrate but cautioned against damaging public property. It also emphasised that the Army, together with other sections of the population, had suffered the effects of the rising cost of living and cancellation of subsidies on essential goods (49).

In Omdurman town, a part of greater Khartoum, hundreds of women took to the streets in a large demonstration to protest against rising food prices; reports indicate that many

were shouting 'down, down the IMF' (50).

On Monday, 1st April, police used tear gas against demonstrators in the Popular Market of Khartoum. Meanwhile, Khartoum's doctors -including those from private clinics - continued their strike, refusing even to deal with emergencies; and 'they were joined by the Lawyers' Association Seven hundred doctors from Omdurman and Khartoum North joined those from Khartoum hospitals on strike and the Medical Doctors' Association called on the people of the Sudan and the political organisations representing them to institute a campaign of civil disobedience with a view to the overthrow. of the regime, and suggested a mass demonstration and march on the Presidential Palace to demand the resignation of Numeiry (51). From outside the capital there were reports of continuing disturbances in Atbara, where anti-government demonstrations had taken place over the weekend. Arrests of those involved in orchestrating opposition to the regime continued; leaders of the doctors' union whose strike now effectively paralysed hospitals in the capital were arrested, and the total number of those detained by the security forces was reported as having reached over 5,000 (52). But, despite this harassment, several other professional associations agreed to support -the doctors'. call for a general strike on Wednesday and for mass demonstrations against the regime; and there was evidence to suggest that some sections of the police backed the proposed action.

In an attempt to forestall growing organised opposition the Minister of Labour announced in a broadcast on radio and television, that wages were to be increased between 20 and-40-per cent, with the largest increases . _ going-to_ the lower paid, in order to offset the effects of the recent devaluation of the Sudanese currency and the removal of subsidies on certain commodities (53).

On Wednesday April 3rd, vast crowds took'to the streets to express their views; a report brought out of Sudan by messenger (all telex and telephone links to the outside world were cut early on Wednesday morning) told how 'thousands of middle class Sudanese protesters flooded the streets of Khartoum on Wednesday. Diplomats estiamted about 20,000 in the center of the city. In contrast to the destruction during food riots last week by students and unemployed street dwellers, the demonstration was mainly people in their thirties and forties and peaceful if vociferous, and extremely well planned' (54).

The demonstration was led by the professional associations (including those of doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants) and joined by bank workers, shop staff, academics and students. The protest was clearly directed predominantly against the Numeiry regime, but there were also shouts of 'down, down USA' and 'we say no to World Bank policies' (55). Lines of riot police began firing teargas into the crowd just after 9 a.m., but in general the police and the army acted with restraint and some police appeared even to support the demonstrators, who lifted one or two policemen on to their shoulders, chanting 'the police go with the people' (56). An unconfirmed report by Tripoli Radio suggested that troops fired at the demonstrators from close range, but most sources indicate otherwise; and no deaths or injuries were reported. It seems that senior military officers met first vice-president Omer El Tayeb before the start of the demonstration to insist that troops should not be used to back up police unless the protest became violent, and that only NCOs should be deployed as they could not guarantee the loyalty of ordinary troops to the regime (57).

At 11 a.m, as the crowd of some 20,000 began to march on the presidential palace, the judiciary declared a civil rebellion. But the demonstration remained well organized and non-violent. Later in the day, the official news-agency SUNA issued a statement to the effect that 'a number of ideologist students staged a demonstration headed by some bank workers, doctors, lawyers and engineers this morning. They were dispersed by the security authorities. Some of the leaders and agitators were arrested' (58).

In an official announcement, first vice-president Omer El Tayeb promised that 'popular committees' would study the increases in food prices. He admitted that the country was facing a difficult economic situation but said that the solution would not be found through secret organisations and plotting against the government (59).

On Thursday, April 4th the Sudan remained cut off from the outside world; in addition to the shutdown of telegraph and telephone facilities, the airports were closed and radio stations stopped transmitting. There were 'wide-spread demonstrations', including one in Omdurman where police used teargas to disperse stone-throwing demonstrators, and the strike became, in effect, a general strike, paralysing the economic and social life of the capital, and affecting other cities also (60).

Throughout Friday April 5th the scale and extent of demonstrations and civil disobedience increased. Police and troops maintained strong guards on government buildings and other strategic installations in Khartoum, but riot police were reported as evidently unwilling to confront the large crowds of protesters. The strike extended to affect every sector of the economy, including power-and. water supplies.- In a letter to President Numeiry, the executive of the doctors' association called on him to go: 'It is our patriotic duty to ask you to step down from the leadership of the Sudanese people and leave the national and democratic popular movements to make their destiny' (61). In a last desperate effort to stem the rising tide of widespread opposition to the regime, the government promised to reduce the price of basic commodities, including bread, sugar and petrol, in some cases (that of bread) to below the price prior to the increases (62). (President Numeiry was, throughout the entire period, still in the United States, although he announced at a press conference on April 4th that he had decided to return to Sudan on Saturday April 6th to 'struggle from there'.) (63)

But at 9.35 on Saturday morning Sudanese time, the Minister of Defence and army Commander-in-Chief, General Sawar al Dahab, announced on Omduraman Radio that "...the Sudan armed Forces have been observing the deteriorating security situation all over the country and the extremely complex political crisis that has affected the country over the past few days. In order to reduce bloodshed and to ensure the country's independence and unity the Armed Forces have decided unanimously to stand by the people and their choice and to respond to their demands by taking over power and transferring it to the people after a specified transitional period" (64). In a second statement Sawar al Dahab declared the removal from power of the President of the republic, his deputies, assistants and consultants and of the central and the state ministers., The constitution was suspended, and a state of emergency declared all over the country; the borders were closed, and air traffic into and out of the country halted. The military had taken power.

5. The economic roots of social unrest

All of the evidence suggests that increased prices- for basic goods,--either actual or prospective, played a crucial role in triggering the. violent upsurge of social unrest in the Maghreb in early 1984 and in the Sudan in spring 1985. But price rises were only the trigger; the economic roots of social unrest in North Africa lie deeper than that.

In Tunisia, the unrest began in the Nefzaouas a semi-arid region southeast of the Chott el-Djerid - the salt depression that separates the Saharan south from the industrial north and northeast. The southwest is historically the poorest region- in historically Tunisia. It has the highest unemployment rate, and many workers leave in search of jobs in the more prosperous towns of coastal Tunisia; some 60,000 are employed in Libya. It suffered severely from drought during the winter of 1983-84; in the area south of the Chott el-Djerid, the date harvest was disastrous. Poor households in the small towns of

Douze, Kebili, el-Hamma and Soukel-Ahad, who live close to the bread line at the best of times, were particularly badly affected. Neglect of agriculture in the south, combined with the lack of investment in the new factories established during the 1970s. Of the 86,000 or so jobs created between 1973 and 1978 in Tunisia as a whole, around 46,000 were in Tunisia and the northeast; the number barely exceeded 4,000 in the south. (65)

In the south of Tunisia, after the demonstrations of January 1 1984, one local observer in Kebili remarked that "it was not for bread that the young demonstrated, but because they were the victims of unemployment." (66) In the impoverished regions of Tunisia and Morocco, the lack of investment in the rural areas has stimulated a massive rural exodus. But in the absence of any real growth in urban jobs, unemployment has grown there almost as rapidly as the population has grown.

Unemployment statistics are notoriously unreliable, but a figure often cited for the total unemployed in Tunisia is 300,000 (about 20 per cent of the active labour force). This is almost certainly an underestimate. With a rate of population increase well over two per cent a year, some 60 per cent of Tunisia's 6.5 million inhabitants are under 20. A high proportion of the unemployed and underemployed are young. A large percentage of the young unemployed are in the poorer neighbourhoods and shantytowns which have mushroomed in the last ten years. Roughly 21 per cent of the population of greater Tunis now lives in shantytown areas; and 12 per cent inhabit housing projects. The 'city' of Ettathamen, for example, which had a population of 7,000 in 1975, had grown by 1979 to 28,000 and by 1983 had reached 65,000. (67)

In Tunisia, the vast majority of households rely on substantially less than the average per capita income of about \$1,500. Income distribution is less skewed than in Morocco, but there are substantial inequalities. The recent downturn in the Tunisian economy has seriously affected the situation of the lower paid and the unemployed, who now amount to between 20 and 25 per cent of the labour force. Wage rises of around 30 per cent to basic wage earners in industry in 1981 and 1982 had little impact on those with only seasonal jobs or without employment, or on those working in the extensive 'informal sector'. Indeed, there is a significant divide between the organized industrial workers who benefit from wage increases, trade unions and social legislation (health, safety, minimum wage, pensions, etc.), and the mass of casually or seasonally employed and those without jobs at all. When the government proposed to compensate for the price increase by a raise of 1.9 dinars on the monthly wage of the most disadvantaged, one local UGTT official remarked, "But what can Mabrouk, with his eight children do when a kilo of meat costs 4 dinars and the price of flour is doubled. For the poor, it means despair." (68) The connection between economic disadvantage, large-scale unemployment and social unrest in the south of Tunisia was intimate.

In Morocco the earliest demonstrations also occurred in the south, particularly in Marrakesh. Here the drought of 1983-84 had seriously affected the availability of food and the cost of living. The condition of the poor and unemployed in Marrakesh had deteriorated markedly over the winter. Small wonder that the students were soon joined by others from the poorer quarters protesting the prospect of further price increases.

The region in which mass demonstrations developed on the most significant scale, and generated the greatest violence, was the northeast. This region and particularly that part of it that had experienced Spanish colonial occupation between 1912 and 1956, has suffered considerable economic and social disadvantage in comparison with the rest of the country ever since independence. The integration of the old Spanish zone into the former French protectorate between 1956 and 1958 immediately caused great hardship and substantial increases in the cost of living for the population of the north. In 1958 and again in 1959, the region experienced massive social unrest as the people of the northeast expressed their resentment and anger at what they saw as discrimination,

maladministration and neglect. A commission of inquiry into the disturbances of 1958 in the central and eastern Rif mountains (the provinces of al-Hoceima and Nador) revealed exceptionally high levels of unemployment, lack of credit for agricultural development, inadequate economic and social infrastructure and poor and corrupt administration. (69)

During the 1960s and 1970s, many Moroccans from the north sought employment outside the region. Historically, emigration had been east to Algeria, but after independence that route was **closed** and men from the Rif mountains either went west to the large cities of the Atlantic coastal areas (such as Casablanca) or to Western Europe. For the last two decades, remittances from abroad have been the mainstay of the local economy, while agriculture and industry remained almost entirely underdeveloped. In 1971, when some 35 per cent of the Moroccan population was recorded as unemployed, the province of al-Hoceima recorded a rate of 65 per cent unemployed. An evaluation of the 1973-77 national development plan shows that the north - notably al-Hoceima and Nador - received very little investment. The development of irrigated agriculture on the left bank of the Moulonya river (which marks the southern boundary of Nador province) in the second half of the 1970s provided a boost to--incomes among the minority owning land in the new irrigated perimeters, and a small increase in the local demand for labour. The northeast as a whole, and particularly the mountain areas, remained relatively disadvantaged and underdeveloped. The national plan for 1978-80 stressed the need for a reduction in spatial and social inequalities, but again concentrated investment in the most developed industrial and agricultural areas of the Atlantic littoral.

In Morocco, where income distribution is very unequal, the past two decades have witnessed a steady decline in the purchasing power of the poor. In 1960, the poorest- 10 per cent accounted for only 3.3 per cent of the total value of consumption; by 1971 this had declined to a mere 1.2 per cent. The introduction to the 1973-77 national plan recognised that "the overall improvement in living standards far from diminishing differentials in standards of living has to a certain extent accentuated the differentials." (71) Between 1973 and 1977, food prices rose by an average of 11.1 per cent a year, (72) substantially faster than wages, which in any case benefited the lower-paid and irregularly employed only marginally. The rate of increase-in-the cost of living and in food prices slowed down somewhat in the period from 1977 to 1980 (averaging between 8.3 and 9.8 per cent per year) but then accelerated dramatically again in the early 1980s: 12.5 per cent between 1980 and 1981, 10.5 per cent between 1981 and 1982, and 8.1 per cent in the first nine months of 1983. Between 1973 and 1983, Morocco's index more than tripled. In the five months between July and October 1983, largely as a consequence of the August price increases, the food index rose 10.6 per cent and the general cost-of-living index 8 per cent. (73) For those able during the past twenty years to improve their incomes - certain sectors of organized labour, the better situated small businessmen and the middle classes as a whole - the rising cost of living has been associated with improved standards of living. For those unable to keep pace with the rising prices - the "unorganised" Workers and some sections of the traditional petty bourgeoisie - the rise has meant declining living standards and pauperisation.

Morocco has also experienced very rapid urbanisation. With a demographic growth rate of some 2.5 per cent a year, a large majority of the population under the age of 20, a massive expansion of the size and population of the popular quarters and shantytowns, and very considerable youth unemployment, the general features of the problem are similar to those of Tunisia, although arguably more serious. Even in 1971, the rate of unemployment and underemployment was estimated at around 35 per cent of the labour force, and half of those recorded unemployed were aged less than 24 years. The situation has worsened, if anything, since that time. Within the remoter and relatively impoverished regions, rates of unemployment remain significantly higher even than in

the shantytown areas of the big coastal cities. (74)

Inequality, unemployment and poverty are fundamentally social and not simply spatial problems. The 'poor' regions themselves exhibit major social inequalities, and the general lack of investment and economic development in these regions affects certain social classes more than others. In the northeast of Morocco, for example, it was clear even at the beginning of the 1970s that while foreign labour migration had increased the number of households with substantial incomes and had raised the average level of incomes within the region, it had also served generally to intensify economic and social inequalities. Those unable to obtain employment- abroad were now, -more -than' before, from the working classes and small peasantry. The difficulty of finding reasonably paid jobs within the region ensured that their incomes were depressed both relatively and absolutely as the general cost of living rose. (75)

For the lower paid majority of workers in Tunisia and Morocco, and for the unemployed, the rising cost of living has had a devastating effect on their capacity to fulfill even their most basic needs. Only two and a half years ago, the World Bank suggested that well over 40 per cent of the Moroccan population was living below the absolute poverty. (76) In Tunisia, a very large proportion of households in the southern interior live at or below the level of basic subsistence. In some of the shantytowns, conditions are at least as bad; infant mortality in the shantytown areas of Tunis, for example, ranges from 112 to 169 per thousand compared with only 8 per thousand in the middle class residential area of el-Menzah (77)

When President Bourghiba cancelled the price increases, he made some attempt to justify the original decision, remarking that bread was so cheap that some were feeding their cats on it. Such profligacy would be unthinkable for the majority of the population, and this comment reveals the yawning gap between the lived experience of rich and poor in Tunisia. When the price increase came in Tunisia at the end of December 1983, it was dramatic. The price of the 700-gram flat loaf that is the basic staple for most poor people was raised from 80 millimes to 170 millimes. In the far south of Tunisia, it was the increase in the price of semolina (used for cous-cous) that created the main impact; as one local person explained, "A sack of 50 kilos of semolina went from 7.2 dinars to 13.5 and a kilo of flour from 120 millimes to 295." (78)

In Morocco, the major increases came in (August 1983,/" when the 20 per cent reduction in subsidies on basic commodities had its first impact; tea (much consumed by the poor) increased by 77 per cent and 2s3 !gar by 14 per cent, butter went up by nearly half and cooking oil by 18 per cent; on top of these came increases in the prices of soap and candles. At the beginning of January, virtually all basic foodstuffs (flour, bread, tea, sugar and cooking oil) went up by at least 20 per cent, while cooking gas increased by 5 dirhams a bottle. (79) The budget for 1984 proposed further increases still. The Financial Times reported at the beginning of December that, 'so far, the population has accepted the austerity measures and appears resigned to the lean years that lie ahead.'" But the second round of price rises, with the prospect of more to come, created an enormous sense of despair and anger which required only the trigger of the school strikes and demonstrations to burst out in open, violent protest.

In Sudan,/ the bread riots in Khartoum and other towns during the spring of 1985 were the culmination of more than five years of economic crisis and growing social unrest in the rural and urban areas. (81) Between 1978 - when the International Monetary Fund imposed an austere 'economic stabilisation plan' on Sudan, involving drastic currency devaluation, removal of government subsidies on food and other consumption items; a moratorium on new development projects and the promotion of foreign investment and 'the free market' - and 1984, the value of the Sudanese pound declined from \$2.87 to less than half a dollar. Exports slumped and the cost of imported goods, including an

increasing-element of food grain, rose dramatically; the effect was a rapidly deteriorating balance of payments, growing trade deficit, and serious decline in the standard of living of urban workers and small rural producers as the cost of living soared. In 1979 there were mass demonstrations in the streets of Khartoum following increases in the price of several basic commodities notably fuel, transport and food; police eventually gained control after ten days of disturbances, but not without considerable violence and the eventual cancellation of the price increases by the government and direct state intervention to ensure adequate supplies of bread and meat for the urban population.

Further implementation of 'the IMF Package' during subsequent years - involving devaluations in 1980 and 1981 -- failed to produce any increase in exports, and was largely responsible for an upsurge of social unrest and protest throughout the country during December 1981 and January 1982. By the end of 1982 the Sudanese pound was devalued by 31 per cent and new austerity measures declared. By 1983, after a series of poor harvests, the grain reserves in many provinces (including Kassala, Northern and Southern Darfur and Northern Kordofan) were virtually depleted, driving up grain prices to the extent that a bowlful of unprocessed sorghum could fetch as much as £6 Sudanese in the markets near Gedarif at the end of the 1983-84 harvest season. By January 1984, one bag of sorghum was selling for £140 Sudanese. People began to starve.

For months, the Numeiry regime successfully covered up - at least from foreign observers - the existence of a growing famine. But in the meanwhile, there were incidents of hungry peasants attacking the granaries of merchants in El Obeid and Gedarif - who responded by hiring armed guards to protect their hoards - and unrest mounted in the countryside, notably in the south where the activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLA/SPLM) had become more effectively mobilised and directed against the regime and where guerrilla attacks on government forces and installations were increasing. Finally, early in 1984, during his visit to Washington, Numeiry requested emergency food assistance. Approval in principle by the Reagan administration for some 70,000 tons of grain for the Sudan was delayed in practice, and by late 1984 the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation listed Sudan as one of the twelve countries hardest hit by famine and conservatively estimated that over a million people were at risk of starvation.

In eastern Sudan in particular, where refugees from Eritrea and Tigray have been crossing the border as a result of protracted war, drought and famine for years, the situation was extremely serious. In 1984, drought hit the eastern Sudan very badly (estimates suggest that more than 80 per cent of the harvest failed) and contributed to a growing shortage of food and dramatic rises in the price of grain (from £30 Sudanese in 1984 to £140 Sudanese by January 1985) in the area. In addition, the price of livestock dropped as peasants sold off their animals to buy grain, thereby reducing their capacity to raise income; while wages for agricultural labour declined as did the demand for farm labour itself. The result was rapid pauperisation and immiseration of large sections of rural population; and one major consequence of this was an acceleration of the already substantial rural exodus to the urban areas, notably to Khartoum. In the towns, however, conditions for the urban poor had also deteriorated as the government's austerity measures combined with the economic crisis ensured a reduction in employment opportunities and in incomes. When in March 1985 the government introduced yet another round of price increases, first in fuel and then, a couple of weeks later, in sugar-based commodities and in bread, the urban poor and the rural refugees joined together in a wave of mass demonstrations, which lasted three days and provided the impetus for the rapid development of organised political protest and opposition to Numeiry's regime.

6. Economic policy and economic crisis

Why in Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan in 1984 and 1985 was the price of basic commodities, upon which the urban poor so crucially depend, increased? After all, the social and political repercussions of such measures are well known, and even in North Africa in the mid 1980s there was ample evidence that bread riots were a distinct possibility as a response to food price rises.

In Egypt in 1977 and the Sudan in 1979 "bread riots" were a reaction to major increases in food prices. In Morocco price increases in June 1981 for a range of basic commodities (sugar, flour, butter and cooking oil) provoked a warning strike by the Democratic Labour Federation, founded in 1978 to protest against price increases in staple goods. In Casablanca these turned into violent street demonstrations as workers in both the private and public sectors were joined first by small shopkeepers and then by students and the unemployed from the shantytowns. The social unrest brought special police units, the national guard and finally the army into action. In two days of clashes throughout the city, between 637 and 1,000 demonstrators were killed. (82)

However, in a period of increasing economic difficulties, the economic cost of maintaining subsidies on certain consumption items may appear too high to governments, and the social costs of removing these subsidies simply the price to be paid for improved performance. If those whose support for the government is essential can be convinced of this need for austerity, and if the most obvious sources of organized opposition can be either muzzled or co-opted by preferential treatment, the social and political repercussions of adopting a hard line on subsidies may appear manageable.

The annual report of Tunisia's central bank warned last autumn of difficult years ahead. Clearly it believed that an economic crisis was a possibility. In the last few years, lower output and prices for oil and phosphate (the two major foreign exchange earners), a decline in foreign tourists, and a slowing down of industrial growth all affected the balance of trade and balance of payments. Last year, the trade deficit grew by 24 percent, to 738 million dinars, during the first ten months. This led to the restriction of imports of certain raw materials and semi-finished goods to 80 per cent of 1982 volumes. Agriculture, which had remained a low priority, in Tunisia's development strategy, has virtually stagnated in terms of output since 1976, and grain imports have become increasingly necessary. Inflation has also risen significantly in the last five years to double digit figures in 1982. In 1983, the bread subsidy alone cost around 114 million dinars - about two per cent of GDP; in 1984 it could climb to 143 million. Subsidies on all cereal-based products (bread, cous-cous, pasta) account for 60 per cent of the total food subsidy of 259 million dollars. (83)

But this deterioration in the state of the Tunisian economy could not be said to have reached a crisis yet. The Financial Times, which reflects an economic philosophy close to that of the IMF, observed that "the manner in which the Tunisian authorities set about reducing the growing budgetary burden of subsidies on basic food stuffs provides an object lesson in how not to do the right things." (84) In its view, it was not the removal of subsidies that was at fault, but the suddenness and the size of the increases in the price of basic goods and the failure to consider seriously the social and political implications. It argued that 'neither the IMF nor the World Bank advocated, or would have advocated, the approach to subsidies adopted by the Tunisian government at the turn of the year.' (In fact, the IMF and World Bank have pressured numerous Third World countries, including Morocco and Sudan to adopt austerity measures without delay and with little heed for the social, and even political, implications as will be shown below.)

It is significant that the former Tunisian minister of economical affairs, Azouz Asram, who had overseen the gradual and relatively trouble-free removal of subsidies on energy prices since 1980, resigned in October 1983 precisely because he was aware of the implications of the sudden dramatic increase in basic commodity prices. Asram argued that the poorer Tunisians should be protected. Yet the price of the baguette (mainly consumed by the middle classes) increased by less than that of the popular flat loaf that is the staple for the urban poor, or of the cous-cous that is central to the diet of the far south. It is also of interest that the new draft budget presented to the Tunisian national Assembly in Tunis in March 1984 included proposals to raise revenues by increasing taxes on a variety of goods such as cigarettes and petrol and also to cut back on investment. Together, these measures would generate approximately 40 million dinars. Between March and July 1984, several small price increases were introduced for specific food stuffs and public services, and gave rise to no obvious social unrest. A slight increase - up to 10 millimes - in the price of bread, semolina and other cereal products on July 10, 1984, occurred without any particular reaction from the mass of the Tunisian population.

Why, then, the earlier decision to put up prices suddenly. Prime Minister Mzali stated that the potential saving was around 140 million dinars. "If the government had relied on taxes," he said, "all prices would have increased as in 1982 and the government would not have raised a fifth of that amount." (85) Another reason is the confidence of the government that they had the strong support of the middle classes and the tacit acceptance of organized labour. Finally, there was clearly a belief that the security forces could maintain control and prevent social unrest.

In the event, it was not from organized labour that the protest came, not from the middle classes, if one excepts the students, but from the mass of the poor and disinherited. The government seriously miscalculated both the response of the Tunisian people and the capacity of the state to implement its "new" economic policies without repression.

If the Tunisian economy was in serious difficulties at the beginning of the 1980s, the [Moroccan economy was already in crisis. Morocco's foreign debt is now over \$11 billion, and debt servicing alone rose from 700 million dirhams in 1976 to 2,500 million in 1980 and reached an estimated 5,000 million dirhams in 1983. The critical balance of payments situation results from internal problems, world price changes, increasing Comm slowly - from 6,200 million dirhams in 1975 to 7,300 million in 1979 - but in the second half of the 1970s the cost of imports rose steeply, from 10,440 million dirhams in 1975 to 14,300 million in 1979. The balance of trade deficit has steadily worsened. In the 1950s, Morocco was a net exporter of cereals, but by the late 1970s between 40 and 50 per cent of the country's cereal requirements were imported. Earnings from remittances and from tourism have failed increasingly to cover the deficit, and Morocco has become ever more dependent on aid and loans. (86)

Efforts in late 1983 to reschedule about \$530 million of its debts owed to commercial banks (which fell due between September 1983 and the end of 1984) ran into considerable difficulties. In September 1983, the International Monetary Fund formally approved the program of "economic stabilization" that it had earlier recommended and made a condition for further loans. This was the programme which the Moroccan government began implementing in August. It included a creeping devaluation of the dirham, the rescheduling of part of the foreign debt, severe cuts in public expenditure (including investment), and the removal of subsidies on basic goods. August saw a 10 percent devaluation and a first round of price rises. At the beginning of December 1983, negotiations with major US and European banks to reschedule part of the country's foreign debt were reportedly nearly complete. But the prospects for the next year or so looked grim even at that time. Just servicing the foreign debt would absorb at least 40 per cent of Morocco's hard currency income, while the visible trade deficit - which the

government reduced by around 27 per cent during 1983, largely restricting imports and stifling domestic demand - would remain uncomfortably high. Officials projected that the investment budget for 1984 would decline by roughly a third, compared with the 1981-85 Economic Development plan projections. The figure for 1985 was thought likely to drop to 40 per cent below initial projections.

Given this bleak outlook, and the pressure from the IMF to maintain tight control over expenditure, the Moroccan government was inclined to reduce even further the burden of subsidies, and the draft budget for 1984 contained proposals to raise prices again. Unlike the case of Tunisia, the pressure from the IMF to adopt extremely stringent austerity measures was great and immediate. With the recent experience of 1978-79 and 1981 clearly in mind the Moroccan government must have approached the price increases of August 1983 with very considerable trepidation. There was no dramatic response at the time, for several reasons. Firstly, the price increases came after two years of rapidly rising food prices, whereas in Tunisia the price of basic foodstuffs had been kept level or a long period of time. Secondly, the price increases in August were between 20 and 35 per cent, compared with the 100 per cent or more increase in Tunisia. Thirdly, wage increases among certain sectors of organized labour had helped reduce the threat of union-organized strikes. But if the price increases did not immediately bring the Moroccan people onto the streets in open protest, they added considerably to the sense of desperation and frustration of the large majority whose living conditions have not visibly improved over the past decade, and particularly of those who have seen their standard of living deteriorate. A second round of price increases at the end of December set the stage for the January "bread riots."

In Sudan, the economic crisis was even more acute than in Morocco.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, reliance on export earnings to fund economic and social development combined with policies which effectively starved the export sector led to increasing balance of trade and balance of payments deficits, and growing foreign debt. The external public debt rose from \$308 million (15.3 per cent of GNP) in 1970 to \$3,097 million (37.2 per cent of GNP) in 1980 and then to \$6,300 million in 1982. Foreign reserves were insufficient to pay for even half a month's imports. IMF 'economic stabilisation' measures imposed between 1978 and 1984 failed to resolve the acute crisis in the Sudanese economy and indeed arguably exacerbated it. By the beginning of 1985, high hopes of a decade earlier - when the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation described Sudan as a potential 'bread-basket of the world' - had turned to economic nightmare. Agricultural and industrial production had declined in per capita terms over the previous seven years; external debt had risen to over \$9 billion and imports were three times the level of exports; the value of the Sudanese pound had fallen to less than 10 per cent of its 1978 value (against the US \$); and the 1984 grain harvest had failed to provide even half of the country's needs (1.5 million tons instead of 3.4 million tons).

It has been argued that "the problems faced by the Sudanese economy led directly to political disintegration. Civil conflict has re-emerged, partly as a result of the constrictions stemming from economic failure. The immense foreign debt and the severe imbalances in the economy left the government with little room for manoeuvre in determining priorities for public expenditure.. (the government's) immediate economic policy dilemmas were reinforced by external pressures. The International Monetary Fund and the consortium of Sudan's creditors created a framework from which there was no escape.. The Numeiry government seems to have been aware of the political dangers inherent in the situation.."(88) But the fact is, that whatever the immediate pressures on the Numeiry regime, in Sudan, as in Tunisia and Morocco, the logic of the economic 'liberalism' pursued over the previous decade led directly to the growth of inequality, unemployment and social deprivation. which themselves underlay the discontent and social unrest.

Particularly in a period of world economic recession, the "open door" strategy for economic development has proved a snare and a delusion. Ultimately, these economic policies and their social consequences derive from the distinctive class structure and dynamic of contemporary Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan and from the dominance of certain economic interests within the political sphere. The balance of forces in all these countries has enabled certain sections of the bourgeoisie to maintain their predominance in the political as well as the economic sphere. They thus could ensure that the government pursued "liberal" export-oriented economic policies in Tunisia and Sudan and Morocco to their very considerable advantage. but at the expense of the majority of workers and peasants. The struggle between the various sections of capital, and that between capital as a whole and organized labour, have marginalized a significant proportion of the population, and perpetuated economic policies favouring big capital. These policies have created their own social and political contradictions, and deepened the crisis of the national economy.

Even if the riots of 1984 and rebellion of 1985 do not oblige an immediate re-assessment of the entire economic strategy on the part of government, they may stimulate more serious consideration of alternatives among those whose interests are not best served by the 'open door' policies that have predominated hitherto. Parties and trades unions may reconsider their own political --? strategies and recognise the potential for a broad-based popular movement to include the 'unorganized' and unemployed as well as the 'organized' workers and disaffected members of the middle class and the bourgeoisie.

Neither the repression of popular protest in Tunisia and Morocco, nor the military coup which replaced Numeiry in Sudan, will be able for long to prevent further social and political unrest unless new economic policies and strata can be developed which meet both the demands and the needs of the mass of the people. But such policies and strategies are unlikely to be pursued unless the social and political contradict one created by previous regimes give rise to a significantly new balance of social forces.

RIOT AND REBELLION...

David Seddon

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