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Senegal

Stop the social and liberticidal regression in Senegal

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV562 - November 2021 -

Publication date: Thursday 18 November 2021

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Faced with multiple social protests, President Macky Sall is trying to restrict political space in Senegal. At the same time, he is leaving open doubt on whether he will run for a third term in office, even though this is forbidden by the Constitution.

In many respects, the situation in Senegal has deteriorated. Economic growth is negative (-0.7 per cent) whereas traditionally this rate was above per cent. Indeed, the pandemic has hit important sectors of the economy such as tourism, which accounts for nearly 8 per cent of GDP. The crisis has led to an increase in the cost of transport for industry and increased difficulties for the sale of agricultural products. According to trade union sources, job losses number in the tens of thousands. Informal economy activities have also been undermined without any social safety net. At the same time, the attacks on land ownership continue with their share of expropriations, as shown by the case of the 18 hectares of Nianning.

Third term and authoritarianism

It is perhaps in the area of liberties that the situation is most worrying. We remember the terrible repression of demonstrators at the beginning of March. They were protesting against the arrest of the main opponent Ousmane Sonko on charges of rape. A dozen people were killed, the first time this has happened in the country for decades.

President Macky Sall is trying to use the terrorist threats to initiate two liberticidal laws. They allow the punishment of anyone who encourages acts of terrorism. A vague formula that opens the way to arbitrariness. Wasn't it Abdoulaye Diome, Minister of the Interior, who considered the demonstrations in favour of Ousmane Sonko as "acts of a terrorist nature"? They also allow leaders to be tried criminally for crimes committed by their party. Penalties can go as far as the confiscation of their private property. Not to mention the possibility for the police to monitor any citizen suspected of terrorism without any control by the judicial authority.

On 23 January 2022, there will be municipal elections. These will be a test for all political forces and particularly the presidential majority.

Macky Sall is creating suspense on his intentions to run for a third term in spite of the Constitution, which he could change in his favour. However, he must have the political possibility to do so. Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to impose a third term on the nation ended in a resounding failure in favour of a certain... Macky Sall.

An opposition that is reorganizing

The country is seeing a multitude of social mobilizations with the emergence of organizations such as the "Frapp-France Dégage" movement (Front pour une révolution anti-impérialiste populaire et panafricaine – Front for a People's Anti-Imperialist and Pan-African Revolution). Its activists highlight the submission of the Senegalese elites to French companies, whether in the retail sector with the Auchan company, in the agro-industry with the Mimran group, in telecommunications with Orange, etc.

These struggles must find a political expression, and this is in any case the will of fourteen organizations, some of

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which come from the radical left. They have decided to join PASTEF (Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité – African patriots of Senegal for work, ethics and fraternity), the organization of Ousmane Sonko. This party fights against corruption and for Senegal's independence from France.

It is to be hoped that the arrival of experienced radical left-wing activists in this organization will enable it to take better account of certain themes that seemed to be neglected, such as pan-Africanism, the fight against sexism, for social justice and ecology.

An electoral coalition for the municipal elections, Yewwi Askan Wi, has been built around PASTEF, but it is encountering difficulties with the administration in registering their lists.

Last week the authorities summoned Barthélémy Dias, Yewwi Askan Wi's candidate for mayor of Dakar, for a case dating from 2011. This led to clashes with the police and the imprisonment for a few hours of the coalition's leaders.

The strategy of the government aims to weaken the opposition by using the justice system. The main rivals Karim Wade, Khalifa Sall, Barthélémy Dias and Ousmane Sonko all have legal proceedings against them.

18 November 2021

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