

# Protests by students and workers in Algeria and Morocco

Antoine Lerougetel  
21 February 2011

Anti-government protests took place Saturday in Algeria and Sunday in Morocco, as thousands took to the streets to demonstrate their opposition to autocratic rule, ruling-class corruption and desperately poor living standards.

The protest Saturday in Algiers was smaller than that held the week before in the Algerian capital, which was brutally attacked and suppressed by some 30,000 police. Some 500 demonstrators tried to reach May 1 Square in the city center but were baton-charged by police, driven back and then surrounded.

Riot-control vehicles armed with water cannon were on standby, and a police helicopter hovered overhead. The government of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika refused permission for the march and arrested one opposition figure, Belaid Abrika, an advocate for the rights of the Berber minority.

Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia said February 16 that the state of emergency, in force in Algeria for nearly 20 years, would be lifted by the end of the month, but it is still in effect and bans virtually all forms of public protest and opposition to the regime.

In neighboring Morocco, several thousand people took part in opposition rallies, including 3,000 in the capital city, Rabat, and 1,000 in Casablanca, the country's largest city. Other protests were held in the port of Tangier and in Marrakech.

The demonstrators called for reforms to open up the political system, a monarchy in which King Mohammed VI holds virtually all power, behind a parliamentary façade. Banners declared, "The king must reign not govern" and "The people want a new constitution." People chanted, "Down with autocracy," and many carried Tunisian and Egyptian flags, to show their sympathy for the popular uprisings in those countries.

In an effort to head off unrest, the government has proposed €1.4 billion in additional subsidies for food and other staple goods, and there was no attempt by police to suppress the demonstrations. In Rabat the city's bus service was shut down to prevent people reaching the march site.

The protest movement in Algeria has continued despite a massive mobilization of state violence against it. Unemployed youth, workers and university students have joined in the struggle for decent living conditions, jobs and rights in towns and cities all over the country.

Their anger and determination is fueled by the fact that they have not benefited from the oil boom which has given Algeria around \$150bn (£93bn) in foreign currency reserves, almost no external debt, The state-military bureaucracy, the national bourgeoisie, and imperialist investors have been the beneficiaries.

After the demonstration February 12 was suppressed and dispersed, organizers met the following day and decided on a second rally February 19 and every Saturday thereafter. Ali Yahia Abdennon of the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH) reported that "yesterday the police has brutally beaten many protesters, amongst them a pregnant women, old ladies, a journalist, young men and women, we should carry on protesting until we get our rights."

The Algerian French language daily *El Watan* carries numerous reports of ongoing struggles in other towns:

- On 13 February, a crowd of youths gathered in front of the Annaba wilaya (region) office demanding the 7,000 jobs they had previously been promised, and threw stones at the governor. One was prevented from committing suicide by his brother, one of a rash of such desperate actions throughout the country. On Wednesday and Thursday youths demanding jobs in Tadmaït near Tizi-Ouzou in Kabylie blocked roads, burned tires and damaged administrative offices.

- In Hassi-Messaoud in the oil-producing region, youth occupied town hall offices in a protest against poverty and oppression. Mahmoud Zegoune, spokesman of the Hassi-Messaoud unemployed workers committee told *El Watan*: "The gendarmes asked me to calm the demonstrators down and ask them to go home. But I told them that we have the right to demonstrate our exasperation. Destitution and poverty are going to starve us. Our families don't even have anything to eat. How then can we not protest and

demonstrate?”

- Others protested in Touggout in front of the local office of the National Employment Agency.

- Nursing and paramedical staff, despite management intimidation, went on unlimited strike on February 8 and hospital and polyclinic services have been restricted since. They are demanding recognition of their qualifications and the resignation of the Health Minister Ould Abbès, chanting on their demonstrations: “Ould Abbès out”, “Promulgate our status”, “Status and dignity.”

- A strike movement in the universities, started on February 14 at the university of Mohamed Boudiaf in M’sila, in opposition to a decree that entails the non-recognition of their science and engineering diplomas for public service employment. On Thursday, as part of their protest, which has spread to several universities, hundreds of students and post-graduates were camping outside the Ministry of Higher Education in Algiers.

Splits in ruling circles fearful of social revolution, have emerged with the publication on February 17 of an open letter to the president, addressed as “Brother Abdelaziz Bouteflika,” from the former general secretary of the National Liberation Front. The FLN led the war of national liberation from French colonial occupation, and is still, with the army, the backbone of the regime.

The former official says: “The voices which demand a change in this regime, who are concerned that it should take place in a climate of peace and free debate, are many.” He makes a barely veiled appeal to the parties of the opposition to help the Algerian bourgeoisie and state bureaucracy disarm the rebellion and stabilise the regime.

Spontaneous nationwide rebellions have been developing from January 3, in response to steep rises in the cost of basic necessities. Between January 3 and 10, riots and protests broke out across most Algerian towns, triggered by large increases in the prices of basic foods including oil, sugar, and flour.

While localised riots have been a frequent occurrence in Algeria since 2005, these were the first to spread across most regions of the country simultaneously. Young workers blocked roads, burned tires and ransacked government buildings, demanded social housing and sought to stop the demolitions of shantytowns. Three demonstrators died at the hands of the police, more than 800 people were reported wounded. There were at least 1,100 arrested, many of them teenaged youth.

The government sought to calm the situation and announced on January 8 temporary cuts in taxes on sugar and cooking oil. The protests continued. On January 20, more than 1,000 people demonstrated demanding housing in the Said Hamdine neighbourhood of Algiers. Five people

were killed and 800 injured by the police on January 22 as 20,000 police were deployed to prevent demonstrations in Tizi-Ouzou in Kabylie.

On January 24, more than 500 people demonstrated in front of the regional administrative building (daïra) of Khemis El Khechna, demanding water and gas connection and better housing for their nearby hometowns, Chebachebb and El Kerma. In Tizi-Ouzou, the same day, parents of youths detained in the protests of early January staged a sit-in in front of the wilaya (region) administrative building, demanding the release of their children, who were provisionally released the next day.

In other towns, town halls were occupied and main roads blocked by people demanding better roads, gas and sewage and water connections and public lighting. Youth demanding jobs blocked the main road RN 12 in Naciria near Boumerdes using burning tires and other objects,

On January 30, 600 factory workers demonstrated in front of the wilaya building in Bouira, demanding to be re-hired by ENAD, the German-owned detergent company. Also on the same day, unemployed youths in the wilaya of Ouargla demonstrated in Touggourt against the head of the local employment bureau, accused of favouritism.

A coalition of “opposition”, pseudo-left organisations came together on January 20 to form the National Coordination for Change and Democracy, in order to prevent this movement from developing into a revolution.

Those forming the CNCD included the Socialist Forces Front (Front des Forces Socialistes, FFS), the largely Kabyl Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie (RCD), the Stalinist-led Democratic and Social Movement (Mouvement Démocratique et Social), the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH) and officially unrecognised unions such as SATEF and SNAPAP.

They are part of the official opposition tolerated and used by the dictatorship. They make vague calls for democracy, but have no perspective of overthrowing the regime. Their primary purpose is to protect Algerian capitalism and its imperialist masters from the development of an independent, revolutionary movement of the working class.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**