

Nationwide strike shakes Algerian regime

Will Morrow
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Large parts of Algeria were brought to a standstill on Sunday as tens of thousands of workers joined the start of a five-day general strike to demand an end to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's regime.

The movement against the Bouteflika government, which has seen student-led demonstrations since February 22 drawing in ever-broader sections of the population, is entering a new stage. The working class is emerging as its basic revolutionary force.

The call for the strike has been spread online through social media by workers acting independently of the trade unions. It has hit the entire education and transportation systems and closed shopping centers, ports and private industrial centers.

The national train network was brought to a standstill. In the capital, Algiers, metros, buses and trams did not run. Privately run buses transporting travelers between cities east and west of Algiers were stopped. The *Dépêche de Kabylie* reported that bus drivers going from Bouira to Algiers informed their passengers Saturday morning that there would be no service on Sunday.

Teachers joined the strike across the country. *Tout sur l'Algérie* (TSA) reported that teachers closed most middle and high schools, and that "students freed by their teachers' strike have demonstrated since this morning." High school students organized demonstrations on Facebook and marched in Algiers, Draria, El Achour, Dely Brahim, Rouiba and Bananiers.

The teachers defied the national education unions, which last week issued a call for a one-day strike to begin two days from now, on March 13. The unions called the strike to maintain control and prevent an extended walkout, after teachers at numerous schools had already called meetings and voted to demonstrate.

The *Dépêche de Kabylie* noted yesterday: "Since last week, multiple educational institutions have been warning students of the possibility of a strike at primary, middle and senior schools, without any education unions making a statement on the walkout."

All universities have been closed. In a last-minute attempt to preempt a nationwide university strike, the National

Liberation Front (FLN) government abruptly announced on Saturday that the holiday break would be brought forward by 10 days, to begin yesterday. Students and lecturers have posted videos and issued statements on Facebook denouncing the extension of the holiday and have continued to organize demonstrations.

Workers shut down the port of Bejaïa, a northeastern city on the Mediterranean, as well as the Bejaïa plant of Cevital, which produces sugar, oil and other agrifood products. It is the largest private company in the country, owned by billionaire Issad Rebrab. Thousands of workers held a march through the city during the day. Port workers struck in Djendjen (Jijel) and Skidda. *Al Jazeera* reported yesterday that exports were not affected, however.

Workers struck the Hassi Messaoud oil field in eastern Algeria, owned by the state mining company Sonatrach, as well as oil fields in Hassi R'mel, Hassi Berkine and In Amenas. A video posted on Facebook of hundreds of mining workers marching off the job has been viewed more than 100,000 times. TSA reported that workers at Sonatrach's research offices located in Boumerdes refused to enter their offices yesterday morning and staged a sit-in outside the building. Workers at the state electricity and gas distributor Sonelgaz also struck.

Workers struck in the industrial zone of Rouiba, located 30 kilometers east of Algiers, including hundreds of workers at SNVI, which assembles buses and cars. The industrial zone at Bordj Bou Arreridj was also affected.

Small private traders and shopkeepers closed across the country in support of the strike, including in central Algiers, Ouargla, Constantine, Setif, Bouira, Bejaia, Tizi-Ouzou and Bordj Bou Arreridj.

The powerful movement of the Algerian working class is part of a growing movement of strikes and demonstrations by workers in the Maghreb and around the world, in opposition to the pro-corporate trade union apparatuses.

This year has witnessed a one-day general strike of 700,000 workers in neighboring Tunisia, mass strikes by teachers across five continents, and growing opposition among autoworkers to plant closures and poverty wages, including the rebellion by 70,000 Mexican maquiladora

workers, the largest strike in North America in 20 years. Yesterday saw demonstrations by thousands of workers of Algerian origin in France, which has been shaken by mass “yellow vest” protests since last November.

The Algerian strike follows last Friday’s demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of workers and young people across the country demanding Bouteflika’s removal. The president was reportedly flown into Algeria yesterday from a hospital in Geneva, Switzerland, where his aides claimed he had been undergoing a routine operation for the past two weeks. The 82-year-old is not physically able to speak publicly after suffering a stroke in 2013. He is a figurehead for the inner circles of his regime and the military, which wields power.

The Algerian working class is being driven into struggle by opposition not only to Bouteflika’s corrupt and sclerotic regime, but also to the poverty, unemployment and growing social inequality over which it presides.

The official “opposition” parties that claim to be supporting the movement against Bouteflika are no less hostile than the regime to the strivings of the workers. Their aim is to ensure that if and when he is removed, the result will be nothing more than a reshuffling of personnel, with greater access to positions of wealth and power for themselves.

On Friday, *Al Jazeera* reported that more than 30 opposition parties, including the Workers Party (PT) of Louisa Hanoune, met in the capital, at the headquarters of the Talaie El Hourriyet party, founded by the former prime minister under Bouteflika, Ali Benflis. All these parties are in discussions with the military brass and the government to work out a political transition aimed at suppressing the growing movement of the working class. Yesterday afternoon, the ruling FLN released a statement declaring that it was “in the process of working with all the political actors to find a way out of this crisis with the least cost to the national interest.”

Yesterday, the PT’s Hanoune issued a statement, published in the *El Watandaily*, that the government had to “respond favorably to the people and stop this process, which contains every danger,” or else “assume responsibility for steering the country into chaos.” She denounced unnamed individuals who “call for the rejection of the political parties” as preparing the way for the “transformation of the revolutionary upheaval into an Arab Spring, that is to say, bloody chaos,” leading to a “fascist state.”

In fact, the PT has been discredited due to its decades-long support for the Bouteflika regime. What Hanoune expresses, by warning of “chaos,” is the regime’s fear of revolution.

By referring to the Arab Spring, she is asserting that

attempts by workers to embark upon revolutionary struggle will end up either with a new authoritarian regime, as in Tunisia, or a military dictatorship, as in Egypt.

This is an attempt to politically disarm the working class. The defeat of the revolutionary struggles of the working class in Egypt and Tunisia were due to the absence of a revolutionary leadership, basing itself on the perspective of world socialist revolution. Responsibility for this lies not with the working class, but with pseudo-left parties like Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists, who opposed a revolutionary struggle and prevented it from being fought through to the end: the overthrow of capitalism and establishment of a workers’ state.

They instead channelled workers behind factions of the ruling class, both the Islamists and the military, paving the way for the ruling class to restore authoritarian military regimes in both countries. In Egypt, the military carried out a coup to crush the struggles of the working class. The PT is seeking to set up the Algerian working class for a similar bloody outcome by keeping it subordinated to various sections of the Algerian bourgeoisie.

This underscores the necessity for the working class to draw the essential political lessons of the mass revolutionary struggles of 2011. The building of a revolutionary leadership, basing itself on the theory of permanent revolution elaborated by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the Russian Revolution and founder of the Fourth International, remains the critical task.

The fundamental social interests of the Algerian workers and oppressed masses—for social equality, democratic rights and an end to imperialist domination—can be secured only in the struggle for workers’ governments throughout the Maghreb and internationally, the overthrow of capitalism, and its replacement by socialism on a world scale. This is the perspective fought for by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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