

The working class enters into struggle in Algeria

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13 March 2019

After weeks of youth protests against Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's attempt to seek a fifth term in office, the working class is emerging as the leading force in the struggle against the National Liberation Front (FLN) regime. Strikes have spread to mass transit, auto, education and the critical natural gas sector, as millions march demanding the fall of the regime.

The movement in Algeria is at the heart of an international resurgence of the class struggle and of political opposition among workers. In France, deep anger against President Emmanuel Macron has erupted independently of the unions in the "yellow vest" movement, amid a strike wave against European Union (EU) austerity stretching from Portugal to Berlin. Teachers' strikes across the United States, the maquiladora strikes in Mexico and strikes across the Maghreb are being organized via social media, against the union bureaucracies.

The FLN will give nothing to demands for jobs, a better future and the end of the dictatorship of the capitalist clique around Bouteflika. Backed by Paris and the other imperialist powers, it has suspended April 18 elections, aiming to keep Bouteflika in power until it can halt the protests. Nearly a decade after workers' uprisings toppled imperialist-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, new international revolutionary struggles against capitalism are being prepared.

The lesson of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings is the need for a Trotskyist revolutionary vanguard in the working class. Without this, despite heroic struggles by millions of workers, middle-class pseudo-left parties like Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and Tunisia's Workers Party (PT) were able to block a working class seizure of power in both countries. At each step in the revolution, they advanced the lie that imperialist-backed military juntas or Islamist parties would grant national democratic reforms, politically disarming the working class and enabling the ruling class ultimately to restore the old dictatorships.

The eruption of a working class movement against the FLN is a historic vindication of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) struggle for Trotskyism. The petty-bourgeois "left" insisted that the FLN's coming to power after the 1954-1962 Algerian independence war against France

proved that neither working class struggle against capitalism nor a Marxist vanguard party were needed to build a democratic and even a socialist society. Today's movement of Algerian workers demanding jobs, social equality and democratic rights against the FLN explodes this lie.

The Algerian war was a heroic struggle, costing hundreds of thousands of lives and defying French imperialism's resort to mass torture and repression. In the 1962 Evian accords ending the war, however, Paris handed power in Algeria not to the working class, but to the FLN. While it inscribed a pledge to build socialism in Algeria's 1963 constitution, the FLN was a bourgeois party. It based itself neither on workers' committees in the workplaces nor on the expropriation of capitalist property.

But petty-bourgeois anti-Marxist groups, such as the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, hailed the FLN. Having split from the Fourth International in 1953, which opposed their attempt to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist parties, the Pabloites promoted the FLN as one of many movements that would supposedly replace the Fourth International. These ranged from Castro's guerrillas, who took power in Cuba in 1959, to the capitalist regimes that emerged from the partition of India imposed as part of formal independence from Britain in 1947.

Pablo claimed the Algerian war was "the living permanent revolution, which from a united anti-imperialist national struggle is transforming itself irresistibly into a profound social revolution in the quest for its true nature and achievement—as a proletarian and socialist revolution." On this basis, he accepted a position as an FLN advisor, until he had to flee General Houari Boumédiène's 1965 coup that ousted President Ahmed Ben Bella.

The ICFI alone fought to elaborate a socialist perspective for proletarian revolution in Algeria. Against advocates of an unprincipled reunification of the ICFI with the Pabloites, led in the United States by Joseph Hansen, the Socialist Labour League (SLL), the ICFI's British section at the time, defended Marxism and Trotskyism. In 1963, the SLL wrote:

Hansen made great play of the SLL's condemnation of the Evian agreement between the Algerian government and French imperialism. We said this was a "sell-out." Hansen said that here was an ultra-left mistake, showing failure to recognize that at least Evian included national independence and should be welcomed as a victory. We proceeded from an analysis of the class tendency which has asserted itself through the FLN leadership in arriving at a compromise with French imperialism, preventing the Algerian people from going on to win their own revolutionary demands. Those who concentrated on the "victory"... only helped Ben Bella to deceive the masses, and turned the energies of socialists towards alliances with the bourgeoisie rather than the construction of an independent revolutionary party.

Nearly 60 years later, this analysis and Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, the perspective underlying the October 1917 revolution in Russia, has been confirmed.

Trotsky established that in countries with a belated capitalist development, the capitalist class, tied to imperialism and fearing the working class, cannot lead a democratic revolution. The struggle for democratic demands can proceed only if it goes over to a socialist revolution, led by the working class and drawing behind it the other oppressed classes in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and establishment of a workers' state. Only through the struggle for world socialist revolution, to expropriate the capitalist class and place the world economy under the democratic control of the workers, can the necessary resources be mobilized to build a truly socialist and democratic society in the former colonial countries.

The Algerian regime, tied to imperialism and fearing the workers, proved incapable of building a democratic, let alone a socialist, society. Algeria's natural gas wealth, instead of serving to build industry, create decent-paying jobs and improve living standards, was funneled into the bank accounts of a parasitic clique of capitalists around the FLN leadership.

The struggle for democratic rights can proceed only if it goes over to a socialist revolution against the FLN, led by the working class and drawing behind it the other oppressed classes. The growth of the international class struggle opens vast political horizons for workers in Algeria. The expropriation of the financial aristocracy by the working class on an international scale can place the economic resources needed to build a truly socialist and democratic society in the hands of the workers in the former-colonial countries. But none of this can be accomplished on the basis of a nationalist program: rather, the struggle for socialism requires a decisive turn to the international working class.

Such struggles require a ruthless break with Pablo's political descendants. The Pabloite Socialist Workers Party (PST) and

its ally, Louisa Hanoune's Workers Party (PT), which has propped up the FLN since the PT's birth during the FLN's failed "democratization" in the 1980s, are preparing a trap. Today, the PST is calling yet again for democratic reform of the FLN, carried out in alliance with the PT, human rights groups and Algeria's pro-government trade unions. It writes:

The left wing of the popular camp proposes for its part, in a more or less coherent way, a solution from below giving the people a voice and immediately re-establishes it in its role of sole sovereign via the perspective of electing a Constituent Assembly... The PST proposes to unify the democratic, anti-free market and anti-imperialist forces, bringing together all parties, unions and social movements sharing this perspective.

The key task is to prepare a struggle for socialism by the working class, which means an irreconcilable break with middle-class forces such as the PST. Its pledge to build democracy is propaganda from union bureaucrats, academics and professionals terrified of a movement from below threatening the privileges they derive from their links to the FLN. Desperate to tie the workers and youth to the regime and, as in Egypt and Tunisia, organize defeat, they are hailing the FLN's maneuver to keep Bouteflika in power as a "first step back" and a model of what the current movement should achieve.

The basis for a socialist struggle against these tendencies is to be found in the historical and political perspective of the ICFI. For workers and youth entering into revolutionary struggle, the turn now is to the construction of sections of the ICFI in Algeria and in countries around the world.



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