

Socialist Workers Party seeks to derail movement against Algerian regime

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16 March 2019

As workers launch strikes against the Algerian military dictatorship, and millions of workers and youth pour into the streets in cities across the country, the petty-bourgeois Socialist Workers Party (PST) is seeking to derail the movement. While the struggle poses the need for the working class to take power, the PST is promoting illusions that Algeria's bloodstained regime will reform itself.

The National Liberation Front (FLN) regime has announced it would suspend elections and that the figurehead president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, will only step down after the protests are over. It is a sign that the regime intends to make no concessions to the workers and youth, and intends to put in a new figurehead for the same corrupt regime. However, an article published on the web site of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the French affiliate of the PST, hails this maneuver as "a first step back by the regime, to be turned into a victory against the system."

"The announcement of Bouteflika's retirement is the result of the fantastic popular movement that is underway," PST member Kader Leoni writes, adding, "But we haven't won yet! Bouteflika has announced his retirement ... but he's still president!" Leoni demands a self-reform of the FLN regime by rewriting Algeria's constitution:

The promise of a Second Republic and a new constitution risk being indefinitely delayed or, even worse, of serving to put the regime back together again without any democratic improvements but, on the contrary, stepped-up free market reforms demanded by key sections of the bourgeoisie and the army, together with imperialist powers, notably France. ... We must continue the movement, obtain Bouteflika's immediate departure and impose a new constituent assembly based on delegates elected during the mobilization, its self-organization and the ongoing mass strikes.

This call for rewriting the constitution aims to demobilize workers and youth, subordinate them to the regime, and cut them off from the growing international movement in the working class.

There are mass "yellow vest" protests by French workers, ongoing mass protests and strikes in Sudan, and strikes across North Africa. Teachers strikes have spread on five continents, and mass opposition is rising among autoworkers, expressed in the Mexican *maquiladoras* strike this year, the largest in North America in 20 years.

Instead of fighting to link their struggles to those of their class brothers and sisters internationally, the PST wants Algerian workers and youth to elect a team of lawyers and patiently wait for them to work out a new constitution in talks with the FLN dictatorship.

The notion that this corrupt regime will reform itself is absurd. It oversaw the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people during the bloody 1992-2002 Algerian Civil War, to crush the Islamist parties and keep power after the Islamists won the 1991 legislative elections.

Top FLN officials monopolize hundreds of billions of dollars of gas export revenues, buying real estate in Paris and beyond from offshore bank accounts while leaving millions in poverty.

Youth unemployment is now at close to 30 percent, and more than two thirds of the population is under 30. A report by the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights in 2015 found that 80 percent of the national wealth is held by 10 percent of the population, while some 14 million people live in abject poverty at less than \$1.50 per day.

The way forward is a revolutionary struggle against the FLN on a socialist and internationalist program for the working class to take power. The riches plundered from Algerian working people by the FLN regime must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the workers, as part of a broad struggle of the working class internationally against capitalism. This requires a struggle not only against Bouteflika, but also against parties like the PST that defend the regime while masquerading as its "socialist" opponents.

The role of the PST

While it cynically claims it is fighting the regime in order to carry out a democratic reform, the PST is consciously hostile to a struggle for the independent interests of the working class and to build a revolutionary leadership among the growing masses of insurgent workers. It functions as a barely disguised wing of the regime, seeking to ward off the threat from below.

The PST issues vague calls for electing a Constituent Assembly based on the movement, knowing very well that right-wing and free-market forces are trying to intervene in it. These include Mouwatana, led by a former prime minister under Bouteflika, and a variety of businessmen with grievances with the top FLN leadership. In a March 7 essay titled "Algeria: from a crisis of rule to a political crisis," PST member Hocine Belalloufi notes that those rallying to the protests include "members of the FCE [Business Leaders Forum] and FLN mayors and members."

These are the forces Belalloufi wants to decide how to re-write Algeria's constitution. He adds that the movement has "no elaborated program, is not organized, has no spokespeople, and even less of a known and identified leadership." However, "these weaknesses constitute, paradoxically, at this stage, [its] strong points, and do not hinder the movement from taking initiative, going on the offensive and winning adherents and supporters."

Belaloufi calls for an alliance with Louisa Hanoune's Workers Party (PT), which is widely mocked by the protesters as a tool of the FLN regime, and Algeria's unions—pro-government bureaucracies set up by the FLN itself after independence from France in 1962. Belaloufi 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 PT and PST believe it should be tasked with determining what type of regime to put in place, immediately proclaiming democratic liberties and satisfying without delay the social aspirations and demands of the workers and poor. 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.

This amounts to a promise that, by proclaiming themselves to be democratic, the regime and its cronies, against whom the masses are rebelling, will oversee a historic flowering of democracy.

The sharpest warnings must be made: the PST and its allies are tools of the regime and will defend it ruthlessly against a threat from below. Algeria's pro-government unions have tail-ended the movement; a few called strikes in education after teachers organized them via social media, but only to try to keep control of the situation. As for the PT and the PST, they speak for layers of academics, journalists and union functionaries whose privileges depend upon their close ties to the FLN regime, and who fear a revolution against it.

The PST's nationalist orientation to the FLN is rooted in the class interests of its petty bourgeois base and justified by the anti-Trotskyist theories of the Pabloite tendency of which it is a part. Its precursor, the Revolutionary Communist Group (GCR), was founded in 1974 by Algerians sympathetic to the NPA's forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), the French section of the Pabloite movement that broke from Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953.

The historic founder of this tendency, Michel Pablo, insisted that the FLN, which took power after the Algerian war of independence against France, was one expression—along with Stalinist and other bourgeois nationalist organizations—of a new road to socialism that did not require the building of Marxist parties in the working class. Though the FLN represented not the working class but the Algerian bourgeoisie, Pablo insisted that its rule was leading “irresistibly into a profound socialist revolution.” On this fraudulent basis, Pablo worked for several years in the FLN regime.

Over decades of deepening integration into ruling circles, the PST in Algeria, like the NPA in France, emerged as a middle class constituency for order. Both maintain empty references to anti-capitalism or socialism in their party names, but their politics are reactionary. Perhaps the clearest indication is the fact that, while the PST postures as “anti-imperialist,” it is allied to the NPA which, after the workers' uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia of 2011, publicly called for French imperialism to arm Islamist proxies in bloody wars for regime change in Libya and Syria.

The lessons of the Egyptian Revolution

The lessons of the revolutionary experiences in Egypt are a

particularly sharp warning as to the dangers posed to the workers by the PST's counter-revolutionary role today.

Events of Egypt in 2011-2013 confirmed tragically, in the negative, the correctness of the strategy of Permanent Revolution elaborated by the founder of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky. In countries of a belated capitalist development and former colonies, such as Egypt and Algeria, Trotsky insisted, basic democratic tasks that in previous epochs were achieved in bourgeois revolutions can only be achieved by the struggle of the working class, leading behind it the oppressed masses, to take political power and establish a workers' state as part of the fight for socialism internationally.

While the working class of Egypt fought heroically to bring down the Mubarak regime, it was blocked from taking power in its own hands. The Revolutionary Socialists (RS) party played a decisive role in this process. While using “left” phraseology to deceive the masses, the RS promoted different bourgeois factions at different stages of events. It initially claimed the military-led junta that took power after the fall of Hosni Mubarak would initiate democratic reforms, then supporting the Muslim Brotherhood on the same basis in 2012; finally, in 2013, it promoted bourgeois allies of the army as it prepared a coup.

The one consistent feature of its maneuvers was a virulent hostility to the building of an independent revolutionary party of the working class to fight for power. The RS thus helped pave the way for General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's coup, the massacre of thousands of workers, and the re-establishment of a bloody military dictatorship in Egypt.

The PST, desperate to conserve the privileges it has acquired over decades under the Algerian dictatorship, is pursuing a course no less reactionary than that of the RS.

The emergence of Algerian workers and youth in revolutionary struggle against the FLN and its Pabloite defenders is a historic vindication of the ICFI's decades-long struggle for Trotskyism against Pabloism. Revolutionary struggles are rapidly emerging on the order of the day. The key task in Algeria is building a section of the ICFI in struggle against Pabloism, to arm the working class with a genuinely revolutionary perspective and leadership.



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