

Bouteflika's resignation as Algerian president to take place by April 28

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Yesterday evening, after six weeks of strikes and mass protests, the Algerian presidency set a deadline yesterday for the Abdelaziz Bouteflika to step down as president.

Its communiqué declared, “The naming of a new government on 31 March 2019 by his Excellency Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the president of the Republic, will be followed by important decisions he will take, in line with the specifications of the constitution, to allow him to guarantee the continuity of the functioning of the institutions of the state during the transition period that will begin when he decides to resign. ... This resignation of the president of the Republic will take place before 28 April 2019, the date on which his electoral mandate ends.”

While this text promises that Bouteflika will leave office, it does not satisfy in any way the aspirations that have driven millions of Algerians into struggle since February. It is a maneuver of the regime that workers and youth are seeking to bring down, to protect itself from a revolution by getting rid of a hated figurehead. But the wealth that the regime has monopolized is not to be transferred to the working class, which produced it, and power is still in the hands of a sclerotic clique of generals and top officials who are violently hostile to the workers.

The way forward is building rank-and-file organizations of the working class, independent of the state and its trade unions, to coordinate a revolutionary struggle against Algeria's bloodstained capitalist dictatorship and the repression it is preparing.

Many of the millions of workers and youth who have protested since February will reject this transparent attempt by the regime to hold on to power. Bouteflika's departure was prepared through violent internecine conflicts between the army brass and the presidency,

since Gen. Ahmed Gaïd Salah's unconstitutional intervention last week, pledging to invoke Article 102 of Algeria's constitution to remove Bouteflika on grounds of his infirmity.

The new government announced on Sunday precariously balances between the regime's various feuding factions. The new prime minister, Nouredine Bedoui, is the former interior minister and reportedly close to the Bouteflika family. The defense ministry and the command of the army will remain in Gaïd Salah's hands, strengthening the position of the army even though the general is technically still the second-ranking figure in the government.

Meanwhile, these same parasitical factions are embroiled in vicious infighting to determine who will control the wealth of the country, and on whom the ruling elite will try to pin the blame for the bankruptcy of Bouteflika's presidency.

At 3 a.m. Sunday morning, Algerian customs arrested Ali Haddad, the head of the CEO Forum (FCE) business federation who is close to Bouteflika, at Oum Teboul on the Tunisian border. Yesterday, the El Kala court ordered he be transferred to detention in Algiers. Haddad allegedly presented customs with illegal papers and tried to cross the border with €5,000 in cash without declaring it, whereas Algerian law requires travelers to declare any cash sum over €1,000.

Yesterday, the Algiers prosecutor's office announced charges against a dozen other billionaire businessmen close to the Bouteflika clan: two of Haddad's brothers, the Kouninef brothers, and Maihieddine Takhout and several of his relatives. “Preliminary investigations are underway on charges of corruption and illicit capital transfers overseas,” announced the prosecutor's office. It added that in order to carry out its investigation, it had ordered “a ban on travel overseas by certain

individuals.”

The Algerian state also banned until April 30 all flights by private jets to prevent businessmen from fleeing Algerian soil. “All private aircraft that are the property of Algerians and are registered either in Algeria or abroad, are banned from taking off or landing in Algerian air space,” declared an official announcement published late Sunday.

General Gaïd Salah is also denouncing Algerian intelligence, whom he has accused of secret collaboration with French imperialism. According to Echourouk News, he declared at a general staff meeting on Saturday that there are “ill-intentioned” forces who aim “to undermine the credibility of the army and evade the legitimate demands of the people.”

He claimed that a meeting took place between the president’s brother Saïd Bouteflika, the former head of the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) General Mohamed Mediène (“Toufik”), current DRS head General Athmane Tartag, and French officials. According to Gaïs Salah, this meeting led to the decision to “create a certain anarchy” in Algeria, organize “the rejection of Article 102 of the Constitution” and “incite regionalisms.”

The army doubtless hopes to use such allegations to justify stepped-up law and order measures and the inciting of a climate of fear to facilitate repression within Algeria itself.

Mediène published in *Tout sur l’Algérie* a reply to Gaïd Salah, calling his accusations a “grotesque manipulation.” He added, “Accusing me of meeting foreign agents to discuss subjects relevant to national sovereignty is a deliberate attempt to harm my reputation. ... I have never in any way deviated from the principle of defense of national sovereignty. It is an untouchable rule that I have always respected in my behavior and my actions.”

It is impossible to confirm or rule out any of the allegations made by top Algerian officials, whose byzantine quarrels are infamous for their obscurity. However, certain things can be said with certainty.

The Algerian capitalist regime is collectively guilty of what its leaders are accusing each other of doing. It has misspent the hundreds of billions of dollars in natural gas revenues, pocketed by the families and relatives of top officials, while working closely with Washington, Paris and other NATO powers. It was

thanks to collaboration with Algiers, which opened up Algerian airspace to French fighter-bombers, that Paris was able to invade and bomb Mali starting in 2013.

The only way for workers to overthrow imperialist domination and take back the wealth they have created is to bring down the dictatorship and take power, in a revolutionary struggle carried out together with workers in France and internationally. This requires building a revolutionary vanguard, an Algerian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), offering revolutionary leadership and opposing the political parties who hide their support for Algerian capitalism behind tactical criticisms of the regime.

The Front of Socialist Forces (FFS), linked to France’s discredited, big-business Socialist Party, deplored the regime’s decision “to ignore the legitimate and pressing demands of virtually the entire Algerian people” and to continue “recklessly heading straight into a wall. ... The FFS reaffirms its promise to remain mobilized until complete satisfaction is given to popular demands for liberty, democracy and self-determination.”

The Workers Party (PT) called Bedoui’s nomination a “fruitless re-branding operation” trying “to get around the will of the vast majority to kick out an obsolete and outmoded system.” The PT, which has worked closely with the regime for decades, warned that the new government would face “the rejection of the vast majority of the population, as a hijacking of the objectives of the revolutionary process.” The PT proposed instead a “sovereign and national Constituent Assembly” to draft a new constitution for the existing Algerian capitalist state.

Rewriting the Algerian constitution and redistributing the top offices among the regime’s current top officials will resolve none of the problems that drove masses of workers and youth into struggle. The only way forward is the independent mobilization of the working class in a revolutionary struggle for political power.



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