

Mass protests in Algeria follow Bouteflika's resignation

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Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in cities across Algeria yesterday, the seventh successive Friday of mass anti-government protests. The demonstration was the first to be held after the announcement of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's resignation on Tuesday and the initiation of a military-backed transition process safeguarding the regime, minus its figurehead.

Varying media reports indicate that the demonstrations were as large as or larger than the previous week. Hundreds of thousands filled the streets of the major cities of the capital Algiers, Bejaia, Oran, Tizi Ouzou, and others across the country. Tens of thousands were pictured protesting in Guelma, a city of only slightly more than 100,000 people.

The protesters' chants were directed against the fraudulent transition announced by General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, the chief of staff of the armed forces, and key powerbroker in the country, last Sunday. Salah called for Bouteflika to resign or be declared medically "unfit to rule" according to Article 102 of the country's constitution. On Tuesday night, Bouteflika's office released a resignation letter, and the Constitutional Council formally acknowledged Bouteflika's resignation the following day.

The escalation of protests yesterday make clear that popular opposition is directed not merely at Bouteflika, who was largely incapacitated for the past five years, but the entire regime and the conditions of growing social inequality, poverty and exploitation over which it has presided for decades. The slogans reported by news outlets were "You are all going to resign!" and "The people are mobilizing for the fall of the regime!"

According to *Tout sur l'Algérie* (TSA), they also chanted "The people want a hospital" and "We will never forgive you for the boys who drowned," a

reference to the untold number of young people who have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

Under the terms of Article 102, the interim president is a close Bouteflika ally, Abdelkader Bensalah, speaker of the house for 16 years. The next elections, due to be held in 90 days, are to be overseen by Tayeb Belaiz, a government minister for the last six years who was named by Bouteflika to head the Constitutional Council.

Protesters also opposed the intervention of General Salah and the military, chanting "Gaïd Salah, the people are not fooled." Banners and home-made signs visible on images of the protests in the capital published on social media read: "Gaïd Salah, let the people decide on its own destiny," "A general will never submit, not even to the facts," and "No repeat of the Egyptian scenario"—a reference to the Egyptian military's coup in 2013 to crush the revolutionary uprising that overthrew Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The military's official organ *El Djaïch* released a statement yesterday threatening any opposition to its interests. It declared that "the proposition in question [Article 102] provides a solution inscribed in the constitution, permitting Algeria to traverse the present conjuncture in security and thus avoid harmful downfalls."

It declares that the army's proposal has been "favourably received" by the population, and warns "certain parties" who "attempt to slur the credibility and the image of the military institution."

The military moved yesterday to extend its control over the state apparatus. Afthmane Tartag, a former general who had been appointed by Bouteflika to head the country's intelligence agency, the Direction of Security Services (DSS) in 2015, was removed. The

DSS was moved directly under the control of the military and Salah, who also occupies the defense ministry. TSA reported that the heads of the interior and exterior branches of the DSS were likely to be replaced, as well as the head of the national police.

While these actions take place amidst a bitter internecine struggle within the regime and the ruling class, they are directed above all at preparing mass repression against the developing movement in the working class.

Every faction of the political establishment, including those parties claiming to support the mass demonstrations, is hostile to the basic strivings for social equality and democratic rights of workers and young people.

On Tuesday, Ali Benflis, the former prime minister under Bouteflika and current leader of the Talaie El Hurriyet party, which has organized multiple meetings of oppositional parties over the past month claiming to support the protests, appealed to the military to intervene.

“Faced with the most imminent dangers that the extra-constitutional forces are weighing on the very existence of the national state,” the only obstacle was “our armed forces, supported on their side by the Algerian people.” He called for the “neutralization of these extra-constitutional forces whose scorched-earth policy has never been so perceptible and visible.”

The Workers Party (PT) of Louisa Hanoune, which has collaborated with the regime for decades, has criticized the military-backed transition process, issuing warnings that it threatens to provoke an explosion among workers, and that some form of democratic fig-leaf must be provided.

The PT issued a statement on April 3 following the announcement of Bouteflika’s resignation, warning that the resolution of the crisis could come only by means of “credible and transparent institutions, produced through the exercise of the sovereignty of the people via a national and sovereign constituent assembly.”

Any such body would be nothing more than a fig leaf for the continued rule of the capitalist elite over the country, and the continued exploitation and impoverishment of the working class. This is made very clear by the experience of Tunisia, where the ruling class introduced a Constituent Assembly in order

to dissipate the mass revolutionary struggles that forced out Ben Ali in 2011. Today the country is ruled by an equally authoritarian regime.

Such a path would inevitably provoke further opposition in the working class, which the regime is preparing to suppress with military bloodshed.

This underscores the necessity for the working class to draw the political lessons of the events from 2011 on.

Despite fighting heroically and bringing down the Mubarak regime, the working class of Egypt was blocked from taking power in its own hands and was politically subordinated to different bourgeois parties. Responsibility for this lies in large part with the Revolutionary Socialists party, which used “left” phraseology to while promoting different bourgeois factions at different stages of events—initially claiming the military-led government that followed the fall of Mubarak would initiate democratic reforms, then supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012, and then, in 2013, promoting bourgeois allies of the military as it prepared and carried out its coup.

The ongoing movement of the Algerian working class against the military-backed regime is part of a renewed eruption of working-class struggle around the world. The way forward for the working class in Algeria lies in the fight to overthrow the capitalist system, take power into its own hands and extend its revolutionary struggle internationally.



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