

Mass protests intensify against Algerian regime

Will Morrow
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The mass protest movement that forced the removal of Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika at the beginning of the month is continuing, with growing demands for the downfall of the regime and mounting expressions of opposition to the military.

Last Friday was the tenth successive week of protests since February 22. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in the capital, Algiers, in Oran, Constantine, Bejaia and other cities and towns. For the second successive week, gendarmes put up roadblocks on all the major highway routes leading to the capital, turning away all traffic in an attempt to reduce the number of protesters in Algiers.

Nonetheless, AFP reported that the crowds of protesters filling the streets of the capital stretched for kilometres. The protesters chanted “The system must go,” and “You have pillaged the country, thieves!” News outlets reported a marked increase in slogans directed against the military and General Ahmed Gaid Salah, including, “The people do not want Gaid Salah or Bouteflika.” The *Washington Post* reported that demonstrators chanted, “The army isn’t the solution,” and called for Salah to “get out.”

The military, which is the backbone of the government, intervened to remove Bouteflika at the end of March in order to preserve the regime while seeking, unsuccessfully, to put an end to the protests. Bouteflika’s long-time ally and speaker of the legislative body, Abdelaker Bensalah, has been installed as interim president until elections are called on July 4.

Protesters have rejected this transition as a fraud aimed at removing only a figurehead while keeping the existing regime in power. They have denounced the government of Bensalah and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui as a “government of shame.”

“We want this system to leave and all the thieves to be judged,” Zohra, a 55-year-old teacher who travelled 350 kilometres to attend the Algiers demonstration with her 25-year-old son, told AFP.

Over the past two weeks, the regime has arrested a series of close Bouteflika allies in the security forces, as the military has consolidated its direct control over the state apparatus. On Monday, Abdelghani Hamel, the former head of the country’s police forces, faced trial on corruption charges.

At the same time, under the banner of an “anti-corruption” campaign aimed at providing a semblance of democratic reform, scores are being settled between different factions of the ruling elite. Five billionaires were arrested in the past week and are facing corruption charges, including four brothers close to Bouteflika’s inner circle: Reda, Abdelkader, Karim and Tarek Kouninef.

Isaad Rebrab, the country’s richest individual and founder and chairman of Cevital, Algeria’s largest private company, was arrested on Monday.

The crisis facing the government, confronted with mass opposition, was expressed in the army’s announcement, reported by *Tout sur l’Algérie* (TSA), that government ministers will not hold their first planned meeting on May 2. While the meeting was organized to provide a semblance of credibility to the government, with ministers to give oral answers to pre-written questions by the military, the event was called off for fear it would only trigger protests. TSA reported that the “announcement of such an event” alone was widely denounced on social media.

The ongoing protests in the working class and among young people reflect the deep opposition to conditions of social inequality and poverty. The millions who forced the removal of Bouteflika were not seeking a

new fig-leaf government controlled by the military and representing the country's billionaires and their imperialist backers, but a revolution to improve their conditions of life.

While a tiny layer of multi-millionaires and billionaires in the regime has enriched itself over decades, official youth unemployment is close to 30 percent in a country where approximately two-thirds of the population is under 30.

The explosive social anger was expressed in clashes in the eastern city of Tebessa on Sunday. Private security guards for the private bottled mineral water company Youkous fired birdshot at local villagers protesting outside the factory to oppose the lack of water for the town.

"In the morning, 20 of us went to [the factory] to find a solution for the lack of water that has affected our town for a long time and has gotten worse since the building of this factory," one villager told *El Watan*. "Around 11, we were attacked by individuals with batons, swords and other arms..."

When the protesters fought back, "armed men began to shoot from the roof." Thirteen people were shot, including one youth. Later that day the factory was reportedly burned down.

A France Info report on April 4 indicates the scale of the crisis in the public health care system. Doctor Mohamed Taileb told the news outlet: "We are lacking syringes. The gloves are torn." He said that the facial masks necessary for treating patients with tuberculosis were no longer available. "This is not normal," he added. "I risk my safety... Many materials to operate are missing. Glasses, oxygen masks."

The growing struggles of the Algerian workers and youth are part of an international upsurge of struggles by the working class, including in Sudan, where protests are continuing to escalate against the military government, and in Morocco, where strikes are spreading.

The official opposition parties—stretching from that of the former prime minister Ali Benflis to the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party (PST), which is allied with France's New Anti-capitalist Party, and Louisa Hanoune's Workers Party—are working to block a political struggle against the military dictatorship. They are instead seeking to channel workers and youth behind appeals for the regime to carry out democratic

reforms.

Benflis issued a statement on Saturday warning the military that the holding of its sham elections on July 4 would be politically dangerous under conditions where none of the parties has any popular credibility. He wrote: "To stick stubbornly to holding presidential elections ... can only expose the country to an electoral parody without candidates and without voters, and as a result the president will lose all legitimacy."

Louisa Hanoune of the Workers Party (PT) is repeating the main demand of the PT and PST for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, aiming to provide a pseudo-democratic fig leaf for the continued rule of a military dictatorship. Hanoune warned that the "management of this phase of transition proceeds through a national sovereign constituent assembly, an ideal solution which corresponds to the wishes of the people desiring change..."

Such statements are aimed only at sowing illusions in the working class and blinding it to the dangers it confronts, while blocking a determined revolutionary offensive. While opposition is growing to the military government, which waged a brutal civil war in the 1990s that killed over 200,000 people, the regime is preparing a violent crackdown.

The social interests of the working class and the fight for a democratic government can be achieved only through the fight by the working class—in opposition to all of the pro-capitalist parties—to take political power into its own hands, expropriate the billions of dollars plundered by the corporate and financial elite, and establish a workers' government as part of the fight for socialism internationally.



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