As protests grow, Algerian army arrests Workers Party leader

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On Thursday afternoon, the Algerian government controlled by army General Ahmed Gaid Salah arrested Workers Party (PT) General Secretary Louisa Hanoune and imprisoned her following a military tribunal hearing. She is reportedly charged with "attacking the authority of the army" and "conspiracy against the authority of the state."

The Socialist Equality Party condemns Hanoune's arrest and detention, which are baseless and for which the army presented no evidence. The army's goal is to terrorize far broader opposition among workers and youth, by sending a signal that the army can deal ruthlessly with anyone—even figures with close ties to the regime, like Hanoune. It is a warning that Salah is preparing a crackdown on protests that have seen millions of workers and youth take to the streets each week to demand the fall of the regime.

Hanoune had been summoned to appear before a military tribunal to testify as a witness in the trial of Said Bouteflika, the brother of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the former longtime president, when she was detained. Abdelaziz Bouteflika was removed in March on Salah's orders, in an unsuccessful effort to put an end to the protests that began on February 22, propelled by anger over social inequality and unemployment.

Said's trial followed a string of arrests of top figures in the Bouteflika regime and the intelligence services over the past two weeks. On Monday, General Mohamed Mediène, known as Toufik, who led the Department of Intelligence and Security for 25 years; and his former deputy and successor, General Athmane Tartag, known as "Bashir," faced trial along with Said.

A week earlier, five billionaires close to the Bouteflika inner circle were arrested on corruption charges, along with Isaad Rebrab, the country's richest individual (and ninth richest person in Africa, according to Bloomberg) and founder and chairman of Cevital, Algeria's largest private company. These arrests were aimed at settling accounts between rival, reactionary factions of the regime, as well as projecting a false image of democratic reform.

Hanoune was arrested after making limited criticisms of Salah and the military, warning that the latter could launch a bloody coup like that launched in 2013 by Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi against the revolutionary struggles of the Egyptian working class.

Last Saturday, after Salah demanded that the population support the fraudulent, military-run "transition" he is leading, Hanoune warned of an "Egyptian situation." She noted, "Once in power, [Egyptian dictator Abdel] al-Sisi ordered the imprisonment of even the naive people among the activists and political parties who supported him, believing that the army would open a true democracy…"

The SEP's opposition to Hanoune's arrest in no way modifies our principled political opposition to Hanoune and the Workers Party. The PT has long supported the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), and Hanoune defended Abdelaziz Bouteflika as the protests began in February, absurdly claiming they were not aimed at Bouteflika. This long record of political collaboration with the regime has deeply discredited the PT among workers and youth in Algeria.

Hanoune's perspective of demanding a constituent assembly to rewrite the Algerian constitution promotes the fatal illusion that the regime is capable of conducting a democratic self-reform. Her promotion of this perspective works to prevent the growing protests from developing in the direction of a genuinely socialist struggle of the working class for state power.

Media reports over the past three weeks have noted a marked increase in slogans directed against the military

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and Salah, including, “No to the Egyptian solution,” “Salah, get out!” and “Algeria is un-Sisi-able.”

Mass protests against the regime have escalated since Bouteflika’s removal. Thousands marched yesterday in Algiers, Oran, Sétif, Constantine and other major cities throughout the country for the twelfth successive Friday protest, and the first since the beginning of the month of Ramadan. The protesters reject the calling of new presidential elections on July 4, which are being overseen by longtime close Bouteflika allies, interim president Abdelkader Bensalah and prime minister Noureddine Bedoui.

“We will not give up. The battle will continue,” a 37-year-old school teacher, marching with his wife and two children, told Reuters.

The military has thus far held back from carrying out a bloody crackdown on the protests, fearful that this will only intensify the movement against the government. But such actions are undoubtedly being discussed and prepared by the officer corps.

On Wednesday, the military’s official organ *El-Djeich* published a statement warning against what it called a “Machiavellian plan” and “vile conspiracy” against the government.

The plans “concocted by a handful of conspirators will inevitably fail, including the one seeking to break the cohesion between the people and its military,” the statement alleged. It denounced small groups who it claimed “seek to take control of the popular movement and lead it toward serving their own immediate interests by proclaiming themselves as spokespeople for the population,” in order to “sow confusion.”

On Monday, the public broadcaster censored a program due to be broadcast on Canal Algérie that afternoon, which would reportedly have criticized the military-backed “transition.”

The escalating repression has elicited not a peep of criticism from France, other major imperialist powers in Europe or the United States—all of which expressed their support for the regime. The Macron government in France is terrified that a revolutionary movement of the Algerian working class could spread to France itself, which is home to an Algerian diaspora of millions, amid growing struggles of French workers against austerity and inequality.

The growing opposition to the military in the working class, and the denunciations of an “Egyptian solution,” show that the experience of the Egyptian military coup following the 2011 revolution that overthrew Hosni Mubarak has entered into popular consciousness internationally. The task, however, is to draw the necessary political conclusions from this experience.

Despite conducting a heroic struggle to bring down Mubarak, the working class was prevented from taking political power in its own hands and politically subordinated to different bourgeois parties. This was due above all to the role of the Revolutionary Socialists party, whose political gyrations throughout the revolution were conditioned by their determination to channel workers behind one or another section of the bourgeoisie—first, the military-led transition government, later, the Muslim Brotherhood, and then, in 2013, the bourgeois allies of the army as Sisi prepared his coup.

The experience in Egypt confirmed in the negative Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution, which explains that in countries of a belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie, tied to imperialism, is incapable of establishing a democratic regime. The task of struggling for democratic rights falls to the working class, drawing behind it the rural oppressed in a struggle for socialism.

The central task in Algeria remains the construction of a Trotskyist vanguard party fighting for this perspective.

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