

Algerian army suspends July 4 presidential elections

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On Sunday, the Algerian Constitutional Council cancelled presidential elections scheduled for July 4. Interim President Abdelkader Bensalah had called the elections in April, only a week after the resignation of long-time President Abdelaziz Bouteflika amid mass protests demanding his ouster and the fall of Algeria's military regime.

The decision came amid continuing mass weekly protests of workers and youth in cities across Algeria, opposing the elections, Bensalah and the military dictatorship. In recent weeks, protesters repeatedly chanted slogans denouncing the elections and the military brass, such as "No elections with the gang," "No dialog with symbols of the old regime."

So overwhelming was the popular opposition to these elections, correctly identified as a fig leaf to maintain a corrupt regime, that no parties dared to stand candidates in them. Judges refused to participate in the preparation of election lists, with the Judges' Club association issuing a statement noting that the election was "rejected by the people." In the end, the Constitutional Council called off an election that was proving to be an embarrassment for the regime and only threatened to trigger a broader eruption of mass opposition.

The Constitutional Council's suspension of the elections is not, however, an attempt to bow to the will of workers and youth and build a democratic regime. Power remains in the hands of military strongman General Ahmed Gaïd Salah. And by postponing the presidential election without setting a future election date, the Constitutional Council has effectively left Bensalah and Prime Minister Noureddine Bedoui, who are widely despised, in power indefinitely.

In its communiqué announcing its ruling, the Constitutional Council stressed that its purpose in postponing the election was to preserve the existing

regime. It wrote, "it is essential to create adequate conditions to organize this election transparently and without bias, in order to preserve constitutional institutions that help realize the aspirations of the sovereign people. It is the duty of the head of state to summon the electorate and complete the electoral process through the election of the President of the Republic and the swearing of the constitutional oath."

While the Constitutional Council issued its statement claiming to defend the aspirations of the Algerian people, the military regime is locking up and killing politicians and public figures in an effort to terrorize the population.

Reports and videos posted on social media show that demonstrations over the past month have more and more taken up slogans directed against the military, including "No to the Egyptian solution," a reference to the 2013 coup of dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. While the regime is seeking to find some means of ending the protests, it is preparing a no less brutal crackdown than its counterparts in Egypt and Sudan, where the military government yesterday launched an assault on civilian protest encampments in Khartoum, using live ammunition to kill at least 35 people.

Last Friday's demonstration in Algeria included widespread protests against the state-overseen killing in prison of Kamel Eddine Fekhar, a Kabyle separatist and former leader of the *Front des forces socialistes* (FFS), which is affiliated with France's big-business Socialist Party. Arrested without a warrant on March 31, immediately after giving an interview published on Facebook, he was charged with "threatening state security" and "inciting racial hatred." Fekhar allegedly died as a result of a 50-day hunger strike on May 28.

Fekhar's death attracted international condemnation, with Amnesty International calling it "a result of

nothing more than having expressed his opinions.”

Fekhar’s lawyer, Salah Debouz, pointed to the chilling effect the military regime intends for his death to have. “Now, anyone publishing his views or expressing an opinion on social media can be arrested for having criticized one or another official,” he told *Le Point* on June 3. “I think there are many more people in this situation than is known, because they do not have the means to pay for a lawyer and no one hears anything about them. It is easier to repress them.”

Louisa Hanoune, the general secretary of Algeria’s Workers Party (PT) and a close ally of the Bouteflika family, remains in prison after having been arrested on May 10 while appearing as a witness at a military trial of Bouteflika’s brother Saïd. Her arrest followed statements attempting to present herself as a critic of the military and was aimed at sending a message that any criticism of the army will be met with violent repression.

Hanoune had compared the Algerian army to the bloodstained Egyptian military dictatorship of General al-Sisi, effectively warning against support for Gaïd Salah. “Once in power, 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,” she said. The army has viciously retaliated, imprisoning Hanoune and preventing her doctors from visiting her.

The different bourgeois opposition parties are seeking to find a means of channeling workers and youth behind a fraudulent transition that, while utilizing more democratic phraseology, will leave the country in the hands of the corporate elite and be no less impervious to the social demands of the Algerian workers and rural oppressed for an end to crushing poverty and unemployment, particularly among the youth. Between a quarter and a third of youth are unemployed in a country where 70 percent of the population is aged under 30.

On June 3, *El Watan* reported that a collection of autonomous trade unions, which receive funding from the CIA front National Endowment for Democracy, and the self-proclaimed “Civil Forum for Change,” had launched a call for a new “responsible, serious and rational dialogue, as a means of resolving the present crisis” without Bensalah and Bedoui. The pseudo-left Workers Party and Socialist Workers Party, which is

allied to the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, are seeking to channel opposition behind a no less fraudulent demand for a “Constituent Assembly.”

Such demands are aimed at channeling the working class behind factions of the bourgeoisie, and preventing the working class from waging a struggle to take political power into its own hands, establish a workers government on the basis of socialist policies, and seek to extend its revolutionary struggles across the African continent and internationally. The fight for socialism is the only basis upon which the democratic and social demands of the working class can be fulfilled.



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