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Algeria

Barbacha boils over

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The commune of Barbacha (with around 30,000 inhabitants) near Béjaïa was the only one in Algeria led by a mayor from the Parti socialiste des travailleurs (PST - Socialist Workers' Party), our comrade Sadeq Akrouf. During the municipal elections of November 2012, the Wali (prefect) of Béjaïa tried to prevent the presentation of a PST list but finally had to give way. This list came first with more than 30% of the votes but control of the town hall was lost to an unprincipled alliance of municipal councillors from three other lists.

The FLN, RCD and FFS, supposedly in opposition to each other, set up a coalition of eight councillors against the six of the PST. The people immediately mobilized to impose new elections and thus allow Sadeq to return. For four months hundreds of inhabitants, including FFS and RCD activists who disagree with their parties' representatives, have mobilized night and day, occupying and blocking all the municipal departments (the civil registry and so on) and forbidding any meetings of the bogus majority.

Organized in a permanent general assembly, with delegates from the twenty or villages making up the commune meeting in the community hall, the people practicing a form of self management for various municipal activities (waste collection, distribution of fuel to schools, cleaning and so on). Without any sign of exhaustion, they have organized demonstrations in both Barbacha and Béjaïa (capital of the wilaya) situated at around forty kilometres from each other, which have been covered by numerous articles in the Algerian national press.

Democratic mobilization

Sunday March 24 marked a turning point in the situation. Faced with 2,000 demonstrators blocking the wilaya headquarters in Béjaïa, the Wali called on the riot police who charged the demonstrators with unrestrained violence, wounding several people including a youth whose legs were broken. Twenty-six people were arrested including Sadeq Akrouf who was held for 24 hours before being released to the acclaim of hundreds of people who awaited him, his head bandaged following the blows he had received.

Emotions are running high in Kabylie and throughout the country. The news spread as the government used the police against demonstrations of the unemployed in the south. And the mobilization has not weakened. On Sunday March 31, hundreds of inhabitants of Barbacha demonstrated again before the court in Béjaïa where six people were to appear to demand the cancellation of legal proceedings. The coming days will see national initiatives in favour of the dissolution of the municipal council and new elections.

"The Wali is the law, for me it is the people" stated our comrade Sadeq Akrouf who has succeeded in leading a council recognized as the best in Algeria in terms of social achievements (settling water supply problems, establishing an emergency service at the municipal clinic, and so on). Four months of uninterrupted mobilizations, and a municipality unable to function with representatives incapable of meeting: a fine demonstration of what can be done by an anti-capitalist party and elected representatives capable of linking social achievements, even in a limited context, and popular mobilization.