

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7998>



Algeria

Four years on - keeping the spirit of the Hirak alive!

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV577 - February 2023 -

Publication date: Sunday 26 February 2023

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

On the fourth anniversary of the popular Hirak movement, which began in February 2019, Algeria is sinking further into authoritarianism and repression. The strong state is taking hold!

Going against the democratic demands and ideals of the Hirak, of which freedoms and popular sovereignty were the cornerstone, the illegitimate power in place is getting stuck in its authoritarian drift.

The regime's deep crisis, triggered by Bouteflika's illness in 2013 and then by the fall in hydrocarbon prices in 2014, sharpened its internal contradictions and propelled the conflict between its main factions onto the public stage.

The Hirak became possible thanks to this internal weakening of the regime. The political situation at the beginning of 2019 was already marked by rampant repression and authoritarianism on the one hand, and the fall in the purchasing power of the popular masses and the middle classes, as well as the generalisation of endemic mass unemployment on the other, constituted the explosive ingredients of the largest popular movement since independence, which was christened: Hirak. The cup was already full and the 5th mandate was just the last straw.

Whatever the nature of its triggering factor, the Hirak took on a magnitude that quickly eluded and overtook all the sorcerers' apprentices and all the shadow offices.

Yatnahaw Ga3, let them go!

Indeed, after the first grandiose demonstrations against the fifth mandate of Bouteflika and his clique, it was the questioning of the whole regime, as well as the recurrent return of the army's hold on political power, that took over. At that point, after ousting Bouteflika in April 2019, the Hirak dynamic took on a revolutionary feel for a whole and radical regime change. "Yatnahaw Ga3" became a real leitmotif of the movement.

This is why those in power, and those who defend their thesis, quickly propagated the idea of a "first authentic Hirak", baptized "Moubarek" and sequestered in the constitution, and a second Hirak, i.e. post-April 2019, demonized and fought relentlessly until today.

It is for this reason that the foreign imperialist powers quickly jumped on the opportunity to increase their pressure on the regime, urging it to guarantee a "stability" that would ensure their interests within the framework of liberal globalisation, in return for a recognition of the new power and a "win-win" economic collaboration, as is their custom.

The new laws on hydrocarbons and investment, the maintenance of the unfair association agreement with the EU, the encouragement of the employers and the private sector, the constitutionalisation of the intervention of the army outside our borders, etc., were all guarantees of external support for the roadmap of "New Algeria" initiated by the "election" of the "twelve-twelve" and the appointment of Mr Tebboune.

But these external pressures and threats, which are aimed at our national wealth and the political alignment of our country, continue and are very real in the current evolution of geostrategic power relations at the global level. In contrast to the repressive and authoritarian policy of the regime, they require the urgent establishment of democratic

freedoms and respect for popular sovereignty in order to strengthen the internal front and the capacities of our country to resist all imperialist aims.

The authoritarian, mixed and fragile restoration of the regime in a first phase was reinforced, in a second phase, by the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, which facilitated the repression and contained a new breath of Hirak, and the rise in the price of hydrocarbons, in the wake of the war in Ukraine, which allowed the replenishment of the rent and a providential and unexpected financial ease of the regime.

Thus, "small measures" to calm the social front have become possible and are announced in a pompous and populist manner. They do not correspond to the extent of the social disaster engendered by decades of economic liberalism, nor to the strict catching up of purchasing power of... twenty years ago.

But there are other essential factors that must be taken into account in order to recall the obvious weaknesses of the Hirak and to modestly illuminate the path that lies ahead. For the current ebb of the Hirak can only work in depth the flow of an inevitable new popular Hirak and the social and political struggles of tomorrow.

Elements of a balance sheet

In this context, some key and strategic elements should be kept in mind:

1 - The Hirak, despite the "spontaneity of the masses" and the euphoria it generated about radical and "revolutionary" change, was not able to produce a clear and hegemonic political project translating the demands expressed by millions of demonstrators over a year to impose freedoms, social justice and popular sovereignty.

2 - The absence of self-organisation of the Hirak, especially at the grassroots level, has facilitated the repression and the emergence of several opportunists self-proclaimed as representatives of the Hirak. Without democratic, popular and independent self-organisation at the grassroots, it was impossible to organise the debate between millions of citizens, to centralise the demands of the Hirak in a platform and to establish a constituent process that would allow the establishment of new traditions of popular sovereignty.

3 - The weakness of the labour movement and the lack of involvement of the trade union elites to carry the Hirak and give it a stronger social dimension and a progressive direction, have often reduced it to getting bogged down in vague and partial demands anticipating its weakening and decline. The marginal presence of the labour movement in the Hirak has deprived it of important means of struggle such as the general strike, which in March 2019 was the main weapon that precipitated Bouteflika's departure in early April 2019.

4 - Consequently, it was impossible to hope for the emergence of a unitary, democratic, radical and progressive leadership, acting under the control of the popular self-organisation, and able to offer an alternative to the regime and lead the country in the perspective of concretising the democratic and social aspirations of the Hirak.

Towards a new crisis

Of course, there are other elements to consider in this debate on the Hirak's balance sheet, which remains to be done. However, in this modest contribution, which calls for other contributions, I felt it was necessary to briefly emphasise, on this fourth anniversary of the Hirak, the aspects that seemed to me to be the most obvious in order to help understand the trajectory of the Hirak and its weaknesses on the one hand, and, on the other, to draw lessons from this formidable collective popular experience in order to better envisage and converge the struggles of

tomorrow.

The general strike announced by the autonomous unions for 28 February is good news from this point of view. It constitutes precisely the importance of the organised workers' movement in the resistance against the repression of trade union freedoms, and democratic freedoms in general, and the right to strike. Whatever its scale and impact, it will break the climate of repression that has certainly installed a feeling of fear, but without engendering resignation or the abandonment of the democratic and social aspirations of the Hirak.

But, while waiting for tomorrow and the resurgence of the hope born of the Hirak, the struggle must continue today and as a priority for :

- An immediate end to repression in all its forms!
- The release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience!
- The repeal of all laws and legal provisions that are liberticidal!
- The lifting of all measures and obstacles to the effective exercise of all democratic freedoms!
- Independence of the judiciary and the public media from political power.
- The opening of a democratic and national debate, before the people, allowing the implementation of an authentic popular sovereignty!

24 February 2023

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.