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ACovid-19 and Algeria

Let's act for self-organization and against the coronavirus and the authoritarian temptations of the regime!

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This statement was released by the Parti socialiste des travailleurs (PST - Socialist Workers' Party) in Algeria on 25 March 2020.

While the coronavirus pandemic is in full swing, with its daily share of new deaths, newly infected people, shortages and rising prices of food and sanitary products, the illegitimate and authoritarian regime, embodied by a president designated by the high hierarchy of the army, is taking advantage of this situation of pausing of the *Hirak* to impose on us, in the wake of the confinement, restrictions on our democratic and social rights, accentuating repression and imposing its political agenda on the Algerian people.

For the immediate release of all political detainees!

The unacceptable sentencing of political activist Karim Tabou, in conditions so terrible that he is said to have contracted a serious illness, is simply appalling. The continued imprisonment of political detainees, at a time when the people's *Hirak* incessantly demands their release, is another proof of the political bankruptcy of the regime which cannot tolerate freedom of expression or freedom of demonstration, or the reappropriation by the Algerian people of their sovereignty.

The police and judicial harassment of recent days against political activists, trade unionists and other activists, such as Yanis Adjlia and his comrades in Béjaia, or journalists like Khaled Derrarni, reflect the absolutely repressive nature of the current de facto regime. In the context of today, this escalation provides information about its true future intentions regarding our democratic freedoms and our economic and social rights. This is all the more reason to recall not only the imperative resumption of our *Hirak* as soon as possible, but also the need to qualitatively consolidate the popular revolutionary process of 22 February 2019.

Against the future constitution of Tebboune and his experts, let us impose a Sovereign Constituent Assembly!

Tebboune's reception of the constitutional amendments concocted by his commission of experts is just another attempt at strong-arming after the historic masquerade of the presidential election of December 12. Mimicking Bouteflika's anti-democratic process and his "3issaba" regime, Tebboune entrusts an eminently political question, such as the content of the future constitution, to a commission of constitutional law experts whom he has appointed himself. Excluding the Algerian people from any debate on this subject, the authoritarian and illegitimate de facto regime will use the illegitimate, rump and corrupt parliament of Bouteflika to approve these amendments. Then, if there is a referendum, the Algerian people will just have the right to say, under the control of the electoral commission which validated the farce of the last presidential election, "yes or no" to this future constitution which will be tailor-made for the class interests of those who dominated yesterday and imposed disastrous neoliberal policies on us, that is to say the employers, the oligarchs and the multinationals.

As for our aspirations for freedom, dignity, equality, social justice and sovereignty over our national wealth and our socio-economic choices, we will have to continue the fight to enshrine them in another constitution. The one imposed by workers, young people, women and all the oppressed through *Hirak* and social and democratic struggles. Another constitution which will be drawn up, after a national, democratic and unhindered debate, by a Sovereign Constituent Assembly representative of our democratic and social interests and aspirations.

Let's act for self-organization and against the pandemic and the authoritarian temptations of the regime!

In these times of pandemic, workers and the poor, young people and women, forced to work or fend for themselves, to divert their wages or their annual vacation, to keep the children in cramped and precarious housing conditions, we must demand the closure of all businesses and services which are not strictly essential. Containment must apply to workers or it makes no sense. Wages must be maintained and the free distribution of basic food products in our neighbourhoods and villages. Trade unions and workers' collectives must exercise the right of withdrawal to protect their health. Protective equipment must be provided for ordinary people and especially for workers on the front line. Requisition of the private sector must be accelerated (hospitals, textiles, hotels, pharmaceutical industry and so on.)

Also, in this context of pandemic, containment and restoration of the curfew, it is more than ever imperative to intensify, in particular within the framework of solidarity and mutual aid against the coronavirus pandemic, the establishment of frameworks of self-organization and struggle initiatives, even if symbolic, through alternative actions to demonstrations and mass gatherings.

It is about keeping the flame of our popular *Hirak* lit for the defence of our freedoms and our social rights. It is about fuelling our new collective dream for the construction of a new democratic, social and egalitarian Algeria!

25 March 2020

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