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Algeria

Système dégage!

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Surprise after surprise in Algeria: President Bouteflika appointed the general who wanted to remove him as minister, before announcing his own resignation on 2 April 2019. Kamel AÃssat, an activist in the Parti socialiste des travailleurs (Socialist Workers' Party, Algerian section of the Fourth International), explained the situation to Sam Wahch and Antoine Larrache of the NPA newspaper *l'Anticapitaliste* on 1 April 2019.

Can you explain the statements by General Gaid Salah?

GaÃd Salah announced on the evening of Saturday 30 March 2019 that he was demanding the application of Article 102 and Articles 7 and 8 of the Constitution. Articles 7 and 8 do not comply with Article 102: Article 102 stipulates that it is the president of the Senate who takes over the presidency and organizes the elections. Articles 7 and 8 refer to the sovereignty of the people, to another situation. So that means that Gaid Salah is threatening the president with an offensive if he does not resign. He wants to speed up the announcement of Article 102. This is a political reading and not a legal one, because at the legal level the three articles cited are contradictory.

The political reading is: we do not want Bensalah (president of the Senate), identified as presidential, however they will find an interim president for a provisional period. During the night, groups came out with new banners in Algiers to say "Yes to Gaid Salah and people like that" but they were in the minority and the next day a group of young people who came with these signs were kicked out of the street. demonstration in front of the main post office.

The weekend demonstrations showed that the mobilization remains intact, though it did not strengthen in other sectors. During the week, there have been many marches in sectors of economic activity of workers of all stripes, every day we have a demonstration. So, we can say that the first response to the statements of Gaid Salah was a continuous mobilization.

So, there is a conflict between the army and the presidency?

Bouteflika announced the constitution of a new government where General GaÃd Salah, who had threatened Bouteflika the day before to resign, is Deputy Minister of Defence. So, they have tried to build a compromise in order to preserve the essentials. This compromise is essentially based on the resignation of Bouteflika and the appointment of a government during the transitional period.

And this morning, they began to sacrifice some big billionaires like Haddad and Kouninef, who certainly squandered public assets, but this is only a sample of the characters who were illicitly enriched during the reign of Bouteflika. These sacrifices are a response to the demands of the people who demand in some way the judgment of all those who have acquired wealth on the back of national sovereignty.

The disputes at the summit of the Algerian state between the different factions are very violent, but in no way do their solutions find an echo in the popular movement. The latter is more radical, it expresses in its slogan of "systÃme dÃgage" ("system, get lost") the complete rejection of those who have harmed national sovereignty, those who have pillaged assets for years, this comprador bourgeoisie of which a section is now thrown to the people.

But the people demand a lot more. The first reactions to the appointment of this government and the compromise between Gaid Salah and Bouteflika are discontent and anger on the street. On Monday, there were important

marches in Bejaia, for example, of workers in the higher education sector as part of the activities of a union that is being re-appropriated by UGTA workers. Today it was really a big mobilization.

What do you think of the announcement of the departure of Bouteflika?

A presidential statement was read on Monday night on the television channels, where they say Bouteflika announces he will resign before April 28 and that by then he will take important steps that he will announce later. It does not refer to any particular measure.

GaÃd Salah said a month ago that he was the guarantor of the elections, that he supported a 5th term for Bouteflika. It turns out that the balance of power within society has changed, that there are sacrifices to be made. It started with the first withdrawal of Bouteflika's candidacy and the dissolution of the government, then the appointment of a new government by sacrificing Ramtame Lamamra, the minister of foreign affairs who was number two in the government. He had made too many trips to European countries ...

But we have to understand that we are facing a regime composed of several factions that are in a moment of crisis, so they are looking for the compromise that allows them to maintain their interests in the long run and they have started with the first sacrifices: Bouteflika will not have a 5th term, they are arresting many businessmen who are powerful in Algeria, they are making some concessions under the pressure of the popular movement.

On the other hand, to say that GaÃd Salah would be a guarantee for the continuity of the system is wrong because GaÃd Salah is himself the fundamental continuity of the system. The Algerian bourgeoisie has been linked to the apparatus of the ANP (the armed forces) since 1962, that's why we talk about state capitalism for our country and that's why we call Bouteflika Bonaparte.

What does the PST advocate in this situation?

Next Friday, the PST will be mobilized with all its forces to try to spread our ideas, more particularly on a constituent assembly which starts from the interests of the majority of the Algerian people, that is to say the workers, the unemployed, women, all those excluded from the capitalist system, whose demands must be codified in the new constitution.

The mobilization will be very strong, perhaps much stronger than the other mobilizations. In the associations, in the discussions, people are no longer planning to come with their families, but to come with their pets, so that they understand that the people want them all to go and that we do not want them to organize any transition!

Our idea of a constituent assembly based on the interests of the popular masses is taking root in many sectors. This is not an end in itself, but a step in the ongoing process in Algeria to develop the most space, to establish more social and democratic rights in the new Algerian constitution.

The PST tries to converge with all the forces that claim to be in the workers' camp, the excluded camp, to make our voice heard on all the marches where we are and especially to give meaning to the popular slogans like "système dégage" and "we want to judge all the people who have pillaged assets", something we interpret as the lifting of banking secrecy on all wealth in Algeria, and "système dégage" as the system based on the economy of the bazaar, the market that has ruined the Algerian economy.

How do you see the constituent process?

It must be realized during the mobilizations, otherwise it will be the moneyed forces that will impose another constitution that represents their interests, the interests of a minority who are plundering the wealth of Algeria. The continuity of mobilization and its deepening and self-organization are the only guarantees we have as workers, as oppressed women, as young people, unemployed, excluded from the system to impose our hope in this constituent.

We are facing a spontaneous popular movement that has begun to organize but not with the classical forms we have known in history. There was no social force that emerged in particular at the beginning, but it was civil society in general, the people who were demonstrating on Friday, that is to say the "Algerian Sunday", the day we do not work. The population decided to express slogans on small signs that evolved into the development of banners. These have led to some demands that are very far from a conceptualization but whose content conceptualized by forces like ours gives a very profound, very radical meaning to the movement.

Self-organization is not a concept fixed in history, it is the tool that the masses give themselves at a given time according to their conscience, their traditions of struggle or traditions simply to confront an opponent. Today, the population considers that it is organized to the extent that there is a wide freedom of expression on the marches that demands things and that oppose a regime that responds with letters from Bouteflika or GaÃd Salah. The answer of the people is the Friday marches and the weekly marches by sectors of workers.

There is maximum mobilization, well disciplined, as shown by these young people from the neighbourhoods who clean up behind the demonstrations! But the spokespersons who tried to emerge, propelled by private television channels, especially the business newspapers, were almost all rejected. It is the wish of the regime to have personalities chosen by the media, but this is not the case today. Self-organization has evolved a lot in many areas.

It has begun to be realized in the universities. We are witnessing the emergence of autonomous committees. This explains the eagerness of the Minister of Higher Education to close the Algerian universities two weeks before the holidays and for a period of one month. The second aspect is that now all the neighbourhoods come in an organized march behind their banners, the villages come organized, the workers take action in the different unions. This is the case at SONACOM or in the industrial steel port of Annaba, where general meetings take place, which have led to street demonstrations, and today in many sectors.

Every day we have a beginning of self-organization. Is it a "soviet"? No, but it is a beginning of debate between the workers, of workers' organization, of autonomous expression of the workers including in relation to the union apparatuses and their bureaucratized leaderships.

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