

Algerian regime escalates police violence against growing protests

By Will Morrow
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Algeria's military regime is responding to the escalation of mass anti-government protests against its fraudulent political "transition" with a turn to ever more violent police repression.

In a nationally televised speech on Tuesday afternoon, General Ahmed Gaed Salah issued threats against protesting workers and youth. Declaring that the "army's decision to protect the people" was "irreversible," he continued, "Nonetheless, we expect on the part of the people to avoid recourse to violence, to preserve public and private property, and to avoid impinging the interests of citizens."

Salah also referred to unnamed "suspicious meetings taking place in the shadows to conspire behind the demands of the people and inhibit the solutions of the National Popular Army and the proposals for a way out of the crisis."

These statements are a warning that the military is preparing to vastly escalate the repression unleashed at protests last Friday. While the government had thus far sought to limit police confrontation with protesters over the previous eight weeks, fearful that such actions would only intensify popular anger, police were ordered to fire tear gas and rubber bullets upon peaceful protesters, including women and children, in Algiers.

"There were tear gas shots on the marchers who were inside the tunnel or who were leaving it," one protester told *El Watan*, referring to the Tunnel of the Facultés in the capital. The newspaper reported: "Suddenly a tear gas canister landed right in the middle of Audin Square. It would be followed by dozens of others. Then the panic began among thousands of protesters who were leaving the Tunnel des Facultés ... Old women, children, fell over. Some were made sick, particularly asthmatics."

Tout sur l'Algérie reported that heavily-armed anti-terror police were stationed throughout the city in an attempt to intimidate protesters. On Saturday morning, a group of female protesters were arrested by police while in a café outside the national post office and detained at the Baraki police station. There they were forced to strip naked and were physically searched.

Salah's reference to "respecting property" is particularly ominous given the widespread reports that government-hired thugs were used to carry out a provocation against police and provide a pretext to attack the peaceful protests on Friday. A single police vehicle, stationed without any officers nearby, was set on fire in the course of the day.

The army's turn to more open repression is its response to the continued escalation of protests following the announcement of the military-backed transition process announced at the beginning of the month. Salah's speech occurred the same day as tens of thousands of university students protested in the capital, Algiers. It was the largest demonstration not occurring on a Friday.

In an attempt to pre-empt a growing strike movement in the working class and demonstrations of millions of workers and young people since February 22, the military demanded the resignation of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika and called for new elections, in order to preserve the rule of the regime minus its figurehead.

On Tuesday, the regime announced the resignation of the chairman of the Constitutional Council, Tayib Belaiz, a longtime Bouteflika ally who had been in charge of overseeing the elections set for July 4.

The continuing movement in the Algerian working class and students is part of a growing movement of

strikes and working class opposition internationally. In neighboring Morocco, tens of thousands of contract teachers have been on a strike since March 3. On Monday, the education unions shut down the strike and ordered 55,000 contract teachers back to work without winning their demand for permanent positions, claiming that the return to work was only “temporary.” Teachers rebelled on Monday when they returned to work and were told to complete and sign documents explaining their absences during the strike.

In Poland, hundreds of thousands of teachers have been on a national strike since April 8, the first since 1993, in opposition to decades of austerity imposed since the restoration of capitalism in 1989.

In Sudan, the army ousted President Omar al-Bashir last Thursday in a pre-emptive coup aimed at putting an end to months of escalating strikes and protests demanding the bringing down of the regime. Within less than 48 hours, the regime announced the resignation of Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf, the military chief who had led Bashir’s ouster, in an effort to end continuing mass protests. A series of other regime officials have since been removed in a bid to bring the protest movement to an end.

The growing signs that the Algerian military is preparing a bloody crackdown underscore the treacherous and disastrous policies advocated by the pseudo-left Workers Party of Louise Hanoune and the Socialist Workers Party, affiliated to France’s pro-imperialist New Anti-capitalist Party.

While issuing empty appeals for the military to refrain from intervention into political affairs, Hanoune, who has functioned as a loyal opposition for Bouteflika for decades, has sought to promote illusions that the military can function as a tool for democracy. Hanoune made a statement last week declaring that the army “must not be political,” before adding, “it is the responsibility of the army to protect our national security, our borders, and also, to respond with all possible vigilance to foreign interference.”

The PST published a statement on April 5 declaring that the army’s role “is to defend the people, its social rights and welfare, its national sovereignty, its borders and its political sovereignty.” These parties fight to suppress the Marxist conception that the military and the state apparatus are the instruments of the capitalist class and will respond ruthlessly to protect their

property and interests against a movement in the working class.

Underlying these statements is the nationalist and anti-socialist perspective through which the pseudo-left have promoted the National Liberation Front regime for decades. Rejecting the fight to build independent socialist parties based in the working class, based on the Trotskyist theory of Permanent Revolution, the Pabloite organizations which broke from Trotskyism declared that the FLN and other bourgeois nationalist movements internationally represented a new path to socialism.

Today, the PT and the PST speak on behalf of privileged sections of the middle class tied to the regime, including through their positions in the leadership of several national trade unions. They are hostile to any struggle by the working class against capitalism and crushing levels of social inequality and poverty. They promote the illusion that the regime will be pressured to make concessions and democratize itself.

The way forward for the working class in Algeria lies not in appeals to the military dictatorship for democratic reforms, which will never be granted, but in the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system itself and establish socialism, through the taking of power into its own hands and the extension of its revolutionary struggle internationally.

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