

Algerian workers in France speak out against Bouteflika regime

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The expansion of demonstrations in Algeria opposing a fifth term for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has provoked support and solidarity across France. More than 6,000 people demonstrated in Paris on Sunday, and another 1,500 in Marseille, in support of the protests in Algeria.

While hundreds of thousands of “yellow vests” are protesting to demand the resignation of French President Emmanuel Macron and for social equality, many French workers are closely following the opposition to the corrupt Algerian regime. On Sunday, the WSWs interviewed workers of Algerian origin in Paris about the protests and Bouteflika’s announcement on Sunday that he will seek a fifth term.

Itchir said, “It’s been the same for 20 years, and now he wants a fifth mandate. Why does he ask for a fifth term? To keep control of the gas and the money. That’s not how a country can run; we want radical change for the entire Algerian people ... We have to sweep aside the government first, down to its roots. And then we will start over.”

He said he believes that Bouteflika is dead, or is so incapacitated that he might as well be. “His brother is in America getting treatment,” Itchir said. “They say he has cancer. Those who are with him, his right-hand man, [prime minister] Ahmed Ouyahia, for example, is a bastard. He’s done nothing... The Bouteflika regime just embezzles funds for itself. Go to the Champs-Élysées, and you’ll find the daughter of [ex-prime minister] Sellal. To buy her apartment on the Champs-Élysées, you need hundreds of thousands of euros.”

Itchir stressed that the unions and the entire Algerian political establishment are hardly different from the clan in power. “The unions are all bastards. The unions and the political parties who bring them to the table, all of them are the same. They eat and steal. They think

only of themselves and their families. They don’t think of us, of the youth, of the Algerian people.”

He said that in Algeria “There is nothing for the youth. There are also many young Algerians in Europe. Sometimes they’ll be just over there, selling individual cigarettes.” He added: “As for the Algerian government, you have stolen, you have taken, you have *chateaux* in France and throughout Europe. Now we need radical change.”

Noting the simultaneous outbreak of “yellow vest” protests against Macron and those in Algeria against Bouteflika, Itchir said that the problems for workers in Europe and Africa are the same.

“It’s the same thing there as here,” he said. “Here we have to run all over, and there we have to run all over. There if you don’t work, you don’t eat, here if you don’t work, you don’t eat. I’ve done the calculations, and it’s the same. I’m here; I didn’t have to get on a boat like others did. I had the chance to request a visa. They said yes. Those who don’t have to take a boat to come. It’s said that France is a paradise, but it’s no paradise. I hope there will be a good change in Algeria.”

Itchir underscored his total lack of confidence in elections, which the Algerian regime intends to rig with the support of the European imperialist powers, including France. “The elections begin on March 19. Bouteflika is going to win it,” he said. “They do it with stuffing—not the voice of the people. Everything is prepared—the lockers, the ballots, everything. That’s in Algeria, but we hope that that will change. We only wish good upon the country.”

He added that he placed his hopes in the escalation of struggles in Algeria: “They have protested in all 48 regions [*wilayas*]. We must have a radical change.”

The WSWs also spoke with Djilali and Elwan, two

Algerians originally from Kabylie, a majority Berber region. They expressed their determination for change and anger toward the capitalist regime of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which took power following the Algerian war for independence against France in 1954-1962.

“Algeria is ours,” Djilali said, before pointing to the intolerable situation for workers in the country. “A kilogram of potatoes costs 80 dinars; chili peppers, 220 dinars; beans, 300 dinars. Semolina is 5,000 dinars for per hundredweight. There is no housing. There is no work. We need it. You earn 18,000 dinars [the Algerian minimum wage]. You pay for electricity, rent, gas and it’s gone. We can’t live like this. It’s like in France.”

Elwan attacked the historical trajectory of the Algerian regime. “How many generations did they sacrifice?” he asked. “I was born in 1966. I saw nothing from the war of independence. But from 1966 to 2019, we had no luck. If Algeria was doing well, do you think I would have come to France, to live in this misery? Because it’s misery here, too.”

“In 2019, the people are revolting,” he said. “Now they have gained consciousness.”

He noted the difficulty of unifying the struggles of Arab and Berber workers and oppressed masses in the Maghreb, referring to the Berber revolt of 1949: “We revolted in 1949,” he said. “Every time, the other regions of the country said we were dividing the country, but it’s not true. We don’t want to divide the country.”

This raises the necessity for the unification of the struggles in Europe and the Maghreb in a socialist political movement of the working class, against the establishment parties. Referring to the Stalinist French Communist Party, which voted to support torture during the Algerian war, and the petty-bourgeois French parties allied to the FLN, Elwan said: “On the French elite, I can’t say anything. I don’t know French politics. But it’s France that supports the dictator there. Because otherwise, how does it happen that there are so many elections in Algeria and always the same leaders?”

But he stressed that the establishment parties in Algeria provided no perspective: “These are the parties of power. That is their language: divide and conquer. They create parties for themselves, an opposition elite, but at bottom there is no opposition. It’s 20 years since

Louisa Hanoune has been head of the Workers Party.”

Asked about the decision by Hanoune and the PT on Sunday to not participate in the elections, Elwan said: “She saw the people are waking up; she’s afraid. But she’s not a revolutionary. At the moment, it’s the same everywhere.”



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