

ALGERIA:

THE DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE FROM CAPITAL'S CIVIL SOCIETY PROVOKES A SERIOUS POLITICAL CRISIS. ONLY THE PROLETARIAT, BY FIGHTING INDEPENDENTLY, IS IN A POSITION TO STOP THE PRESENT UPHEAVAL ENDING UP WITH JUST RESTRUCTURING, MODERNISATION AND REINFORCEMENT OF THE BOURGEOIS STATE IN THAT COUNTRY.

A bourgeois democratic movement combined with the slow emergence of the exploited class, still limited to defensive struggles

The big wave of contestation which has been going on in Algeria since February 2019 was initially crystallised around opposition to Abdelaziz Bouteflika standing in the presidential elections. He had been head of state since 1999 on behalf of the FLN, the party-state in power since Independence in 1962. The announcement, on 10 February, of his candidacy for a fifth term was immediately and massively rejected by the Algerian population. Calls to protest were made the same day in Béjaïa, the next day in Oran. The first large-scale protests, on 15-16 February, in Bordj-Bou-Arreridj and Kherrata, but also in Chlef, Jijel and Aïn Beïda, extended the criticism to the regime itself, expressing themselves in slogans like: “Out with the FLN”, “The people want the fall of the regime”¹ and “Algeria free and democratic”.

The Friday marches on 22 February and 1 March were impressive in terms of their numbers (800,000 to 1 million protesters in Algiers) and their territorial extent, as well as by the fact that such things had not been seen for 30 years. They showed that the lead shroud imposed by the regime between 1988 and 2002, through civil war, had been well and truly torn. Nevertheless, that didn't stop the then Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia (RND), from threatening Algerians with a Syrian outcome of civil war if they took to

the streets, at the same time accusing them of following “foreign interests” in wanting to make the country fall into chaos.

The call for a “general strike” was unevenly answered between 8 and 14 March (and up to 17-18 and 26 March) by workers in public and private productive enterprises, principally in Kabylia², and among employees in administration and transport (public and private), teachers and university lecturers. These stoppages were aimed at the fall of the government but unfortunately did not attempt to directly and openly attack the social relations of capital.

Also, and more importantly for communists, since the end of March, strikes, protests by the unemployed and eruptions of proletarian violence have occurred in various parts of the country, signals which stand out from the “political” strikes at the beginning of the democratic movement. These have been massive struggles, spread over several weeks and often victorious, which centred on wages and working conditions, against redundancies, against the power within the workplace, every time beyond the control of the state union, the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers)³. Breaking with the preservation of national capitalist interests, proletarian interests began to emerge in fac-

¹ The same one used in Egypt in 2011!

² Workers in the ports of Bejaïa and Skikda, the oil and gas fields of Hassi Messaoud and Adrar, the industrial zones of Rouiba, Akbou and Bordj-Bou-Arreridj, and employees at the head office of Sonatrach at Boumerdes, the sales offices of Sonelgaz and Algérienne des eaux, as well as at Mobilis.

³ At the beginning of the movement the UGTA lost numerous local sections and workplace delegates. Its leader Abdelmadjid Sidi-Saïd was under pressure!

tories, ports and working class neighbourhoods. However, the first elements of workers' autonomy which surfaced were still mixed with a predominant worker reformism. It was a worker reformism aimed at improving conditions for the exploited within the framework of capitalist domination and which combined with the bourgeois democratic movement which fed it.

Defensive struggles increase and contain elements of workers' autonomy

Workers participated in demonstrations for democracy on an individual basis, without putting forward class demands. However, at some sites of production, the workers felt that the situation could be favourable to them, because the forces of state repression were mobilised to contain numerous demonstrations. In the steelworks and iron ore mines in particular, thousands of workers carried out long strikes, a continuation of struggles begun in previous years. They obtained important wage increases, and improvements in working conditions, without caring about the traditional con of the "general interest". They also swept aside the UGTA to negotiate directly with the company managements.

The most important class conflict took place on the site of the Turkish steelworks Tosyali in the district ("daïra"⁴) of Bethioua, close to Oran. This complex has a capacity to produce more than 4 million tonnes of reinforcing bar and wire, exports 70,000 tonnes of steel to the US and employs 4,800 staff, of which 4,000 are Algerians and 800 Turks. The Turks make up the management, the professional staff and the technicians. Strikes had already taken place in October 2013, then in May, June and August 2014. Significantly the strikers demanded the dissolution of the union section, which they considered as illegitimate, and the opening of wage negotiations. The *gendarmérie* then intervened against a picket line and arrested 15 workers. In October 2018, the workers

nominated 4 representatives to negotiate with the management. The conflict bounced back on 24 March. At issue were the insecurity of employment (there were no more than 35 permanent jobs out of 4,000 Algerian staff), strong wage differentials relative to the Turkish employees, and the arrogance of the Turkish managers. The attempted suicide of a warehouse worker, employed by the company for more than 3 years and afraid that his contract would not be renewed, put the match to the powder. The UGTA union section of the steel complex was the object of a petition of no-confidence signed by 2,200 workers. Of the 9 members making up the management of the section, 8 offered their resignations, only the president wanted to keep his post.

Ten days after the start of the conflict, the labour inspectors for the province⁵ of Oran demanded that the management re-hire the workers sacked for going on strike and to give permanent contracts to staff who had been there for a few years. Permanent contracts were the central issue in the conflict. The complex was then working in slow motion, with the 800 Turks providing a minimum service. On 24 April the hiring promises had not been fulfilled, the situation worsened and production practically stopped following the departure of the Turkish staff after clashes with the Algerian workers. On 27 April, 7 workers were arrested by the *gendarmérie* – they made up part of a black list of 39 drawn up by the Tosyali management. The *gendarmes* beat up the strikers who opposed their action. After 28 days of conflict, work resumed but the management began to regularise the situation of the contract workers, raising their wages by 15%, letting them have an annual bonus, and drafting a collective agreement allowing workers gathered in a general assembly to elect their union section. Nevertheless, there had been 4 arrests and 40 sackings, a repression only limited by the Oran provincial authority.

⁴ Algeria is divided in 547 districts (*daïras*). These correspond to the *arrondissements* created when Algeria was a French colony. The administration of each district is headed by a *chef de daïra* appointed by the Algerian President.

⁵ Algeria has 48 provinces (*wilayas*), each one is headed by a *Wali* appointed by the Algerian President, although it also has its own parliament and an elected president.

The month of April had been difficult for the Algerian steel industry because more than 70% of the workers in various iron ore mines in Ouenza had begun a strike on 31 March, which lasted for the whole month of April. Two weeks later, they were joined by the mineworkers of Boukhadra, causing losses of around a billion dinars. They demanded, amongst other things, improved working conditions, increase in the basic wage, and individual and collective bonuses, along with industrial accident compensation by social insurance. This action was considered illegal by the management of Mines de Fer de l'Est (Eastern iron ore mines - MFE) because the workers in these mines "*did not respect the social contract*" signed by their union reps during the negotiations which followed a first strike of one week in February, resulting in a wage increase of 9,000 dinars.

These two mines provide 2.3 million tonnes of iron ore per year to the Sider complex at El-Hadjar (Annaba). The strike led to it stopping after the stocks were exhausted. A work meeting took place on 30 April at the office of Tébessa province in the presence of the local chief executive, the general management of MFE, representatives of the union sections of the iron ore mines of Boukhadra and Ouenza, along with the acting director of the industry, to find some solutions. The representatives of MFE accepted to pay the strikers their wages for April (paid as holiday) and approved the incentive bonus that they demanded.

The blast furnace of the Sider El-Hadjar complex in Annaba had already been shut down for eight days because of the interruption in delivery of iron ore in February. The workers of SNTF (the national rail monopoly), which made the daily delivery of four trains of ore (1,400 tonnes), had stopped work from 12 to 26 February.

In Constantine province, the workers at *Entreprise des tracteurs agricoles* (Etrag), previously Sonacome, began striking at the beginning of April. But they restricted themselves to denouncing the way the company was run, without putting forward economic

demands even though they were on fixed term contracts.

At Mostaganem, a strike paralysed the port from 25 April to 13 May. All the port workers blocked the main entrance of the head office from 28 April. They demanded that the CEO resigns the lifting of the suspension of two officials who had accused him of corruption, the renewal of the contracts of a category of contractors, and the raising of wages by 20% back-dated to the beginning of January 2018. According to the CEO, also accused of corruption by the strikers, the finances of the port could not support a rise in wages for 750 staff of more than 15%. Nevertheless, after 18 days of stoppages, an agreement was reached; the management gave the 20% pay rise and promised not to bring charges against the strikers. The next general assembly of the workers had to lead to a renewal of the union section.

At the end of May, a strike began in the clothing company Alcost, situated in the centre of Béjaïa. The 730 workers went on strike after claiming that the commitments to increase wages, to integrate the contractors and improve working conditions, gained by a strike in January, had not been honoured.

"No increase, no work!" – Under this banner marched the workers of Eniem, a state-owned electrical goods company in Oued Aïssi, close to Tizi Ouzou. They remained on strike throughout May and obtained wage increases and improved working conditions. They also forced the members of the union section of the UGTA to resign their posts. The 2,000 workers from Eniem, a workplace created in 1983, had participated in demonstrations against the regime and against the management of the UGTA, accused of being on the side of the boss. For all that, they had not forgotten to fight as proletarians, notably announcing: "*We want a change of system and not a change in the system*".

At the end of April, some contamination affected the water used for drinking and watering trees in the town of Hammamet, 15 kilometres from the city of Tébessa. The inhabitants held the management of the pri-

vate water plant Youkous responsible. After an inspection of the plant, carried out diligently by the company, “*it was proved that the contamination came from the septic tanks of houses built illegally on land belonging to the plant*”. But a group of inhabitants occupied the plant and blocked one of the delivery lorries. Armed men came out to “free the lorry”. Protesters and residents chased them away and they fled into the plant, and then they opened fire, injuring a dozen people. Four people, including the owner of the plant, were questioned by the police. Then the inhabitants went back into the plant to set it on fire. Result: the loss of 23 water transport lorries, total destruction of storage hangars, and the burning of raw materials used to make bottles.

The bourgeois democratic movement is large and durable, but still insufficiently organised to face the regime bosses

Since 8 March, the date when women massively entered the demonstrations, bourgeois political democracy has irreversibly marched on and won over whole layers of capitalist civil society. So far, peaceful marches have been enough to destabilise the regime and the movement has not given itself over to recuperation by the organisations of ruling or opposition politics of the regime. The weekly Friday demonstrations carry on without weakening and cover a very large portion of the territory, including during the period of Ramadan starting in May. They are matched by the student Tuesdays, some union Wednesdays, and a multitude of gatherings putting forward demands on a local level expressing the interests of oppressed classes. Strongly rooted in young people in the education system⁶, the city unemployed and women, the democratic movement collected the discontent of all classes and class fractions of Algerian civil society, amplified and relayed by the associations for human rights

⁶ The first attempt at repression was aimed at the students, the real spearhead of the movement (there are 1.7 million students in 2019), who had been temporarily held back by the means of prolonging the spring break from 10 March and above all closing the university residences. On their return from the holidays on 14 April, they simply recreated their assemblies with their enthusiasm intact.

(NGOs) and sectors of the petty bourgeoisie (lawyers, judges, doctors, architects, shopkeepers) already acting as intermediate bodies emerging from the state.

Formulating demands for more political and individual liberties, but also for the renewal of the ruling class, the democratic movement inscribes itself within the framework of capitalist domination by demanding a modernising restructuration of the state and its intermediate bodies in the direction of the reinforcement of representative liberal democracy.

The working class has no role to play in this fight which, in the end, consolidates the dictatorship of capital. Nevertheless, this bourgeois democratic movement has allowed, certainly temporarily, the weakening of the state and, something which is significant, it stands in counter-tendency to the global rise of sovereigntists and the assertion of plebiscitary democracy (cf. the recent European and Indian elections).

The proletariat must not dissolve itself into this movement and must pursue the road of political autonomy, but it is not indifferent to new objective conditions more favourable to its own fight that the bourgeois democratic movement creates today.

Incapable of organising itself accordingly, overcome by contradictory interests and aspirations, the democratic movement is not succeeding in asserting itself in the face of the Army, which always keeps hold of the state, in tight cooperation with the nationalised energy sector, the other spinal column of the regime.

Up until now, the dominant executive bloc has in no way crumbled. The Army – under the leadership of the General and Minister of Defence, Ahmed Gaïd Salah – straight away realised the nature and gravity of the crisis. Preserving the continuity of the state and the dominant fractions of capital, for all that, it has not cut channels of communication with the democratic movement. The Army skilfully made “concessions” by satisfying the “anti-corruption” demands of the movement: removal of Bouteflika (2 April), reshuffling the government, announcing the election (intended for 18 April), en-

gagement of the *ad hoc* constitutional procedure (Article 102), all following a vast purge of the executive and its closest supporters, aiming in particular at Bouteflika's circle. The latest act to date, on 2 June 2019, was the annulment of the presidential election called for 4 July 2019 by the Constitutional Court. The date of 4 July had previously been proudly defended by the High Command which now had to oversee its agenda of controlled "transition".

None of these pledges has been enough to reabsorb the democratic movement. It has continued to call for the total rejection of the "system" and the necessity for an overhaul of the state in the form of a Second Republic, parliamentary, modernised and liberal. Timidly at first, "removalism" is progressively applied to the running of the transition by the Army, and more generally to its place in the state.

The Army understands very well the need for change and democratic renewal. But its thinly veiled objective remains to hammer out a new historic compromise to extend it but without profoundly modifying the basis of the regime by the integration of an opposition more effectively capable of expressing the various components of capitalist civil society. In fact, this project follows on from the restructuration of the state and its executive started in 1988 with the opening to multi-party democracy then, in 1999, with the law of Civil Concord.

To succeed in its aims the High Command can count on the fundamental limit of the democratic movement: its incapacity to represent politically and in an organised way an alternative social bloc to the one which is dominant today. A social bloc which would represent more largely the interests of all the fractions of capital in Algeria, notably those of the private sector of the economy.

This limit allows the Army to put itself formally "*on the side of the movement*" which it "*accompanies*" while keeping control of the transition. The lasting remilitarisation of the regime cannot be ruled out, but it will not correspond to the interests of capital in Algeria, which compel the state to adapt

itself to the world market and to incarnate more efficiently the interests of developed capitalism. In effect, despite the existence of whole layers of society still attached to backward fractions of capital, Algeria is a modern capitalist country, where state capital is largely dominant. It is relatively efficient and capable, notably in the energy sector, of facing international competition.

Social capital in Algeria needs a political representation which is larger and better adapted to global competition

The economic and political domination of the bourgeoisie in Algeria rests principally on the management of oil and gas rent. The export of hydrocarbons accounts for 97% of the revenue in hard currency in Algeria. It represents 30% of GDP and generates around 60% of state income⁷. Variations in the price of oil have a direct impact on the stability of external debt, on the capacity to buy social peace by unproductive expenditure aimed at the population ("political" prices below value of certain commodities, and various state benefits) and, above all, on the financing of industry and commerce. The bosses' front (the *Forum des chefs d'entreprises* – FCE – chaired until his arrest on 31 March by Ali Haddad, one of the main financiers of Bouteflika's election campaign)

⁷ The foreign exchange reserves of Algeria reached 79.88 billion US dollars at the end of December 2018, against 97.33 billion USD at the end of 2017, a contraction of 17.45 billion USD, announced the Bank of Algeria (BA). While this fall testifies to the declining receipts of hard currency because of lower hydrocarbon exports and also expenses agreed by the state to preserve social peace, foreign exchange reserves still correspond to around six months of GDP. According to the customs services, Algeria finished the year 2018 with a trade deficit of 5.03 billion USD. "The Central Bank of Algeria pleaded on this occasion for "supported adjustment efforts", aimed at "improving the recovery of ordinary taxation (including by rationalising subsidies), freeing up the strong potential for growth of the national economy and diversifying the domestic offering and export of goods and services". 97% of the foreign currency receipts of Algeria come from sales of hydrocarbons. The decline in its foreign exchange reserves is explained by the fall in the oil price in the second half of 2014, when it went from 117 dollars/barrel to only 27 dollars in February 2016, turning to 60 dollars today", stated the Chinese news agency Xinhua. "*Exchange reserves continue to melt away at a disturbing rate, presently at just under 71 billion USD, according to our sources. Annual falls in reserves, linked to deficits in the balance of payments, translate, according to the Banque d'Algérie, into a net excess of domestic expenditure of all economic agents over national income, that is to say, excess of imports over exports*". (<https://www.tsa-algerie.com/lurgence-dun-gouvernement-de-vraies-competences/>)

monopolises 80% of the public markets financed by rent, principally in construction.

The rent is therefore principally used for capitalist development. But the state which manages it still does not allow it to generate sufficient valorisation for a world market which is very competitive and where prices of hydrocarbons fluctuate wildly. What's more, the banking system is next to useless in its role of selective financing of the local economy.

After the so-called black decade (1992-2002) marked by the long civil war which undermined the productive fabric, Bouteflika launched a phase of pacification and modernisation of social relations. During the first fifteen years of his reign, benefiting from the high price of hydrocarbons, the state managed to significantly reduce its debt, to develop its infrastructure, to modernise its industry and to establish a rather durable social peace. In 2014, the fall in prices, as well as the fall in production, then of exports, of crude oil and natural gas, accentuated by an increase in imports, plunged the state into a fiscal crisis.

To deal with this, the government adopted measures to clean up public expenditure and protectionist operations, and to raise taxes on some products. All this without touching subsidies on staple foods or unproductive expenditure on education, health and housing. The financing of this economic policy was made possible by printing money. In 2018, more than 6,500 billion dinars (a third of GDP, some 50 billion US dollars) was thus injected into the system by the Central Bank and the Treasury. Yet the population, of all classes, began to worry about the after-oil period. The Algerian state became the target of severe criticism of its organisation and even its form.

Within the proletariat, discontent grew because of degraded conditions of reproduction, lack of jobs and low wages.

The last five-year plan drawn up by the government provided for supporting pro-

duction in several industrial sectors⁸, reducing imports⁹ and steadying the balance of trade in the growing deficit. The plan also tried to attract foreign investment so as to support national SMEs. But this ambitious manoeuvre – which, according to its conceivers, would definitely bear fruit starting in 2020-2022 – has to this day only had very timid results.

It also proved to be the case that the restructuring of the Algerian economic formation and the organisation of the state was perpetually held back by the clan which monopolised executive power and which therefore ran the state. Private productive entrepreneurialism was held back by the clientelism and corruption which, above all, infected the sphere of credit.

Faced with the determination of the capitalists – those who didn't profit from the system – to be represented at the summit of the state and to be able to more freely access the world market of capital and commodities, and that of wide sectors of the petty bourgeoisie (liberal professions and shopkeepers above all) to have a say in the legislature, the Army privileged the *status quo* and the economic nationalism which protects the energy complex.

This is shown by the arrest and replacement of the boss of Sonatrach, Abdelmoumen Ould Kaddour, who had a plan to diversify and internationalise the company.

The union of the people sealed with the anticolonial myth paves the way to a Bonapartist outcome – civilian or military

"It is becoming more and more clear to me that the bourgeoisie has not the stuff in it to rule directly itself, and that therefore unless there is an oligarchy, as here in England, capable of taking over, for good pay, the management of state and society in the interests of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist semi-

⁸ Principally in seven sectors judged high priority: iron and steel, engineering and mechanical, electrical and electronic, food processing, chemicals and plastics, pharmaceuticals, construction materials. Official statistics showed that the industrial sector (apart from energy) grew more quickly than the other components of GDP. From 6.7 billion euros in 2015, the turnover of the industrial sector rose to 7.2 billion in 2016 and 8 billion in 2017, then representing 6.3% of GDP against 5.6% in 2016.

⁹ Domestic production meets only 50% of needs.

dictatorship is the normal form. It upholds the big material interests of the bourgeoisie even against the will of the bourgeoisie, but allows the bourgeoisie no share in the government. The dictatorship in its turn is forced against its will to adopt these material interests of the bourgeoisie as its own.” (Friedrich Engels, Letter to Karl Marx in Margate, 13 April 1866¹⁰)

Accruing defections on all sides, the crisis of the summit was marked by a “clan war”, latent since at least the Fourth Mandate. Until then, Bouteflika succeeded in sharing out the rent and therefore making a synthesis of the various networks of the regime.

From the first day, the democratic movement proved that the mechanisms of stability of the executive power had eroded. Very, very quickly, the *Front de libération nationale* – FLN – (and its little brother the *Rassemblement national démocratique* – RND) was hit, losing numerous active members, suffering break-aways and defection of historic organisations including those of the *Moudjahidine*, the fighters in the war of liberation from France. The Front thus chose to reposition itself on the side of the Army’s High Command.

“As far as both workers and capitalists are concerned, Bonapartism is characterised by the fact that it prevents them coming to blows with each other. In other words, it protects the bourgeoisie from any violent attacks by the workers, encourages a little gentle skirmishing between the two classes and furthermore deprives both alike of the faintest trace of political power. No freedom of association, no freedom of assembly, no freedom of the press; universal suffrage under such bureaucratic pressure that election of the opposition is almost impossible; police-control of a kind that had previously been unknown even in police-ridden France. Besides which, sections of the bourgeoisie and of the workers are simply bought; the former by colossal credit-swindles, by which

the money of the small capitalists is attracted into the pockets of the big ones; the latter by colossal state construction-schemes which concentrate an artificial, imperial proletariat dependent on the government in the big towns alongside the natural, independent proletariat. Finally, national pride is flattered by apparently heroic wars, which are however always conducted with the approval of the high authorities of Europe against the general scapegoat of the day and only on such conditions as ensure victory from the outset.

The most that such a government can do either for the workers or for the bourgeoisie is to allow them to recuperate from the struggle, to allow industry to develop strongly — other circumstances being favourable — to allow the elements of a new and more violent struggle to evolve therefore, and to allow this struggle to erupt as soon as the need for such recuperation has passed. It would be the absolute height of folly to expect any more for the workers from a government which exists simply and solely for the purpose of holding the workers in check as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned.” (Engels, The Prussian Military Question and the German Workers' Party, 1865¹¹)

As we write, the regime continually faces the difficulty of building a political equilibrium between the fractions of the bourgeoisie. The guarantee of continuity of the state while the former intermediate bodies decompose and the bourgeoisie is persistently incapable of directly expressing its historic project, has opened the door to political control by the Army.

The incapacity of the bourgeois democratic movement to structure itself around a clear plan can in its turn open the way to a transitory solution of the Bonapartist type, civilian or military, the only one capable of avoiding the collapse of the core of the state (the energy and military bloc and the public administration). This solution follows the path of minimal purification of the old re-

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https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1866/letters/66_04_13.htm

¹¹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/12.htm>

gime and will ensure the progressive enlargement of the social base of the state to other forces issuing from civil society. The Bonapartist outcome would also have the function of preventing class confrontations¹² of any size by, if necessary, repression and subsequent restriction of civil liberties.

Unity of the Army and the people, the main ideological weapon which enables a Bonapartist outcome for the political crisis

Wedded to Article 102 of the Constitution, the Army has perfectly expressed a message sent by a significant part of the movement: “*People’s Army of Brothers*”. It is in phase with the patriotic flattery of the founding myths and heroes of the nation which they never cease to invoke. The FLN and the *Moudjahidines* are now aligned around Gaïd Salah who calls on the movement to choose its political representatives.

Proposals to resolve the crisis, which are rather confused because they are confined within the narrow framework of the Constitution, have emerged from capitalist civil society. The most liberal fringes demand the organisation of a Constituent Assembly. It’s a step the Army doesn’t want to take because it’s too risky for its project of normalisation and continuity.

Another part of the bourgeois democratic movement channels itself into preserving the present situation by aiming at the adjournment of the elections planned for 4 July 2019: a totally insufficient demand which paradoxically and involuntarily reinforces the Bonapartist perspective. A demand which was, in fact, satisfied on 2 June by the Constitutional Court.

As for Islamists, the ex-FIS are present in the democratic movement in a scattered way. For now, they are still pretty disorganised while the pietist Salafists are lined up with the FLN. This, we have to say in passing, is excellent news: the Islamist

scarecrow no longer strikes fear, in particular in the generation born after the “years of lead”. A new generation which has only known the reign of Bouteflika (45% of Algerians are under 25), which eradicated *and* integrated the Islamists by force and by amnesty. Most of the imams are under the control of the regime and the present opposition movement does not spare them from criticism.

Despite the weakness of political proposals concocted by the bourgeois democratic movement, at this stage, only the fear of military violence risks pushing back the mobilisation. This pushback, obtained by whatever means are necessary, is what is at stake for the Bonapartist solution where the Army puts itself in charge of consolidating the dictatorship of capital even against itself and its representatives. But the danger that the Army ends up tipping towards extra-institutional Bonapartism could convince the more moderate sections of the bourgeois democratic movement to “preventively” challenge the High Command in exchange for some crumbs.

Thus, today, the central question which is posed to the democratic movement in its entirety is knowing who will take it over, the part most advanced and hardest to fool – students in the big cities and Kabyle movements essentially – or the fringes disposed to adhere to the Army’s project of normalisation. Today it looks like the educated youth mobilised on a weekly basis cannot win the political battle within the bourgeois democratic movement as a whole. And for good reason. Only by joining up with the proletariat on the basis of struggle can they do that.

The absence of organised workers autonomy prevents any imaginable revolutionary outcome to the Algerian political crisis. And it objectively weakens the libertarian components of the bourgeois democratic movement which could find in the working class, if it was fighting for itself, a solid support for their aspirations.

¹² “the basic condition of modern Bonapartism, an equilibrium between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat”, Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, 1872, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/ch02.htm>

Only the proletariat constituted as an autonomous political force can create a pre-revolutionary situation

To sum it up, for the moment the dominant capitalist bloc has still not reconstituted itself and the fractions of the bourgeoisie cannot agree on the replacement of the management of the state. As for the proletariat, its defensive struggles rise in power, and contain elements of workers' autonomy. Their victories on the defensive terrain are likely to give confidence to the workers' movement and to contribute to aggravating the crisis of the system. The state-boss is thus going through a very difficult period, and while the "clean hands" operation piloted by the Army is not aimed directly at companies, its fallout begins to affect the productive sector. Investment is falling; banks are not taking any risks with loans.

In a word, Algeria is grappling with an acute political crisis which penalises the valorisation of capital. Those above can no longer run the country because those below no longer want them to. For all that, a proletarian revolutionary outcome is hardly on the agenda. Today, the only possible perspective which avoids the worst is that of an emergency liberal democratic restructuring of the state and the economy which redraws the dominant political and economic bloc. Only on this condition, can we envisage a real change at the top of the executive, the constitution of new modernised intermediate bodies, plus independent of the executive, trade union pluralism and reforms which liberalise the economy and maximise the valorisation of capital.

For the exploited class, on the other hand, what is crucial is the massive entry into struggle of its most concentrated sections, those who work in big state enterprises, above all the energy companies. Highly centralised capital in Algeria is in this sense a potential asset of the revolutionary class.

If these sectors of the working class take up the weapon of the strike and insubordination to the command of the workplace, conditions begin to come together for the polarisation of the classes of civil society of capital to at last materialise, opening the way

to forms of workers' power. The working class has nothing to win and everything to lose if its direct and collective action remains trapped in the choice between restructuring of the existing regime under the sign of continuity and the Army, or that of a more modern liberal parliamentary democracy.

The proletarian movement has no other option than that of distinguishing itself, of autotomizing itself from the bourgeois democratic movement, including its most militant fringes. Those, on the contrary, must accept fighting on the terrain of class struggle to realise their libertarian aspirations. No positive dialectic can be established between the proletariat and the democratic petty bourgeoisie.

The first exists as a class for itself by combatting all fractions of the dominant classes, whatever their particular positions.

In contrast, the second, including its most liberal political components, intends to consolidate and reinforce the domination of capital, and therefore the exploitation of the workers, by increasing the political and social weight of the state and restructuring it to make it more effectively defend the interests of the dominant classes.

If the opening of a period of instability and political crisis is propitious for the collective expression of class hatred, at this stage the proletarian movement shows no sign of separating itself from the democratic movement and its ideological hegemony. The exploited class is channelled into defensive economic struggles, under the ideology of workers' reformism. In these conditions, it is highly improbable that the proletariat will quickly take the lead in autonomous political organisation.

Thus, as it enters the scene still rather timidly the proletariat must fix on the objective of consolidating the elements of workers autonomy which it has already expressed. The exploited class is finding its way very slowly through struggles which are still relatively infrequent. Struggles which are, in fact and as we've stressed already, systematically crowned with success. They are not immediately confronted with repression because of active and massive participation by the

workers and the temporary weakness of the state. The presence in force of the young unemployed, whose demands are essentially centred on income and jobs, offers hope that the fight will go outside productive units in an agitation which takes over working class neighbourhoods and other territories populated by the absolutely poor.

For communists, the main inherent limit to any bourgeois democratic movement, including that in Algeria, can be summarised as their compatibility with the domination of capital. In Algeria, demands for freedom which is political (bourgeois democracy essentially) and libertarian (individual freedom compatible with class war only if achieved by direct action) emerge without the working class fighting the first and absorbing the latter into its own independent political movement.

Is the working class in Algeria thus condemned here and now to play a minor role in the political crisis of the domination of capital? Certainly not. In the longer term, it cannot be excluded that, once the bourgeois democratic movement has run dry, that workers' struggles gradually rise in force towards political revolutionary organisation and struggle. That is our wish and our commitment.

“If the working class can have an interest in a democratic step which facilitates its organisation and its struggles, for this to work it must establish a total demarcation with bourgeois democratic demands and it does not support, directly or indirectly, the process of restructuration of the state. Revolutionary proletarians must find their place in this kind of movement by promoting its social content. To do this it's necessary to put forward themes of struggle against exploitation in the factory, in workplaces generally, in working class neighbourhoods... of combat against all states, irrespective of their particular regimes, and of the political independence of the working class. Democratic demands must be transcended by the practice of a new social order, by the installation of new ways and modes of cooperative life inspired by the revolutionary process. Revolutionary proletarians don't ask the

state for freedom, they take it. In this framework, the first enemy to be defeated is the one which creeps into the movement, whether it is social-democratic, Stalinist, liberal or fascist. Democratic movements constitute just a moment in the long term struggle to destroy capitalism. The compass which guides the working class is that of always promoting its own needs.”

(Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu, May 2015, “What are all these democracy movements about?”¹³)

“No formalisation of individual and collective freedoms in the framework of the state is satisfactory because in the end it favours the stabilisation of the capitalist mode of production and the reinforcement of state domination over the subaltern classes. The formalisation of demands for freedom by democratic movements is the best path for ensuring that they are channelled into the dynamics of negotiation with the state and lose all their subversive potential. The only means for avoiding this impasse is for democratic movements to concretise their aspirations in a durable and autonomous fashion, satisfying the needs which gave rise to them by intransigent struggle. These needs, in addition, must not be reduced to the desire for more individual and collective freedoms for urbanised populations.” (Ibidem)

MC/KpK, 6 June 2019

¹³ <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/LTMC1540%20ENvF.pdf>