



TRADE UNIONS AND THE ALGERIAN UPRISING

A Research Report by MENA Solidarity Network

READ MIDDLE EAST SOLIDARITY

Middle East Solidarity

Issue 13 • Spring 2019 • £3

VIRAL RESISTANCE?

Looking back on a year of revolts - preparing for pandemic



Middle East Solidarity

Issue 12 • Autumn 2018 • £3



OUTSOURCING FORTRESS EUROPE

Middle East Solidarity

Issue 11 • Summer 2018 • £3



The people vs the generals



Sudan's revolution at the grassroots
Insurgent movements continue to challenge for change from below

Algeria: a year in the streets
Looking back from the first and looking forward to the presidential election

'We just want them all to go'
Why are we still waiting for a popular movement to demand a new constitution?

Latter from Raqqa
What has the new front line in Raqqa been doing in the last few months?

Refugees and Lebanon's revolt
How the Syrian left has been left behind in the aftermath of the 2016 election

Sounding the alarm for solidarity
A single strike to challenge the EU's migrant crisis

Rebranding Sudan's brutal militia
How the EU's migrant crisis has been used to rebrand the SPLA

Towards a new Algerian republic?
What can the new constitution mean for the people?

Clampdown after Egypt protests
Over 1000 deaths in the last few months of the revolution

Sowing the seeds of hunger in Iraq
Over 1000 deaths in the last few months of the revolution

The regime strikes back
Regional powers plot counter-revolution in Iraq

Algeria: the storm breaks
Where will the revolution go next?

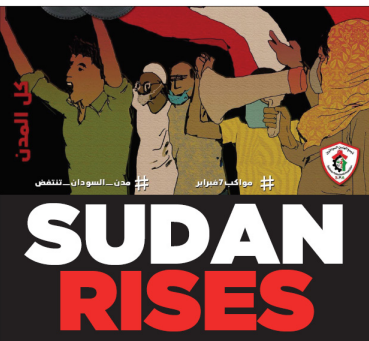
Last stand of the Syrian rebellion?
The battle for Aleppo will not bring peace

'We will not be party to a war atrocity'
Can the Syrian left make a difference?

Saudi women speak out
Challenges to male patriarchy are growing

Middle East Solidarity

Issue 10 • Spring 2018 • £3



SUDAN RISES

Middle East Solidarity

Issue 9 • Autumn 2017 • £3



RESISTING THE KINGDOM OF FEAR

Middle East Solidarity

Issue 8 • Spring 2017 • £3



Jerusalem: whose capital?

'We are no longer scared of death'
Sudanese activists speak out on the ongoing struggle

British universities scramble for profit
Student activists speak out on the ongoing struggle

Four thousand years of Palestine
Historians look back at the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration

The new battle for Africa
Tensions between African groups are rising as the continent's future is debated

Israel election rivalries
How the new election will affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Saudi Arabia's exposed
The kingdom's dark secrets are being revealed

Cambridge University's complicity in war
How the university is supporting the British military

Basra's summer of discontent
How the city's residents are protesting against the government

Academics slam Egypt 'partnerships'
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

Defending free speech on Palestine
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

A struggle for existence
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

March of Return defies occupation
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

Knowledge and analysis
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

This is Bahrain?
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

Jerusalem: whose capital?
How the government is using the revolution to its advantage

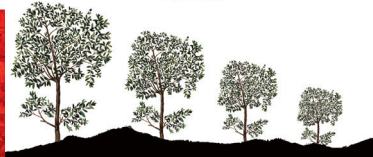
Middle East Solidarity

Issue 7 • Autumn 2017 • £3



Middle East Solidarity

Issue 6 • Summer 2017 • £3



Middle East Solidarity

Issue 5 • Spring 2017 • £3



'Solidarity and resistance are the way forward'

US activists challenge Trump's Middle East agenda

Order your copy at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com

CONTENTS

Introduction: a year in the streets	4
Algeria's trade unions: a history	8
The struggle in Kabylia	12
Algeria's trade unions (continued)	14
The battle for change in the classroom	17
The unemployed movement	20
Trade unions and the hirak	21
Women and the fight for liberation	25
Students build unity in struggle	26
Britain fuels repression	29
Preparing for the struggle ahead	31
Solidarity guide to action	33

Editing and layout by Anne Alexander. Cover photos and image on p8, Zoheir Aberkane. Text and images © the individual authors and photographers.



On the streets in Algiers, February 2020
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

INTRODUCTION: A YEAR IN THE STREETS

Shelagh Smith

On 12 December 2019 a new president was declared elected in Algeria, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, despite the fact that millions of Algerians boycotted the election, which they saw as illegitimate. Since February 2019 millions have protested peacefully, every Tuesday and Friday, against a corrupt regime, and have been demanding system change.

The movement, or Hirak, forced president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to step down on 2 April after 20 years in power, after he proposed to stand for a 5th term. It then forced the postponement of two

presidential elections, in April and July, because people refused simply a change of faces at the top in an unchanged system. Protesters want the removal of an entrenched political and military class that has held power in Algeria since independence from France in 1962. They demand a civilian, not a military state, based on the rule of law.

The protests are always peaceful, and full of satire, humour, chants and songs. There is extensive use of social media, especially Facebook. Some activists have been arrested merely because of their

support for the Hirak on Facebook.

There have been many sectional strikes, for example education, health, public administration, lawyers, magistrates, port workers and the energy sector. Teachers have a long history of struggle, both on socio-economic issues and also in support of the popular movement.

Several general strikes took place between March and December. The first of these in March was instrumental in forcing Bouteflika to quit. A nationwide general strike was called for the four days prior to the December election. It was solid in Kabylia; in Bejaia there was a united call by numerous trade unions, political parties and other organisations. However, it was only partly successful in Algiers, and failed to be supported so well in other areas of the country.

The Algerian government is known as “Le Pouvoir” (The Power) or “the gang”, with power shared between the army, the National Liberation Front (FLN), businessmen and the intelligence services. The army has played the key role since independence, and also has a stake in major businesses.

During 2019 General Gaïd Salah was Algeria’s strongman and de facto ruler, until he died in December. He was succeeded by Saïd Chengriha, Acting Chief of Military Staff.

In June Gaïd Salah banned Amazigh (Berber) flags, and blocked access to Algiers for demonstrators. There has been an increase in repression since June 2019, with mass arrests and heavy policing. Hundreds have been kept in pre-trial detention, and prison sentences handed out – “justice by telephone”

as the Algerians call it. The media is controlled by the government, journalists have been imprisoned and censorship has increased.

There has been an anti-corruption campaign, widely seen as a war between the ruling clans. There are also attempts to divide and rule, with accusations of “foreign interference”.

But significantly, the Hirak has united all the country for the first time in recent history in opposing the regime, and it has resisted the divide and rule tactics of repression.

Since Tebboune’s election, there has been talk of dialogue and negotiation, but repression and arbitrary arrests have continued. Human rights defenders, journalists, activists and politicians are still detained.

Hundreds remain in custody, some for “harming the integrity of the national territory,” which carries sentences of up to 10 years, others for “undermining the morale of the troops”, and “unarmed assembly”.

Others, like Samira Messouci, former elected representative for the RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy), have served six months in prison merely for carrying the Berber flag.

The situation of prisoners and detainees is contradictory. By 6th February Tebboune had pardoned nearly 10,000 people sentenced to less than 18 months. But the CNLD (National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees) said the pardons excluded the 142 Hirak political prisoners who were still in preventive detention, while over a thousand are being prosecuted for participating in the movement. Some

Introduction



Mobilising for the election boycott, December 2019
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

detainees have been acquitted, others released after serving their sentences or pending trial. Human rights activists denounce the current situation of many ex-Hirak detainees, whom public and private companies refuse to reinstate in their jobs.

In an attempt to end the Hirak, the new president Tebboune has been meeting with some politicians who are in favour of dialogue under the government's terms, including the main Islamist party the MSP (Society for Peace

Movement). The Hirak has rejected calls for dialogue with what they see as an illegitimate president, and refuse to be represented by political parties who claim to speak for them.

Tebboune has set up a 'committee of experts' to amend the constitution. Critics point out the tradition of previous constitutional amendments which have done nothing to alter the real exercise of power by the regime, and serve only to highlight the crisis in the system.

After Abdelmadjid Tebboune was

declared president in December 2019, some expected that his talk of dialogue would lead to the freeing of political prisoners and a reduction in repression. The opposite has been the case.

Many Hirak activists have been arrested and imprisoned. Since the coronavirus pandemic started, the Hirak has ceased street demonstrations. However, the regime is using the crisis to continue its repression of the movement, and clamp down on activists, opposition politicians and journalists.

The PAD (Forces of the Pact for the Democratic Alternative) is a movement formed during the Hirak, and involves opposition political parties, associations, members of civil society, women, young people, human rights organisations and autonomous trade unions.

It calls for a transitional period for the establishment of the rule of law, a sovereign constituent process, the independence of the judiciary, free expression and the release of Hirak prisoners of conscience.

The PAD rejects the masquerade of the last presidential election and the current political operation which, through “consultations” and “constitutional review”, aims to legitimise the same power in place.

Algeria also faces economic problems and increased financial pressure caused by a fall in energy revenues and foreign exchange reserves. The regime decided in 2013 to exploit the reserves of shale gas in the Sahara, the third largest reserve in the world, a decision supported by the major oil companies.

Fracking will endanger the precious fresh water reserves under the Sahara

which are shared by Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. In 2014 there was a huge uprising of tens of thousands of people against shale gas, resulting in a suspension of drilling in 2015. Now Tebboune has announced drilling for shale gas will resume, but in 2020 it's the millions in the Hirak who now say “No to shale gas”.

After one year of demonstrations, strikes and boycotts, the stalemate may lead some to be tempted into compromise. Trying to regain legitimacy, the regime declared February 22 a national holiday for the “blessed Hirak”, and is courting certain politicians to support its revision of the constitution, while continuing with harsh repression. It has no intention of giving up any of its power.

While the anniversary of the Hirak saw a rejuvenation of the movement. However, the coronavirus pandemic has now forced a change of tactic. For the first time since the start of the Hirak over a year ago, and by common agreement, all demonstrations were suspended on 17 March.

Karim Tabbou, leader of the UDS (Democratic and Social Union), urged using this period to prepare for future struggles and to preserve the achievements of the Hirak, as the regime will try to use the situation to snuff out the revolution.

The demands of the movement remain: “a civilian not a military state”, “free the political prisoners”, “an independent judiciary”, “freedom of the press”, “the people want the downfall of the regime.” The Algerian people will find other ways to continue the struggle.



ALGERIA'S TRADE UNIONS: A HISTORY

Samir Larabi

Algerian workers had their first experiences of trade unions during the colonial period, under the aegis of the French unions established in Algeria, and amongst émigré workers in France.

The first General Confederation of Labour (CGT) trade union sections in Algeria were created from 1898, exclusively for the benefit of the settlers, because the Indigenous Code in force prohibited Algerians from joining any association or organisation.

Not being subject to this Indigenous Code in metropolitan France, Algerian workers increasingly joined the CGT.

Many union leaders emerged from this working-class population, essentially made up of industrial workers, and union action was thus strengthened despite the fact of colonialism. The arrival of the Popular Front in power in France and the repeal of the Code strengthened union action to the benefit of indigenous workers in Algeria.

The latter joined the CGT in force, and the CGT Algiers section grew to a record number of over 250,000 members.

However, with the end of the Second World War and the tragic events of May 8, 1945 (where tens of thousands of Algerian civilians were massacred by French colonial authorities and settler militias), which the CGT had been careful not to condemn openly, a break with the French unions occurred.

Within the Movement for the

Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) thoughts moved towards the need to found an Algerian national trade union, and the CGT Algiers membership dropped to 80,000.

A few years later, losing momentum in Algeria, the CGT decided to create an Algerian trade union organisation, with an Algerian leadership, with the creation in June 1954 of the General Union of Algerian Trade Unions (UGSA), which now demanded equal rights between Algerian and French workers.

After the start of the revolution the UGSA adopted nationalist revolutionary demands, realizing that the problem was not only economic and social, but political. In retaliation, Governor General Robert Lacoste dissolved the UGSA in 1956.

The outbreak of the revolution of November 1, 1954 also revealed big disagreements within the national movement, disagreements which extended into the union field.

The Messalists (followers of Messali El Hadj, considered the father of Algerian nationalism) created the Union of Algerian Workers (USTA) on February 20, 1956, followed four days later by the National Liberation Front (FLN) which announced the creation of the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA).

The history of the Algerian post-independence trade union movement is intimately linked to that of the UGTA.

Born during the Algerian revolution to mobilise workers for the national cause under the political leadership of the FLN, the UGTA had a nationalist identity more than a class identity.

In the aftermath of independence, it sought to maintain its autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the power struggles of the time, while supporting official social and economic measures. But at the 1969 Congress, the government forcibly parachuted in a leadership and annexed the national union to the party-state, making it an official "mass organisation".

The UGTA became the privileged instrument of the regime to carry out its various political campaigns. Many union leaders were co-opted to become state and party officials.

However, this takeover did not prevent workers from carrying out major strikes in the years 1977 to 1982 and winning victories. But the state intervened to put an end to this rise in struggle which also called into question the power of the bureaucracy and the single party.

It instituted the famous articles 120 and 121, which required prior membership of the party to access positions of responsibility at the level of the state apparatus and mass organisations. Admittedly, the adoption of these two articles in the early 1980s contributed to the weakening of the national union and several officials were ejected, including the communists.

However, workers' strikes were on the rise, especially as the country was heading for a deep economic and social crisis around the mid-1980s. The period 1983-1986 saw 3,528 strikes in the

Timeline

1954 - Algerian War of Independence launched by the FLN (National Liberation Front) on 1 November.

1962 - Algeria wins its independence.

1963 - Ahmed Ben Bella elected as the first president of Algeria.

1965 - Colonel Houari Boumedienne overthrows Ben Bella, establishing a military one-party regime (the FLN).

1988 - Widespread rioting takes place against austerity and food shortages.

1989 - New political parties are allowed, including the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front).

1991 - The FIS wins the first round of the general elections, and looks certain to win the second round.

1992 - The Army cancels the second round of elections and declares a state of emergency. Ten years of civil war follow.

1999 - Abdelaziz Bouteflika elected president after all opposition candidates withdraw, claiming vote rigging

public sector, against 2,298 in the private sector, a total of 5,826 strikes combined.

The workers' strikes of 1988, which led to the bloody revolts of October and the advent of union pluralism, fundamentally changed the Algerian union scene. Far from becoming autonomous, the national union maintained its course and became increasingly bureaucratic.

Over the years, the UGTA turned its back on the aspirations of workers and supported the economic policies of successive governments. Any attempt at workers' resistance was systematically

repressed by the union bureaucracy.

The promulgation of Law 90-14 in 1990 allowed trade union pluralism. As a result, around fifty autonomous unions were created, thus transforming the trade union structure in Algeria. Almost all of these unions were established in the public sector. This pluralism benefited officials and civil/public servants rather than industrial workers.

Public servants took advantage of pluralism to form autonomous unions and leave the structures of the UGTA in which they no longer felt at home. In fact the proliferation of these so-called “autonomous” unions also expressed the tendency of these middle classes wishing to renegotiate their status in the face of the structural adjustment plans imposed by the IMF on the one hand, and the lack of freedom within the historical national union (UGTA) on the other.

In fact, the various battles fought by these “white collar” unions have been suppressed by UGTA's bureaucracy, particularly in the national education sector. These organisations have shown great union fighting spirit in recent years, around issues of wages, status and the defense of union freedom.

Since the legalisation of trade union pluralism, Algeria has some 70 autonomous professional unions, divided between the public and private sectors, in addition to the employers' confederations.

On the economic and social scene three actors make up the tripartite social dialogue in Algeria: the government, the bosses and the union social partner represented only by the UGTA, excluding the autonomous trade union formations.

Indeed, the emergence of autonomous unions has affected the balance of power, since government circles had become used to deciding for workers and their union representatives.

Despite trade union pluralism, the UGTA has preserved its exclusive advantages, including participation in the board meetings of social organisations. The state, which has recognised the right to create autonomous unions, has continued to exclude them and impose the UGTA as the sole representative of workers during the tripartite social dialogues.

Despite the promulgation of the constitution of February 23, 1989 which enshrines political, civil society and union pluralism, the authorities have for years categorically refused any request for the approval of certain autonomous unions or the building of union confederations, thus violating existing laws and international conventions. Dozens of unions have emerged and received approval, with no notable change in the treatment of union work by public authorities and employers.

Many unions still complain about obstacles to the free exercise of the right to organise and the repression and the criminalisation of trade union action. For years, the government and the employers have used an abuse of justice to break up strikes and protest movements of employees.

A phenomenon that has become recurrent in all sectors of activity, not only the autonomous unions but also certain combative sectors of the UGTA, is that in several cases they are victims of legal proceedings, suspensions or unfair

dismissal.

This practice has become “structural” among public authorities and employers (public and private). The private sector does not recognise union work, or the union as a partner. It is as if Algeria were returning to an era of savage capitalism, and in some cases a tacit alliance between private employers and the state regarding certain anti-union practices.

In addition to this arsenal, the government has resorted to the “cloning” of unions in order to create confusion and splits and thus put a brake on the organisational strategy and independence of the functioning of these unions. This “cloning” has allowed the creation of “puppet” unions prepared to support the government and abandon workers’ demands.

Within the UGTA, when a federation or a company trade union becomes troublesome, a reorganisation of leadership takes place or recourse is made to the iron hand of the trade union bureaucracy. Several union leaders have been prosecuted, even expelled from the union for having organised protests or made a speech which did not follow the line of the UGTA leadership.

It is true that social laws require the state as employer to open the doors of social dialogue in all socio-professional conflicts.

However, on the ground, autonomous unions have major difficulties in getting involved, especially during the annual tripartite social dialogue. The state still continues to privilege the relationship with the UGTA. This is one way to prevent union pluralism from taking shape and capitalising on its

achievements.

The management of conflicts with the world of labour or negotiation depends in reality on the balance of power on the ground and on the capacity of union actors to mobilise workers in the sector to which they belong.

In fact, the attitude of the public authorities on this question is to proceed first by the threat of sanction, disinformation and then negotiation. But in sectoral negotiation, so far, the autonomous unions have not been invited to participate in the tripartite negotiations that the government organises annually.

Only the UGTA and the employers’ organisations are admitted to these private meetings. Yet the representativeness of the autonomous trade unions is self-evident, particularly in the public service sector which has millions of employees.

The latest release from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, which invites all union organisations to submit the information needed to assess the representativeness of their union organisation, is part of this exclusionary approach. Besides, certain ministries continue to receive union delegates from their respective departments, notably in national education and public health.

This state of affairs shows once again that the public authorities do not want a “partner” union, but union structures serving the politico-economic choices advocated by the state at central level. Thus, any hint of union autonomy or questioning, even partial, of these political choices is resisted.

[Continued on page 15](#)



Traditional Kabyle dress and Amazigh flags are common sights at the protests
Photo: Zohair Aberkane

THE STRUGGLE IN KABYLIA

Shelagh Smith and Hamza Hamouchene

The Kabyle people are one of several Berber or Amazigh groups indigenous to North Africa, and comprise about 7 million of the 12 million Amazigh-speaking people in Algeria. They have their own language and specific identity which they are fiercely proud of.

Kabylia (Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, Bouira and to some extent Boumerdes and Setif) has a long history of struggle before, during and after the war of independence. For historical reasons, Kabylia has been a site of rebellion and resistance in colonial times.

The land dispossessions and

impoverishment it suffered led to massive migration movements to urban areas and to metropolitan France and resulted in the proletarianisation of so many Kabyle people.

In the 1920s and 30s, they were actively organised within trade unions as well as inside the nascent Algerian nationalist movement in France.

In fact, the majority of members of the nationalist party “North African Star” (founded by Messali El Hadj) were Kabyles.

After independence, the ruling FLN ignored the country’s rich cultural

diversity and adopted a narrower conception of the Algerian identity.

It decided Algeria would be a monolingual Arab and Muslim country, denying any other languages and cultures.

Consequently the Berber dimension of the Algerian cultural heritage was marginalised and reduced to folkloric manifestations.

However, in 1980, during the “Berber Spring”, demonstrations and strikes demanded the recognition of Berber or Tamazight as an official language.

The movement was violently suppressed. The 1980 “Berber Spring” was not merely a cultural uprising.

It constituted the first large scale political challenge to the regime since the early 60s, where the Berbers/Amazighs of Kabylia articulated their grievances against regime authoritarianism, its disdain for rich Berber linguistic and cultural identity as well as its neglect of the region’s economy.

This true democratic mass movement inspired a decade of continuing struggle and revolts.

In April 2001, an insurrection started in Kabylia. In what is now commonly dubbed the “Black Spring”, riots took place following the killing of a young Kabyle student by gendarmes, who subsequently killed 126 people, mainly by gunfire, and severely injured or tortured thousands more. Many villages still display portraits of the victims today.

For one year and a half, a strong popular movement occupied the front of the political scene and put the question of democracy back on the agenda.

This movement organised on June



Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

14th a huge and very impressive march on Algiers and inspired many citizens in other regions to revolt against Hogra (humiliation and social injustice).

Marches in the capital Algiers remained banned during the 18 years since the “Black Spring”, until the Hirak protest movement began in February 2019.

The Hirak has united Kabylia with the entire country for the first time in opposing the regime, whether in large urban centres, remote mountain villages or steppes and deserts of the south.

And it has resisted the divide and rule tactics of repression. The slogan “Arabs and Kabyles are Brothers and Sisters” is a testimony to this regained unity in the face of an authoritarian regime.

TRADE UNIONS: continued

The financial upturn in the 2000s represented a major turning point and opened a long cycle of union protests that affected all sectors of activity. Wage demands were the common factor and the trigger for these protest movements, particularly from 2002-2003. Despite the intensity of union struggles, they remained defensive in nature.

In March 2002, the hydrocarbon sector was paralysed by a strike of UGTA members against the liberal project concerning an amendment to the hydrocarbon law (Khelil Law) which was pro-business and pro-privatisation. Subsequently, a general strike in 2003 further paralysed the country, with the call by the UGTA leadership for the rejection of the hydrocarbons bill and a program of privatisation.

The refusal of the National Federation of Education Workers (FNTE-UGTA) to respond positively in 2002 to the will of its union base to carry out a fight to the end, around their claims concerning the system of allowances and bonuses, led the workers of the sector to engage in struggle in 2003, outside the UGTA.

Three general strikes by secondary school teachers were launched by the Coordination of Algiers High Schools (CLA) which declared a general strike from May 17 to June 25, 2003.

Frozen due to the earthquake that struck the Boumerdes region in May

2003, this strike movement resumed at a national level, this time at the joint call of the CLA and the National Autonomous Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education (CNAPEST) on September 27, 28 and 29 of the same year.

The teachers demanded a 100 percent increase in their salaries, a revaluation of the salary scales, the creation of permanent posts and retirement after 25 years of effective service. This fight lasted three months and ended with a considerable achievement at the time, namely a 30 per cent salary increase. Faced with government threats of being struck off, several education unions affiliated to the UGTA threatened to go on strike if the government carried out its threats against striking teachers affiliated to the CLA and CNAPEST.

On the UGTA side, several strikes were carried out in the Autumn of 2003 and then in 2005 and 2010 by workers in the economic sector: ports, customs, SNTF (rail), SNVI (trucks and buses) and brick factories, to demand wage increases and defense of their industries

These strike movements were generally launched without the approval of the leadership of the UGTA, especially after the signing of the economic and social pact between the UGTA and the Algerian Government in 2006, which had instituted a four-year social truce. The signing of this pact did not prevent certain combative sectors of the UGTA from waging major union struggles, such as in the industrial zone of Rouiba, which has so far maintained a certain fighting spirit.

This stage was also marked by the

struggles of civil servants who were at the forefront and which gradually expanded, despite the various economic and social pacts signed between the Government, the UGTA and the employers' federations, in all public service sectors: education, health, public administration, civil protection, veterinary surgeons...

In 2011, in the wake of the revolutionary process in the Arab world, the country experienced an extension of the struggles of workers affecting several sectors of the country's activity: resident physicians, general practitioners and public health specialists, psychologists, midwives, nurses, teachers, educational assistants, public service workers, postal workers, railway workers, oil workers, steel workers, dockers, lawyers and clerks, municipal guards, radio journalists, Air Algérie airline crew, national education workers, customs, banks etc.

The main common demand remained a salary increase and the adoption of a specific status. However, this dynamic weakened in the second half of 2011, but rebounded in 2016 with another round of union protests and major demonstrations, such as the May 1st march in the city of Béjaïa, in the northeast of the country.

We can say that from 2002 to the present day, autonomous unions have gained visibility and representativeness in other socio-professional categories, as was the case in national education, following the cyclical strikes of 2003 and 2007.

These unions have in fact recorded a very large number of workers joining. We

have thus noted that the autonomous sectoral unions representing the middle strata adopted radical discourse and means of struggle worthy of the proletarian workers' struggles.

The proletarianisation of intellectual work as well as the changes in power alliances which have been increasingly based on parasitic classes, have pushed this social class towards more radicalism, including among university teachers.

The process of going beyond sectoral unionism took time to materialise on the ground. Autonomous unions have come a long way since the experience of the National Committee of Trade Union Freedoms (CNLS) in 2004, a grouping of autonomous unions that has operated with the aim of defending union freedoms in Algeria.

There have been several attempts to organise unions in order to set up sectoral union coordinations or union confederations, but these experiences did not last because of certain administrative blockages and certain trade unionists' desire for leadership.

However, in recent years, there has been a qualitative advance in the demands in the autonomous unions. They have challenged the finance laws, rejected the undermining of Algerian workers' achievements in terms of retirement, and denounced the preliminary draft of the Labour Code. They have moved on from just bonus claims for this or that sector. This development has accelerated another process, that of creating a unity around a new union confederation in Algeria in 2018.

The Confederation of Algerian



Trade Unions (CSA) brings together 13 autonomous unions from different sectors, including five unions in the education sector. These are: The National Autonomous Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education (CNAPEST), the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), the National Autonomous Syndicate of Secondary and Technical Teachers (SNAPEST), the Council of Algerian High Schools (CLA) and the National Union of Workers in Education and Training (SATEF).

The CSA is also composed of the National Union of Public Health Practitioners (SNPSP), the National Union of Veterinarians, the National Council of Higher Education Teachers (CNES), the National Union of Vocational Training Workers (SNTFP), the Union of Postal Workers, the National Union of Aircraft Maintenance Technicians (SNTMA) and the National Union of Imams.

Indeed, this Confederation is the result

of lengthy solidarity work between the member unions. The process dates back to the beginning of 2010, when several united actions took place on the ground, including strikes, marches and rallies.

For the moment, this Confederation brings together only the leadership of the 13 unions which make it up, in a pyramidal structure. Regional meetings have been held in several Wilayas (regions) across the country to consolidate the construction of the Trade Union Confederation.

This will be laborious because of certain objective constraints, notably the internal struggles between union leaders at the national and local levels. In fact, this bureaucratic phenomenon affects not only the UGTA but also the autonomous unions. If not contained, this bureaucracy could be a brake on the enlargement of the Confederation.

Translated by Shelagh Smith

INTERVIEW: THE BATTLE FOR CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

Bordj Samir

Could you briefly describe the school system in Algeria for our audience in the United Kingdom?

To answer this question, firstly I must place myself in my role as a trade unionist, that is to say to inform, and at the same time challenge the Algerian education system. The Algerian constitution guarantees the right to education for all. It is compulsory, free for all children of school age up to the age of 16.

More than 9.2 million students are enrolled in public schools, of whom about 63,800 students are in private schools. The evolution of the Algerian education system has gone through three periods since 1962: a policy of recovery of the colonial system, followed by reforms to assert independence and confirm national sovereignty, and finally a policy of managing student admissions.

The main reasons why our education system does not work are: it is trapped by ideological and political struggles; the incompetence of the main players in the sector; uninspiring programmes of study oriented towards learning by heart rather than understanding; stultifying bureaucratisation; the teachers only copy a programme dictated by the ministry without taking into account the particular difficulties and needs of

the students; the negligence of the State through lack of research in the sector.

The best way of bankrupting a public service is lack of state financial support, a deterioration that prepares the way for the commodification of Algerian schools: schools dedicated much more to social training than to developing knowledge in the service of society.

Which union do you belong to?

I am a founding member of CLA (Conseil des Lycées d'Algérie, Council of Algerian High Schools), founded in 2011. But the CLA already existed long before. The CLA in 2001 was not a trade union; it was a movement of discontent by teachers without a clear status (that is to say those with short-term contracts) mobilised together to regularise their situation.

After its beginnings outside the official institutional framework, firstly in Algiers, and then after spreading in 2007 to other regions, the CLA obtained official recognition from the Algerian state in 2013, and was transformed into the Council of Teachers in Algerian High Schools (CeLA). The CeLA today is established in around thirty wilayas or regions. We defend free, good quality public schools.



Teachers have often taken to the streets to express their anger
Photo: Samir Larabi

Do the different education unions work together?

In 2006, an inter-union organisation was formed within the education sector to counter the reform which was taking place, but especially on three united demands: a salary increase of 100 percent, the elaboration of specific pay and conditions regulations for employees, and retirement after 25 years of service. The following year, the organisation expanded to include all autonomous public service unions.

The late Idir Achour, former General Secretary of the CLA, always worked for a united union front to build a real balance of power and to achieve a general strike. This is evidenced by the recent creation of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA) and the constant maintenance of relations

with combative unions in the local sections of the UGTA (majority national union, which largely covers the private sector, but is very bureaucratic and in bed with the regime).

What were the demands raised by strikes in recent years? What have been their successes and failures?

In 2004, the education trade union movement launched four strikes, including a three-month one that achieved a 60 percent increase in salaries, which was completely offset by the increase in the cost of living.

Some of the other demands were: wage increases, the promulgation of employment regulations in education, and retirement after 25 years of service; guarantee of trade union freedoms and

the right to strike, campaign against a public service statute which aimed to enshrine precariousness; campaign to defend public education and to denounce the planned dismantling of technical education; campaign to regain the pedagogical power of teachers.

The successes were: a slight improvement in promotions to the category of public service status and a 60 percent increase in salaries. Failures: cancellation of early and proportional retirement, tightening of laws relating to the right to strike and to demonstrate.

What role have teachers played in the Hirak?

Algerians cannot and will not suffer any more humiliation. They want to live in an Algeria of democracy and social justice. National wealth must be distributed fairly. Teachers believe that Algeria after February 22, 2019 will never be the same as before, and have engaged in the Hirak from the start.

On March 10, 2019, unionised and non-unionised teachers followed the call for a general strike and demonstrations in all the cities of Algeria. On October 28, 2019, on the initiative of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA), teachers took part en masse in the demonstrations by closing schools, high schools and universities, in a general strike which gained 80 percent support at the national level, to demand the departure of the existing system.

The ruling class has turned to the use of force to push its roadmap and is in a strong position because it holds the means of persuasion and disinformation

(the mass media, the judiciary...). But the struggle continues because the regime has no legitimacy.

Could you tell us more about recent strikes and marches by primary teachers?

Primary school teachers in Algeria suffer on both a pedagogical and a social level. On the pedagogical level, the teachers are asking for a reduction of the timetable which has reached 30 hours per week, the cancellation of classroom newsletters, the generalisation of new technologies, and a reduction in class sizes which sometimes reach 36.

They are demanding that primary schools become the property of the education sector and not of the municipalities, which manage them poorly; and to cease performing a supervisory role in the playground and in the canteen.

On the social level, they are demanding a remuneration which allows them to live a dignified life (faced with soaring prices, 31,000 DA per month, or 200 €, is insufficient for even one person to live in dignity); bring the primary level into line with other levels (revision of the specific pay and conditions regulations). Faced with such a situation, the CeLA can only be united with primary school teachers in their efforts; by declarations and sit-ins in front of the Education Departments.

Bordj Samir is a teacher and a founding member of the CeLA union. Interview by Hamza Hamouchene and Shelagh Smith. Translated by Shelagh Smith.

THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT

Hamza Hamouchene

Since 2012/2013, there has been growing discontent and mobilisation from the unemployed movement represented by the CNDDC (National Committee for the Defence of Unemployed Rights), especially in the oil-rich Sahara, a region that provides the bulk of Algeria's resources and state income but that suffers from long-term political, economic and cultural marginalisation.

With the bankruptcy of party politics, growing dissent and discontent in the last few years have been increasingly expressed through the emergence of social movements organising around social and environmental issues, particularly in the gas-rich Sahara.

Just 85km away from Hassi Messaoud, one of the wealth centres of the country and Algeria's first Energy Town, the unemployed movement CNDDC that started in Ouargla in 2013 succeeded in mobilising tens of thousands of people in huge demonstrations demanding decent jobs and protesting against economic exclusion, social injustice and the underdevelopment of their region.

The unemployed of Ouargla rightly wondered why they have not been the beneficiaries of the oil wealth that is lying under their feet.

How come they continue to suffer from unemployment and political and economic exclusion while multinationals thrive and plunder their resources? As



Thousands joined marches and protests
Photo: BBOY LEE

expected, all attempts have been made by the authorities to crush, discredit and co-opt the movement, which played an important role in bringing an anti-corporate dimension to the anti-fracking uprising that started in January 2015, following the Algerian authorities' announcement at the end of December 2014 that drilling would begin in the first pilot shale well in In Salah in the Ahnet Basin, by a consortium of three companies: Sonatrach, Total and Partex.



Metalworkers' union leader Kouadria Smain addresses a mass meeting, April 2019
Photo: courtesy Kouadria Smain via Facebook

TRADE UNIONS AND THE HIRAK

Samir Larabi

Since February 22, 2019, Algeria has been living to the rhythm of a huge popular movement unprecedented since the country's independence in 1962, a movement that can be described as a real revolutionary process.

The current popular movement has accentuated the regime's crisis and is fundamentally challenging its authority over society. The popular dynamic, with all its limits and contradictions, is part of a process of overthrowing the regime and the construction of a democratic and social republic.

A process that has mobilised all fringes

of society, mainly people and workers crushed by decades of austerity and repression.

Throughout this struggle, workers have been an important mobilising force in the ongoing popular Hirak, either through union intervention, in citizen collectives or as individuals. However, they have taken part in the movement without a class identity and without highlighting the specific demands of the world of labour, which represents more than 9 million people.

From the first days of the outbreak of the popular Hirak, many unions and

workers' collectives have shown their full support for the popular struggle, including the autonomous unions affiliated to the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA).

From the first weeks, the CSA displayed its support for the popular movement, the non-recognition of the government and the demand for the return to popular sovereignty. The demands of the CSA, which exists only in the public sector, are not corporatist or socio-economic, they adopted the demands of the street, namely the departure of the system and the establishment of the second Republic.

The CSA organised two strikes and two marches, with the same political demands, in the capital Algiers on April 10 and May 1, 2019, despite the attempts of the regime to repress them. Even though confined to the public service sector, these two events raised great hopes among the population in struggle. But afterwards the leaders of these unions became passive.

They preferred to engage in a kind of coalition with certain parties and civil society organisations, in groupings and meetings which demanded the return to the electoral process with a minimum of guarantees on the transparency of the elections.

In fact they were not far from the regime's proposal of a political solution within the constitutional framework. These unions' leadership did everything to impede the day of national protest in October 2019 and undermine the participation in a general strike in December 2019, on the eve of the presidential elections.

An attitude which deprived the popular Hirak of a considerable strike force and the prospect of consolidation by organised workers. This meant the movement missed a historic chance for change by and for the workers those leaders are supposed to represent.

At the same time, many workers in the economic sector mobilised to support the Hirak and distanced themselves from the bureaucratic apparatus of the UGTA symbolised by Abdelmadjid Sidi Said. Dozens of economic, even strategic companies went on strike in solidarity with the popular movement.

With the start of the revolutionary process, a new coordination within the UGTA was born. This brought together four regional unions who affirmed their support for the movement of "building a new republic" and demanded the departure of Sidi Said and all the leaders involved in the union's betrayal.

They were joined by several members of the National Executive Commission (CEN), the highest body between two congresses, then by the National Federation of Workers in Metallurgy and Mechanics, Electricity and Electronics (FNTMMEE). The coordination called "National Committee for the reappropriation of the UGTA by the workers" organised rallies on April 17 and May 1, 2019 in front of the union headquarters, and attracted many unionists, workers and left-wing activists.

The Committee launched a national petition for the organisation of an extraordinary national congress of the UGTA before the end of 2019, which only delegates duly mandated by the base

should attend. However, this movement to reclaim the UGTA could not gain the confidence of all workers and union officials, nor prevent the organisation's planned congress from being held.

This movement for change did not last, due to lack of initiative and combativeness and the lack of involvement of the workers in this fight against the bureaucratic apparatus, as well as the objective contradictions in the world of labour.

Known for its long traditions of radical union struggle, the region of Bejaia stood out by the level of real and effective involvement of the unions (UGTA and autonomous unions' sections) in supporting the popular Hirak from the first days of the current revolutionary process.

Both in the economic sector (public and private) and in public service, local unionists and workers' collectives got strongly involved in the mobilisations and strikes, and some are very active in the Pact of the Democratic Alternative (PAD, an alliance of some opposition parties including the left with some trade unions and civil society organisations).

The mobilisation reached its peak during the general strike of December 9, 10 and 11, 2019. During these days of strikes, large processions of workers from the UGTA and autonomous unions unified in the streets.

This demonstrates the ability of workers to unite in struggle, beyond corporatism and the internal struggles between union apparatuses. This experience once again demonstrated that the revolution cannot succeed without democratic organisation and without



the massive support of the workers. The workers' show of force once again proves its ability to mobilise and struggle better once it has freed itself from bureaucratic obstacles.

At this crucial moment in the revolutionary process, the Hirak needs a new lease of life in terms of organisation and perspectives in favour of the workers, not a so-called road map to resolve the regime's crisis.

It needs to offer a perspective for going beyond the current regime, with its union oppression, its social misery, exploitation and precariousness. The unity and permanent mobilisation of workers from all sectors can only open up historic political possibilities for the construction of an authentically democratic and social Algerian republic free from all forms of market domination.

Translated by Shelagh Smith

WOMEN AND THE FIGHT FOR LIBERATION



Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

Women played — and still play — a crucial role in the uprising, as can be seen in their strong presence in marches and protests all over the country, including very conservative areas. They are actively involved in the students' movement that managed to maintain its Tuesday marches for more than a year now. Some of them faced repression and even jail but they continue to show their unflinching dedication to the struggle. Some

feminist organisations are doing their best to put women's liberation at the centre of this democratic revolution and the presence of revolutionary figures such as Djamila Bouhired and Louissette Ighilahriz denotes that the struggles for popular sovereignty and women's liberation are interlinked and ongoing. On International Women's Day (8th March), Algerian women chanted in the streets: "We are not here to celebrate, we are here to uproot you!"



Students and workers march in Bejaia
Photo: PST via Facebook

STUDENTS BUILD UNITY IN STRUGGLE

Samir Larabi

Since the start of the revolutionary process in February 2019, the student movement has played an important role in the popular mobilisations that have shaken the Algerian regime. Admittedly, student mobilisations were initiated via social networks, but quickly a surge of self-organisation took place, especially in the major universities of Algeria, large mobilisations not seen since the student movement of 2011.

Dozens of committees were created in a short time, representatives elected and platforms developed. During this popular Hirak, the student movement

has established itself as an essential force in creating a balance of power in favour of the people in struggle, while going beyond the division and fragmentation within the student population. An objective alliance in struggle has been built with teachers, technical and support staff and even with the people. The Tuesday demonstrations turned into popular marches.

At the start of the popular movement, the student movement had great mobilising strength, which has seen a sharp decline in recent months, despite a timid revival during the campaign for

the presidential elections of December 12, 2019.

In Algeria the role of the university has radically changed, from the anti-colonialist university at the service of national development to an institution at the service of the state bureaucracy and bosses. With the introduction of the LMD reform which subjects universities to the dictates of the market, they play the role of producing skilled labour for companies. The promulgation of the new higher education orientation law (2008) legalises private universities and the creation of centres of excellence, thus enshrining a two-tier education system. By opening up services to private initiatives, the state has embraced the commodification of the university, which has become a huge market for computer and chemical consumables, the paper industry and for heavy scientific equipment. All these market transactions and dealings need to be scrutinised by state authorities.

Student revolt is a universal phenomenon in today's world, reflecting the structural crisis of the education systems globally. Added to this are the poor working conditions and support for students, with unevenness between countries (rich and poor), between schools and universities, especially public ones. This crisis is worsening in the so-called third world countries upon which structural adjustment policies have been imposed. Adjustments that have pushed states to reduce the budgets allocated to public services, especially education.

Leaving university after graduation, even with a degree, has become a nightmare for young university



graduates. As soon as they finish their studies, the majority of students know full well that no employment awaits them. They are either resigned to joblessness or job insecurity, which puts them in the most distressing of situations. And the carefree period becomes a distant memory, and the fear of tomorrow is almost permanent if issues of economic disinvestment and flexible employment are not resolved.

That remains the case despite public authorities' assurances that millions of jobs will be created and that the LMD education reform will allow each student to have a job. Moreover, several officials from the Ministry of Higher Education have recognized that between 140,000 and 150,000 university degrees are injected into the market without any prospect, especially with the austerity



'Open spaces for debate and reflection in our universities, neighbourhoods and villages'
Photo: Collectif indépendante libre des femmes de Bejaia via Facebook

measures implemented since 2014 to the present day. As for recruitment methods, they take place in complete lack of transparency, according to several reports of the ONS (Office of National Statistics).

Faced with the decline of student mobilisations and the disappearance of the overwhelming majority of committees and collectives built at the start of the people's Hirak, it is vital to rebuild these structures on a democratic and combative basis.

There is no specific recipe, but this process can be initiated according to the specifics of each university campus. This process of construction can be done at first by creating nuclei for debates, collectives, associations etc., but with the prospect of enlargement within campuses and student residences.

That is to say, to hold general assemblies, debate, produce platforms and elect representative delegates.

Along with the rest of the Hirak, the weekly student demonstrations were suspended on March 18th due to safety concerns during the coronavirus pandemic. Up until the 55th demonstration on 10th March, the numbers of students on the streets had dwindled, but had been made up for by other protesters joining their ranks. It is to be hoped that students will use this time to plan for the rebuilding and reinvigoration of the movement that will be needed in the future to put an end to Algeria's repressive and undemocratic regime.



Police block protesters in Algiers
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

BRITAIN FUELS REGIME'S REPRESSION

Hamza Hamouchene

BP signed its first joint venture in Algeria in 1995, only three years after the military coup that cancelled the first multi-party legislative elections in Algeria since independence from French colonial rule.

The contract was signed while a brutal civil war was raging, with systematic violence from both the state and Islamist fundamentalists.

This signature has framed both the British government's and BP's engagement with Algeria over the past 30 years. It continues to shape the current context of repression, impunity, and

corruption. Their eagerness to break into Algeria in the 1990s, despite the violent crackdown being enacted by the state, indicates the priorities of the British establishment. The UK favoured its own economic interests and acquiesced in the Algerian regime's 'Dirty War' of the 1990s. The same approach has continued ever since.

UK foreign policy aims to lock North African natural gas into the European and British grids and is heavily influenced by arms and fossil fuel interests. As a result, the Conservative government has courted the Algerian

regime and supported arms sales between British companies and Algeria as well as encouraging an expanded role for BP. In 2010 Algeria was listed as a 'priority market' by UK Trade and Investment's Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO).

A report produced by UKTI DSO in 2013 claimed "Algeria has arguably supplanted South Africa as the African region's largest and most dynamic market, affording major export opportunities for global suppliers."

One of the suppliers to take advantage was British-Italian military helicopter manufacturer AgustaWestland, which secured a deal to produce helicopters reportedly worth over \$1bn in 2016.

This comes despite the regime's dismal human rights record and intense repression of democratic movements in recent years.

The Conservative government has also worked to encourage investment in Algeria by other UK firms: total trade between the two countries was £3.2bn in 2019, up 68 percent on the previous year.

Today, Algeria is still ruled by a military dictatorship with a civilian façade.

Yet BP and the British government continue to ignore social movements and civil society, instead working with the intelligence agencies, training Special Forces and strengthening military and economic cooperation.

Despite its strategic importance and growing relations with Britain, Algeria is barely mentioned in the British media, due to a colonial perspective where the country is seen as the special reserve of France.

GAS DEALS IGNORE HUMAN RIGHTS

Algeria is one of the UK's closest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) providing countries. The UK and Algeria have a long history of LNG collaboration spanning fifty years, with the world's first commercial LNG shipment delivering fuel from Arzew to Canvey Island in the Thames Estuary.

Lord Risby, in his capacity as a special envoy, has paid several visits to Algeria since 2012, the latest took place in February 2020. The Algeria British Business Council, headed by Lady Olga Maitland, has also played a key role in facilitating these links, and counts oil companies BP, Equinor, Sunny Hill Energy and Petrofac as members. ABBC charges members for access to UK and Algerian government officials and hosts business networking events.

Such visits ignore the Foreign Affairs Committee's conclusions that business interests must be balanced with human rights.

Instead, the sole priority is making connections between British companies like BP and Shell and members of the Algerian regime. Britain consistently prioritises fossil fuel interests over human rights and democratic principles, and in the process is actively shoring up a highly repressive and corrupt regime.



Protesters take to the streets on 17 March
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

PREPARING FOR THE STRUGGLE AHEAD

Hamza Hamouchene

The Algerian uprising embarked on its second year and despite the immense difficulties and challenges encountered in the first year, the movement has not disappeared. We are in a situation of relative equilibrium in the balance of forces on the ground.

The Hirak could not topple the regime and the latter could not exhaust the movement. The Algerians mobilized in the Hirak are not giving up and refuse to endorse the dictatorship's democratic façade.

Due to the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the Hirak

decided to halt its weekly protests and marches by mid-March 2020 after celebrating its first anniversary on 22nd February 2020. In the first weeks of March, the protests continued, fueled by an unflinching desire to get rid of the regime as well as a deep mistrust in the authorities' calls on people to avoid big gatherings. However, wisdom prevailed and the popular movement temporarily discontinued its street actions on 17th March 2020. But the amazing energy and dynamic created by this magnificent uprising has not disappeared. In fact it metamorphosed into health campaigns

and solidarity actions with the needy and most vulnerable in society during these difficult times. We have seen several initiatives of cleaning up and disinfecting public spaces, caravans of solidarity to Blida, which happens to be the epicentre of the pandemic in the country, campaigns to raise awareness about the disease and other creative actions to keep the Hirak's flame alive.

Meanwhile, the authoritarian and reactionary regime is redoubling its repression of journalists and activists. In total, dozens of protestors, political activists and journalists are currently in jail at the time of writing.

The regime hasn't stopped at this but is currently preparing a new penal code which will make it extremely difficult to criticise the authorities.

This draft law plans to stifle dissent further and wants to criminalise certain actions that are deemed to "undermine state security and national unity", accusations that have been levelled at many activists and journalists of the Hirak since June 2019.

Moreover, it continues to restrict online media by blocking access to sites like Radio M, Maghreb Emergent and Interlignes.

These times of confinement must be taken as a moment of collective reflection and learning about the achievements as well as the shortcomings and mistakes of the popular uprising. The system will not yield easily. For this reason, resistance must continue through acts of civil disobedience that will not endanger people's health and lives in the exceptional times of Covid-19, to force the regime to give way. There is no doubt

that the Hirak will resume after this pandemic subsides, because the same conditions that gave rise to it are still present. The coronavirus crisis moreover reveals the dire state of the public health sector that has been hollowed out by decades of underfunding and mismanagement and now faces cuts as state revenues plummet with collapsing oil prices (currently at \$20 a barrel).

The Hirak must consolidate through encouraging local self-organisation in the workplaces, through neighbourhood committees, student and women's collectives, independent local representations and the opening up of more spaces for discussion, debate and reflection in order to have a solid platform or a coherent programme.

It must insist on individual and collective freedoms of expression and organise and campaign tirelessly for the release of all political prisoners.

And finally, it will have to connect social justice and socio-economic rights to democratic demands. Because if Algeria continues on this path of liberalisation and privatisation, we will definitely see more social explosions and discontent as a social consensus cannot be achieved while the resulting pauperisation, unemployment, and inequality continue. The recent slump in oil prices may just hammer the final nail in the coffin of a rentier system that is highly dependent on oil and gas exports for its survival.

In this context, Algerians must not dig their own graves by halting their revolution halfway.

The struggle for democratisation will be long and must go on.

SOLIDARITY: A GUIDE TO ACTION

Since the Hirak movement began, the regime has tried various repressive strategies to combat the protests.

It has used the police and the courts to keep activists, opposition politicians and journalists in prison for months pending trial, and to hand out increasingly draconian fines and prison sentences.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, increasing numbers of activists and particularly journalists have been arrested and held in detention.

Karim Tabbou, leader of the UDS (Democratic and Social Union) and a key figure in the Hirak, suffered six months in solitary confinement awaiting trial for trumped up charges of “incitement to violence” and “harming national security” in relation to his speech on his political party’s Facebook page where he peacefully criticised the role of the army in politics.

The verdict in March 2020 was six months in prison, six months suspended, with a ban on taking part in public activities. However, the day before his scheduled release, he was sentenced to a full year in prison, without his lawyers being informed.

Karim Tabbou collapsed in court with a stroke, and continues to suffer paralysis. He remains in prison without specialist medical care.

Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Director, Heba Morayef, said: “The Algerian authorities must immediately release all those imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights. They should also urgently consider the release of other prisoners – especially pre-trial detainees and those who may be more at risk from the virus – and take



Calling for the release of Samira Messouci
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

necessary measures to protect the health of all prisoners.”

Leading militant Samir Benlarbi was acquitted after months in detention, but has been rearrested twice since his release. The journalist Fodil Boumala served six months in prison before being acquitted. Slimane Hamitouche, national coordinator of the Missing Persons’ Families National Coordination (CNFD) and SOS Disappeared, was arrested in March and charged with “infringement of the territorial integrity” and “inciting crowds”.

President of the RAJ (Youth Action Rally), Abdelouahab Fersaoui, remains in detention since October when he was arrested at a rally to support detainees.

SOLIDARITY: A GUIDE TO ACTION

He is charged with “incitement to violence” and “infringement of territorial integrity.”

Hadj Ghermoul is active within the Algerian Human Rights Defense League (LADHDH) and member of the national committee to defend rights of the unemployed (CNDDC). In March he was sentenced to one year in prison and fined 50,000 dinars (3730€) even though he is still unemployed.

Ibrahim Daoudji was detained in March. According to some media sources, he has been on hunger strike since March 16 and is at risk of dying.

Khaled Drareni is an independent journalist, founder of the internet site Casbah Tribune and correspondent for the international French-speaking channel TV5 World and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). He was arrested and detained in March while covering a Hirak demonstration in Algiers.

Sofiene Merakchi is a producer for France 24 and RT and correspondent for the Lebanese TV channel Al Mayadeen. He has been held in pre-trial detention since September for “possession of stolen goods” and “supply of images of demonstrations held on Friday, September 20 to the Al Jazeera channel and other foreign media.” He was the first Algerian journalist to be arrested since the Hirak started.

Louisa Hanoune, general secretary of the PT (Workers’ Party), had been imprisoned for 15 years by a military court for “conspiring against the state and the army”. Her sentence was reduced on appeal to three years, so she has been released with a remaining suspended sentence of 27 months. *By Shelagh Smith*



Karim Tabbou's detention sparks protests
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Write to the Algerian Ambassador calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience: Algerian Embassy, 1 - 3 Riding House Street, London W1W 7DR. E-mail: info@algerianembassy.org.uk**
- **Put a resolution to your trade union branch calling for action in solidarity with Algerian political prisoners**
- **Read more online at www.menasolidaritynetwork.com**
- **Sign Amnesty International's petition "Defend the right to protest in Algeria."**

Acknowledgements



Filling the streets of Algiers, May 2019
Photo: Zoheir Aberkane

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samir Larabi is an activist in the Parti socialiste des travailleurs (PST), he has participated in building numerous popular movements and unions, notably the unemployed movement in Algeria. He is also a sociologist and researcher, specialising in social movements in Algeria.

Hamza Hamouchene is a London-based Algerian researcher and activist. He works for the Transnational Institute (TNI).

Shelagh Smith is a member of the National Education Union in Britain.

Acknowledgements

This pamphlet was published with the support of MENA Solidarity. We would like to thank the Transnational Institute (TNI), our national union affiliates NEU, PCS and UCU, and Newham NEU and Lewisham NEU for providing funding towards this project.



For a year Algeria has been rocked by a peaceful mass movement, the Hirak. In April 2019 it forced president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to step down after 20 years in power, after he proposed to stand for a 5th term. It then forced the postponement of two presidential elections, in April and July, because people refused simply a change of faces at the top in an unchanged system.

Protesters want the removal of an entrenched political class that has held power in Algeria since independence from France in 1962. They demand a civil, not a military state, based on the rule of law.

Although the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced protesters to leave the streets for now, this pamphlet reveals the deep roots of the mass movement

in Algeria's history of popular struggle. **Samir Larabi, Shelagh Smith** and **Hamza Hamouchene** explore how the fight to create independent trade unions, the rise of the unemployed movement and the struggle against state oppression in Kabylia have fed into the emergence of the Hirak and assess the movement's prospects for the future.

