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Algerian regime jails top generals, Workers Party leader Louisa Hanoune

On September 25, after a two-day trial, an Algerian military court imposed 15-year jail sentences against top figures linked to deposed former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. They were accused of “conspiring against the army” and “the authority of the state.” The accused were Bouteflika’s younger brother and adviser, Said, ex-spy chiefs General Mohamed Mediene (known as “Toufik”) and General Athmane Tartag (“Bachir”), and Louisa Hanoune, the leader and three-time presidential candidate of the petty-bourgeois Workers Party (PT).

The aim of the trial was not to reveal the real crimes of Bouteflika’s allies, but to terrorize the movement in the working class against Algerian strongman Gen. Ahmed Gaid Salah’s military regime. It was a reactionary attack on democratic rights. Algeria is paralyzed by mass protests that erupted in February against Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth presidential term. The military court was silent on the crimes committed by Mediene and Tartag while they led the armed forces in the bloody 1991-2002 Algerian civil war. Hanoune, on the other hand, was arrested after she criticized Salah and the military, warning that the military could launch a bloody coup against mass protests similar to the one launched in 2013 by Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. She was charged with “attacking the authority of the army” and “conspiracy against the authority of the state.”

Hanoune’s lawyer, Mokrane Ait Larbi, said the court was “surrounded by military checkpoints” and that “journalists were not authorized to approach the court.” While his

client's close ties to the Bouteflika clan are a matter of public record, he noted that the military had furnished "no proof that there was a conspiracy" in which she participated.

Said Bouteflika, Mohamed Mediene and Bachir Tartag were arrested in May over a meeting in which they allegedly discussed imposing a state of emergency and firing Salah in a last-ditch effort to keep Abdelaziz Bouteflika in power. They were accused of meeting in late March to discuss forming a new body led by ex-President Liamine Zeroual to lead a post-Bouteflika "transition." The meeting was held shortly after Salah called for Bouteflika to step down. On April 2, Bouteflika resigned.

The late March meeting was part of the ruthless infighting the protests provoked within the Algerian ruling class. Ex-Defense Minister Khaled Nezzar, who has since fled to Spain, stated in May that Saïd Bouteflika contacted him at the time to warn that Salah could move against Bouteflika, and that he was planning to "remove the army chief, impose a state of emergency and keep his brother in power." He also told Nezzar that Salah could move against the Bouteflika clan "from one instant to the next."

During the trial, Hanoune's lawyer confirmed that his client participated in one of these meetings, on March 27, as a "parliamentarian and head of a legal party."

The military defendants in the trial, with whom Salah worked for decades, were infamous for their role in torturing and murdering approximately 200,000 Algerians during the civil war. However, they faced only the limited charge of plotting against Salah; they were not prosecuted for the army's crimes against humanity, in which they and Salah are all implicated.

Gen. Mohamed Mediene led the Algerian secret services, the Intelligence and Security Department (Département du renseignement et de la sécurité, DRS), from 1990 to 2015. Trained by the KGB, the Soviet bureaucracy's intelligence agency, he was infamous for his role in the Algerian civil war, during which he went only by the name "Toufik" in order to preserve his anonymity as he planned savage repression of the Islamist militias. He led a faction of the army brass known as *Les éradicateurs* ("the Eradicators"), working closely with the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) party.

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In September 2015, Mediene was replaced by a retired major general, Athmane Tartag to head the DRS. Trained by the KGB, like Mediene, Tartag—who went by the name of "Bashir" during the war and was known for personally torturing detainees—was also known by nicknames like "the Butcher" or "the Bomber." During the 1990s he managed

the notorious *Centre Principal Militaire d'Investigation* (CPMI) which, the Berlin-based NGO Algeria Watch reports, he turned into “one of the main centres for the torture and elimination of opponents.”

The railroading of Hanoune to jail is a reactionary measure meant to send a signal that opposition will not be tolerated, and that workers opposed to Salah can expect draconian punishment. Her victimization, however, in no way lessens the need to carry out a principled opposition to the PT's petty bourgeois politics.

Founded by student radicals recruited in the 1970s by the French *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) of Pierre Lambert, after it broke with Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1971, the PT has functioned for decades as a discredited prop of Bouteflika's FLN. Hanoune's lawyer's admission that she met with figures like Bouteflika, Mediene and Tartag only underscores that her politics are utterly hostile to Trotskyism and the working class.

When mass protests began in February, Hanoune backed Bouteflika, absurdly claiming protesters were not hostile to him. She called for holding a constituent assembly—promoting illusions that the FLN could implement democratic reforms by writing a new constitution for the Algerian capitalist state. The union bureaucrats and “left” academic milieu that shapes the PT's politics was deeply hostile to a challenge to the Algerian regime from the working class.

The decisive question facing the working class in Algeria and internationally is the building of sections of the ICFI, fighting for a Trotskyist program, as its revolutionary leadership. This can take place only through a determined political struggle against the corrupt role of the PT. However, the purpose of Salah's authoritarian crackdown on Hanoune is to intimidate and threaten anyone opposing the regime.

Amid growing opposition to the December 12 presidential elections that Salah announced shortly before the trial began, authorities are stepping up arrests—jailing activists for criticizing the army, shutting down political meetings, and blocking websites. In June, they began arresting protesters with Amazigh flags of the minority Berber nationality. Human Rights Watch wrote that “about 40 protesters remain in custody, most in Algiers,” charged with “harming the integrity of the national territory.” They thus face up to 10 years in prison.

Despite the bankruptcy of Hanoune's politics, class conscious workers will oppose her jailing and, as part of a revolutionary struggle against the military regime and its repression, demand her release.

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