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## ***Five candidates contest December 12 Algerian election amid mass opposition***

Amid ongoing mass protests against the Algerian ruling establishment and the December 12 presidential elections, Algeria's electoral authority announced that five candidates are running. The field of candidates vindicates the overwhelming opposition among workers and youth to the elections, which are correctly seen as a cynical maneuver of the ruling class.

Under the guise of letting the people choose, the regime led by Bouteflika's former Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaed Salah, is desperately trying to hold on to power. On Saturday, the electoral authority validated five of the 23 candidates who had applied. They are former Prime Ministers Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, former Culture Minister Azzedine Mihoubi, former Tourism Minister Abdelkader Bengrine and Abdelaziz Belaïd, the head of the El Mostakbal Movement party.

They are all tools of the regime of now-ousted President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Benflis was prime minister in 2000-2003 and ran in the 2004 presidential election. Tebboune, who served as housing minister from 2001 to 2002 and again from 2012 to 2017, was prime minister from May to August 2017. Mihoubi is an acting Secretary General of the National Democratic Rally (RND), a party of the state machine that supported Bouteflika's election. Belaïd's party is another split-off from the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), which Belaïd left in 2011.

The overwhelming hostility among millions of Algerians to the regime's call for the December 12 elections points to the revolutionary confrontation that is brewing between

the working class and youth in Algeria and the regime. Mass protests demanding democracy have not produced any appreciable change in the politics of the regime. The decisive question posed to workers and youth in Algeria is the struggle for the working class to take state power and pursue socialist policies.

The organizers of the election do not conceal their fear and hostility towards the protests and the working class. As he announced the candidates, Election Control Authority President Mohamed Chorfi boasted that he had refuted “those who doubted the Authority’s capacity to carry out its mission, and those who criticized the choice to hold elections to get the country out of the terrifying situation in which elements with evil intentions want to keep it.”

The 37th consecutive protest on Friday November 1 was the largest anti-government demonstration in weeks. Over a million Algerians took to the streets in the capital, Algiers, and other cities across Algeria. The day marked the 65th anniversary of the 1954 outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence against France. This war, led by the FLN from 1954 to 1962, ended 132 years of French colonial rule over Algeria.

The expulsion of French occupation forces from Algeria was the result of a mighty revolutionary struggle of Algeria’s workers and oppressed masses. However, it is now clear that formal independence from France solved none of the fundamental problems that drove the Algerian masses into struggle. The Algerian bourgeois regime led by the FLN continues to plunder the country’s wealth in the interests of imperialism, while condemning millions of Algerians to poverty.

On Friday, protesters carried banners which read: “History is repeating itself. November 1, 1954-2019. The 48 provinces, to the capital! Remember the start of the glorious liberation revolution.”

One banner read: “Algeria was freed, and the people now struggle to free themselves.” Another declared, “This concerns everyone. Call the Algerian people to come out, to march and storm the capital by the millions, from all provinces, on Friday, November 1, until all the crooks are brought down.”

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Some demonstrators shouted, “Dump the generals in the garbage!” Protesters repeatedly chanted “Independence! Independence!”

In addition to ongoing weekly mass protests, Algeria is paralyzed by a resurgence of strikes in a number of key sectors. Under these conditions, even Algeria's trade unions—which are long-standing tools of the regime, deeply hostile to a revolutionary struggle by the working class—have felt compelled to make statements of solidarity with mass anti-regime protests.

Energy workers at Sonatrach, the Algerian oil and gas company, are on strike from November 5-7. The National Union of Energy Workers (SNT-Énergie) issued a statement declaring: “It is time to make our voice heard and to improve working conditions, and first of all the mediocre monthly salary. And we would express our unconditional support for the protests and their legitimate demands.”

It added, “We call on all energy administrations in Algeria to go on a general strike, in order to paralyze the public administration and demand the recognition of the dignity of energy workers who suffer in silence.”

Lawyers and judges have gone on strike against the Ministry of Justice's reshuffling of 3,000 magistrates, clashing with riot police. Protesters battled with police in the courthouse of Oran, a major city in western Algeria. The National Magistrates' Syndicate (SNM) criticized the re-shuffling by the regime, saying that it was part of “a stranglehold by the executive over the power of the judiciary.”

Salah, for his part, is stepping up the bloody crackdown on the protests, jailing protesters and political opponents. He has outlawed the public display of the Berber (or Amazigh) flag at protests. In recent weeks, authorities have used this reactionary ban to arrest dozens of protesters, who face prison sentences of up to 10 years as well as hefty fines for supposedly “harming the integrity” of Algeria.

The ongoing protests in Algeria are part of a broad radicalization of the working class and a resurgence of class struggle across the world. Of particular importance to the Algerian working class are the developing strikes and protests against imperialist wars and occupations developing along Algeria's southern borders. There, French imperialism and its NATO allies have waged ever bloodier wars since the 2011 NATO war in Libya. Now, protests demanding the expulsion of French and NATO troops are spreading from French-occupied Mali, which Paris bombed with the active complicity of the Algerian armed forces, to Burkina Faso and Niger.

The millions of Algerians taking part in mass demonstrations for nearly a year have shown great determination, but the central problem workers face is the question of international

revolutionary perspective and leadership. The fate of the FLN regime is powerful testimony to the fact that the bourgeoisie in the former colonial countries is integrated into the camp of imperialism, supporting wars and repressing the working class on behalf of international finance capital.

There is no national road forward for the developing movement in Algeria. In the struggle against imperialism and to overcome the national divisions inside Algeria itself, the working class faces international and revolutionary tasks that require the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the only force fighting for the mobilization of the international working class in a revolutionary struggle against imperialism and world capitalism, and for socialism.

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