

Algeria : “Contribution in the spirit of the Hirak!”

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On this fourth anniversary of the popular Hirak movement, launched in February 2019, Algeria is sinking even further into authoritarianism and repression. The strong state is taking hold!



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Going against the democratic demands and ideals of the Hirak, of which freedoms and popular sovereignty were the cornerstone, the illegitimate regime that exercises power is bogged down in its authoritarian drift.

The deep crisis of the regime in 2013, triggered by the illness of Abdelaziz Bouteflika (president from 1999 to 2019, who died in September 2021), and then by the fall in hydrocarbon prices in 2014, sharpened internal contradictions and propelled the conflict between the principal factions onto the public scene,.

The Hirak became possible thanks to this internal weakening of the regime. On the one hand, the political situation, at the beginning of 2019, was already marked by creeping repression and authoritarianism; on the other hand, the fall in the purchasing power of the popular masses and the middle strata, as well as the generalization of endemic mass unemployment, were the explosive ingredients of the largest popular movement since independence, which became known as the Hirak. Suffice it to say that the cup was already full and the announcement, on February 10, 2019, of a fifth term was only the last straw.

Whatever the nature of what triggered it, the Hirak took on a scale that quickly escaped and surpassed all the sorcerer’s apprentices and all the shadowy operations.

Indeed, after the first grandiose demonstrations against the fifth term of Bouteflika and his clique, it was the questioning of the entire regime and the recurrent return of the army’s stranglehold on political power that took centre stage. At that point, after ousting Bouteflika in April 2019, the Hirak dynamic took on a revolutionary pace for a full and radical change of regime. “Yatnahaw Ga3” (Out with them all!) became a real leitmotif of the movement.

That is why those in power, and those who defend their ideas, quickly spread the idea of a “first authentic Hirak”, baptized “Mubarek” and consecrated in the Constitution, and a second Hirak, that is to say post-April 2019, demonized and fought relentlessly up to today.

Thus, it is for this reason that the imperialist powers quickly jumped at the opportunity to increase their pressure on the regime, urging it to guarantee a “stability” that would ensure their interests in the context of neoliberal globalization, in return for recognition of the new regime and “win-win” economic collaboration, as enshrined in their formulas.

The new laws on hydrocarbons and investment, the maintenance of the unjust association agreement with the European Union, the support given to employers and the private sector, the constitutionalization of the intervention of the army outside our borders, etc., have all been guarantees for external support for the “New Algeria” roadmap initiated by the “election” of the “twelve-twelve” (December 12, 2019) and the nomination of Abdelmadjid Tebboune as president.

But these external pressures and threats, which target our national wealth and a political alignment of our country, continue - they are very real - to influence strongly the current evolution of geostrategic power relations at the international level. In contrast to the repressive and authoritarian policy of the regime, they actually require the urgent establishment of democratic freedoms and respect for popular sovereignty in order to strengthen the home front and our country's capacity to resist all imperialist aims.

The authoritarian restoration of the regime, mixed and fragile at first, was reinforced, in a second phase, by the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. This facilitated repression and stemmed the new dynamic of the Hirak; the rise in hydrocarbon prices, in the wake of the war in Ukraine, has made possible the revaluation of oil and gas rents and a providential and unexpected financial windfall for the regime.

Thus, “measures” to calm the social front became possible and were announced in a pompous and populist way. They corresponded neither to the extent of the social disaster caused by decades of economic liberalism and the various cases of “embezzlement” that accompanied it, nor to the strict catching up of purchasing power, which has been slow for ... twenty years.

However, other essential factors must be taken into account, in particular to recall the obvious weaknesses of the Hirak and to illuminate, modestly, the path that awaits us. For the current ebb of the Hirak can only prepare in depth the upsurge of an inevitable new popular Hirak and the social and political struggles of tomorrow.

In this context, the following key strategic elements should be noted:

(1) The Hirak, despite the “spontaneity of the masses” and the euphoria it aroused about radical and “revolutionary” change, could not produce a clear and hegemonic political project translating the demands expressed by millions of demonstrators for a year to impose freedoms, social justice and popular sovereignty.

(2) The absence of self-organization of the Hirak, especially at the grassroots, facilitated the repression and the emergence of several self-proclaimed opportunists as representatives of the Hirak. Without democratic, popular and independent self-organization at the grassroots, it has been impossible to organize the debate among millions of citizens, to centralize the demands of the Hirak in a platform and to establish a constituent process to give new features to a “reconstituted” popular sovereignty.

(3) The weakness of the workers' movement and the significant non-involvement of the trade union elites in carrying the Hirak forward and giving it a stronger social dimension and progressive leadership have often reduced it to getting bogged down in vague and partial demands, anticipating its weakening and ebbing. The marginal presence of the workers' movement in the Hirak has

amputated it of important means of struggle, such as the general strike which, in March 2019, was the main weapon that precipitated Bouteflika's departure at the beginning of April.

(4) Therefore, it was impossible to hope for the emergence of a unitary, democratic, radical and progressive leadership, acting under the control of popular self-organization, and able to offer an alternative to the regime and lead the country with the perspective of realizing the democratic and social aspirations of the Hirak.

Of course, other elements of reflection are to be taken into consideration in this debate on the balance sheet of the Hirak, an assessment that remains to be done. But, I felt that in this modest contribution, which calls for further contributions, it was necessary to insist briefly, on this fourth anniversary of the Hirak, on the aspects that seemed to me the most obvious to help understand the trajectory of the Hirak and its weaknesses, on the one hand and, on the other hand, to draw lessons from this formidable collective popular experience to better envisage and make converge the struggles of tomorrow.

The general strike announced by the autonomous unions for February 28 is good news from this point of view. It constitutes precisely the importance of the organized workers' movement in the resistance against the repression of trade union freedoms, democratic freedoms in general, and the right to strike. Whatever its scale and impact, it will break a little this climate of repression that has certainly installed a feeling of fear, without however engendering resignation or abandonment of the democratic and social aspirations of the Hirak.

But, while waiting for tomorrow and the resurgence of the hope born of the Hirak, the struggle must continue today and give priority to the following points:

- An immediate end to repression in all its forms!
- The release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience!
- The repeal of all repressive laws and legal provisions!
- The lifting of all measures and obstacles to the effective exercise of all democratic freedoms!
- The independence of the judiciary and the public media from political power!
- The opening of a democratic and national debate, before the people, making possible the implementation of an authentic popular sovereignty!

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P.S.

- Fourth International. :
<https://fourth.international/index.php/en/africa/508>