

Algeria: Students Build Unity in Struggle

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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 anticolonialist 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 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.

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https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tradeunions_algerianuprising_0520_hires-1.pdf

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