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Algeria

# **“We are convinced that only revolution will finish off this regime”**

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**An interview with Mohand Sadek Akrou, outgoing mayor of Barbacha and candidate for the Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs (PST – Socialist Workers’ Party, Algerian section of the Fourth International) at the local elections of November 29, 2012. The interviewer was Farid Ikken**

**Your list of candidates in the local elections of November 29 was rejected by the wali and then accepted by the courts, why, in your view?**

Our list was accepted by a judgment of the administrative court on Monday October 22nd, but also, more or less, thanks to the support of the local people. The verdict was only just, because the decision of the wali was an arbitrary, politically motivated decision, which leads us, perhaps, to think that elections are not going to change things but are a moment of struggle, that this regime is not democratic and expresses its dictatorial and monopolist nature in the political field. It has already seen what we have done these last five years during the mandate we have exercised, our actions, our way of management that is in total antagonism with that regime. It does not surprise me that the wali rejected our list because currently I gave the resources of the local council to trade unionists, social movements because they are the resources of the people and they belong to the people. I took positions during gatherings of the unemployed, of local trades unionists and automatically it bothers the regime that an elected official is representative of the people instead of the state power.

**Have you boycotted the wali of Bejaia during his visits to Barbacha?**

We have not boycotted him at first glance. He had already made two trips to Barbacha, was very well received. He had guided tours in the majority of the villages there. Only, there were promises that were made on his part and the requirements on our part that have been made, including the minimum requirement made in early February on the acquisition of a bulldozer because our town is a rural area and its richness lies in agriculture, livestock, arboriculture and the products of the soil, and to develop them we need agricultural tracks. When these promises have not been met, we boycotted the wali, first telling him, you have not kept your promises, we boycott you but we will not prevent you from coming to Barbacha. We have not made a movement to stop him. Indeed, he has already come and he was received by the head of the district. Again, he programmed a visit in the bordering commune, Kendira and the district head asked us whether the wali could include Barbacha in his visit. And they were told if you have things to bring us you are welcome, if not it is better to postpone. The wali opted for a very wise decision in opting to postpone. But on the return from Kendira the wali stopped in our commune at the level of a social housing construction site, and we got angry and issued our statement denouncing the visit of the wali in the absence of local elected representatives.

**Can you motivate your choice to participate in the upcoming elections?**

For the elections, we reiterated throughout the year that it is not the elections that are going to change things in Algeria. It is our belief as long as there is no class consciousness among the broad popular masses in this country, when there is no huge relationship of forces to stop electoral fraud carried out by the administration of the regime, because the regime holds all the possible tentacles to defraud, so it takes a popular left movement strong enough to bring about change. What we want is revolution. We are convinced that only revolution will put an end to this capitalist mafia regime. We consider that where there is a space, it is necessary to open it up, including by elections. The elections for us are a movement to take advantage of a platform of expression to speak to the people, express our politics because the political field is closed throughout the year and we believe these “recreations” represent an opportunity for the party, why not win some spaces to exercise its politics and expose the contradiction within the

institutions of the state.

Of course, while keeping the umbilical cord with the popular masses and with the relationship of forces that you always need to create. This is what we did for five years at Barbacha. We have presented lists only in the communes where we have activists to avoid opportunists and “chkara” people, we are present in 11 communes at the national level and 2 communes in Bejaia, namely Barbacha and Adekkar. We were also willing to sponsor left lists, of trade unionists or activists in the associative movement, we have sponsored these lists in other wilayas.

**You also have candidates for the elections for the wilaya assembly, according to our information. That's right?**

At the level of the wilaya assembly, actually because it's also a pretty important issue, it is impossible to have a local council that can perform its duties if it does not have support at the level of the wilaya, including at the financial level because the wilaya budget is quite large and because it's a space that the wilaya represents where one can also influence policy. It is in this sense that we presented three lists at the national level in Mostaghanem, Tlemcen and of course Bejaia. Our candidate in Béjaïa is Kamel Acharya, a doctor of biology, a teacher at the university, a trade unionist and a veteran activist, with 30 years as party militant.

**Some political parties have chosen to boycott the local elections of November 29 arguing that the vote would support the regime in place. What do you think?**

But of course, we call them, who are these parties? We tell them, that a boycott is a political option that we share, but to boycott by staying idle is a resignation. Passive abstention is not in favour of the interests of the popular masses but we support an active boycott.

**What do you mean by “actively boycotting”?**

An active boycott means preventing the elections from taking place, this means revolution, people out in the street. That is a boycott that has a meaning. We boycotted and remained absent for several years during elections and we were not able to put forward a popular movement to prevent the elections, which is a resignation. As we said through our secretary general, to boycott and stay at home is not an option for the PST.

**You have also mentioned the risk of fraud at every election. Are these risks not present at the next elections in which you take part?**

The risks of fraud are also present at the level of the wilaya and the local council. It is still possible to counter fraud if the administration activates its networks at the level of the body consisting of the army and other bodies that are added to the lists of local voters. We have seen how fraud took place in the parliamentary elections of May 2012, through the vote of the constituent bodies and in other elections previously. This risk of fraud arises also today in Adekkar, where there are constituted bodies of the army. We have a list and our comrades in Adekkar started an action with the FFS and the RCD who withdrew at the last minute when the PST organized a gathering in Adekkar on October 30 to denounce these lists. In this sense, there may be fraud. But if the wali knew he could cheat in Brabacha, he would have not rejected our list. Where it has no bodies, where the population ensures transparency and safety and self organisation at the level of the polling stations, the authority cannot cheat. If we can generalize this awareness at the national level, you can create an anti-regime event at the national level.

The military have the right to vote like all Algerians but must vote in their places of residence. The massive

registrations they have made in the town of Adekkar are things to denounce and we must prevent these fraudulent practices that violate the communal code.

**Béjaïa has already experienced such scenarios in past legislative elections passed, at the level of the primary school of Quatre Chemins where young military conscripts have been brought to stuff the ballot boxes, what guarantees are there that such scenarios do not occur in the next communal elections?**

Actually, it happened at the Boucherba school, the recount took place in Bejaia district. The distribution of votes at the level of the regime coalition was very clear, two ballot boxes to the FLN, there was no dissenting voice within a single box, it was blatant. The regime is capable of reproducing these fraudulent practices.

**The national electoral monitoring commission suspended its work temporarily in protest, what do you think?**

Actually, I think that the demands of the national electoral monitoring commission, filed at the level of the Ministry of the Interior, were not honoured, there was no response to the recommendations of the national commission. This regime is Machiavellian and has no desire to establish a democracy in this country. Therefore, we believe that only a broadly popular relationship of forces is able to put an end to this mafia regime. Otherwise it remains effectively that what we do is reform and it is recognized. But at the risk of repeating it, as long as the boycott promoted by ourselves or by others amount to a silence or a resignation which is unable to bring the masses onto the street to prevent the elections being held, then it is a tactical and symbolic participation on our part.

**What legitimacy, according to you, can a local elected official draw from a vote where the participation rate does not exceed 26% as was the case in Bejaia in the elections last May or during previous communal elections?**

This is not legitimate at all, first these are deputies produced by fraud, by a coalition co-opted by the regime, with the absence of a legal framework. In 2002, we had deputies who were elected with rates of 2%, after the movement of 2001, because there was no text in the electoral code which required a minimum rate for the validation of the elections.

There is no legitimacy, obviously, as evidenced today by the minister of the interior who was more or less “honest” in declaring that he aspires to achieve a 45% participation rate. This is official recognition that no more than 45% vote in Algeria, that representation at the national level is to be reviewed today. But of course in our municipalities we will try to mobilize the population to vote in our favour to be real representatives. Because you cannot be representative with low rates. If we had not had, in 2007, the absolute majority in Barbacha, I think we could not coexist with the others.

**You said recently that an SNMG [guaranteed minimum wage] of 35,000 dinars is needed in Algeria to improve the purchasing power of the citizens. An opinion shared by many economic experts, but the government is not listening. Do you think that this estimate is able to cope with the current inflation situation?**

First, you should know that the SNMG of 35,000 dinars is not the estimate made by the PST; it is the UGTA which has made this calculation. Other autonomous unions opt for 42,000 dinars. For our part, we say, today with the galloping inflation that we have experienced in recent months, inflation that started in the mid-1980s; a general increase of prices in the long term and the long term today dates back 30 years. So today, I think a minimum wage of 50,000 dinars is insufficient to live with dignity in our country. I was a university before becoming a local councillor, and with my salary of 80,000 dinars, I cannot live decently and what about large families? Look at the prices of basic products, the price of educational materials, that is obligatory household expenditure, not luxury spending. So 35,000

dinars was logical a year ago today, it is already insufficient.