

ALGERIA REBUILDS

Henri Alleg

HENRI ALLEG, writer of this article, played a notable part in Algeria's heroic struggle for national liberation. His book, 'The Question,' written from experience as a victim of French imperialist brutality, drew world attention to the torture inflicted on captured Algerian patriots.

WHERE DOES ALGERIA stand today, eighteen months after independence? Despite the gloomy prophecies of the supporters of 'Algerie francaise' who claimed that once they had gone everything would be in ruins, Algeria is not doing too badly and one can predict that she will go from strength to strength.

Of course this view is not shared by those who have seen their lands nationalized and handed over to the agricultural workers, now the owners of the farms on which they had toiled as slaves for years. Nor is it the view of those Western politicians and businessmen who look askance at the anti-imperialist and Socialist decisions of the Algerian Government. But the 'pessimism' of such people merely confirms that things are not going badly in Algeria for the workers and the ordinary people.

In an extraordinarily short space of time, the country has emerged from the chaos in which it was left by 132 years of colonialism, including more than seven terrible years of war, of OAS destruction and atrocities.

Little more than a year ago it seemed as if Algeria was about to topple into anarchy and bloody battles between rival factions. This was what the defeated imperialists hoped for, because a divided and weakened nation would have provided a more favourable terrain for neo-colonialist revenge. But thanks to the maturity of the Algerian people, there was no 'Congolization' of Algeria. This maturity upset the calculations which certain people were making on the basis of the inevitable difficulties facing a newly-independent people. It broke through (and with what speed!) the obstacles erected by the French experts in the Evian agreement, in the hope that they would prevent the winning of independence from opening up the struggle for social liberation.

The Evian agreement provided, for example, for prior consultations between the Algerian and French Governments on all matters concerning the expropriation of the French settlers in relation to indispensable agrarian reform. This method was intended to limit, control and guide the future policy of the new Algeria in the countryside, for the

French 'experts' considered, and correctly, that on this depended the whole future of the country.

But at the time of the signature of the agreement they never thought of the possibility of more direct intervention by a third force which till then had only fought. This third force was composed of the people, the workers and poor fellaheen who were not at all prepared to wait for 'permission' to regain their lands. The O.A.S., by burning all the bridges behind the Europeans whom it had dragged in its bloody wake, also assisted paradoxically in rendering null and void all this part of the Evian agreement even before the ink on it was dry.

In fact, the European settlers and landowners, fleeing from Algeria, abandoned their property and the agricultural workers had no need to wait for a slogan before organizing themselves and starting to work these lands in place of the former landlords. In the course of a few weeks over two and a half million acres passed into the hands of those who before were the pariahs of colonialism. What is more, instead of dividing the lands between them, the workers decided to manage them collectively under a council elected by themselves.

The protests of the settlers, supported by the French Government, had little effect, and the workers finally masters of a land which they had for decades watered with their sweat, will now never let it go. They would sooner be killed defending their gains and are ready to fight in the same way as they fought to win their freedom.

THE DECREES OF MARCH 1963

President Ben Bella's decrees of March 1963 only served to extend these initiatives of the people by legalizing and organizing them. But the decrees are nevertheless of historic importance, for they show the profound agreement which exists between the aspirations of the masses and the views of Algeria's leaders. After these first decrees came those of October 1963 which practically liquidated European colonization and handed over all its lands to the agricultural workers and the fellaheen. Other decrees are being prepared which will limit to 125 acres the amount of land which an Algerian can own. Thus the agrarian reform will cover a total of 15 million acres out of 25 million acres of arable land, of which 7½ million acres will be lands of former colonialists and another 7 million taken from the big Algerian feudal landowners, after the limitations on private property.

The best lands, those which were cultivated in almost industrial fashion by the European settlers, have here and now been made part of the collective sector which indicates what weight this sector will have in the economic and political future of Algeria.

Cutting their losses, the French colonialists would have liked to

limit these revolutionary measures to the countryside, but workers' self-management has widely and rapidly gone beyond the agricultural sector. The workers in the towns, with Government encouragement, have not been left behind. In Algiers, Oran, Constantine and other towns, they have taken over control of the factories and commercial undertakings abandoned by the French owners and started them up again. That is how the workers' self-management committees in the industrial and commercial sector have come into being. By now some 500 enterprises have been taken over, varying in size from those employing several hundred, such as the Oran Glassworks (former property of the Saint-Gobain trust and which is functioning thanks to technical help from Czech engineers), or the Acilor foundry (offshoot of the Pont-à-Mousson group), and the iron-ore mine at Béni-Saf. A number of transport and tobacco firms as well as hotels and blocks of flats have also been nationalized.

None of this was foreseen, not even in the 'Tripoli Charter', drawn up before independence was proclaimed, though this was itself a bold programme. But the action of the masses was yet more bold, giving birth to this workers' self-management sector which has laid the first basic foundations of a socialist sector in Algeria's economy.

THE SOCIALIST CHOICE

It is today clear to the majority of our people that there is no other choice possible for Algeria except Socialism. This appears to them to be so indisputable that it is inscribed in the Constitution, Article 10 of which states:

'The fundamental objectives of the Algerian Democratic and People's Republic are . . . the exercise of power by the people whose advance guard consists of the fellaheen, the workers and revolutionary intellectuals . . . the construction of a socialist democracy, the struggle against the exploitation of man in all its forms.'

President Ben Bella has explained this choice on many occasions. On November 1, on the occasion of the celebrations of the anniversary of the beginning of the armed insurrection, he stated precisely what this new power is, replying at the same time to those who accuse the regime of dictatorship.

'*What we want,*' he said, *'is the dictatorship of the humble, the dictatorship of the poor, that of the peasants and the workers. This dictatorship will have a long life in this country.'*

Such a revolutionary orientation could not but arouse the opposition of all those who felt their privileges and ambitions threatened by the measures which it implied. For a section of the Algerian bourgeoisie, whether they did or did not participate in the liberation struggle, in-

dependence meant above all new possibilities to enrich themselves, and possibilities of access to economic positions which before independence had been held by the French colonialists. Part of the petty bourgeoisie in its turn, while wanting to be protected against the big boys, saw in independence above all the possibility of being able to acquire shops and the like at low prices, as well as good jobs in the administration and in private companies. Thus those whose interests were directly encroached upon and those who feared that their prospects for advancement might be limited, found themselves united against the measure taken by the Government and its non-capitalist choice.

That is basically the reason for the clash of the various tendencies which have torn the F.L.N. since independence and right up to the last crisis in Kabylia. Those opposing forces, whatever flag they fly, in fact defend directly or indirectly the class interests of those who do not accept the political orientation of the new Algeria.

Thus the situation becomes clearer every day—one is either for the Ben Bella Government and its revolutionary measures, or one is against it.

The seekers of personal wealth, of all sorts, have already chosen their side. Rather than accept this 'dictatorship of the poor' they are ready to ally themselves with the neo-colonialists whose positions remain strong. They have sent their money to France and Switzerland and they are plotting more or less openly for the overthrow of the government. And on the other side, the workers in the towns, the agricultural workers, the unemployed, the fellaheen, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie are with President Ben Bella and his Government.

Abroad the same cleavage came about between the true friends of the Algerian Revolution and those who took fright at the position it took up alongside the world peace forces, alongside those who are building socialism.

MOROCCO

The most recent example is the conflict unleashed on Algeria's western frontiers by King Hassan II, representative of Morocco's big bourgeoisie and feudal lords, because he fears that the Algerian revolutionary 'virus' might contaminate Africa and his own country in the first place. Behind the Moroccan aggression are the imperialists of every hue, who have only been made more prudent by the setbacks suffered over Cuba and the lessons they learned there.

The crushing diplomatic defeat sustained by Morocco at Bamako has shown in striking fashion which side had the sympathies of the African people, and what pressure these sympathies can bring to bear.

Indeed it is this pressure which has forced reaction in Morocco finally to accept the proposed arbitration and to submit to the decisions taken at Addis Ababa by all the independent countries in the African continent.

Nor is it only a question of Algeria's relations with Africa. The path Algeria is choosing, which is becoming clearer day by day, is helping to bring about a coming together and a real alliance between her and the countries in the socialist bloc.

During the Algeria-Morocco crisis, the solidarity of the socialist countries made itself evident, nor was it lacking in helping in the great construction tasks which face Algeria. The most important assistance was that provided by the Soviet Union in a long term loan of 50 million francs to help build sixty sites for public works, twenty to thirty dams, and the establishment of a network of machine and tractor stations as well as supplying a whole range of agricultural machinery.

Thus, as the Algerian revolution is being 'radicalized'—as they would say in Cuba, she can distinguish more clearly between her real friends and the neo-colonialists who only smile upon her deceitfully and whose help is subject to conditions.

A REVOLUTIONARY ORIENTATION

Foreign observers are sometimes sceptical about statements by leaders of the Algerian Revolution on the beginning of the march towards socialism. They point out that Algeria has not yet rid itself completely from the imperialist control contained in certain articles of the Evian agreement. Consequently, they claim, Algeria's struggle must be directed towards the complete political and economic liberation of the country, and the social revolution can only come later.

Of course Algeria's independence has still to be completed—the French imperialists are still at Mers-el-Kebir and Oran. They have not given up the idea of using the Sahara for atomic tests, and their position is still very strong in certain sectors of the economy, particularly in the oil industry, which is the most important. The Algerian Government, though it does not reject co-operation with France, is conscious of this and has already begun the battle for the revision of the Evian agreement which no longer corresponds to the realities of the present situation.

But must one conclude from this that it is impossible to talk about 'socialist liberation' so long as the French are at Mers-el-Kebir? This would be to forget the example of Cuba which although not completely liberated has nevertheless carried through a socialist revolution.

The process of social revolution can very well begin and continue without the great task of liberation having been completely accomplished. Indeed one of the most remarkable aspects of the Algerian national liberation movement has been the fact that from the beginning of the insurrection it has had a profound revolutionary content.

This is explained, among other things, by the weakness of the national bourgeoisie and the outstanding part played in the struggle by the poor peasantry allied with the industrial workers in the towns and the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. These classes were already formulating their social objectives in the course of the struggle, when colonialism had not yet been defeated.

Right through the war of liberation, this revolutionary content became clearer and more precise. Under the pressure of the masses and with the experience acquired in the internal struggle of the F.L.N. the essential characteristics of the new society to be built, began to appear. Once the war of liberation was over, the word 'socialism' was suddenly endowed with the same prestige and gained the same mobilizing force as the word 'independence' during the years of battle.

Thus the rapid overtaking of purely anti-imperialist objectives, which paves the way to the radical transformation of the structure of society, was already written into the liberation struggle.

One cannot conclude from this that the process of building socialism has already begun. What can be said is that the revolution has begun, under new forms, and is fighting for victory. This does not mean that everything is now clear and that the 'socialism' everyone is talking about means the same thing to everybody. We know very well that many are using this word to conceal bargaining which has nothing in common with socialism.

But it is above all deeds and not only words which show that the country's orientation is correct. There is the powerful participation of the masses in the elaboration of the new society and also the declarations of the leaders of the revolution making it clear that by 'socialism' they mean the form of society already achieved in the Soviet Union, Cuba and other socialist countries. Thus there can be no confusion as to the sort of socialism which has been chosen.

President Ben Bella recently gave greater precision to this matter when he stated in an interview with the Syrian newspaper *El Ahram* that 'the socialism chosen by Algeria is scientific socialism.' Replying on another occasion to a reporter of the Finnish Radio, Ahmed Ben Bella also indicated that he accepted all the Marxist conclusions in the economic field. These declarations reflect not only the progress already made by Marxism-Leninism among the most revolutionary cadres

but also the decline of idealist conceptions and anti-communist, prejudices.

A PARTY OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Nevertheless other important steps need to be taken to formulate the ideological bases on which will be formed the indispensable Party of the Revolution without which it would be impossible to fulfil the tasks which must be accomplished.

The F.L.N. which was the gathering together of all classes and all national tendencies during the struggle, can no longer play this role. What is more, under cover of the proud banner of the F.L.N. certain opportunist and counter-revolutionary elements are taking advantage of their position to act as a brake on progress.

The revolution cannot obtain in the present organization the necessary 'conveyor belts' capable of carrying out the decisions taken and of inspiring everywhere the spirit of renewal. The Algerian leaders and Ben Bella in particular are very conscious of this serious weakness and of the need to get rid of it.

In an interview with French journalists, Ben Bella said: 'The F.L.N. today must be the party of the socialist revolution. It therefore has a task fundamentally different from the other F.L.N. which was responsible for the struggle for independence and whose objective was national independence. This new F.L.N. will itself also be forged in action starting with workers' self-management, starting with nationalization, starting with the co-operatives which are in the process of being formed. It is in the fire of everyday action that we will be separating the most valuable elements for the formation of the party.'

This idea of the formation of a powerful, united Party of the Socialist Revolution is supported by the Algerian Communists who, before playing an eminent role during the war of liberation had the historic honour of propagating Marxist ideas in Algeria. Thus, the paths of the genuine revolutionaries who emerged from the F.L.N. and from the ranks of the Algerian Communists, would logically meet. In practice an alliance in fact already exists between them.

When will the new Party be born? The experience of the past months shows that the conditions for its realization could ripen relatively quickly. But it is obvious that it could not come about unless all the revolutionary elements accept not only a common programme but also the essential elements of a common ideology.

How will this Party be born? It will be born in action, for it is in the fulfilment of the tasks set by the revolution that the best people will come forward. There is no doubt, and experience has already proved this, that they will be recruited above all among the workers in town and

countryside. They will come from among those who have already freed themselves of the employers and settlers, who know what capitalist exploitation is and who have at the same time become accustomed to organized action.

The Communists have as their watchword to give the example in sacrifice for the country and for the revolution. Their ambition is to be among its most far-seeing and devoted supporters of unity, the most devoted to the interests of the masses. It is not surprising therefore that in these conditions many are today being requested to become leaders of trade unions and national organizations. And these requests will increase as anti-Communism retreats and as the agents of imperialism and the reactionary bourgeoisie whose classic weapon it is, are definitely beaten.

There is no doubt that by expressing these aspirations, the majority of the delegates to the forthcoming F.L.N. Congress will advance the realization of the Party, the advance guard of the workers and the entire nation. Armed with this party, the Algerian people will not only complete its liberation, foil the plans of the neo-colonialists, face up to all the problems of transition, but also definitely assure the triumph of the socialist revolution in Algeria, harbinger of the liberation of the entire African continent.

The African Communist

With this issue, our journal adopts a new type of 'news' cover, which will change with each issue, and will draw attention to the more topical items of the contents.

Collectors, librarians and others interested will note that we have reverted to the serial method of numbering each issue from number one, issued in October 1959. Most back numbers are out of stock, but a few copies of some issues are still available at 2s. 6d. per copy.

Readers will notice other changes designed to make their magazine more attractive and readable. The price remains unchanged, but a special appeal is made to friends of our magazine and our cause to assist by sending donations to our London agent. It will also help a great deal if all agents would settle their accounts, and subscribers renew their subscriptions promptly.