

ALGERIA AND DE GAULLE

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WHEN the European settlers in Algeria rose against the Paris government on 13th May last, they were taking part in the fourth rising of this nature which has occurred since the occupation of the country in 1830. They had made similar demonstrations in 1848, 1870 and 1898.¹ The fact is that they have never been satisfied with the way in which Paris has governed the country. They would have liked to set up a government and rule the country themselves; but never being strong enough to face either the metropolitan government or the Muslim inhabitants, they have always sought, with a considerable measure of success, to use the forces of the former to impose their own will on the latter. For over a hundred years the plan worked, but it has finally led the mother country into a dead-end.

On this last occasion, there had been premonitory signs on 6th February, 1956. It was then fifteen months since the start of the rebellion, and it had become plain that the French government had to choose between two courses. One was to negotiate with the rebels; the other was to send an army of half a million men to Algeria and to incur all the expense, the odium and the risks which such an undertaking would imply.

Meanwhile a general election in France brought into power, at the beginning of 1956, a socialist government whose election programme included making peace in Algeria. The new Prime Minister, M. Guy Mollet, decided to prepare the way by naming General Catroux as Governor-General; but also to visit Algiers himself first. Greeted by a hostile demonstration and bombarded with tomatoes, he yielded to this pressure, allowed General Catroux to withdraw without even taking up his duties, and appointed instead the "strong man" of the party, Robert Lacoste, as Resident Minister in Algeria. Instead of negotiation a policy of "pacification", similar to that followed earlier in Indo-China, was adopted. This implied the forcible suppression of rebellion, to be followed by elections for some unspecified body and, finally, discussions with the Muslims elected, but only with the provision that any idea of independence was to be ruled out. The result of this policy was the extension of

¹ "Rien de nouveau sous le soleil d'Algérie." *Le Monde*, 12-6-1958.

the rebellion and a political deadlock which has continued to this day.

Early in the current year, there were indications that a new French government, the third to take office since M. Mollet's comparatively long-lived regime of fifteen months, was considering the possibility of negotiations. Settler alarm at this news was increased by the disastrous results, from the French point of view, of the bombing of Sakiët; by the retirement of the protagonist of pacification, M. Lacoste, from the post of Minister for Algeria; by the execution by the rebels of three French prisoners in reprisal for the killing of rebel prisoners; and by the Conference of Tangier at the end of April, which promised the rebels the firm support of the Tunisian and Moroccan governments. This combination of events was sufficient to set off a rising which the politically active settlers had long been meditating. It had the sympathy of senior army officers and the tacit approval of the outgoing Minister, M. Lacoste, though he had not supposed that it would be directed against his own former headquarters and against the high officials who had worked with him. This, however, was only one of the lesser oddities of this most paradoxical of revolutions. A more important one was the participation of Muslims in the demonstrations. It has since been acknowledged by the official spokesman of General de Gaulle's government that this participation was originally organized by the settlers and by the army and paid for in cash. Later, however, there was undoubtedly a substantial measure of spontaneous adherence to the welcome given to General de Gaulle when he visited Algeria. This "fraternization" was hailed by official spokesmen as a miracle, though it was in fact perfectly explicable by non-supernatural causes.

The slogans used by the revolutionaries were two: "*integration*" and "*de Gaulle to power*". These had one thing in common; they meant quite different things to different people. For the settlers, integration meant the abolition of any institutions which suggested that Algeria was different from an exclusively European portion of France; from which it followed that there would be no more concessions to Muslims on the grounds that Algeria had something specifically Muslim about it. As one settler put it to Muslims whom he was inviting to fraternize, "Integration is very simple and very good. It means no more fighting and everyone friends again—everything just as it always

has been."² For army officers, who often regarded the self-interestedness of the settlers with distaste, it meant better conditions for the Muslims together, of course, with the defeat of the rebels. For the officers of the Special Administrative Services, whose duty it was to conciliate the Muslims by raising their standards of living, it meant greatly increased attention to this aspect of their work. For General de Gaulle himself, to judge from his utterances, integration meant a kind of mystical identification of the two communities within a French mould, as a result of which all material differences or causes of dissension would disappear, or at least lose all significance. For most Muslims, on the other hand, integration was just another of the fine phrases by which their ears had so often been tickled before, without any great change subsequently occurring in their material circumstances. As long ago as 1865, they had been solemnly assured that "the native Muslim is a Frenchman"; and again, in 1947, the Statute of Algeria had laid it down, rather more long-windedly, that "all holders of French nationality in the Algerian departments enjoy the rights attaching to the quality of French citizens without distinction of origin, race or religion." But while the new formula was of little interest, there was for the moment a notable material change for the better. Muslims were being flattered instead of harried; a number of their relatives were being released from detention; the symbols of the Lacoste regime, under which they had so long been suffering, were being removed, the buildings of the Governor-General had been sacked, and Lacoste's prefects chased from their offices.

As for the second slogan, "de Gaulle to power", this too had a different signification for Europeans and for Muslims. For the former, de Gaulle was the symbol of an assertive French nationalism and of scorn for the parliamentary system, to whose shortcomings both settlers and military attributed the failure which was really the result of a mistaken policy. For the Muslims, on the other hand, de Gaulle was an exceptionally honest and liberal-minded idealist who was known to believe in transforming the French empire into an association of free peoples. He had shown goodwill when he introduced the Statute of 1947; it was not his fault that his successors had failed to implement it honestly.

This failure of the European population and of French states-

² *Le Monde*, 1-7-1958.

men to grasp the motives of the "fraternization" has created a situation of political make-believe which must be without parallel in history.

And meanwhile the guerrilla war continues, with five hundred Algerians announced as killed in one week (as well as an unspecified number of Frenchmen) and six hundred the next. Terrorist outrages are on the increase again. The French army is once more complaining of rebel attacks from Tunisian territory. The only women who have been truly emancipated are those who are serving with the rebels. The problems of disease, illiteracy and poverty are no more tractable now than they were in the past. In these circumstances, measures of clemency based on the supposition that all is now well—the release, for example, of over 11,000 detainees since 13th May—and the agreements with Tunisia and Morocco can serve no purpose but to strengthen the rebel cause. Nothing could have been more revealing than an episode which occurred during the celebrations of 14th July. As a symbol of the future, 2,000 Algerian boys, carefully selected, were brought to Paris to march in the parade. As the group passed the saluting point, four boys produced and unfurled Algerian rebel flags and shouted "Down with French Algeria!"; and when parachute officers and police came to arrest them, the flags were passed from hand to hand until they disappeared.³

It is against this background that General de Gaulle announced in general terms his ideas for the future of Algeria. "We are emerging," he said, "from the period of doubt about our future relationship. We are moving towards a vast and free community. During 1958 . . . we must establish the links of our Union on a federal basis. . . . I cannot let slip this opportunity of saying that Algeria, with the metropolis and the overseas departments, with West and Equatorial Africa, with Madagascar, with Jibuti, with New Caledonia and the French establishments in Oceania, has a place reserved for it among the others—and it is a choice place."⁴ In this reference to Algeria two points are to be noticed. One is that the settler cry of "One France and 53 million Frenchmen from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset" (in the far south of the Sahara) was by implication rejected; Algeria was clearly to have a place and a personality of its own. Secondly, it was assumed that in future Algeria would take its place in a free federal community and remain

3 *Le Monde*, 16-7-1958.

4. *Ibid*, 15-7-1958.

there without compulsion. In other words, it was taken for granted that "fraternization" has influenced the overwhelming majority of Muslim Algerians and signifies that they are willing to form part of a French federation.

It would be impossible to accept the latter supposition, even if a majority were secured by an administratively controlled referendum, with all known members of the nationalist parties excluded from the voting. Consider the development of the rebellion. When it began on 1st November, 1954, it was an affair of some 500 men, armed with a few rifles, a good many shotguns and some stolen explosives. To-day the Front of National Liberation is an organization carrying out many of the functions of a government. It controls a force of at least 100,000 uniformed and armed men, and has carried on an armed struggle against French forces of over half a million for almost four years. It has voluntary charitable organizations affiliated to it which look after 60,000 penniless refugees on the Moroccan side of the Algerian border and as many again in Tunisia. Its budget is collected partly by its own underground tax-collectors in Algeria and partly from the Arab states. It maintains representatives in most of the principal capitals of the world and at the United Nations. It has been recognized as representative of the Algerian Muslim people by the Governments of Tunisia and Morocco. A refugee diaspora of professional men from Algeria exerts a powerful political and social influence in the two sister countries. The events of 13th May have not enabled the French government to produce any new Algerian of standing to make a declaration in their favour. It appears to have proved impossible to find an Algerian who could be given a post in the French Cabinet, though this had been announced as imminent. One or two Muslims of importance, who on the first coming of de Gaulle had expressed their hopes for a new deal, have now given utterance to bitter disillusion.

No other deduction is possible from these facts but that the policy of General de Gaulle's government towards Algeria is based on one of the most remarkable pieces of self-deception which any government has ever inflicted upon itself. It is alarming to try and picture what French reaction will be when the grim reality finally breaks through the fog of illusion. Many of those who brought the General to power have already shown their alarm and disappointment at the policy which he is following with regard to Algeria and with regard to the

other territories which he hopes to associate with France in a freely accepted commonwealth. When the French public realize that the result has been the strengthening of secessionist tendencies throughout the French Union, it seems probable that the same elements which brought the new regime into power will turn against it and overthrow it. Things might have been different if General de Gaulle could have had the patience and the skill to carry such a policy through ten years ago. But his temperament seems to be such as to lead him to hope to achieve difficult political operations by the mere force of personality. The wearying and often sordid task of turning a political ideal into reality seems to be so abhorrent to him that he prefers to retire disdainfully and cherish his dream in solitude.

The prospects of a compromise solution for Algeria are small. It is unlikely that a people as tough as the nine million Muslims of Algeria have shown themselves to be can be ruled indefinitely against their will; while it is equally hard to see how they can assimilate the European population of a million so long as the latter has the backing of the French army. In so far as reforms can be realized, they are likely to strengthen rather than weaken the sentiment of nationality in the Algerians, just as corresponding British reforms did in the Irish at the beginning of the present century.

On the other hand, there is a faint hope that some form of association might be accepted. Tunisia and Morocco look with horror on the prospect of being gradually drawn into the armed struggle against France. If they could, by a form of association with France, induce the latter to grant Algeria a similar status to their own, it is conceivable that they might accept a proposal of such a nature. The Muslims Algerians themselves have suffered terribly, and there is still no prospect of negotiations. For the moment, however, there is little evidence that General de Gaulle would consider such a solution; if he did so it is obvious that his difficulties with his own supporters would be immense. The Muslim leaders of North Africa are not optimistic; it is doubtful whether the position can be better put than it was by President Bourguiba in a recent interview with an American journalist: "During the next six months or a year," he said, "anything may happen—including the worst."