

National independence: The only possible outcome

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The term 'independence' has single-handedly pitted us against the French, in their unanimity. Whilst it has the gift of sending inveterate imperialists into a muted rage, neither has it failed to ruffle the left, whose chauvinistic reactions have become uncontrollable. French opinion has not forgiven us for demanding, with so much conviction, the full and complete sovereignty of our country. It accuses us of infantilism and reproaches us for the fetishist passion that has allegedly made us slaves to a word.

In thrall to an upsurge of nationalism, this same French public opinion unhesitatingly calls into question the idea of national independence in general. It deems the concept obsolete and incapable of meeting the demands of our time, one in which great political ensembles prevail to the detriment of small powers. It does not understand independence as a chance; independence is no longer considered an advance but instead a regression for Algeria, which, located at the doors of Europe, has everything left to gain by remaining in France's bosom.

A fundamental objective and not a tactical claim

In France the Algerian problem is taken up only in order to present it in unintelligible terms by obscuring the basics. A multiplicity of often contradictory and always illusory solutions have been put forward. Amongst the swarm of projects, the valid solution, the only one that matters for peace, which is to say, the independence of Algeria, is envisaged only to be systematically dismissed. Of all the controversies and discussions that have arisen between French officials, this solution is deemed unjustified and, all in all, arbitrary.

By demanding it, then, the Algerians are allegedly clinging to a position that is extremist and essentially emotional. France, the claim is made, is not obliged to adopt it and will not be dragged into a game of one-upmanship. Besides, some reasonable Algerians exist. Quietly, they think that the demand for independence is a mere façade, an artifice of propaganda, and the reality of things altogether different. So the war shall be continued whilst they wait for these 'moderates' to raise their voices. As people become weary, a phase of negotiations will ensue in which France, from a position of strength, can enforce the 'liberal' status that will win over a substantial proportion of Algerian opinion, if not all of it.

Such a conception is evidently misguided; it expresses desires and wishes, but does not correspond to the real spirit driving the FLN. Its mistake is to reduce to a tactical claim of the revolution that which is posited from the first as its fundamental objective. It shows France's inability to grasp the Algerian problem in its real givens as well as the solution it demands. This problem cannot be abstracted from the revolutionary context of which it has been a constant part since 1 November 1954, and the requisite

solution is not to be located outside the limits of this context.

The Algerian people conceives of its relations with France in terms of an irreducible opposition between its interests and those of the colonial presence. For this people there can be no point in waiting for colonialism to be reformed, for it to prove less cupid and less ferocious, for it to loosen its grip. The system is condemned en bloc and the advent of independence alone can really consummate its fall. The FLN, taking up and clarifying this point of view, laid it out in November 1954: independence, from that date, has been posited as a red line, short of which no agreed arrangement between the Algerian people and France is possible.

An idea essential to Algerian reality

French public opinion cannot hide its astonishment at seeing a country like Algeria, considered as a 'French province', rise into a national existence in a single movement, objectivized in an independent state. Nations whose legal situation had presented fewer difficulties were made to accomplish the path towards independence in stages. Allegedly the single leap Algeria wishes to take corresponds to no rational notion and is merely a suspect and dangerous undertaking.

Regardless, French public opinion has refused to achieve a lucid awareness of the mutation underway in Algeria. Deny things is all it does. Its ears are reached only by the FLN's unprecedented and audaciously expressed claim. To the French it is shocking and can be put down to fanatics who have transposed their delusional dreams onto politics. They do not understand that the Algerian people cannot accept the necessity of transitions that would bring about its autonomy gradually. This does not take enough account of the specific nature of colonialist oppression in Algeria, oppression that helped to trigger the revolutionary process.

Decreeing Algeria to be a French *département* entailed establishing total oppression in it, wiping a nation from the map, depersonalizing a people, reducing it to decline and death; but it also meant determining an explosive situation in this country, a permanent state of tension, as well as giving rise to such profound contradictions that the system that had generated them would find it impossible to deal with them.

In other terms, the extreme form that French colonialism assumed in Algeria – settlement colonialism of a southern type – has elicited no less extreme reactions in the people. These cannot be reduced to bouts of collective violence or uncontrolled movements of revolt and despair. They are translating into a slow maturation of political awareness, which they broaden in contributing to it a revolutionary dimension. By being internalized and developed in depth, they are inciting in the people a progressive lucidity that, whilst giving it a precise idea of its chances of survival and its essential interests, provides it with the possibility of an implacable undermining of the colonial system, not in the particular form it has assumed here or there, but in its very essence and objective foundations.

Under the extraordinary pressure that has been brought to bear on it, and that excludes all possibility of normal development, the Algerian people has gained its political education. Sustained at the base by a revolutionary pedagogy, it constitutes a novel experience that will play a determinant role in Algeria's future.

The specificity of neocolonialism is to pre-empt revolutionary situations by introducing scalable methods into its system. Experience shows that it has often succeeded in doing so and thereby in keeping hold for some time of colonial situations that may have been lost beyond hope. In Algeria, the situation is precisely already lost and neocolonialism has missed its historical chance. A historical discrepancy has arisen between the Algerian people and France; where one presents the problem in terms of evolution, the other expresses itself in terms of revolution and translates the actual situation in which it is engaged.

A realist aim

The idea of independence finds its strength less at the level of the FLN leaders' psychological awareness than in the objective colonial reality in which it is dialectically inscribed. Were it not, like the revolution that claims it, the fruit of a profound ripening and the outcome of a long, subterranean advance, it would be merely contentless and abstract intransigence.

In 'normal' times, refusing structural reform and serious modes of evolution would have expressed a total absence of intelligence on the part of those in charge. In a period of revolutionary engagement, such refusal expresses a fundamental demand. To accept an option centered around something other than independence would be to give up on the chance of toppling colonialism, would be to allow virulent germs to subsist that would quickly engender a more monstrous system of oppression than the preceding one.

The revolution is by essence an enemy of half-measures, compromises and backward steps. Taken to its end, it saves peoples; stopped in the process of happening, it brings about their loss and consummates their ruin. The revolutionary process is irreversible and inexorable. Political sense commands that its march not be stymied.

So the FLN's intransigence does have a content. It is a revolutionary intransigence and not merely some beautiful discourse. Far from expressing political unrealism, it is the demand for a revolutionary realism. The Algerian people's strength resides in its knowing what it wants and where it's going. It wants its independence and it knows that this possibility is close at hand and will ultimately be attained.

France, on the contrary, does not know what it wants or where it is going. It refuses to recognize the well-foundedness of such an objective, but its attitude remains negative and sterile, unable to convert itself into a dynamic and effective direction. It deems it enough to rule independence out, but ignores the new reality that has been created in Algeria. It devises plans and drafts Reform Acts, but it continues to reason within a pre-revolutionary context and is moving in full unreality, in the empyrean of ideas of prestige, grandeur and permanent and indissoluble bonds.

In such a context, Algerian independence seems to be a chimera and the Algerians are treated as fanciful. What is considered an impossibility in France is transposed onto Algeria and made an objective and absolute impossibility. It is, assuredly, to set out from a very weak analysis of reality and rush headlong into adventure by declaring, with M. Mauriac, that no French government will grant Algeria independence.

A goal in full realization

Regardless of what M. Mauriac says about it, independence is not something to be granted and it hardly depends on the will of French governments to issue or refuse it. It is not a good that is someone's to be given, but a living reality that someone builds.

Three years of revolutionary war have profoundly shaken the colonial system; it has become a pitiful edifice collapsing in ruin. Atop of this material, in full disintegration, the technicians of 'pacification' intend to base their reforms. Whilst they do their utmost to retain the walls that are crumbling on all sides, new foundations are being dug everywhere in Algerian soil, whereupon the powerful edifice of national independence is rising up.

Independence has descended from the sky of ideal possibilities. It has become flesh and life, has been incorporated into the substance of the people. This people henceforth exercises its sovereignty in the framework of its army and its administration. That is where the prodigious success of the Algerian

revolution can be experienced first-hand.

From the Algerian of the colonial period, a new man has sprung, the Algerian of the era of independence. This Algerian rediscovers his personality in action, discipline, the sense of responsibilities, and rediscovers the real that he takes fully in hand and transforms by renewing efficient relations with it. He becomes a responsible citizen, an organizer, an administrator and a soldier.

The only possible outcome

By upholding independence as a condition of peace, the FLN is not in thrall to gratuitous extremism. Conceiving its politics from a revolutionary perspective, it has put the means in place for it to succeed. The Algerian problem ceased to be the affair of politicians a long time ago. With choices being made on each side, it is posed in military terms and its resolution depends essentially on the evolution of the relations of force involved.

It is a well-known fact that the enemy cannot count on a decisive victory and that the war could go on indefinitely. It is a lesser known fact, however, but will not remain one for long, that the conditions are being produced, increasingly so, for a military disaster for the imperialist troops. Unless wisdom comes to reassert itself in France, the revolution's fourth year will be stamped by an intensification of the war, wherein the possibility of disaster on the French side cannot be ruled out.

In addition, the idea of independence has made immense progress on the international level. This evolution is palpable even in American and European public opinion; such clearly shows that the FLN is not alone today in demanding independence and that the overwhelming majority of nations are echoing its view. Not for long will France be able to withstand the international wave that its obstinacy has unleashed. It will have to snap out of its precarious immobilism and pronounce the taboo word it so fears today.

Algeria has become a country able to elude French mastery. Try as France might to elaborate alternative methods, new statutes aimed at holding onto its former colony, these efforts are belated and in vain. The Algerian nation has taken back its freedom and engaged resolutely in the era of independence.

¹[I, p. 120 sq. (JF; GP).]