

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



The Class Struggles in Algeria

Situationist International

December 1965

One could almost think that the new Algerian regime has devoted itself exclusively to confirming the brief analysis that the SI made of it in the *Address to Revolutionaries* that we issued in Algiers soon after its inaugural putsch. Liquidating self-management is the entire content of Boumedienne's regime, its sole real activity; and that project began the very moment when the state, through the deployment of the military force which was the only crystallization it achieved under Ben Bella, its only solid structure, *declared its independence* vis-à-vis Algerian society. The state's other projects—the technocratic reorganization of the economy, the social and juridical extension of its power base—are beyond the capacities of the present ruling class in the real conditions of the country. The mass of undecided, who had not been enemies of Ben Bella but who were disappointed by him and who waited to judge the new regime by its actions, can see that it is ultimately doing nothing but establishing an autonomous state dictatorship and thereby declaring war on self-management. Even to formulate specific accusations against Ben Bella or to destroy him publicly seems to be beyond its power for a long time to come. The only vestige of “socialism” professed in Algeria is precisely that

Situationist International
The Class Struggles in Algeria
December 1965

Retrieved on July 31, 2007 from web.archive.org

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

core of *inverted socialism*, that product of the general reaction within the workers movement itself which the defeat of the Russian revolution bequeathed as a positive model to the rest of the world, including Ben Bella's Algeria: the *big lie of the police state*. Thus the political enemy is not condemned for his real positions, but for the opposite of what he was; or else he suddenly fades into an organized silence: he never existed, either for the tribunal or for the historian. Thus Boumedienne, from the beginning one of those most responsible for the fact that Algerian self-management is only a caricature of what it needs to be, officially calls it "a caricature" in order to reorganize it authoritarily. In the name of an essence of self-management ideologically backed by the state, Boumedienne rejects self-management's real, fledgling manifestations.

The same inversion of reality determines the Boumediennist critique of the past. What Ben Bella is reproached for having done and for having gone too far in is precisely what he did not do and what he scarcely pretended to strive for—the liberation of women or real support for the emancipation struggles in Africa, for example. The present regime lies about the past because of its own profound unity with the past. The ruling class has not changed in Algeria, it is reinforcing itself. It reproaches Ben Bella for having done poorly what he had in fact only *simulated*; for a revolutionariness that it has now ceased even simulating. The Algerian ruling class, before 19 June as well as after, is a bureaucracy in formation. It is pursuing its consolidation by partially changing the way its political power is shared out. Certain strata of this bureaucracy (military and technocratic) predominate over others (political and unionist). The basic conditions remain the weakness of the national bourgeoisie and the pressure from the poverty-stricken peasant and worker masses, a part of which took over the self-managed sector when the former (European) ruling class fled the country. The merging of the Algerian bourgeoisie with the bureaucracy in possession of the state is easier with the new ruling strata

committees that are working toward self-management in the private and state sectors; to transmit and publish all information on the workers' struggles and the autonomous forms of organization that emerge out of them, and to extend and generalize these forms as the sole path for a profound contestation. At the same time, through the same clandestine relations and publications, it is necessary to develop the theory of self-management and its requirements, within the self-managed sector itself and before the masses of Algeria and the world. Self-management must become the sole solution to the mysteries of power in Algeria, and it must *know that it is that solution*.

that Boumedienne represents; moreover, this evolution harmonizes better with the region of the global capitalist market to which Algeria is linked. In addition, the bureaucratic strata that ruled with Ben Bella were less capable of an open struggle against the demands of the masses. Ben Bella and the unstable social *equilibrium*, which was the temporary result of the struggle against France and the colonists, were overthrown at the same time. When they saw themselves supplanted, the previously predominant bureaucratic strata (the leaders of the FLN Federation of Greater Algiers and the General Union of Algerian Workers) hesitated, then rallied to the new regime because their solidarity with the state bureaucracy as a whole was naturally stronger than their ties to the mass of workers. The agricultural workers' union, whose congress six months before had adopted the most radical theses on self-management, was the first to come over.

Among the bureaucratic forces in the lobbies of power around Ben Bella, two groupings, enemies yet related to each other, had a special status: the Algerian Communist Party and the foreign leftists-nicknamed "*pieds-rouges*"-who placed themselves at the service of the Algerian state. They were not so much in power as pretenders to power. Poor relative of power, waiting to inherit it, this extreme-left of the bureaucracy acquired its credentials as representative of the masses *through its connection with Ben Bella*: it drew its mandate not from the masses but from Ben Bella. It dreamed of one day getting a monopoly on this power over the masses, this power that Ben Bella still shared on all sides. Since Ben Bella was personally its only access to present power and its main promise for the future, its only guarantee of being tolerated (its Sukarno), the bureaucratic extreme-left demonstrated in his defense, but in an uncertain manner. Just as it respectfully flocked around the state, it placed itself on the terrain of the state to oppose the unfavorable shift of the relation of forces within the state. Here again the Boumediennist critique of

these elements, lumped together as “foreigners,” in the name of a specifically Algerian Socialism, is entirely false. Far from “making theory for theory’s sake” (*El Moudjahid*, 22 September 1965), the *pieds-rouges* represented an exhausted mixture of complete theoretical nullity and of unconscious or consciously hidden counterrevolutionary tendencies. Far from wanting to make adventurous utopian “experiments” in Algeria, they possessed nothing but mistakes or lies that had been *revealed as such a thousand times*. The best revolutionary ideas of the *pieds-rouges* were unsuitable not because they came from *too far away*, but because they were repeated much *too late*. It was a question not of geography, but of history.

More radical and more isolated, at the extreme left of the Ben Bella regime, Mohammed Harbi was the thinker of self-management, but only by grace of the prince, in the bureaus of power. Harbi rose to the highest point reached by Algerian revolutionary thought: up to the *idea* of self-management, but not at all up to its consistent, effective practice. He understood its notion, but not yet its being. Harbi was, paradoxically, the *governmental* theorist of self-management, or rather its court poet: soaring above practice, he eulogized self-management more than he theorized it. The *self-management state*, that logical monstrosity, had in Harbi its guilty conscience and its celebrator. Boumedienne’s tanks in the streets meant a rationalization of the state, which wanted henceforth to free itself from the ridiculous paradoxes of the Ben-Bellaist equilibrium and from any guilty conscience, and simply *be a state*. It then became clear that Harbi, the unarmed prophet of self-management, had not considered self-management’s *self-defense*, its defense on its own terrain, but only its defense through the *mediation* of Ben Bella. But if Harbi counted on Ben Bella alone to defend self-management, who did he count on to defend Ben Bella? The thinker of self-management was protected by Ben Bella, but who was going to protect his protector? He believed that Ben Bella, the incarnation of the state, would remain univer-

compromise. But the time for compromise is past, both for the state power and for the real power of the Algerian workers

Radical self-management, the only kind that can endure and conquer, refuses any hierarchy within or outside itself; it also rejects in practice *any hierarchical separation of women* (an oppressive separation openly accepted by Proudhon’s theory as well as by the backward reality of Islamic Algeria). The management committees, as well as all the delegates in the federations of self-managed enterprises, should be revocable at any moment by their base, this base obviously including all the workers, without any distinctions between permanent and seasonal ones.

The only program for the Algerian socialist elements consists ~ the defense of the self-managed sector, not only as it is but as it must become. This defense must therefore counter the purge carried out by the state with another purge within self-management: a purge carried out by its base against all that negates it from within. A revolutionary assault against the existing regime is only possible with a continued and radicalized self-management as its point of departure. By putting forward the program of quantitatively and qualitatively increased workers’ self-management, one is calling on all the workers to directly take on the cause of self-management as their own cause. By demanding not only the defense but also the extension of self-management, *the dissolution of all specialized activity not answerable to self-management*, Algerian revolutionaries can show that this defense is the concern not only of the workers of the *temporarily self-managed* sector, but of all the workers, as the only way toward a definitive liberation. In this way they would show that they were struggling for a general liberation and not for their own future domination as specialists of revolution; that the victory of “their party” must at the same time be its end as a separate party.

As a first step, it is necessary to envisage linking up self-management delegates with each other and with the enterprise

tralize in order better to control the self-managed enterprises,” Boumedienne openly admits in *Le Monde*, 10 November 1965), a subordinate level of central administration; and in contrast to the Proudhonian mutualism of 1848, which aimed at organizing on the margins of private property, real self-management, revolutionary self-management, can be won only through the armed abolition of the titles of existing property. Its failure in Turin in 1920 was the prelude to the armed domination of Fascism. The bases of a self-managed production in Algeria were spontaneously formed—as in Spain in 1936, as in Paris in 1871 in the workshops abandoned by the Versailleses—wherever the owners had to flee following their political defeat: on *vacant property*. These takeovers are the vacation from property and Oppression, the weekend of alienated life.

This self-management, by the simple fact that it exists, threatens the society’s entire hierarchical organization. It must destroy all external control because all the external forces of control will never make peace with it as a living reality, but at most only with its name, with its embalmed corpse. Wherever there is self-management, there can be neither army nor police nor state.

Generalized self-management, “extended to all production and all aspects of social life,” would mean the end of the unemployment that affects two million Algerians, but it would also mean the end of the old society in all its aspects, the abolition of all its spiritual and material enslavements and the abolition of its masters. The present fledgling effort toward self-management can be controlled from above only because it consents to exclude below it that majority of the workers who don’t participate in it or who are unemployed; and because even within its own enterprises it tolerates the formation of dominating strata of “directors” or management professionals who have worked their way up from the base or been appointed by the state. These managers are the state virus within that which tends to negate the state; they are a

sally accepted in Algeria, although Harbi himself only accepted his “good side” (his formal recognition of self-management). But the real process advanced by way of his bad side: the forces that followed the opposite line of argument on Ben Bella were more capable of intervention. Ben Bella was not the resolution of the Algerian contradictions, he was only their temporary cover. History has shown that Harbi and all those who thought like him were mistaken. They will now have to radicalize their conceptions if they want to effectively fight the Boumediennist dictatorship and *realize* self-management.

The fall of Ben Bella is a landmark in the collapse of global illusions regarding the “underdeveloped” version of pseudo-socialism. Castro remains its last star, but he, who could justifiably argue that elections were pointless because the people were armed, is already demanding that all arms be turned in, and his police are rounding them up (*Reuters*, 14 August 1965). Already his lieutenant, Guevara, has left without any explanation being given to the masses from whom these leaders had demanded a blind personal confidence. At the same time, the Algerians who are experiencing the fragility of Ben-Bellaist socialism are also discovering the value of all the so-called socialist camp’s concern for their cause: the Chinese, Russian and Cuban *states*, along with Nasser, are naturally rushing to outdo each other in expressions of friendship to Boumedienne’s regime. Revolutions in the underdeveloped countries will always fail miserably as long as they recognize and emulate any existing model of socialist power, since they are *all* manifestly false ones. The disintegrated official Sino-Soviet version of this socialism and the “underdeveloped” version of it admire and reinforce each other and both lead to the same outcome. The first underdevelopment we have to get beyond is the *underdevelopment of revolutionary theory* everywhere in the world.

The internal struggles of the Algerian bureaucracy, during the war and in the 1962–1965 period, took the form of clan

struggles, personal rivalries, inexplicable disputes among the leaders, obscure shifts of alliances. This was a direct continuation of the conditions prevailing around Messali Hadj since before the insurrection. Not only was all theory absent, even ideology was summarily improvised and confused; everything remained centered around superficial, abstract political questions. Since 19 June another period has begun: that of the confrontation between the ruling class and the workers, and this is the real movement that creates the conditions and need for a theory. As early as 9 July, at a meeting of delegates from 2500 self-managed enterprises held at Algiers and chaired by Minister of Industry Boumaza, the delegates expressed to the latter their insistence on self-management as an inviolable principle and made a series of critiques concerning the state's role in limiting this principle. The delegates "questioned the multiplicity of overseers (prefectures, ministries, party) and denounced the state's nonpayment of debts and the heavy taxation; some delegates also brought up the problem of layoffs, the 'draconian' demands of the foreign suppliers and the paralyzing role of the customs" (*Le Monde*, 10 July 1965).

Those delegates knew what they were talking about. Since the June 19th Declaration-in which the word "self-management" is not even mentioned once-the regime has been preparing the "stabilization" of the economic situation through the strengthening of state control and the accelerated training of "cadres." It aimed to start collecting installment payments as soon as possible for the more than 100,000 lodgings occupied without permission; to recover the money "stolen from the state" in the self-managed enterprises; to reduce the wearing out of poorly maintained equipment; and to regularize all the illegal seizures carried out by the masses upon the departure of the French. Since then, in spite of the fact that self-management is the very form through which the paralyzing respect for property (private or state), which has been such an obstacle in the workers movement,

by philosophers." The realization of philosophy, the critique and reconstruction of all the values and behavior imposed by alienated life-this is the maximum program of *generalized self-management*. The leftist militants of the bureaucratic groups, however, tell us that these theses are correct but that the time has not yet come when one can tell the masses everything. Those who argue in such a perspective never see this time as having come, and in fact they contribute toward making sure that it never does come. It is necessary to tell the masses *what they are already doing*. The specialized thinkers of revolution are the specialists of its false consciousness, who afterwards come to realize that they have done something entirely different from what they thought they were doing. This problem is aggravated here by the particular difficulties of underdeveloped countries and by the persistent theoretical weakness in the Algerian movement. Although the strictly bureaucratic fringe within the present opposition is extremely small, its very existence as a "professional leadership" is a *form* that by its weight imposes itself and determines the content of that opposition. Political alienation is always related to the state. Self-management can expect nothing from *revived bolsheviks*.

Self-management must be both the means and the end of the present struggle. It is not only what is at stake in the struggle, but also its adequate form. It is its own tool. It is itself the material it works on, and its own presupposition. It must totally recognize its own truth. The state power proposes the contradictory and absurd project of "reorganizing self-management"; it is in fact self-management that must *organize itself as a power* or disappear.

Self-management is the most modern and most important tendency to appear in the struggle of the Algerian movement, and it is also the one that is the least narrowly Algerian. Its meaning is universal. In contrast to the *Yugoslavian caricature* that Boumedienne wants to emulate, which is only a semi-decentralized instrument of state control ("We have to decen-

to a close. Their doubts about Ben Bella overlapped with their doubts on the world (and on socialism) and will continue after Ben Bella. They don't say all they know and they don't know all they say. Their social base *and their social perspective* is that bureaucratic sector which came out worst in the reshuffling of power and which wants to get back its old position. Seeing that they can no longer hope to dominate the regime, they turn toward the people in order to dominate its opposition. Nostalgic bureaucrats or would-be bureaucrats, they want to counterpose "the people" to Boumedienne, whereas Boumedienne has already revealed to the masses the real focus of opposition: state bureaucrat versus worker. But the most despicable aspect of their bolshevism is this glaring difference: the Bolshevik Party did not know the sort of bureaucratic power it was going to end up establishing, whereas these leftists have already been able to see, in the world and among themselves, that bureaucratic power which they wish to *restore* in a more or less purified form. The masses, if they have the chance to choose, will not choose this corrected version of a bureaucracy whose essential elements they have already had the opportunity of experiencing. The Algerian intellectuals who don't rally to the regime still have the choice between participating in this apparatus or seeking a direct link-up with the autonomous movement of the masses. But the whole weight of the Algerian petty bourgeoisie (storekeepers, lower functionaries, etc.) will naturally tend to support the new technocratico-military bureaucracy rather than the bureaucratic leftists.

The only road to socialism, in Algeria as everywhere else, passes through "an offensive and defensive pact with the truth," as a Hungarian intellectual put it in 1956. People in Algeria who got the SI's *Address* understood it. Wherever practical revolutionary conditions exist, no theory is too difficult. Villiers de [Isle-Adam, a witness to the Paris Commune, noted, "For the first time one can hear the workers exchanging their opinions on problems that until now have been considered only

can be overcome' the workers in the self-managed sector, awaiting their several months overdue wages, are continually reproached for having stolen a large part of what they have produced. The most urgent goal of the Algerian state, which already has enough soldiers and police, is to train 20,000 accountants a year.

The central struggle, veiled and open, immediately broke out between the ruling class representatives and the workers precisely over the issue of self-management. The "reassuring" declarations of Boumaza and Boumedienne didn't fool anyone. The "labor unrest" alluded to by *Le Monde* on 3 October is a euphemism for the resistance of the sole bastion of socialist revolution in Algeria—the self-managed sector—against the most recent maneuvers of the ruling bureaucratic bourgeois coalition. The union leaders themselves could not remain silent: their official status as representatives of the workers vis-à-vis the state and their social status as left wing of the ruling class were at stake. The September articles in *Revolution et Travail*—in which real workers' demands ("when workers are reduced to poverty, self. management is violated") are mixed with expressions of the increasing alarm of the union leaders ("agreement with the June 19th Declaration's analyses," but denunciation of the technocrats and economists)—exactly reflect this situation of overlapping vertical and horizontal struggles. The increasing reference to "economic anarchy" (which all ways really means self-management), the judicial measures against the self-managed sector (e.g. forcing the self-managed enterprises to pay back-taxes), which the newspapers talk about less, and the restitution of the Norcolor factory to its former owner—all this shows these "labor" leaders that soon they will no longer have a place in the ruling apparatus. Already the new pretenders are there: the "scramble for power of dubious elements" that outrages *Revolution et Travail* expresses the ruling class's swing to the right. The techno-bureaucrats and the military have no possible allies but the representatives of the old

traditional bourgeoisie. At the same time that the officers, in the style of South American armies, are attaining bourgeois status (everyone knows about their BMWs, duty-free and 30% discounted), a multitude of Algerian bourgeois, following in the footsteps of the Norcolor owner, are returning to the country in the expectation of recovering their property, seized “in completely illegal conditions by unscrupulous persons” (Boumaza). Added to these challenges is the rapid increase in food prices. The workers, thoroughly aware of this process, are resisting *on the spot*: the repeated strikes in the Renault factories, the strikes of the press and parcel distributors and of the telephone and insurance workers, the demonstrations of the unpaid workers of Mitidja — these are the first steps of a movement of rage which, if it asserts itself effectively, is capable of sweeping aside the whole present regime.

Incapable of mastering a single one of their problems, the rulers react with constant delirious conferences, constant torture in their prisons, and denunciations of the “slackening of morals.” *El Moudjahid* (7 December 1966) attacks “the erotic sentimentalism of a young generation without political commitment” and the accurate viewpoint of those who “are tempted to reject religion as being a restraint on their taste for pleasure and on their liberation, which they take simply to mean their possibilities for pleasure, and who consider the contributions of Arab civilization as a step backward.” The tone is no different from that used by the rulers in Washington or Moscow when they regretfully announce their lack of confidence in their young people. And after a few months the new regime is emulating Ben Bella in the most ludicrous manifestation of its Mohammedanism: the prohibition of alcohol.

The present opposition to the Boumediennist dictatorship is twofold: On one side, the workers are defending themselves in the enterprises (self-managed or not); they are the real contestation implied in the facts. On another side, the leftists of the

FLN apparatus are trying to re form a revolutionary apparatus. The first effort of the Organisation de la Resistance Populaire, led by Zahouane and supported by the French Stalinists, was a hollow declaration that only appeared six weeks after the coup, which analyzed neither the present regime nor the means to oppose it. Its second appeal was addressed to the Algerian police, from whom it anticipated revolutionary support. This strategy proved to be somewhat of a miscalculation since by the end of September this police had arrested Zahouane and broken up his first clandestine network (Harbi himself had already been arrested in August). The ORP is continuing its activity, beginning to collect contributions “for Ben Bella” from Algerian workers in France and winning over the majority of the student leaders. This apparatus [underground or in exile] is counting on an economic-political crisis in Algeria in the near future to reestablish its influence with the struggling Algerian workers. In this Leninist perspective it will present itself, with or without the banner of Ben Bella, as the solution for a replacement of the Boumediennist regime.

What is nevertheless going to prevent the establishment of a Bolshevik-type apparatus, striven for by so many militants? The time passed since Lenin and his failure, and the continued and evident degradation of Leninism, which is directly expressed by these leftists’ allying with and fighting each other in every sort of variant: Khrushchevo-Brezhnevists, Maoists, sub-Togliattists, pure and semi-Stalinists, all the variants of Trotskyism, etc. All of them refuse, and are forced to refuse, to clearly confront the essential problem of the nature of the “socialism” (i.e. of the class power) in Russia and China, and consequently also in Algeria. Their major weakness during the struggle for power is also the major guarantee of their counterrevolutionary role if they were to accede to power. These leftists will present themselves as a natural continuation of the personalized political confusion of the preceding period; but the real class struggle in Algeria has now brought that period