

March 19, 1961

**Report attached to 'Development of Relations with
Socialist Countries since March 19, 1961'**

Citation:

"Report attached to 'Development of Relations with Socialist Countries since March 19, 1961'", March 19, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Dossier 08/13/07; Fond: GPRA, 1958-62; Archives Nationales d'Algérie, Alger. Translated from French and transcribed by Pierre Asselin, with Paulina Kostrzewski.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/121589>

Summary:

Report gauging Algeria's political possibilities among Eastern Bloc countries, with the exclusion of Yugoslavia. Begins with a summary of Marxist positions on national and colonial issues, followed by a detailed history, from 1922-1961, tracing the development of communist attitudes and policies toward the question of Algerian independence. Concludes with a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary (1961) status of international relations between GPRA and several blocs of socialist countries.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

Report

The goal of the present report is to gauge our political possibilities in Eastern bloc countries, excluding Yugoslavia. To that end, we will first discuss Marxist positions on national and colonial issues, then we will study the positions taken by communists concerning the Algerian problem historically, and conclude with an analysis of the current international situation and of our relationships with Eastern bloc countries.

a) Marxism and national and colonial issues: the analyses of Marx and Lenin concerning social development consider the nationalist and colonial question an integral part of the global struggle against colonialism.

a. According to Marx, human societies go through different stages in their history. Those stages are the product of the level achieved by that society's productive forces and by the action of man regarding social relations. By this rationale, the progress or backwardness of a people depends solely on political or geographical factors. These realizations imply an equality of principles between peoples and the rejection of the subjugation of one people by another ("a people who exploits another cannot be a free people").

b. Recycling Marxist analysis at the end of the 19th century, Lenin concluded that capitalism had achieved its ultimate stage, imperialism, characterized by the existence of monopolies. "Monopoly is the product of colonial policy. To the many aspects of colonial policy, financial capital has added the struggle for the sources of primary materials, for the exportation of capital, for zones of influence." This theory by Lenin establishes the alliance of all the victims of imperialism and defines the means of that alliance. Nations have a right to self-determination. From that right derives the imperative necessity for the working class and its Marxist vanguard to support unconditionally the struggle of colonial peoples for their emancipation. How have those principles translated into facts? That's what we will see next.

COMMUNISTS AND THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE OF THE ALGERIAN PEOPLE

Concerning our country, the orientation of our communist parties has been of a reformist and opportunistic nature. The blueprint for their action was determined by elements foreign to the internal dialectic of Algerian society itself. It has been the same for the leaders of the Communist International, who have considered the tendencies of Algerian society to infer the necessary tactical and strategic implications, and, especially, to understand all the elements capable of sustaining a policy animated by international elements.

We can distinguish 3 phases in the evolution of the communist political line on the Algerian question. The first extends from 1922-1932, the second from 1933-1937, and the third is ongoing.

1. The period 1922-1932

The triumph of the Russian revolution in 1917 was followed by the creation of the Komintern whose goal was to establish socialism through revolution across the world. In this context, the Komintern supported the French communist party which launched in May 1922 a call for the complete liberation of Algeria. This call was, until 1932, the mission of the international communist movement, and this despite the reservations of the faction of Sidi-Bel-Abbes, which considered that "the projected uprising of the Algerian Muslim masses was a dangerous folly which the Algerian federations which understand Marxism do not want to be responsible for before the judgment of communist history."

2. The period 1933-1937

A) Communists and Algeria before 1954

In 1932, the struggle within the Komintern opposing supporters of socialism in one country to supporters of the world revolution concluded with the defeat of the latter. Russian leaders henceforth dominated the Komintern and became the dispensaries par excellence of strategic and tactical revolutionary conceptions. The communist vanguard on the shores of the Western Mediterranean, the PCF was called upon to become the foundation of internationalist power in this region. The tendency of the Soviet Union, starting in 1933, to contain fascist aggression by forming an alliance with so-called democratic powers (France and England), decisively affected the political behavior of communists regarding the right of our people to self-determination.

1936: At the congress of Villeurbanne, the PCF reconsidered the call of the Komintern and adopted a position on the Algerian national question tainted by assimilationism [assimilationisme], with the motto of "One Algeria Free and Happy and Fraternally United to the French People in a Community of Interest." That same year, it violently attacked Etoile Nord-Africaine [ENA], which it had supported until then, and now accused of "aligning with fascist colons."

1937: In Algiers, the Muslim Congress purged from its ranks members of the ENA which the PCF had let Blum dissolve without any response. We recognize in this strategy the consequence of systematic united action with the SFIO and radicals.

To justify all these events, Maurice Thorez introduced in 1939 a theoretical argument on the nature of the Algerian problem. Denying the history of our country and the decisive influence of Arab civilization, he compared our people to a mosaic of communities (Arab, Berber, Mozahite, Jewish, French of European origins) and subordinated the existence of an Algerian nation to the mixing and to the fusion between all the ethnic elements living on Algerian soil. The right of our people to self-determination was thereafter replaced by the right to a free life as individuals or communities for all Algerians, of French origins, Arabs, Berbers, and Jews. The theory of the nascent Algerian nation recycled the colonial theme of the difference between Arabs and Berbers and tied the liberation movement to the fate of the European minority. Its main goal was to situate the Algerian liberation struggle within the framework of French society to answer the requirements of international Stalinism. Those requirements, after having been determined by the fear of Nazi Germany, were later on determined by the fear of the USA. For the USSR, as well as Algerian and French communists, it was better to have to deal in North Africa with French imperialism than American imperialism. In September 1947, Leon Feix expressed without reservation this position: "The independence of Algeria", he wrote, "would represent a lure [for imperialism] and a potential new base for its consolidation."

THE ALGERIAN REVOLUTION AND COMMUNISTS

The armed action of 1 November 1954 caught by surprise the French and Algerian communist parties. Having condemned our people to serve as frontmen for supporters of the Franco-Soviet alliance in France, the PCF and the PCA forsook the movement. A PCF communiqué dated 8 November 1954 recognized that a national problem existed in Algeria, but condemned armed struggle. "Loyal to the teachings of Lenin," or so it was said, "the PCF cannot approve the recourse to individual actions susceptible of playing into the hands of the worse colonialists, even if those were not fermented by them, [but] assures the Algerian people of the support of the French working class in its struggle against repression and for the protection of its rights." Under the pressure of circumstances, the [PCF's] positions would always change. On 2 March 1956, the political bureau of the PCF, which sought to end the isolation in

which it had been confined since 1948 and promote a foreign policy favorable to the Soviet Union, published a declaration favoring a vote in support of the special powers requested by Guy Mollet and announced itself in favor of "the existence and the permanence of special political economic and cultural ties between France and Algeria."

In response to American initiatives in North Africa, the PCF via the intermediary of Leon Feix defined communist policy in Algeria. Certain nationalist leaders envisioned the fusion of 3 countries in an Arab or Muslim Maghreb, tied to all other Arab peoples; or [tied to] Muslims from Morocco all the way to Pakistan. This was an old idea introduced by the Arab League and recycled and imposed by the bourgeois leaders in Cairo and in Karachi. It had been a long time since Lenin and Stalin had exposed the forcibly reactionary character of currents based on race or religion. It is completely natural for the Algerians, the Tunisians, and the Moroccans to feel great sympathy for the peoples of the Middle East, as much because of their sense of religious community and similarity of language as because of the support they had received from those peoples in recent years. But that does not justify a political community against which so many historical, geographical, economic, and other elements play. Another path is possible, the path of the French union. The obduracy of the PCA and the PCF to maintain Algeria within the French sphere of influence [has been misguided]. Their theoretical explanations, far from informing public opinion on the nature of the Algerian problem, sowed confusion.

The failure of the PCA to integrate itself into the revolution as an autonomous entity, the development of the armed struggle of our people for the cause of independence, [and] the anti-imperialist momentum in the Arab countries following the Suez aggression all constituted new elements that the USSR could not ignore. Khrushchev's interest in Nasser's attempt to create Arab unity and Egypt's interest in the Algerian revolution would eventually incline the Soviet Union to consider Algeria as an integral part of the Arab world. The time for reconsideration [of their respective policies] came for the PCA and the PCF on 15 February 1957, when Maurice Thorez, who for years had maintained that only the fusion between Europeans and Muslims could give birth to an Algerian nation, declared that the fusion between the ethnic communities living in Algeria had been realized, and this just as the quasi-totality of Europeans rallied behind the colonialists.

This examination of the theoretical positions and policies of communists regarding the Algerian problem allows us to infer a number of conclusions:

- 1) For the Soviet Union, there is not, as there is for the GPRA, an Algerian problem, but an Algerian aspect to the struggle against imperialism;
- 2) Therefore, the right to self-determination of peoples is recognized only as part of the global balance of forces between socialist countries and their supporters, on the one hand, and the global imperialist system, on the other;
- 3) In the imperialist global system, the USSR considers France the weakest link in the chain. The tendency of the Americans to closely subordinate it to their economic interests and to replace it in certain territories which it controlled before suggests the existence of contradictions that the USSR and the PCF can only exploit by encouraging France to pursue an independent foreign policy and by helping it to break free from the grasp of its allies;
- 4) The fear of seeing a stronger imperialism replace France in Algeria (yesterday, Germany, today, the United States) has for a long time prompted the USSR to have a prudent attitude on the Algerian question and to limit the principle of unconditional aid, by prioritizing the necessity of a union with France and not the right to a separation, that is, to independence. The profound changes that have taken place in

the Arab world have made it reconsider its Algerian policy;

5) However, this reconsideration is not definitive and is subject to fluctuations. Only a policy [adopted by us] that does not rely upon the West, which manifests our good faith in our dealings with the East, [and demonstrates] our willingness to struggle against all imperialisms can encourage the USSR to take a firmer stance on the Algerian question;

6) Before the revolution, the USSR did not consider the positions defended by the nationalist parties on the nature of the Algerian problem. Everything has changed today, as our people play an active role in the international political life. Thus, following the declaration of Charles de Gaulle of 16 September, TASS agency and the PCF qualified the French initiative a "maneuver." The GPRA's acceptance of the self-determination policy has put them in a delicate situation and has made them reconsider their appreciation. This example does not mean that the USSR and the socialist countries will embrace all of our positions. But it is certain that they cannot ignore them as in the past. Since 1953, many things have changed in the life of nations seeking to change in a fundamental way international relations.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The end of the Second World War brought major changes in the world situation. While Western Europe and Japan were weakened by the war effort and had to accept American tutelage to restore their economies and repress internal opposition, a whole series of countries in central and South-Eastern Europe adopted the same system as the USSR, thus forming around it a buffer zone. Two different conceptions of society confronted each other thereafter, giving birth to two rival political blocs. The existence of these two blocs produced as an essential economic result the separation and division of the old global market into two parallel markets. Composed of three circles existing in interdependence, the first market (USA, Western Europe, newly liberated and colonial countries) was a veritable prison for underdeveloped countries, which were easy prey for Westerners, the only buyers of primary materials and providers of manufactured goods. The advent of socialist countries, reinforced by China, North Vietnam, North Korea, and the German Democratic Republic, on the global commercial scene put an end to the confrontation between the West and underdeveloped countries and opened the way for a non-homogenous third force represented by the countries of the Bandung Conference. This evolution of international relations reduced the potential for a general conflict between the great powers and introduced the issue of coexistence and economic competition between socialist and capitalist countries. The existence on both sides of terrible modes of destruction favors the seeking of negotiated solutions to existing problems. But if the prospects of détente do not affect all socialist countries, it is not the same in the West, where alliances are becoming problematic. The expansion of American hegemony in capitalist countries weakened by World War II manifests itself by an increasingly deceptive struggle for the conquest of new markets between the USA, England, Western Europe, and Japan. Even though they remain the greatest capitalist power in the world, the United States has lost a good portion of its hegemonic economic and financial means acquired during the last war. The volume of American industrial production relative to that of the rest of the capitalist camp has fallen to what it was in 1938; while American industrial output surpassed that for the rest of the capitalist camp by 50% in 1933, it was only by 30% in 1958. The supremacy of the USA is thus affected, and [the world] slowly evolves toward a polycentrism of powers. The disengagement of England and France and even to a certain extent of Germany vis-à-vis American foreign policy is meaningful in that respect.

Such a context nullifies any foreign policy seeking to create American pressures on France to bring about a solution to the Algerian problem within a Western framework. A pragmatic diplomacy and effective propaganda must have as a fundamental basis the search for unconditional assistance to the struggle of our people for its

independence and the recognition of the legitimacy of the path it has chosen to succeed. This diplomacy is not possible if we continue to ignore the major contradiction of our era, that is, the East-West rivalry, as well as the secondary differences among westerners. The support that we have obtained from the Afro-Asian group must not make us forget the reluctance of certain countries, their refusal to unconditionally support our political positions, their tendency to apply on us pressures to force us to a compromise, a compromise which can only be at this point association as it has been defined by Charles de Gaulle in his speech of 15 September. Sustaining political relations with Eastern countries is a necessity to realize our aspiration to independence.

ALGERIA AND SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

Up to now, it has been very difficult to speak of relations between Algeria and socialist countries because relations necessarily suppose willing partners. The shallowness of our files pertaining to Eastern bloc countries at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is telling. Not integrated within the framework of an overall strategy of struggle against French imperialism and its direct and indirect allies, the ties that have developed between our country and the popular democracies have been the result of daily necessities and independent of all political orientation. Material assistance to our revolution has been provided through parallel intermediary organizations (CRA, UGEMA, UGTA) and has taken place under different guises: student scholarships, supplies to refugees, assumption of charge for the wounded, and union training for the adherents of the UGTA. At no point (with the exception of China) has this assistance been the consequence of a political discussion between the communist parties and the FLN, or between the GPRA and the socialist governments. On the political front, the contribution by the popular democratic countries to our struggle has essentially manifested itself at the UN. Those relatively better dispositions, at least compared to other countries, have only been exploited under the guise of a verbal blackmail used occasionally against Western countries. That was an elegant way of confirming the search for a solution within the Western context and the exclusive policy against Eastern countries. But if it is correct to assume the futility of our behavior toward popular democracies, it is nevertheless true that their positions concerning the Algerian problem are not always expressed clearly. Between the open support of China, of North Korea, of North Vietnam, of Outer Mongolia, and of the GDR, and the nuanced attitude of the USSR and of the popular democracies of Central and South-Eastern Europe, there is a difference. This difference is the product of the separation of labor amongst socialist countries on the international front, and in no way reflects ideological or interpretive divergences concerning the social aspects of the Algerian revolution. Socialist countries members of the UN behave within international organizations and state their preferences for diplomacy in their struggle against Westerners, whereas the others have a policy oriented more towards the peoples than governments. The most important problem for the GPRA at present is to set the stage for an exclusive policy addressing Eastern countries. Accordingly we must:

- 1) Denounce the involvement of Western countries in the Algerian war and blame them for its continuation;
- 2) Exercise and practice an attitude consistent with the principles of Bandung;
- 3) Tighten our ties with Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, the UAR, and Afghanistan, whose positions will inevitably influence eventual discussions with the USSR;
- 4) Send representatives to China and to East Germany.

This proactive effort would allow us to see in a more concrete manner our possibilities in socialist countries and to erase the doubts that our pro-Western foreign policy has

elicited among them, and thus be in a better position to request their recognition of the GPRA.