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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ALGERIAN REVOLUTION

An Open Letter to the Editors of The Militant

(Note: The following letter received from Paris and written by a supporter of the Pablo tendency in reply to the series by Philip Magri on the Algerian question is submitted for information purposes to the Discussion Bulletin.)

Comrades:

Your paper published in its issues of December 16, 23 and 30 three articles on the Algerian revolution and the Algerian nationalist movement by a casual collaborator, one Philip Magri. These articles are full of false or distorted information, and the conclusions at which they arrive are incompatible both with factual truth and with revolutionary Marxism. The continuing defense of these incorrect ideas would do great harm to the Trotskyist cause among the revolutionaries and rising masses not only of Algeria itself but also of all the countries of the Middle East.

For that reason I have felt it necessary and urgent to send you this letter, which presents the balanced opinion of the great majority of the world Trotskyist movement about the Algerian revolution and the Algerian nationalist movement. I hope that you will live up to the Leninist tradition of telling the truth without restraint by publishing in The Militant the whole or extensive parts of this letter, thereby correcting the false positions of Philip Magri -- which I hope are not those of the SWP.

"Politics of Assassination" -- In Recent Months or For Three Years?

Philip Magri's thesis, in a nutshell, amounts to the following. The National Algerian Movement, M.N.A., led by Messali Hadj, is the left wing of the Algerian revolution; the National Liberation Front, F.L.N., is its right wing. The struggle between the FLN and the MNA is something like a class struggle between the "bourgeois" and the "proletarian" wings of that revolution. The point of departure for this thesis is that "in recent months, many supporters of the Algerian liberation struggle have been profoundly disturbed by crimes against Algerians committed, not this time by the French, but by other Algerians participating in the struggle against French imperialism."

As the victims of these murders have been "a large number of Algerian trade-unionists," the inference drawn is simple: "reactionary bourgeois" forces within the FLN have murdered honest socialist revolutionaries of the MNA.

Unfortunately for Philip Magri and other defenders of this thesis, it is not only in "recent months" that "crimes and murders" have been committed against Algerian revolutionaries in France. These crimes have been going on without interruption since the end of 1955. Philip Magri does not mention these assassinations for a very simple reason: they were, with few exceptions, committed by the MNA; the victims were militants and leaders of the FLN (among them, the leader of the FLN organization of the Algerian workers in Belgium).

The then Minister of the Interior, Bourges-Manoury, speaking before the French National Assembly, declared recently:

"The attacks multiplied during the year 1956. The victims were mostly FLN people: there were 80 murdered, most of them of that faction, during that year. At the beginning of 1957, the FLN, having consolidated itself, started to counter-attack by increasing its activity. And it also began a terrorist campaign and tried definitively to exterminate its enemies.

"These actions and reactions are becoming more and more violent, and the two nationalist parties are today carrying on a real struggle of mutual extermination on our territory."

(Journal Officiel, Nov. 12)

But we do not need this testimony of French imperialism to confirm the correctness of our thesis. Philip Magri himself says that the MNA solidly controlled the Algerian workers in France at the moment of the outbreak of the revolution. How could the weak, if not inexistent, FLN have in a short time organized sufficient arms and people to kill 80 persons? All French revolutionaries know how desperately the few FLN cadres were searching for arms to defend themselves during the whole year 1956. Why does Philip Magri keep silent about the 80 murders of that year? Certainly not because they were committed by the "bourgeois" FLN; he indicts them only for the crimes of 1957. Very significantly, the "solemn" public appeal made by Messali himself to the Algerian workers in France to stop murder and bloodshed was made.. in the summer of 1957, nor in the spring of 1956. It is not because it was his own supporters who were killing FLN militants in 1956 before the tide turned?

The truth is that the MNA had the complete support of the Algerian workers in France when the revolution broke out. It tried to keep that support by pretending that it was the MNA that led the revolutionary struggle in Algeria itself. But as this was an obvious falsehood, and as the Algerian workers in France started to receive news about the actual struggle in their homeland from their families and friends on the spot, first a few, then more and more, militants left the MNA and set up an FLN organization among the workers.

Messali was furious and desperate. He had lost his control over the revolution in Algeria. He began to fear that he would lose also his control over the Algerian workers in France. So he gave orders that the militants leaving the MNA in France to found FLN organizations should be executed as "traitors." Philip Magri well characterizes this action when he writes:

"What more need to be said to characterize a political movement than that its preferred methods of political discussion is the assassin's bullet?"

Finally, the FLN, having consolidated its organization and receiving more and more help from the Algerian workers in France when it became clear that the armed struggle in Algeria was FLN-led, started to answer back to assassination by assassination. And as the relationship of forces changed radically between the two organizations around the beginning of 1957, soon the majority of the people killed became MNA people. And it was only then, after they had been forced to swallow their own bitter medicine, that Messali and the MNA began to protest about "murders"...

Let me make our position clear from the start. We are opposed to methods of physical violence inside the labor movement, inside the international revolutionary movement, in which we include the liberation movement of the colonial peoples. Just to the extent that violence is inevitable in the fight against imperialism, to the same extent it should be banned within the revolutionary forces. We have consistently defended that position in the past, we defend it today, and we shall defend it tomorrow. It applies in the Algerian question quite apart from the change in the relationship of forces between the rival nationalist organizations. Only such a principled position can be consistently defended. It is completely unprincipled, nay, cynically hypocritical, to let out a great shout of moral indignation about the killing of Messalists by their opponents while keeping complacently silent, white-washing, or justifying for reasons of "self-defense" the numerous murders of FLN militants by MNA people.

These murders, by the way, continue, especially in the North of France where the MNA still has some strength. The latest incident was during the night of 27-28 January, when five armed Algerians broke into a workers' dormitory of the Bouchain factory, near Valenciennes, and savagely sprayed the room with shots, killing one worker and gravely wounding another; a third saved his life by simulating death. Three hours later the murderers were arrested. According to all newspapers, they belonged to the MNA; the leader among them had already been arrested on December 18 for "reconstitution of a dissolved league" (the police definition of the Algerian nationalist organizations), and -- significantly -- later on set free. It is particularly to be noted that it is a matter of public knowledge that those cases where whole cafes are machine-gunned without regard to the individual identities of the people in them are exclusively MNA jobs.

The Origins of the FLN and the MNA

The second reason why, according to Philip Magri, the MNA is the "left" and the FLN the "right" wing of the Algerian nationalist movement is to be found in the origins of both organizations. The story he tells in that respect is highly colored. He writes about the split which occurred inside the old Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Democratiques (MTLD) in 1954, between the right-wing "centralists" and the "orthodox" Messalists. He himself admits that the insurrection of 1 November 1954 was launched, not by these centralists (who wanted to collaborate with French imperialism, according to Philip Magri), but by "impatient" militants of the MTLD. But he then hastens to conclude that at present it is these right-wing people who lead the FLN, whereas the MNA continues to be led by the old intransigent revolutionary group around Messali Hadj.

There is something slightly ridiculous about the "leader Messali" "carefully" preparing the revolution," and suddenly "taken by surprise" by the "action of a small group of men" somehow "stealing" the masses from the "true revolutionists" by launching it. The truth of the matter is that the Messali leadership had been for years procrastinating and increasingly passive, that it was that passivity and lack of perspectives -- I shall return later to the political reason for this -- which had led some opportunistic leaders of the Messalist party to incline toward a policy of winning reforms from the "moderate" imperialists, that at the same time however the rank and file and the lower cadres in Algeria became exasperated by the passivity of the leadership, especially when they saw how armed struggle was spreading over Tunisia and Morocco and winning important victories for the revolution in those countries, and that it was these rank-and-file militants who started the insurrection of 1 November 1954.

It is very sad for self-proclaimed "leaders" that the revolution doesn't follow their timetable. But if they are responsible people they acknowledge the fact and try to reintegrate themselves into it. When on the contrary they subordinate the objective processes of history to their own narrow sectarian purposes, the revolution simply passes them by. That is what happened to Messali.

But, says Philip Magri, the nature of the FLN "changed" when right-wing politicians like Ferhat Abbas and the former reformists of the MFLD (the so-called "centralists") joined it, and when its initial leadership around Ben Bella was kidnapped from a Moroccan plane by the French army. Now the FLN leads a revolutionary army of tens of thousands of people, spread over thousands of villages. It has the active support of hundreds of thousands of poor peasants and agricultural workers, organized in village committees. It is hard to see clearly how the nature of that mass movement could have been changed by the kidnapping of a couple of its leaders.

Contrary to what Philip Magri affirms, the whole world press has reported the fact that the real leadership of the FLN is in the hands, not of the Cairo or Tunis politicians, but of the leaders of the armed underground. These, on the other hand, are described by the bourgeois press as "the hard ones," the "intransigents," and "the extremists." They lead the army; they collect the money; they control the apparatus; and they are under the tremendous pressure of the uprising revolutionary masses of Algeria. It is not very clear why they should turn the leadership of their movement over into the hands of a couple of turncoats.

But, some bright boy will argue, didn't we see in Spain how the leaders of a revolutionary mass uprising abdicated and turned their power over to the shadow of a bourgeoisie? Well, in the first place, there is no comparison between the capitalist class inside the Republican camp in Spain and the "Algerian bourgeoisie" in Algeria. The former, though very weak, did have factories, banks, landed property, big merchant capital, innumerable links with its class brothers in Wall Street, the City, and Paris; the latter is economically, socially, and politically non-existent, as Philip Magri himself indicates. Wealthy lawyers, physicians, and state functionaries are not capitalists, but rich petty-bourgeois.

In the second place, the Spanish "shadow of a bourgeoisie" got the power back notwithstanding its weakness, for the sole reason that the recognized leaders of the mass movement, i.e. the Stalinists, the Social-Democrats, and the right-wing Anarchists, handed it back to them voluntarily. By their own strength, the Spanish capitalists could never have expropriated the revolutionary masses in the Republican camp. Even Philip Magri himself does not dare say that the leaders of the Algerian revolution in Algeria, the heroic figures who lead the armed struggle against the sanguinary French imperialists, voluntarily handed over the power which they created through innumerable sacrifices, to a (non-existent) bourgeoisie. This "bourgeoisie" "captured" that power somehow by .. taking a plane to Cairo and Tunis? The absurdity of this thesis simply knocks one's eye out.

It is true that some opportunist petty-bourgeois leaders of nationalist groups to the right of the old Messalist MFLD have joined the FLN. But if it is "historical precedents" that are being sought for, the correct one would be that of some bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians joining Tito's "Popular Front" during the war. At that time, also, many comrades feared that these forces would lead the Yugoslav revolution back to capitalism; history showed those fears to

be unfounded. There is a decisive difference between workers or revolutionary leaders being the "hostages" of the bourgeoisie, and petty-bourgeois politicians being the "hostages" of revolutionary or Stalinist forces. The Algerian case seems much closer to the Yugoslav than to the Spanish one.

The Class Nature of the Algerian Revolutionary Organizations

In order to determine the social nature of both the FLN and the MNA, it is necessary to sketch the social structure of the country, to analyze the objective role which both organizations play toward the different social classes and layers of Algeria, to examine their programs and see to what extent their day-to-day politics are consistent with those programs. This is the Marxist method of analyzing the social nature of an organization in the past; it is the same method which has to be applied to the case of Algeria, and for which we cannot substitute Philip Magri's method of gossip and fairy-tales about "intrigues," "murders," and some people taking planes to strange places with strange passports.

As Philip Magri himself admits, there does not exist any capitalist class in Algeria. There is not a single Algerian industrialist or banker of any importance. There is no compradore class linked to French capital in foreign trade. The French capitalist class, which tried to destroy the Algerian nation, has completely monopolized the leading economic and entrepreneurial functions in all ways of life. The only better-off layers of the Algerian population are some landowners and the upper strata of the petty-bourgeoisie (local merchants, intellectuals, and state functionaries).

At the other end of the social ladder, the broad mass of the Algerian population is composed of semi-proletarian layers of landless peasants, who work as agricultural laborers and as wage-earners for private bosses or the public administration, whenever they find work, which is not very often. Above them stands the class of more or less permanently employed city-dwelling wage-earners, the proletariat in the true sense of the word, which is not very broad. The rest of the Algerian people is composed of a mass of small peasants, eking out a dubious existence for themselves and their many unemployed relatives on the unfertile land which the French colonialists did not grab, and in the primitive Algerian village where a strong bond of collective solidarity still reigns.

Under such conditions, it is clear that no bourgeois or even petty-bourgeois mass movement is possible. The incredibly miserable and highly explosive social conditions imply an instinctively revolutionary mass movement, plebeian and semi-proletarian in nature, led by more or less educated petty-bourgeois elements. That was the nature of Messali's MFLD. That is the nature of the MNA. That is also the nature of the FLN. Inasmuch as the basis of the FLN is today much broader than that of the MNA, the relationship of forces is more favorable to the plebeian masses than to the petty-bourgeois elements in that movement than in the MNA. And as a matter of plain fact there are more conservative religious landowners in the MNA than in the FLN.

Again, I should like to make our position quite clear. We do not say that the FLN is a socialist or a revolutionary Marxist movement. We say that it is a broad mass movement of a revolutionary anti-imperialist character, in which the crystallization of distinct political currents, defending distinct social interests, has only begun, reflecting parallel tendencies within the society itself.

It is the task and duty of revolutionary Marxists to aid that process by defending and unconditionally helping the Algerian revolution and its organizations, against imperialism, by developing a clear Marxist program for Algeria, North Africa, and the whole Arab world, by advocating an independent organization of the working class. Such an independent organization is a matter of principle for Marxists; but not the independence of one petty-bourgeois nationalist organization from another, and especially not in armed struggles against imperialism.

Concerning the program of both the MNA and the FLN, it can be in general said that they remain mostly on the line of the old MFLD program. It should not be forgotten that Messali was in origin a Communist, and that the old pre-war Algerian Popular Party (PPA), of which the MFLD was an offspring had strong socialist elements in its program. In the MFLD's own program these socialist slogans were much less put in the forefront; in the MNA's propaganda they are never mentioned. It is true that both organizations, being petty-bourgeois nationalist groupings and not revolutionary Marxist class parties, are trying to solve their problems also by internationalizing the Algerian conflict and thus avoid any formulation which would antagonize American imperialism. The only distinction is that the FLN from time to time, reasserts these socialist elements of its positions, whereas, the MNA has descended to such depths of opportunism as calling upon Washington to save Algeria ... for NATO!

For instance on 24 January 1957 Moulay Merbah, Secretary-General of the MNA, sent a telegram to President Eisenhower which said among other things:

"The Algerian people and Messali Hadj greet with favor your policy on the Middle East and approve it as a generous and positive contribution to the well-being, the peace and the liberty of the Arab people... The truly colonial war which is being waged in Algeria weakens the security of Europe [!] as 500,000 French soldiers, among which 4 NATO divisions and NATO arms, are being engaged in it."

(Le Monde, 25 January 1957)

And in an interview with a Social-Democratic weekly, Demain, Messali Hadj, declared:

"We are convinced that a solution of the Algerian problem will consolidate peace in North Africa, will reinforce the camp of freedom [!], and consolidate Franco-Arab friendship... Islamic North Africa will develop by taking into account its western neighbors, their economic interests and relations with Mediterranean states. Let us meditate about the examples of India and Pakistan. Pakistan, this great Islamic power, while enjoying freedom [!] and independence, has maintained links of sympathy and relations of interest [!] with Great Britain."

On the other hand, the FLN leaders, in an interview with the radical French weekly France-Observateur, made the following statement of policy:

"European property which has been honestly acquired will be respected. But the Algerian government will claim the right, if public interest makes it necessary, to nationalize for example the great means of production which are today in the hands of a few colonialists. It will be the

"same for the agrarian reform. No Algerian government worthy of the name could tolerate that a single family exploits tens of thousands of hectares while the immense majority of Algerians stagnate in dismal misery."

Again, I repeat that in our opinion the FLN is not a socialist organization, although there is a Marxist proletarian current which is crystallizing in that organization. The one thing I do want to point out is that there is no objective basis in the matter of program for handing the palm of virtue for socialism or "leftism" to the MNA while refusing it to the FLN. What remains are two radical plebean organizations, which represent the same class forces and present substantially the same written program. It is precisely under these conditions that the concentrated attacks of the MNA upon the FLN, which leads the revolution, lose all principled character, and become purely cliquish, destructive, and gravely harmful.

Philip Magri proclaims that the MNA is for a "general uprising of the people" whereas the FLN is for "blind terrorism." These accusations smack somehow of the slander campaign which the French imperialists are conducting day and night against the heroic Algerian revolutionaries. This "blind terrorism" is being carried out by a revolutionary army of tens of thousands of poor workers and peasants, swelled month after month by new recruits. The official program of the FLN, adopted at the Congress held in the liberated Valley of the Suman on 20 August 1956, proclaims that the FLN is preparing the general armed uprising of the whole Algerian population and the general armament of the whole people. A strange slogan indeed for "bourgeois" forces trying to come "to an agreement" with French imperialism!

The Struggle for Algerian Independence

"Certain" newspaper correspondents have found the MNA more moderate than the FLN, says Philip Magri; nothing, he considers, could be more ludicrous. May I point out that this opinion has been voiced not only by "certain" newspaper correspondents but by such responsible bourgeois organs as the London Economist and the New York Times! I should further like to point out to him that the International Latex Corporation, the most fanatic defender of French imperialism within American/circles (because it owns great plantations in South Vietnam), is paying thousands of dollars to put ads in newspapers like the New York Times, in which all the attacks are concentrated upon the FLN, and the MNA is also declared to be "moderate." And I should like finally to point out that French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, a staunch partisan of the imperialist Atlantic Pact and a staunch supporter of the Algerian War, who should know what he is talking about, declared at the United Nations on 4 February 1957:

"What is the difference between the MNA and the FLN? The MNA appears to us to be more westernized [!], more realistic [!], especially more independent [from whom?], which does not mean that its claims are less vivid."

(Le Monde, 5 February 1957)

Be this as it may, the essential difference in day-to-day policy between the FLN and the MNA is the fact, as Philip Magri states, that the FLN stands for unconditional independence which France must recognize prior to any negotiations, whereas the MNA stands for a round-table conference between all representatives of Algerian opinion and French imperialism, in order to prepare free elections which would lead to self-determination.

Now, says Philip Magri, the FLN position is only "verbally radical." What the FLN really wants is "to persuade the French to allow them to share in the government of Algeria and in the profits to be derived from its exploitation." Why do they really want only such a "share" and not total independence? Because, Philip Magri writes, the FLN, "representing the Algerian capitalist class [?],"

"cannot dream of standing alone against the Algerian masses. Its privileges [?] have been derived from cooperation with colonialism, and their perpetuation requires the continued 'French presence' in Algeria as a counterweight against the Algerian revolution."

According to that thesis, one would then expect the MNA, that authentic representative and leadership of the "Algerian revolution," to stand for unconditional independence. Alas, against the "verbal extremism" of the FLN, the MNA asks -- I quote -- "that the war be ended by means of a round-table conference at which all French and Algerian tendencies involved would be represented," without prior recognition of independence by France.

What does that mean? It means that the representatives of different Algerian parties plus the representatives of French settlers in Algeria will start "discussing" its future status with French imperialism, i.e., repeat the sterile policy of stagnation and practical passivity which Messali has consistently followed for many years and which provoked the crisis and split in his organization! It means that the French imperialists will be allowed to play the cards of communal and national differences among the various sectors of the Algerian people, instead of a united front of anti-imperialist struggle being built. It means giving up the tremendous advantages won by the armed revolutionary struggles through countless sacrifices of thousands and thousands of the best sons and daughters of the Algerian people.

It means more. The actual slogan launched by the MNA for many months was the slogan, "For an Aix-les-Bains on the Algerian question." Now the Aix-les-Bains round-table conference to which this slogan alludes was the conference which granted formal independence to Morocco while "safeguarding" the economic interests of French imperialism in that country.

So now we have the following ludicrous picture painted by Philip Magri: the FLN, which stands flatly in so many words for unconditional independence, and refuses to stop the civil war until the imperialists formally recognize that independence, is accused of really wanting "to share power" with French imperialism; but the MNA, which actually launches the slogan for a conference leading to a share-the-power compromise, is presented as the staunch defender of unconditional independence! It is hard to imagine a more grotesque distortion of truth and facts than this completely upside-down picture.

National Independence and Permanent Revolution

Philip Magri tries to make some capital out of the fact that the MNA defends the "consistently democratic position" of self-determination by means of free elections for a sovereign Constituent Assembly. But the FLN recognizes the same principle. The whole question here is: who and under what conditions will call for these elections?

The Algerian people have had a bitter experience with "general elections!" Philip Magri himself describes how "all the elections in Algeria were outrageously falsified" after 1945. Now at that time there was relative "peace" in Algeria, whereas today there are 500,000 French soldiers and tens of thousands of armed European "militiamen." Under these conditions could "elections" be anything but a sinister farce? The position of the FLN is that only a provisional Algerian government could call for general elections after the recognition of Algerian independence and after the withdrawal of French troops.

It might be said that democratic guarantees for elections under these conditions would be found insufficient. The right for all Algerian national parties, all shades of Algerian national opinion, to participate in these elections, could and should be demanded. We ourselves would always defend the right of the MNA to participate in these elections. But is it not clear that the FLN position is far more anti-imperialist, revolutionary, and democratic than that of the MNA which, in the midst of a war, calls for a "democratic election" without saying one word about the presence of the sanguinary occupation troops!

This is all the worse because it has been the political program of that reformist stooge of French imperialism, Guy Mollet, to counterpose "democratic elections after a cease-fire" to the FLN's demand for unconditional recognition of Algerian independence. The MNA slogan came dangerously close to that imperialist one; and what is implied in the latter has been made clear by that French Noske called Robert Lacoste who openly stated last week in the French National Assembly that a "cease-fire" implied disarmament of the rebels, and that no elections could be held without those rebels being disarmed.

The position now becomes quite clear. In the armed uprising of the Algerian people against French imperialism, the FLN, leaders of the revolution, whatever may be the insufficiency of their doctrine or the opportunism of their tactics, call for unconditional independence and for the withdrawal or disarming of the imperialist troops; the imperialists, for their part, logically stand for the disarming (i.e., wholesale murder) of the revolutionaries, and "free elections" afterwards. And what does that "vanguard" organization called the MNA stand for? For a round-table conference of both camps and "free elections," without mentioning the few hundreds of thousands of people busy cutting each other's throats in the war! One could make a definition of that position. But it would certainly not be the definition "Bolshevism" or "socialism."

The question of the winning of national independence by an armed uprising of the masses is a decisive question in the unfolding of the revolutionary process in a colonial or semi-colonial country. It is no accident that the colonial or semi-colonial bourgeoisies, from Ghana to India, and from Argentina to Iran, have always shied away from the perspective of an armed mass uprising against imperialism. Their way to "win independence," has always been that of negotiation, of haggling, of compromise, of "round-table" conferences, which enabled them to keep the masses from violent action and to maintain important economic links with imperialism. On the other hand, the strategy of proletarian parties in the national-liberation struggles of colonial countries has always consisted in developing the mass struggle, culminating in the armed uprising, to its logical conclusion, because the theory of the permanent revolution teaches us that the process that begins as an armed mass struggle for national independence ends as a civil war for proletarian dictatorship.

The hesitations, weakness, and betrayal of the Indian bourgeois national Congress leadership prevented this process from working out completely in India in August 1942; the same characteristics of the bourgeois Mossadegh leadership in Iran, of the bourgeois Arbenz leadership in Guatemala, of the bourgeois Peron leadership in Argentina, enabled imperialist or pro-imperialist counter-revolution in each of these cases to triumph temporarily without organized armed mass resistance. But the example of Yugoslavia shows that where a revolutionary leadership, even an opportunist Stalinist one, consistently tries to develop the mass uprising for national independence, it is forced by the logic of the situation and the pressure of the masses to trespass on the fields of social revolution. There are many signs that the same process is taking place in Algeria, with incalculable consequences for the whole of North Africa. The confirmation of that revolutionary process would shatter the shaky compromises in Tunisia and Morocco, would bring about a new stage of the North African revolution, and would give a tremendous impulse to the revolution in all Arab countries.

Already today the relations between Bourgiba and that part of the FLN revolutionary army stationed on Tunisian territory are very strained. They are indeed strained to the point where American imperialism felt it wise to send some arms to Bourgiba to enable him to defend himself against the much stronger Algerian forces. In Morocco the FLN partisans openly collaborate with the Liberation Army, against the pro-imperialist stooges around King Mohammed V.

It is true that the FLN leadership as a whole cannot be said to work consciously for a socialist Algeria. But by developing the mass uprising more and more broadly, by preparing and putting into effect regionally the general arming of the whole population, it is objectively preparing the socialist Algeria and socialist Middle East of tomorrow. It deserves unconditional support in its fight against imperialism, and friendly criticism in working out its politics. It does not deserve irresponsible attacks and slanderous gossip, copied from the imperialist yellow press which, like Philip Magri, speaks of them only as "gangs of killers" and "assassins."

The Bellounis Case

In the last weeks, however, at the very time that Philip Magri's articles were being printed in The Militant, the real situation in the Algerian national movement has been made even clearer by the dramatic betrayal of Bellounis.

Bellounis was the only important underground leader heading a large group of armed fighters in Algeria in the name of the MNA. The Algerian "maquis" visited by the French journalist Claude Gerard, whom Philip Magri quotes, was precisely the "maquis" organized and led by Bellounis. After many months of very strange and shady goings-on, Bellounis, at the beginning of December 1957, signed an agreement with the French imperialist army. In the first public declaration, published by the French newspapers, he declared:

"If I should be recognized as representing the national army of the Algerian people and the Algerian National Movement, and if Messali Hadj were recognized as the 'valid negotiator,' I am ready to participate in the pacification [!] of Algeria with my army."

As there are differences among the imperialists, and most of them do not think it useful to "play up" the MNA and Messali, Bellounis a few days later made a speech over the French radio of Algiers, in which, without mentioning the name of Messali, he denied having any links with the MNA.

Some provinces of Algeria were covered with his "proclamations," in which he defends the position of "free elections" in his somewhat special manner:

"I hereby solemnly declare that my army is struggling against the anarchistic [redacted] forces of foreign obedience represented by the FLN, in order to liberate the population of this country from their [redacted] cruel rule. My goal is essentially to allow everyone to express himself freely on the day when the destruction of the FLN will allow the people of Algeria to define freely [redacted] their destiny in a harmonious framework indissolubly linked with France.

"I have undertaken this struggle in close collaboration and friendship [redacted] with the civil and military authorities of France. My army is engaged in the struggle which France wages against the killers of the FLN who spare neither women nor children nor old people."

Bellounis, of course, has become a vulgar traitor. After his proclamation and the open collaboration of his armed forces with the imperialist army, there can be no doubt about this. But Bellounis was defended by Messali and his friends till the very last moment; why do they keep silent today? Why don't they openly and publicly dissociate themselves from this traitor?

We do not want to identify the MNA or Messali with Bellounis; neither do we identify with the MNA that irresponsible split-off group of French Trotskyists led by Lambert. But what should one say about these people when one reads the following sentence in their newspaper, La Verite, of 14 November 1957?--

"With regard to the objectives of Bellounis and the situation in the zone he controls, most fantastic and contradictory information has circulated and still circulates. On the other hand, the assertions of those who pretend that Bellounis has gone over 'to serve France' are brought into question when one reads [redacted] l'Action, the official paper of Bourgiba which, in its issue of 28 October, says that Bellounis has reached a 'modus vivendi' with the French troops, that is to say, an armistice, which is a purely military situation [redacted] and which does not presuppose any particular policy."

The "purely" military situation which involves collaboration with the French army against "anarchistic," "communist" assassins -- doesn't that remind one of the behavior of the Mihailovitch forces in Yugoslavia making "armistices" with the fascist forces against Tito's "gangs of assassins?"

Furthermore, after Bellounis's political betrayal became public and he went over into the camp of imperialism, a trial was being held in Algiers of some MNA militants. According to Le Monde of 15 January 1958 they claimed that they were MNA people and that they had fought under the leadership of Si Lahoucine and Si Mohammed Bellounis. Two days later, Le Monde gave the following excerpt from the speech for the defense made by Lawyer Dechezelles, a close friend of Messali Hadj:

"Today my task could be easy; for if these men had not been captured in 1956, they would be part of an army which seems to have been recognized [redacted] by the French government. I do not wish to penetrate into

"the mysteries of government affairs, but I am forced to state that the civil and military authorities have come to an agreement with the chief of these accused: Bellounis."

Some sophists have tried to compare the "desperate situation" of the Bellounis forces to the situation of the POUM and Trotskyist armed forces on the Spanish Civil War front, when Stalinist repression closed in on them from behind. I have already explained why the social and political characterization of the FLN makes such a comparison absolutely slanderous. The Stalinists in Spain strangled and killed the revolution; the FLN for the moment organizes it and pushes it forward. But even if the parallel were correct, can anyone for one moment visualize the POUM or the Trotskyists making "purely military" or military and political agreements with Franco for common struggle against the Stalinists? Only the Stalinist slanderers of our movement have ever advanced such possibilities. It will be to the eternal honor of the Trotskyist movement that never and nowhere did it for one moment subordinate the general interests of the revolution and the abyss separating hostile class camps, to its own self-defense. There were no such traitors or turncoats in our movement, no people making "military armistices" with fascism! We must defend the POUM and all honest revolutionaries against slanderous comparisons like this one. And we must openly denounce the unprincipled irresponsibility of people like the Lambert group, which puts the label of "Trotskyism" on sentences like the above-quoted, which come very near to open betrayal.

Comrades might say: in Spain and in Yugoslavia there was fascism; in France, there is bourgeois democracy; this makes a difference. These comrades are quite wrong. It was not in France that Bellounis made his agreement with the army of imperialist butchers; it was in Algeria. And in Algeria there is not only no bourgeois democracy, there is a regime of terror and wholesale assassination worse than Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1938 and beyond comparison with fascist Italy. The horrors of the imperialist repression in Algeria can be compared only with the worst traits of the Nazis in Poland, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Conservative figures of the number of innocent civilians slain by the imperialist bandits are around 500,000. In such a situation one chooses one's side without a moment's hesitation. One is the camp of the revolution, whatever may have been the errors or even the crimes of its leaders, and the other is the camp of counter-revolution. And that's where Bellounis is today. Any honest revolutionary who had mistakenly identified himself with that traitor should today show the moral courage of acknowledging his mistake. And an organization like the MNA, which has consistently and proudly identified itself with Bellounis, should dissociate itself all the quicker because of the extent of its past mistake in the matter. History tolerates no misunderstandings on questions of such importance.

A Dangerous Revision of Leninism

But, it might be asked, how do we explain the bitter fight between the two Algerian nationalist organizations, if there are no class differences between them?

One of the reasons for this fight is, of course, cliquism, which has often and will often in the future play a role in young and rapidly growing revolutionary movements. Messali was the acknowledged leader of the Algerian nationalist movement. At the Hornu Congress of 1954, he had himself nominated "president for life" (a strange proposal for a socialist, don't you think?). When he saw that control over the mass movement and the revolution was escaping from him, he tried to recapture it by all means, abandoning thereby all principled positions and becoming cynical and demoralized.

But, of course, there is a question of "profound political difference" between Messali and the FLN, and that question trickles through Philip Magri's articles, although it is nowhere explicitly stated. Magri many times alludes to the "necessary solidarity between the French proletariat and the Algerian masses." This seems OK, of course. But what is behind this correct phrase is Messali's conception that, because of the presence of a million French settlers in Algeria and the strength of resistance of French imperialism toward the national liberation movement in that country, the victory of the Algerian revolution is impossible without a revolutionary upsurge in France. As there is no immediate prospect of such an upsurge, the Algerian revolution cannot achieve military victory.

During the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, according to the newspaper Le Monde, the MNA issued a communique stating that "the end of the Algerian conflict cannot be the result of military victory. The only democratic and just solution can be the organization of free elections under the effective control of the United Nations."

And the irresponsible Lambert, acting like a mouthpiece for Messali, faithfully echoed in La Verite:

"As a result of its relative isolation, essentially from the French proletariat [...], the Algerian people cannot achieve a military victory."
(Issue of 7 November 1957)

Such theories are wrong in principle and unproved and irresponsible in practice. It is true that the proletarian vanguard in a national-liberation movement of a colonial country must be internationalist in theory and action, that it must call on the oppressed people of its own country not to identify the rulers of the metropolitan country with the exploited toilers of that country. It is also true that the victory of the colonial revolution will be the easier and the quicker, the more energetically the proletariat of the metropolitan country joins in the fight against imperialism. But it is absolutely wrong that the armed uprising or the revolution of the oppressed people must be subordinated in any way to the "favorable timetable" for revolution... in the metropolitan country. On the contrary, the revolutionaries of the colonial country must audaciously forge ahead, conscious of the fact that by the blows they are striking against imperialism, they are preparing the revolutionary upsurge in the metropolitan country.

Lambert even dares reproach the FLN leadership for its "adventurism" which "favors" the climate for war in France! This is Leninism turned upside-down. When the exploited people of the colony rise, it is the task of the vanguard of the metropolitan proletariat to call tirelessly on the masses to come to the defense and active help of the colonial revolution, irrespective of the "errors" and "mistakes" of its leaders. To correct these "errors" is primarily the task of the proletarian revolutionaries of the colonial countries, rather than of the workers of the metropolitan countries. They must first win the right to "correct the errors" of the colonial revolution by showing in practice their capacity to help this revolution.

Now in practice the French proletariat, owing to the betrayal of the Stalinist and reformist leaderships, and to the hesitations and procrastinations of the most influential centrists, has done nothing to help the Algerian revolution. There has not been one strike in a harbor; there has not been one ship transporting soldiers or loaded with munitions which was held up 24 hours; there was not

one general strike on an all-city level anywhere in France against the Algerian war. Under these circumstances, it is not very becoming for a French revolutionist to reproach the heroic leaders of the Algerian revolution for their "nationalism;" he would do better to address these reproaches to the leaders, cadres, and even sometimes militants, of the working-class organizations of his own country.

It is significant that the FLN is not only far to the left of bourgeois-nationalist parties such as Bourgiba's Neo-Destour or the Moroccan Istiqlal. Its criticism of Stalinism is also criticism of a left nature. CP leader Leon Faix was forced last week in the Stalinist paper France Nouvelle to get into public polemics with the FLN over its accusations that the French CP leadership is criminally inactive with regard to the Algerian war. He timidly reproaches the FLN for its "ingratitude," saying that French Communists have "done much" to help the Algerian revolution. In reality, the bitter FLN criticism of the criminal passivity of French Stalinism has found broad echoes inside the French CP, and especially in the international Communist movement (Moroccan and Tunisian CP, Yugoslav CP, Polish CP, Chinese CP, etc.).

There is no imperialist war in Algeria; there is a war of liberation by an exploited people against imperialist slavemongers. Under these conditions, no honest revolutionary can "wage a war on two fronts." Leninism teaches us that under such conditions the only correct position is the united front, not made conditional on politics within the colonial revolution, between the working class of the imperialist country and the colonial revolution, for the defeat of imperialism. The MNA, Messali, and the Lambert group have never said this in so many words. Our International and its French section are proud to be the only working-class organizations that have consistently defended that position. The Militant would do well to defend it also.

Fraternally,

/s/ Patrick O'Daniel

Paris, France
3 February 1958

To the Editors of The Militant

Comrades:

After mailing you my letter of 3 February, I received your issue of 6 January, with still another article by Philip Magri on Algeria. It contains a further major error of fact and additional distortions which require answering. I am therefore asking you to insert in my letter at the points indicated the following additional material:

Page 12: Add at end of second paragraph, after words in that country. -- /no paragraph/ (In the December 1957 issue of the newspaper La Voix du Travailleur Algerien, organ of the MNA-controlled trade-union federation, the USTA, Ahmed Bekhat, its secretary, since killed, published an article on the Bamako Conference, that brought together most of the political militants of the French colonies of Central Africa at the end of September 1957. In this article he wrote: "We have seen that the African people are whole-heartedly ready to build a union with France on a basis of equality." Terrible words if we recall the moment when they were written. At the moment when the Algerian people had gone into open insurrection, whose example has been inspiring and will continue to inspire the revolutionary movement in Central Africa, the so-called "left-wing" leader of the Algerian nationalist movement calmly takes the opinion of the reformist collaborationist tendency among the petty-bourgeois politicians for the opinions of "the people!" And then they condemn the FLN for "collaborationist" tendencies?).

Page 16: Add at the end of fifth paragraph, after words from this traitor? -- /no paragraph/. (In its issue of 6 January, The Militant states that "the MNA has disclaimed any connection with Bellounis or his action." I believe that The Militant published this statement in good faith, and that some "informants" have deliberately provided incorrect information to its editors. Because in fact no such declaration of the MNA has been published anywhere; and several French left newspapers have repeatedly declared that Messali Hadj, while refusing himself to come to terms with imperialism, has also refused to denounce Bellounis, because the majority of his followers in Algeria approve Bellounis.)

Page 20: At end of first paragraph after words the metropolitan country, insert new paragraph:

Philip Magri comes close to formulating this wrong and dangerous theory of the "impossibility of a victorious revolution in a single country" when he writes in the 6 January Militant: "Exhaustion of the Algerian revolutionary forces is a serious danger," when he speaks of a "deadlock," and when he concludes: "But the French workers will have to act soon, for the war of attrition has begun to tell on the Algerians. As Messali has emphasized all his life, the fate of the Algerian revolution rests in the hands of the French working class."

This thesis of the "exhaustion" of the Algerian revolution was feverishly developed by French imperialism on the eve of and during the session of the United Nations General Assembly, in order to prevent an "internationalization" of the Algerian conflict. All bourgeois and pro-imperialist newspapers in France were talking about this "exhaustion." Alas, no sooner was Philip Magri's article printed than the news from Algeria caused great alarm in French imperialist circles. Butcher No. 1, Robert Lacoste himself, was forced to admit that the "rebels" were now so strong and so well-armed that they could go over from "terrorism"

to full-fledged "guerilla warfare." And Bourguiba announced to French public opinion, without being contradicted, that the Algerian revolutionists control "large parts of the Algerian territory."

Under these conditions, talk about "exhaustion" and "attrition" is irresponsible, to use a very moderate term. Working-class and Marxist revolutionists should always be the most enthusiastic and intransigent soldiers in the struggle for national liberation, who should tell the downtrodden masses that they are able to liberate themselves, and not constantly shed doubt on the future of the colonial revolution and repeat the defeatist and anti-Leninist thesis that without action of the metropolitan proletariat the colonial revolution is doomed to defeat.

I suppose that in the very first sentence of my letter the date of January 6th should be added.

I am sorry to give you the extra work of making these insertions, but the points seem to me too important to omit. I express once more the hope that the line presented by Philip Magri is not that of the SWP itself, and urge you to utilize my letter for a rectification, the failure to make which now will unquestionably put The Militant in a most embarrassing situation later as the factual situation becomes ever more clear.

Yours fraternally,

/s/ Patrick O'Daniel

Patrick O'Daniel

12 February 1958

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM AND THE SPLIT IN THE
ALGERIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Reply to O'Daniel

-- by Philip Magri

In his "Open Letter" Comrade O'Daniel disputes in the strongest terms the accuracy of my presentation of the present situation within Algerian nationalism. The questions in dispute are of the most serious nature, involving the alignment of sections of the Trotskyist movement on opposite sides in a conflict approaching at times the sharpness of civil war. This fact in itself would necessitate the most serious and sober study of this entire question by all concerned -- but even more important, the Algerian Revolution is one of the decisive facts of the present international situation. A false position on it could have the most disastrously disorienting effect on the revolutionary socialist movement.

In my articles in the Militant, I analyzed the struggle between MNA and FLN as a conflict within the colonial revolution between a basically proletarian and a socialist tendency and a petty-bourgeois opportunist group orienting toward a capitalist Algeria and a rotten compromise with imperialism. For Patrick O'Daniel the situation is different: the FLN is a plebian mass movement with a leadership reflecting its social base and playing an objectively revolutionary role under the impetus of the Algerian masses, the MNA is a "sect," a "clique" without a political basis for existence, evolving toward a policy of conciliation with French imperialism.

The political and factual issues in dispute can be grouped under four main headings: the question of which organization is primarily responsible for the use of violence within the nationalist movement, the origins and leadership of FLN and MNA, the difference in politics and program of MNA and FLN, and finally the basic perspective for the Algerian Revolution.

I. Who is Guilty of a Policy of Assassinations?

Patrick O'Daniel contends that the MNA was first to resort to systematic assassinations of FLN militants, starting at the beginning of 1956 when the FLN first tried to organize itself in France. The actions of the FLN, according to this theory, were originally motivated by legitimate self-defense. According to Patrick O'Daniel, the overwhelming majority of murders which took place in 1956 were committed by the MNA against the FLN.

On analysis, the arguments and evidence advanced by Patrick O'Daniel to establish this point appear flimsy indeed. In the first place, the only documentary evidence he cites is...a statement by one of the most violently reactionary members of the French government! Bourges-Manoury, a consistent apostle of all-out war in Algeria, has one purpose and one purpose only -- to slander the entire Algerian liberation movement, to persuade the French public that all Algerians are simply murderers and thugs. Neither Comrade O'Daniel nor myself would attach the slightest value to an attack on the FLN by Bourges; why then does Patrick O'Daniel call on Bourges as his sole witness against the MNA? Can he find no better one?

This, I repeat, is the only empirical evidence presented by Patrick O'Daniel in regard to the murders of 1956. He also uses two arguments to infer the guilt of the MNA. One is the initially small size of the FLN: "How could the weak, if not inexistent, FLN have in a short time organized sufficient arms and people to kill 80 persons?" But murders are not the work of a mass movement -- they are by their very nature carried out by a small apparatus which may or may not be tied to a mass movement. It is tragically easier to organize terrorist groups than to build a mass movement! In addition, the MNA has charged that the FLN murders have been carried out by hired killers from the French-Algerian underworld. Whether or not this charge can be proven, there is in any case nothing unlikely about it. The FLN, financed from Cairo, has quite obviously always disposed of sufficient funds to pay for this sort of dirty work. It is thus impermissible to argue that the FLN could not have been responsible for murders in 1956!

The other argument is that the defenders of the MNA ignored all these crimes in 1956 and only spoke up in 1957, when the MNA became the principal victim. "All French revolutionaries know how desperately the few FLN cadres were searching for arms to defend themselves during the whole year of 1956. Why does Philip Magri keep silent about the 80 murders of that year?" But this is a very, very dangerous point for a representative of the Pablo tendency to make. If, in fact, all through 1956 the FLN was "desperately" trying to defend itself from a murderous attack by the MNA, was it not the elementary duty of "All French revolutionaries" to come to the aid of the FLN, to denounce the MNA? Well, the paper of this tendency, "La Verite des Travailleurs" went through the entire year of 1956 without a word of condemnation of MNA murders! Why? Surely not out of hostility toward the FLN...

Another paper which only discovered in the fall of 1957 that "The MNA was the first in France to use physical liquidations.." was the staunchly pro-FLN weekly "France-Observateur." This journal, too, let the whole year 1956 slip by without the least denunciation of MNA "terrorism." Its first statement on terrorism within the Algerian nationalist camp came on May 30, 1957: "What astonishes and disturbs part of French opinion -- and most particularly left-wing opinion -- is the persistence of 'settling of accounts' taking place in the metropolis between representatives of rival tendencies (and for which members of both FLN and MNA bear responsibility)." Again, the failure of "France-Observateur" to indict the MNA can scarcely be explained by a lack of partiality toward the FLN...

The MNA, for its part, claims to have acted only in self-defense. An MNA pamphlet reprints a study by Claude Gerard's "Interafrique Presse" which states: "In France, the small organization of the FLN tried to disorganize the cells of the MNA by murder until that moment when, so it seems, the MNA decided to answer back."

Claude Gerard is, of course, a partisan of the MNA just as Patrick O'Daniel supports the FLN -- and their assertions as to the primary guilt for the "settling of accounts" are completely contradictory. Is there then any independent, verifiable evidence showing the truth about the responsibility for assassinations?

In fact, there is. It is unquestionable that the introduction of violence within the Algerian nationalist movement began with the seizure and imprisonment of MNA leaders Mezerna and Mekki by the Nasser government at the request of the FLN. This took place in the fall of 1955 -- well before even Patrick O'Daniel accuses the MNA of murders. It proves that as early as 1955 the FLN was resolved

to use techniques of violence to wipe out the MNA! Another action of this type was the murder of one of the original leaders of the insurrection, Ben Boulaid. A member of the secret organization of the MFLD, Ben Boulaid had been asked to participate in the uprising in the name of Messali Hadj by the leaders of the CRUA, who would have been incapable of starting the revolution without the illegitimate use of Messali's prestige. Ben Boulaid was captured by the French and sentenced to death at a trial at which he defended the ideas of the MNA and Messali Hadj -- but he was able to escape with the aid of the MNA. Shortly thereafter he was assassinated by the FLN on March 27, 1956! These events in Egypt and Algeria provide the real context for the outbreak of violence in France itself.

But beyond these facts there is one conclusively significant event which Patrick O'Daniel only alludes to: In the summer of 1957, Messali, in an effort to break the vicious cycle of terrorism and counter-terrorism, made a solemn appeal to all Algerians to end the use of violence among themselves. This appeal was initially effective -- for several weeks all violence stopped. Assassinations began again on the sole initiative of the FLN leaders outside France, with a series of murders referred to in the Militant.

And this is, of course, decisive proof of the guilt of the FLN, for after Messali's appeal it no longer had any pretension to a claim of self-defense, however unjustified. Denunciations of the MNA's behavior in 1956 from people who were silent at the time cannot conceal the fact that in the fall of 1957 the FLN carried out a series of coldly calculated political murders without provocation of any sort. Patrick O'Daniel quotes with ironic approval my statement "What more needs to be said to characterize a political movement than that its preferred method of political discussion is the assassin's bullet?" And who were the assassins of Bekhat, Fillali, and the others?

Political murders have to be explained politically. It is not enough to deplore them -- supporters of the FLN are called upon to explain why the FLN carried out these crimes.

The FLN, to be sure, has its own "political" explanation. Patrick O'Daniel spends a great deal of time on an analogy with Spain that I made nowhere in my articles -- perhaps that is because a certain analogy with Spain imposes itself. To justify their murders of revolutionary socialists, the Stalinists resorted to the vilest form of slander against their opponents, calling them fascists, counter-revolutionaries, agents of France. In exactly similar fashion the FLN has covered its murder campaign against the MNA by denouncing its revolutionary opponents as counter-revolutionaries and agents of the police! The attacks of this sort against the MNA are so similar to those against the Poumists and Trotskyists that I for one would not be surprised to learn that they had been written by the same hands...and as for the killings, the similarity there, too, lets the mind wander...

I believe that only on the basis of the analysis presented in the Militant can the political basis for the FLN murder campaign be understood. The FLN realizes that it cannot destroy the influence of the MNA and Messali Hadj over the Algerian masses, either in France or Algeria, except by terrorism and the physical annihilation of the MNA. In any honest political confrontation, in any free election, the FLN would be relegated to minority status: And because the Algerian people will not end the war without having won the right to choose their own government by free elections the MNA must be smashed now before the war ends. Hence Melouza. Hence the murder of Bekhat, et al.

II. Who Leads the FLN?

Patrick O'Daniel does not dispute the picture of political forces within Algerian nationalism before November 1, 1954 presented in the Militant articles. What he denies is that the bourgeois reformist tendencies within the FLN control its leadership. Instead, it is claimed, the nature of the FLN is determined by the mass movement that it heads, and the real leadership of the FLN rests in the hands of "the hards," the underground military leaders in Algeria.

In regard to the leadership of the FLN, a clear picture was given in a recent article in the New Leader by Joseph Kraft, an American correspondent who entered Algeria in FLN territory, and is extremely sympathetic to the Front. According to Kraft, the FLN is led by a committee of nine members, of whom Ferhat Abbas and one other are from the former UDMA and three members from the former MFLD Central Committee -- thus at least 5 out of 9, a clear majority, are from the bourgeois reformist tendencies. A revolutionary movement does not usually give "bourgeois hostages" a majority voice in its leadership!

As to the so-called "hard ones" of the underground FLN leadership, there is considerable question how much more than skin deep their "extremism" goes. Perhaps the most prominent of these "intransigents," at least judging from the French press, is an underground leader named Ramdane Abane. Ramdane makes an appearance in Servan-Schreiber's "Lieutenant in Algeria" which is worth noting.

Apparently one of the officers of the French Army in the area made direct contact for negotiations with Ramdane. According to this officer "What impresses me most about the way he looks is his shoes. They've got a shine on them like a looking glass. And his hands are clean, and his nails are as well trimmed as if he's just come from a manicurist. Started me thinking about the kind of people the maquis are recruiting..." But this, of course, is secondary -- the essential is the political basis for these negotiations: "it had been laid down from the beginning that the exchange of ideas must be founded on the premise that Algeria would remain French and that the aim was to be the application of the Minister Resident's directives.."

In any case, we can concede that incidents like Melouza show that there really exist FLN leaders who merit the term "hards" -- in a certain sense, of course.

Can we say that Patrick O'Daniel's third factor, the pressure of the Algerian masses, alters the nature of the FLN leadership? In the January 6 Militant I indicated that the pressure of the FLN ranks is extremely important -- that it restricts the freedom of maneuver of the leadership, and continually pushes them to a more determined stand against France. But this in no way alters the bourgeois character of the FLN leadership, and for two reasons. First of all, the pressure of the masses is fully effective only to the extent that the MNA exists as an alternative to which the FLN ranks can turn. If the FLN leaders by terrorism could succeed in gaining a monopoly on Algerian politics, they would be much freer of mass pressure, at least until the Algerian masses had succeeded in rebuilding their own organization.

And in the second place, the bourgeois character of the FLN leaders enters continually into contradiction with the demands and needs of the masses following the FLN. Thus the FLN is, in fact, neither a "bourgeois mass movement"

which Patrick O'Daniel rightly considers impossible in Algeria, nor a classless "plebian," "instinctively revolutionary" mass movement. Rather, it is a petty-bourgeois revolutionary tendency dominated by a contradiction between its bourgeois leadership and its semi-proletarian base.

Political stability within such a movement is inconceivable. The FLN must evolve either toward complete domination of the bourgeois elements and a compromise with French colonialism or toward a split and the regroupment of its more revolutionary tendencies with the Messalist MNA. The current heterogeneity of the FLN leadership is notorious. It is an artificial creation and can be held together only by force.

As to the MNA, its quality as the direct continuer of the Algerian revolutionary movement of the past and the fact that it is solidly based on the Algerian working class (it is, of course, the decisive peculiarity of the Algerian revolution that the great bulk of this working class can find employment only in France) in addition to its socialist traditions justify our terming it a proletarian tendency.

For Patrick O'Daniel, on the other hand, the MNA has become a "clique" -- it was reduced to that status because the revolution of 1954 broke out without its participation as the result of a "crisis" brought about because "the Messali leadership had been for years procrastinating and increasingly passive ..." As a result "...the revolution simply passes them by. This is what happened to Messali."

In fact, as I showed in the articles in the Militant, the split between "Messalists" and "Centralists" in the MFLD in 1954 was precisely over the issue of orienting toward an armed uprising of the Algerian people, and everyone recognized this at the time. Among those aware of the fact were the French comrades of Patrick O'Daniel, who wrote (La Verite des Travailleurs, November 1954): "The creation of the Algerian maquis is also the expression of a political crisis in the national movement."

Did they, perhaps, refer to some "crisis" caused, they now claim, by the perennial "passivity" of Messali? It would not seem so, judging from the June 1955 issue which said: "L'Humanite ignores the name of the greatest Algerian leader who merits the respect and admiration of all workers, the living symbol of the unbending will to emancipation of the Algerian people."

And if, indeed, the "passive" and "procrastinating" MNA was simply bypassed by the Algerian revolution, it also took our comrades of the Pablo tendency a rather long time to realize this simple fact. In that same June issue of La Verite des Travailleurs they wrote denouncing the French Stalinists whose policy was: "to play upon the internal divisions of the Algerian nationalist movement and to deny to the MFLD of Messali Hadj its quality as the authentic representative of the Algerian masses."

III. Where is the Left-Wing Program?

Patrick O'Daniel contends that political differences between FLN and MNA are minor, and those that exist place the FLN to the left. He cites two seemingly pro-Western declarations by MNA leaders. It is impossible to say how much the pro-Western tone of these passages can be ascribed to opportunism on the part of the MNA, and how much to an out-of-context quote. In any event, Patrick O'Daniel asserts that the FLN in its turn tried to "avoid any formulation which would antagonize American imperialism." As to statements sympathetic

to the MNA from certain French Social-Democratic leaders, notably Pineau, we need merely realize that such statement represent exclusively an attempt to play off MNA against FLN before world public opinion. When it comes to repression, these "Socialist" scoundrels are at least as vigorous against the "more Westernized" MNA as against the FLN. And, while they eagerly use the MNA to explain in the UN why they cannot negotiate with the FLN, at the same time they carry on undercover negotiations with the FLN exclusively, such as the mission of Commin and Grose.

Patrick O'Daniel states that the MNA cannot in any sense be considered "socialist" because, while the old Algerian nationalist program had socialist elements, "in the MNA's propoganda they are never mentioned." The validity of this statement can be judged in the light of this statement by Messali Hadj, from his pamphlet "The Algerian Revolution:" "The MNA is deeply soaked with the principles of democracy. While struggling to win its freedom, it is determined after having done so to join its efforts to those of all the democrats to go as far as possible on the road towards socialism, for the purpose of creating a society in which man, without distinction of race, religion or color, can finally live in freedom and security from all the torments which preceding generations have known."

Of course, the decisive programmatic difference between MNA and FLN lies in their position on negotiations and the eventual Algerian government. Patrick O'Daniel manages to confuse these questions completely. He counterposes, in the most misleading fashion, the MNA's proposal for a round-table conference to negotiate a cease-fire to the FLN's proposal for "unconditional independence." He makes it appear that the MNA wishes to submit the future of Algeria to the result of a conference with French imperialism, while the FLN will settle for nothing less than complete independence.

In reality, the MNA proposal for a round-table conference has always been presented solely as a method to negotiate a cease-fire and conditions for free elections to a sovereign Constituent Assembly. It insists that only the Algerian people through free elections has the right to determine its government and future political status -- and no one can doubt that the choice would be for independence. It should go without saying that these proposals have nothing in common with the Mollet-Lacoste program for falsified elections and unconditional surrender of the revolutionary army camouflaged under the phrases of "free elections" and "cease fire." Patrick O'Daniel's effort to imply that MNA policy comes "dangerously close" to that of French imperialism is certainly an unworthy one.

Patrick O'Daniel also takes off from the MNA's use of the term "An Algerian Aix-les-Bains" to insinuate that the MNA wants to settle for a pseudo-independence like that gained by Morocco. But, as we have seen, the MNA's position on this is that only the Algerian people can determine the status of Algeria. The analogy to Morocco comes from the fact that there, too, the French pretended that they could find no valid negotiator, since the Moroccans were divided between the Sultan, the puppet Sultan, the Istiqlal, the "Democratic Independence Party," and other groups. In Algeria, the round table formula would be a crushing answer to French attempts to play off MNA against FLN if the FLN accepted it.

But in fact, and until this is understood the question must remain a complete mystery, the basic political orientation of the FLN is that it alone has the right to negotiate in the name of the Algerian people, it alone can form an Algerian government. It does no good to claim that the FLN "recognizes" the principle of free elections -- Melouza, the murder campaign, the repeated FLN slanders against the "counter-revolutionary MNA" show clearly that, as Patrick O'Daniel so delicately put it, "democratic guarantees for elections under these conditions would be found insufficient."

In these circumstances, what is the meaning of the slogan "unconditional independence" which Patrick O'Daniel counterposes to the MNA demand for a round-table conference and free elections to a sovereign Constituent Assembly? On its face, this FLN position is a downright lie, since the FLN has on many occasions entered unilateral negotiation with the French without a word being said beforehand about "independence." And as I established in the Militant articles, all the concrete aspects of this "independence" would be negotiated after the word was conceded. But Tunisia and Morocco are "independent," too. So, for that matter, is Cuba. The only meaningful guarantee against a sellout of the type that the background and social character of the Yazids and Ferhat Abbases makes absolutely inevitable is the power of the Algerian people to establish its own government. And it is exactly on this question that the difference between MNA and FLN is most clearly marked.

The only content of the famous phrase "unconditional independence" is thus that the FLN has the monopoly of negotiations and can establish itself as an Algerian government without the consent of the people. If the Front is, as Patrick O'Daniel contends, the authentic representative of the majority of the Algerian people, it is incredible that the FLN should refuse free elections (really free elections, of course, not elections a la Lacoste) or insist that it alone can negotiate for Algeria. Why is it afraid of the MNA? Why is it afraid of the verdict of the Algerian people?

IV. The Bellounis Case

All connection between the MNA and Bellounis or his action was disclaimed to the Militant by the MNA representative in New York, Mr. Abed Bouhafa. The accuracy of the MNA statement is apparently confirmed by the statement of Bellounis himself (although his first declarations had tried to use the MNA as a cover for his betrayal), and Patrick O'Daniel further confirms it when he says: "We do not want to identify the MNA or Messali with Bellounis." Unfortunately, it is also true that the MNA failed to denounce Bellounis publicly, and I do not wish to defend this failure in any way -- but that is a long way from implicating the MNA in any way in Bellounis' treason.

Furthermore, there is one fact that escaped Patrick O'Daniel in his lengthy discussion of Bellounis -- that is the fact that he stood at the head of a resistance group of 3,000 Algerian fighters. Why did they go along with his betrayal? Certainly, opportunistic "Machiavellian" arguments could play a part. But treason of this sort could never take place if the actions of the FLN units typified by Melouza had not provided a basis for the desperate reaction of "war on two fronts" and then "cooperation with the lesser evil." The treason of Bellounis cannot be excused -- but the FLN cannot escape a heavy share of the responsibility for it.

V. What Perspective for the Algerian Revolution

Patrick O'Daniel rejects the proposition that "the Algerian people cannot achieve a military victory." Apparently his reason for this is not a specific analysis of the military situation confronting the Algerian revolution today, but the general proposition that the colonial revolution is able to triumph on the basis of its own forces. This is obviously correct in some cases, even in most cases; China, Vietnam, Egypt are only some of the best examples. It is also obviously incorrect in some cases -- anyone who told the Puerto Rican people that they could win their freedom by military means would be acting as a criminal provocateur. Even the best general principle is never universally true -- it must always be applied concretely.

The Algerian people have demonstrated that they were capable of initiating and sustaining a magnificent struggle in the face of the most terrible difficulties -- their continuing struggle was worthwhile, proper, and is today one of the most dynamic and progressive elements in the world situation. But does this imply that the Algerian revolution can achieve military victory? When we talk of military victory we mean something very definite -- the defeat and destruction of the opposing army. An Algerian Dienbien Phu. And this is obviously out of the question.

But if we recognize that the Algerian people cannot achieve military victory does it mean that they cannot win, that they should accept some solution short of real freedom? Not in the least -- a negotiated settlement which would amount to a political victory is entirely conceivable. But only on one condition. Algeria, its chosen field of exploitation and investment for a century, is far too precious to the French ruling class to be given up willingly, even apart from the pressure exerted by the French colons in Algeria. The cost of the war is exorbitant, but as long as it can be shifted to the shoulders of the workers it can be born easily. What French capitalism cannot afford are the revolutionary consequences inside France itself of the Algerian war. Patrick O'Daniel is absolutely correct to point out that the French working class has by and large remained passive during the Algerian war, and to place decisive blame for this on the Stalinists and Social-Democrats -- but it is equally necessary to emphasize the fact that French capitalism can be forced to give up its rule of Algeria only if the proletariat can overcome the treason of its leaders, move out of passivity, and convince the capitalists that if they insist on holding on to Algeria they will merely succeed in losing -- France!

To emphasize the indispensable relationship between the Algerian revolution and the working class struggle in France, as the MNA has consistently done, is not to adopt a policy of defeatism toward a struggle which powerfully increases the prospects of revolution in France -- it is to base revolutionary strategy and tactics on a realistic, not abstract, analysis of the nature of the Algerian revolution. And a realistic analysis cannot ignore the fact that the Algerian people, too, are made of flesh and blood. No people can fight indefinitely in the face of a terrorist slaughter. Neither "La Verite," the MNA, or the Militant has said that the Algerian revolution is today at the point of exhaustion. But we are not blind to the fact that such a point exists, that it will one day be reached if the French working class does not intervene, and that the FLN policy of terrorism within the Algerian revolutionary camp brings that day nearer.

I believe that revolutionary socialists should support the MNA, whose program stands for an Algerian independence, the real content of which must be determined by the Algerian people through a freely elected sovereign Constituent Assembly as against the FLN whose program calls for an "independence" dominated and defined by a clique of leaders of petty-bourgeois origin behind the back of the Algerian people, an "independence" which would embody the reality of a deal with French colonialism. Patrick O'Daniel does not accept this analysis. But at least he, I and all Trotskyists can agree on a position of unconditional support for the Algerian struggle against French imperialism, whatever our estimate of the tendencies within that struggle, a position of defense of the militants of all tendencies against the common enemy, French imperialism. Fortunately, the comrades of the Pablo tendency as well as the tendency represented by "La Verite" and the Militant have taken this position, which can, I hope be the basis for common action despite deep divergences on other questions.

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