

ICHTIRAKYA

THE REVOLUTIONARY CHARACTER OF THE ALGIERS CHARTER

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ICHTIRAKYA! As soon as national liberation was proclaimed this word swept through the whole of Algeria. It was inscribed on every banner, it climaxed every demonstration, it was used to end every proclamation. It inspired the masses with the same enthusiasm as yesterday 'independence' had done. It means: socialism.

For the workers and poor peasants, this watchword answered a profound desire to build a new society, free from the injustice and capitalist oppression of which the colonial regime had presented so cruel and repulsive an example.

To be sure, this affirmation, often repeated, that Algeria had chosen socialism was met with some scepticism even in friendly circles abroad. It was said, and truly, that before Algeria, many leaders of the countries of the Third World had brandished the flag of 'socialism'—though it was intended only to disguise old wares and to deceive the masses by playing on their growing attraction towards socialism.

It was the Algerian people who replied to these fears and showed that what was happening in their country could in no way be compared to the course followed in certain other African states. They replied by building in record time a socialist sector of the economy based on thousands of agricultural, commercial and industrial enterprises which had been abandoned by the colonialists.

This 'spontaneous' action of the masses was subsequently legalized and institutionalized by the government, and also extended to other sectors. In this way all the French settlers were expropriated, as well as very many Algerian collaborators who had betrayed the national cause.

Three million hectares of the best land were taken over under the collective control of the workers organized in self-management committees.

As regards buildings, in the Algiers area alone, more than 200,000 houses, flats, shops and offices became state property, and the new tenants pay their rent to the state.

Thus, from the beginning of independence the revolution made its

impact on life, but the actual 'Algerian way' to socialism still had to be clearly defined. It was necessary to draw up a programme which would formulate the perspectives leading to socialism not on a basis of idealistic and moral aspirations, but on the objective study of realities.

The need for such a programme, which had long been apparent to the most far-sighted revolutionary militants of the National Liberation Front (F.L.N.) led to the F.L.N. Congress of April 1964 which adopted *the Programme and Constitution now known as the Algiers Charter*.

SOME SPECIAL FEATURES

Before I give a—necessarily brief and sketchy—outline of the Charter, I should give some picture of the particular conditions in which the Algerian revolution developed.

1. The far-reaching European penetration into Algeria prevented the formation of a strong national bourgeoisie there. Even the embryonic commercial bourgeoisie which existed at the time of the conquest was destroyed and the Europeans monopolized all the privileged economic positions. So the national liberation struggle was not led by the big capitalists, as had been the case in certain countries of the Maghreb; it always had strong roots among the people. The fight against the oppressor was at the same time a fight against the land-grabbers and the exploiting European bosses, and in the mind of the poor peasant and the worker action against foreign capitalist exploitation was soon identified with action against exploitation of all kinds. During the war years this popular feeling was reflected in the often repeated phrase: *We are not fighting in order to replace the French boss by an Arab boss*.

This explains why, straight after liberation, the movement for the complete transformation of society and a régime not based on exploitation took an extraordinary leap forward. It also explains the weakness of the national bourgeoisie and its inability to resist the powerful impetus of a nation which had been, so to speak, almost entirely 'proletarianized' by the colonial regime.

2. Algeria was deeply attached to the traditions of Arab-Islamic civilization. In the face of colonialist attempts at Christianization and depersonalization, Islam was one of the factors that held the nation together and helped to keep live the spirit of resistance to imperialism. Protests against colonial oppression, and in the same way after independence the aspirations for a society free from exploitation of man by man, expressed themselves under the banner of religion.

For most of the agricultural workers, for instance, taking over the land of the settlers and the traitors appeared not only as a revolutionary

task but also as an action quite in accordance with their Islamic faith and with the 'hadith' of the Koran: The land belongs to him who makes it bear fruit.

3. The Algerian Revolution has developed and is developing within the framework of the compromise Treaty of Evian. Contrary to what happened in Cuba, where the aggressive attitude of the U.S.A. speeded up the revolutionary process, there was no abrupt break with imperialism in Algeria. Indeed, the French Government seems to have drawn the lessons from the American failure in Cuba. The French Minister of Algerian Affairs stated when he replied to a senator who was asking for a tougher policy towards Algeria: 'that we must not play in Algeria the same role that America played in Cuba': 'A different attitude' said the minister in substance, would only result in the Algerian revolution going 'further and quicker'.

Though the French rulers have followed a deliberate line, it should be said also that Algeria is looking for genuine co-operation, while being on her guard against the dangers that co-operation hides. The immediate consequences of an abrupt break with France would greatly complicate Algeria's task, particularly in the economic field. Nevertheless, amidst this compromise, the ultimate goal is and will remain total disengagement from the economic grip of imperialism.

4. Finally, although today Algeria is resolutely advancing along the non-capitalist path of development, where socialism has become her watchword, she does not yet have a powerful vanguard party based on scientific principles which would be capable of leading the revolution. After independence, the F.L.N. carried on as it had done during the war, as a union of all the patriotic forces interested in liberating the country. This does not mean that all the supporters of the F.L.N. were necessarily partisans of socialism. It was possible to overthrow colonialism without a vanguard party, but everyone realises that it is impossible to build the foundation for socialist society without such a party.

It was the task of the April Congress of the F.L.N. to mark out the way to build this party, uniting on a class basis the people who were the most far-sighted and devoted to the revolution so that they could lead Algeria on her difficult march towards complete freedom from imperialist chains and towards socialism.

THE F.L.N. CONGRESS AND THE ALGIERS CHARTER

While they take into account national conditions and are at the same time impregnated with scientific thought, the texts which were adopted at the F.L.N. Congress (the Algiers Charter), taken together, appear as *'a political and social vision derived from our own values,*

fed on scientific principles and forearmed against mistaken attitudes of mind'.

Those who drew up the clauses of the Charter high-lighted the necessity for the revolution both to integrate itself into the world trend to socialism and to take root in Algerian national conditions.

Taking these conditions into account means primarily defining the stage which the revolution has reached in Algeria. Even though the Evian Treaty was imposed on Algeria by French imperialism at the end of an extraordinary struggle of eight years carried on against the largest colonial army of all time, it was none the less a compromise, and a compromise has its negative and its positive aspects for both sides. The negative aspect for Algeria is that the agreement preserves certain links and privileges to the benefit of France. Thus the Charter underlines that fact that, in the present situation, *'imperialism is still the major enemy'* but *'the struggle for the consolidation of independence and the struggle for the triumph of the socialist option are indissolubly linked'*.

Since the essential aspect of the struggle is still the anti-imperialist fight, one must therefore take an energetic stand *'against those who want gradually to weaken our will to break away from imperialism'*.

Imperialism has its allies in this country. A section of the Algerian bourgeoisie, even if a weak one, aspires not to help the country's progress towards socialism, but to take possession of part of the *'national heritage which was saved by the sacrifices of the peasants and workers'*. Some of these elements have slipped into the machinery of the State and are hindering the advance of the revolution, thus objectively becoming allies of imperialism. It is necessary to attack them, but this does not mean that the middle and lower middle layers in the towns and in the country can all be 'lumped together' since they themselves are victims of the capitalist system. Any mistake in this field could result in pushing them into counter-revolutionary positions.

HOW TO ENSURE THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE REVOLUTION

Whom should the revolution rely on?

The Algiers Charter answers this question: above all on the workers in town and country. These are the people who took over the property of the settlers and the French employers, and who through their management committees in the farms and industrial enterprises form the 'spinal column' of the new Algeria, for of all people they are most interested in the success of socialism.

'The role of the urban workers,' reads the Charter, *'together with the agricultural workers of the self-management sector, is going to become more and more important, for the revolutionary State can only*

have as its social foundation the working masses allied with the poor peasants of the traditional sector and with the revolutionary elements among the intellectuals.'

For the power of the working masses will be exercised—through the agency of the revolutionary State, a new kind of State:

'The choice of socialism includes the necessity to build a State of a new kind, which will express the interests of the peasants and workers and become more and more an instrument of production and not of coercion.'

In the meantime, the '*producers' State*' must be defended, and this is being done through '*the dictatorship of the poor, the fellahs, and the workers*', in President Ben Bella's phrase.

Thus the Algiers Charter gives a class analysis of the State, which follows scientific socialism. This brings us to another question: what, at the present time, is the nature of the Algerian State?

Part of the answer is provided by the series of decrees which took away land and industrial enterprises from the European settlers and employers, seized wrongly acquired property and prohibited its passing into the hands of the Algerian bourgeoisie. However, it must not be forgotten that there is another strong deprived capitalist sector and that '*immediately following independence, the State structure and its human components formed in part, with the exception of the National Army of the People, one of the legacies of colonialism, of which objectively they expressed the ideas and methods. This heritage kept alive habits and manners of administration which make the State apparatus act as a brake on the realization of the aims of the revolution.'*

The struggle between the revolutionary forces and the conservative forces which are directly or indirectly allied to imperialism is still being carried on at the heart of the State apparatus. That is why the Algiers Congress laid down as one of the necessary tasks not only the purging but the complete transformation of the administration. For '*this is the bureaucratic sector where the interests, customs and methods threatened by the revolution will endeavour to hide themselves*'.

Elsewhere, the Charter lays down the economic tasks during the building of socialism, and points out:

'The suppression of economic exploitation and the abolition of colonial and neo-colonial ties, the expropriation of dominant foreign capital, the agricultural revolution, the socialization of the means of production, will enable us to put an end to economic anarchy and will make possible efficient and harmonious planning based on the true interests of the community'.

Thus in order to ensure the final victory of socialism it is necessary in the political field to secure the power of the true and natural pro-

ponents of socialism, that is to say the power of the town and country workers together with the mass of poor peasants and the revolutionary intellectuals, progressively to abolish '*exploitable private property*' and to arrive at collectivization and the socialization of the means of production.

It is in the self-management sector that the battle can first be won, for as the text points out it is '*the real spring of the political and economic life of the country*' and its development must '*progressively lessen the role and influence of the private sector*'.

Parallel to this, a thorough-going agrarian reform must be carried out; in fact, it is better to speak of an agrarian revolution which will destroy the basis of feudalism and of the great landed properties, while drawing the peasant masses to the socialist revolution. President Ben Bella, in the speech he made on October 27th, 1963, to the Congress of Agricultural Self-Management, gave a general outline of his programme which was later confirmed by the April Congress:

The question is, he said, '*to set a limit to private property in such a way that the constitution of a privileged class becomes impossible, to lay down a modern land law for the whole of our country adapted to the demands of our revolution, and to create new ways for Algerian agriculture to work on these two foundations: collective cultivation through self-management, and small family farms*'.

In fact agrarian reform must take into account '*the desire of the fellahs to own land of which they have been too long deprived. However, simple re-distribution of the land would be an uneconomic enterprise if it were not accompanied by measures which in the end go beyond this kind of expropriation*'.

Thus as soon as the agrarian law becomes operative, co-operatives will be established alongside the farms under self-management, and these will become the centres of organization not only for the eventual beneficiaries of the reform but also for the remaining small proprietors.

As for foreign economic aid, the Charter observes that it must be considered as a palliative, merely as additional income which is contributed to the basic income from the national effort. It is clear that blind acceptance of foreign aid from capitalist countries can only compromise the political and economic independence of the country in the more or less distant future. For this reason external trade must be started up '*as soon as possible*'. Any formula like 'a society based on a mixed economy' must be avoided at all costs, adds the Charter, for it would end in the resurgence of capitalism in the key sectors of the Algerian economy.

FOREIGN POLICY

'Two facts dominate international relations: the advance of the democratic socialist forces shown in the stress on anti-imperialist struggles, the accession to independence of new States, the economic development of the socialist countries and the strengthening of the struggle by democratic movements on the one hand and the continual reduction of the imperialist sphere of influence on the other.'

On the basis of this definition, the Algiers Charter could only reach one conclusion: internationally Algeria must stand on the side of the Arab, African and Asian peoples fighting against imperialism, on the side of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and on the side of the democratic forces of the world.

Socialism can only be built under peaceful conditions. Thus, the defence of world peace will be a constant factor in the determination of Algerian foreign policy:

'The advance of the anti-imperialist forces to world stature is making imperialism seek forcible solutions to the problem of securing its hegemony; this is the origin of the arms race and the manufacture of atomic weapons with a capacity for massive destruction, whose existence puts humanity in grave danger. The elimination of the atomic menace and the final cessation of all experiments, including underground ones, would fulfil the spirit of the Moscow treaty. Peace and disarmament are necessary for extending co-operation between nations and would create favourable conditions for settling questions in dispute.'

Thus the F.L.N. Charter has appropriated the idea that the struggle for peace and the struggle for national liberation are complementary, not opposed. *'In those countries which are not yet independent,'* reads the Charter, *'armed struggle can be decisive in the attainment of national sovereignty. . . . The people's revolutionary struggles are one of the surest and most efficient guarantees against the attempts of imperialism to loose a nuclear holocaust on the world.'*

Nevertheless, the F.L.N. Congress points out that imperialism still has considerable capacity to adapt itself. The Charter says that the utmost vigilance must be observed over the *'resources for adaptation that imperialism has at its disposal to modify its methods of exploitation and to slow up the course of events'*, which makes possible *'the preservation of the hegemony of the imperialist countries in new guises'*.

In Africa examples are not lacking to illustrate this proposition, and recent events in the Congo have shown what independence is worth in a country which has a Tshombe at its head. Neo-colonialism—meaning oppression adapted to today's conditions—threatens nearly all the countries who have recently won or rewon their sovereignty

but who have not yet been able to break their former bonds completely. The Algiers Charter rightly emphasizes the need to struggle for *'structural disengagement from imperialism' . . . 'an absolute condition for the consolidation of national independence and the liberation of oppressed countries'*.

THE PARTY AS MAINSPRING OF THE REVOLUTION

How can all these tasks be carried out? How can progress be made in building the new society?

As Ben Bella said in his report to the Congress, a new society *'needs a mainspring, the mainspring of one party only, one party which is fully aware of the needs of the working masses, which is determined, and capable of translating all popular initiative into its true course'*.

However, the Congress did not set up this party. It only provided the political, ideological and administrative basis on which to build (though this is a considerable step forward). The Charter gives a general outline and a framework for action which is valuable for all revolutionaries who believe in socialism. It thus creates the conditions for organic fusion of *all* the revolutionary forces (including the communists) in a single powerful party which would be in the vanguard of progress and whose aim would be, as set out in the adopted text: *'to build a society from which all kinds of exploitation of man by man will be banned, to build a socialist society'*.

Clearly this means that *'the elements hostile to this transformation'* who existed in the old F.L.N. during the war will find no place in the party. In this connection clause No. 7 of the Algiers Charter underlines the proposition that *'the union of all forces which was an indispensable instrument of the armed struggle should be reconsidered in the light of the objectives and perspectives of the socialist revolution. Such a union has had its day. To keep it could only result in confusion and unhealthy compromise.'*

Ahmed Ben Bella added in his opening speech:

'Today, there is no question of resuscitating the old structure of the F.L.N. but of building on what already exists to make an instrument fitted to defend and consistently to foster socialism'.

When it was reconsidering the nature and objectives of the party, the Congress was also induced to define what social composition it should have to enable it to play its part. Clause 15, on the party, recommends *'scrupulous care to see that the social composition of the party is based on the producers and the urban and rural workers'*. The General Secretary of the F.L.N. also emphasizes in his report that *'the party cannot allow exploiters to penetrate its ranks without running the risk of degenerating and becoming a bourgeois party'*.

However, there is a danger in the one party system. This danger has taken shape in certain African countries where the bourgeoisie, allegedly in the name of national unity, have used the single party to defend interests which are not the interests of the most exploited masses. In this regard the Charter states that the best way of eliminating this risk is to keep the party constantly in touch with the masses and controlled by them. Machinery must not be constructed, says the text *'which may express the aspirations of the masses at first but then evolves independently of them'* which could only end *'sooner or later, either in the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie or in the establishment of a bureaucratic class using the machinery to further its own interests, or again in a régime of personal dictatorship making the party into a mere organ of the political police'*.

No revolutionary can fail to grasp the importance of the Charter, for it places Algeria in the vanguard of the African continent. This brief analysis of the text shows that the Algerian revolution has not only assimilated the wealth of international socialist theory and experience but is also, out of experience in Algeria itself, making its own invaluable contribution.

This fact was underlined in the common communiqué signed at the outcome of the discussions between Algeria and the Soviet Union, which emphasized the positive contribution Algeria has made to international socialism.

The leaders of the revolution do not deny the influence of scientific socialism (as bourgeois Western journalists discovered with comical terror when they read these texts).

On several occasions President Ben Bella himself has said that he took his political and economic analysis from Marxism, though as a Moslem he could not follow Marxist philosophical conclusions. This is no doubt one of the most novel features of our revolution. A whole people is on the march, and a party is being forged which will ensure the victory of true socialism based on scientific principles (as Ben Bella has said, *'there is only one socialism'*). Yet the leadership rejects the materialist philosophy. However, this clearly will not provoke any split in the ranks of the revolutionaries. The important thing for them is to unite and fight together *'to build heaven on earth'*. The party, in its advance along the path mapped out by the Algiers Charter, is the rallying-point where they will gather and together wipe out all prejudice and sectarianism which might oppose or divide them, for the only valid criterion of a militant in the new party is devotion to the cause of socialism. Here communist Algerian militants will have a particularly useful role. Their knowledge of scientific socialist principles, their great

experience of organization, their spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to the revolution will be of enormous value.

THE PRESENT STAGE

It would be only too easy to elaborate on the gap which separates reality in an Algeria still suffering the consequences of 125 years of colonial domination and eight years of cruel warfare from the ambitious aims laid down by the Algiers Charter. But this would be unfair to Algeria. The proper question to ask is whether the chosen path is being followed and progress being made towards the objective.

The answer can only be in the affirmative.

The revolution is advancing and consolidating itself even though there are many difficulties and the path is not always straight. This is so both objectively on the facts and subjectively in the minds of the militants who are constantly gaining from the lessons of their experience a clearer and more realistic view of socialism and the ways to it.

Of course, all sectarianism and exclusivism has not been destroyed, nor all false ideas eradicated. In certain situations they could even start growing again, but then no one has ever thought that for a Congress to adopt a text was enough to transform it by magic into reality. Only the day-to-day struggle of the masses will defeat the egotistic interests and prejudices which hinder the march forward and especially the building of a progressive party which will act as the instrument of the socialist revolution and make the content of the Algiers Charter into a fact.

A quick look at the months following the April Congress will show that important steps along the way have already been taken.

The principal fact is the great success achieved through the liquidation of the counter-revolutionary army. Western circles (notably certain French and West German right-wing groupings), hankering after *Algerie française*, as well as the reactionary wing of the local bourgeoisie, had built a lot of hopes on this army. They saw Chaabani (a feudal land-owner from the South) and Ait Ahmed (son of a noble family), who stood out against the revolution, as potential Tshombes. However, the attempts to 'Congolize Algeria' were thwarted after the People's National Army had captured the two men. In any case, they had never succeeded in attracting the masses to their support in spite of their demagogic appeals to the regionalist feelings that the colonialists had always nourished. The revolutionary government came out of this political battle strengthened and with increased prestige.

In the economic field, the socialist sector whose failure was forecast by the prophets has successfully withstood all attacks and all the

attempts at sabotage inspired by foreign or Algerian private capital, and has extended its influence throughout the country.

During the last anniversary meeting on the 1st November, President Ben Bella was able to announce that 70 per cent of agricultural production was now supplied by the self-management sector.

Nevertheless, Algeria still depends largely on France for her imports and exports. She is equally bound by the aid she receives from the U.S.A. in the form of food. The aim is obviously to break away from this dangerous hold.

This is particularly true of oil. In spite of threats and difficulties in this field, Algeria is going ahead with her plans: to recover her national riches and use them to develop the country. At the end of September Ahmed Ben Bella inaugurated a factory for liquefying gas at Arzew and operations for laying a third oil-pipe at Haoud-el-Hamra-Arzew. In the near future this pipe-line will have alongside it another pipe for butane and propane gas. Both pipes will finish at the coast, for commercial purposes, but this time it will be for the benefit of Algeria and not for the capitalist companies.

The President of the Republic took advantage of this opportunity to reaffirm clearly the fundamental attitudes of the Algiers Charter, and the inspiration of his speech is to be found in the following passage:

'Algeria made too many sacrifices for political liberation not to proceed as quickly as possible to economic liberation, which is what really counts in the eyes of the masses of Africa, Asia and Latin America. We ourselves are convinced that we have chosen the right way, even though it may upset certain private interests, for the private companies take their methods from foreign soil and their inspiration from ideas bound up with the colonial tradition, and their only business is amassing profits.'

'In the case of oil, our position is clear and not open to any doubt. Algerian gas, like all national resources, is the property of the State, and the State will allocate it first for use and conversion on the spot, and then for export to foreign countries who wish to sign long-term contracts with Algeria designed to guarantee the security of their supplies.'

It is not only a question of selling raw materials, for Algeria must use these materials on the spot so that she can start industrialization and put an end to unemployment. Soon both a national refinery and a fertilizer factory will be built at Arzew. These two enterprises will constitute the nucleus of a large oil and chemical industry.

One of the most important factors in the struggle for economic liberation are the bonds of friendship and co-operation with the socialist countries. The training of numerous experts with experience of hydrocarbon is a necessity, for without them Algeria will never be

able to exploit her wealth. Thanks to the Soviet Union, an African Hydrocarbon Institute started work in October at Bou Merdes (thirty-seven miles from Algiers) and more than 2,000 students are attending courses given by Soviet professors. At the same time, following the Algerian-Soviet agreement, a Textile Institute opened near Algiers at Bordj el Bahri. The first Algerian steelworks whose annual production will be from 300,000 to 350,000 tons of steel will be built at Annaba with the aid of a loan of 20 million roubles from the U.S.S.R. Other financial, commercial and cultural agreements have been or are to be signed with the socialist countries. They help develop the country, strengthen Algerian independence and frustrate possible imperialist blackmail.

In the field of foreign policy, Algeria has also kept to the Algiers Charter and has put herself at the head of the fight for national liberation and unity of the African and Arab peoples. At Addis Ababa during the O.A.U. conference, at Cairo at the conference of non-aligned countries, and at the UN during the debate on imperialist intervention in the Congo, Algeria's voice has rung out for the cause of independence and in defence of peace. In spite of her own difficulties, Algeria has concretely demonstrated her solidarity with the Congolese patriots in the fight against Tshombe and his mercenaries. Several months ago Algiers became a place of refuge and support for patriots expelled from their own countries by colonialism and fascism.

Similarly, relations with working class movements in capitalist countries, especially communist parties, are being organized and built up from mutual interest. Delegations from the French and Italian communist parties have been received in the past few months by the F.L.N. party, and common communiqués showing agreement on essential political problems and outlining ways of co-operation between each of the parties and the F.L.N. have been signed. The right-wing French press was astonished at these friendly links between the F.L.N. and the French Communist Party. President Ben Bella replied that it is natural for men and parties who hold the same socialist beliefs to join their efforts.

The enthusiasm of the masses is bound to grow and pessimism and doubt bound to be routed when so much progress has been made in applying the Algiers Charter. The enthusiasm (even if it is not 'explosive' as elsewhere) shows itself in voluntary work, such as the campaign for planting trees, when hundreds of thousands of men and women, young and old, gathered together to plant millions of trees to replace the forests which had been destroyed by the settlers or by French napalm bombs.

Workers in the town and country are the first to give an example of

dedication, for they know that the revolution belongs to them and it is their task to defend it and make it advance. They know the necessity for strong vital trade union organizations and for a revolutionary party to lead them and of which they will constitute the essential foundation. Thus Algeria is now undergoing a period of organization: everywhere meetings are being held to form party branches; every week there is a conference for trade unionists, for young people, for women. People speak more and more openly of what is right and what is not right, they are not afraid to denounce faults or to criticize those responsible and the authoritarian methods which have not yet altogether disappeared.

People are not afraid to ask for a reckoning and to put forward ideas, as if the whole country wants to justify these points in the Algiers Charter:

'The struggle for the victory of democratic principles has penetrated to the masses, motivated their acts and determined their behaviour and ideas. Armed resistance to French imperialism has made them aware of their strength and of their ability to resolve their problems themselves. . . . The history of our people teaches us the importance of democracy. The party must always, without exception, put its trust in the masses.'

It is true that enemy intrigue and sabotage, various obstacles, and the consequences of old methods and prejudices hindering the formation of a progressive party could slow up the revolution or even put a halt to it.

But one thing that is sure at the beginning of this new year is that Algeria has started out on the right path. From now on nothing can make her retrace her steps. She will advance irresistibly along the way marked out: the way of socialism.

Algiers, December 1964.