



Algeria: The menace of Islamic fundamentalism

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Islamic fundamentalism is growing throughout North Africa. In Algeria it has been able to threaten the very stability of the state. In this article by Emile Gallet of Pouvoir Ouvrier (France) we examine the dangers facing the Algerian masses

In 1962, Algeria was in the vanguard of the struggle against imperialism. After eight years of bloody and courageous combat against French imperialism, the National Liberation Front (FLN) had finally forced the French to withdraw. This represented a victory for workers everywhere in the world. But it was a victory whose fruits were rapidly snatched from the Algerian workers and peasants. After three years of faction-fighting inside the FLN, on 19 June 1965 Boumedienne and the National Popular Army (ANP) staged a successful coup d'état and installed a monolithic dictatorship.

Thirty years after their greatest moment of triumph, the FLN is a broken party. Hated by the overwhelming majority of the population, in particular by the youth, it has been swept off the political stage by the events which took place following the results of the parliamentary elections at the end of 1991, elections which were themselves the consequence of the FLN's panic in the face of the popular uprising of 1988.

Following the first round of the parliamentary elections on 26 December last year, the fundamentalists of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) were all but assured of a majority in the National Assembly in the second round, scheduled for 16 January. Rejecting the policy advocated by Chadli of power-sharing with the FIS, the ANP put forward its own brilliant 'solution': relieve the president of office and send the tanks onto the streets of Algiers.

Since then, the country has been subject to special courts. There have been numerous arrests and the recently won limited democratic freedoms have been attacked. All this is in strict conformity with the dictatorial order to which the ANP generals had become so accustomed.

Yet there is a difference this time. The social forces unleashed will not easily be confined again within the narrow bounds of a military dictatorship. The Algerian masses have changed in the last few years. They have had a small taste of freedom which they will not quickly forget. There can be no doubt that they will fight to regain it and to resist the effects of government economic policies. But in their fight they have to find a political leadership that can defeat not only the FLN but also the party which has gained most from the FLN's bankruptcy, the FIS.

The rise of the FIS represents a double rebuff for the FLN. Firstly, it expresses a resounding rejection of the nationalists' austerity policies. With unemployment at over 25% there was a lot to protest about. Secondly, the FIS, which was the most important external factor in the collapse of the FLN, is by and large a monster of the FLN's own making.

A combination of its long standing reliance on Islamic ideology and on the big landowners, its nationalist limits and the atrocious living standards imposed by the IMF and rigorously implemented by the FLN, created the conditions under which the fundamentalists were able to posture as a radical opposition to the government. From the beginning the FLN and, behind it, the ANP have proved to be firefighters who only poured petrol onto the fundamentalist flames.

The FIS was officially set up in February 1989, claiming three million members on the day it was founded! But its roots lie in the history of post-independence Algeria and are thoroughly bound up with the FLN's policy in relation to

Islam. From 1956 onwards the FLN sought to make Islam the cornerstone of Algerian identity.

This was legally codified in 1976 when the FLN ratified a National Charter, Article Two of which declares that 'Islam is the state religion'. It goes on to say that the president must be a Muslim and codifies the FLN's understanding of its own role as: 'the building of socialism in Algeria is identical with the flourishing of Islamic values'.¹

During the struggle against imperialism Islam, like many other elements of Arab culture, contributed to the masses' sense of identity in the face of the French. Nor should the determination of the French state to root out native Algerian culture be underestimated. In 1938, Arabic was officially classified as a foreign language in Algeria.

The FLN leadership, shrewd populists that they were, used Islamic rhetoric and the influence of the imams to gain support for their struggle for independence.

Nevertheless, this stress on Islam was not simply an expression of national culture and tradition. It also expressed the petit bourgeois nationalists' deep fear and hatred of the growth of class ideas and class organisation amongst the Algerian proletariat. Many Algerian workers had been influenced by the revolutionary politics of the Communist International and then by its Stalinist replacement.

Thus, the nationalists were obliged to use the slogans of socialism but, at the same time, stressed their Islamic identification by hitting out against the 'godless, atheistical communists'. Of course, they were aided in this by the French Communist Party's disgusting pro-imperialist stance during the Algerian War. Despite their rhetoric, the FLN had no intention of breaking from private ownership of the means of production, seeking instead a 'third way' of compromise between the contending classes.

In reality, this was a form of state capitalism suited to a semi-colony with a weak bourgeoisie but numerous petit bourgeois, each eager to become big time exploiters via the good offices of the state.

'Algerian socialism' turned out to be little more than a series of concessions to the factory workers, even if the 'self-management' system was enough to convince pseudo-Trotskyists like Michel Pablo and Ted Grant that Algeria was a workers' state.

Between 1964 and 1966, inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood led by Sayyed Qutb, Algerian fundamentalists were drawn into activity around a review, *El Qiyam* (Values). Their objective was to counter the influence of the left in relation to the countryside, education and 'self-management'. Their first victory came when Ben Bella, claiming to represent 'Islamic socialism', introduced compulsory Islamic doctrine lessons in state schools. Although Boumedienne's coup d'état put an end to the fundamentalists' appearances in public, the concessions to Islam remained in force.

During the 1970s Boumedienne introduced policies which continued the FLN's policy in relation to Islam: a series of concessions to the fundamentalists' demands combined with repression of the fundamentalists themselves. The aim was to reinforce the Bonapartist position of the FLN in general and of the president in particular.

Fearful of the reactionary, anti-government momentum that their opponents might have harnessed in the countryside, the FLN decided to steal the fundamentalists' political clothes. Thus it was that, in September 1970, the Minister for 'Eternal Teachings and Religious Affairs' launched a mass campaign against the 'degradation of morals' (meaning Western influence) targeting in particular 'cosmopolitanism, alcoholism and snobbery'.² A few months later a campaign of Arabisation, the fundamentalists' other war horse then and now, was launched by the FLN.

In February 1971, Boumedienne, in search of left credibility, announced that 51% of each of the five French petrol companies would be nationalised. Ten months later private land ownership found itself in the firing line with the implementation of the 'agricultural revolution'.

Although apparently aimed at the 3% of the population who owned 25% of all land, this policy was in no sense

revolutionary. The reform's main purpose was to rationalise land distribution and to scale down some of the larger holdings. Expropriation was never on the agenda as landowners were guaranteed reimbursement over fifteen years and were given interim annual interest of 3.5% on the value of their property.³

Inevitably, this reform was greeted with cries of indignation among the big landowners who would tolerate no change, however minor, in the balance of class forces in the countryside. They were supported in this at both an organisational and ideological level by the fundamentalists who systematically visited the big landowners to offer their support.

Worse still, the reform's natural allies, the peasantry and the agricultural proletariat, were equally hostile to the FLN, as much because of the manner in which the 'revolution' was carried out as because of its subsequent outcome. For example, co-operatives, the fruit of state reform, were left under-funded and struggling to function, not even allowed to decide how to use the land at their disposal (that was the state's prerogative). Equally, the FLN failed to mobilise the peasants and the agricultural proletarians against the remains of feudalism and colonialism. Nevertheless, government policies did lead to a fundamental restructuring of Algerian society. Throughout the 1970s, there was nothing short of a rural exodus. Rapid urbanisation combined with industrialisation to cause an explosive growth of the slum towns around Oran, Algiers and Constantine where more than 500,000 workers lived in the early 1980s.

These new workers, recently arrived from the countryside, did not have the same traditions as those who participated in the campaigns for 'self-management' of the 1960s. The mid-1970s marked a turning point in Algerian working class history: 'what took place was nothing less than the substitution of one working class by another'.⁴ In any case, the FLN saw to it that the workers were prevented from voicing their discontent. For the FLN, the working class was a tool, at best a counterweight in its struggle to force concessions and toleration from imperialism and the Algerian bourgeoisie.

From the rhetoric over the agricultural reform to the bureaucratic policies of the trades union congress, the UGTA, the FLN always sought to contain any possible eruption of working class anger: 'The chief objective of the Algerian state was to deny the working class the possibility of any independent action or framework for self-determination. Viewed from this angle, unions had a special role to play.'⁵ Left high and dry by the FLN, ignored or manipulated by the UGTA, Algerian workers had nothing to hope for from the regime.

The FLN soon realised that the situation was starting to spiral out of control. Fearful both of the reaction in the countryside and the mounting influence of the Socialist Vanguard Party, the nationalists in the government decided once more to make a right turn. In 1976, the campaign of Arabisation was relaunched.

At the same time, a wave of mosque building began all over Algeria, a trend which has gathered increasing momentum for 15 years. Financed for the most part by the big landowners,⁶ these mosques had the benefit of tacit acceptance from the state. In that period, the fundamentalists generally worked more secretly, infiltrating community life by setting up cultural and sporting associations which, once again, had the declared or covert support of the state.

As Sunni Muslims, Algerian fundamentalists have naturally rejected the influence of Shi'ite Iran. Yet the fervour which spirited Khomeini to power in the wake of the 1979 revolution and the fall of the Shah inevitably gave hope to Muslim fundamentalists the world over, and nowhere more so than in Algeria.

In 1981, Mustapha Bouyali, a veteran of the old FLN underground, founded the Armed Islamic Algerian Movement (MAIA). In the course of various armed actions, it succeeded only in embarrassing the government which, nevertheless breathed a sigh of relief when Bouyali was killed by the army in 1987.

The rise of the Berber independence movement at the beginning of the 1980s was a natural response to the Arabisation campaign and it was greeted with bloody repression by the FLN. All cultural events were banned and a general strike was put down by the police. The government's policies were now of a piece with the fiercely Arab chauvinist anti-Berberism of the fundamentalists.

The highpoint of this policy of reactionary concessions to Islam came at the beginning of 1980 when the new Code of

Family Law (?Code de Famille?) was being debated and finally adopted in 1984. According to one article, a woman must ?obey her husband, treat him with the respect due to the head of the family? and ?respect the parents of their husband and those close to him?. A divorce deprives the woman of the roof over her head. Child custody automatically goes to the husband when the child is more than ten years of age. And, as seen in the 1990 local elections, a husband was entitled to use his wife?s vote!

The bitter fruits of this legalisation of bigotry and misogyny were not long in appearing. Long before the fundamentalists were organised on a national scale, the early and mid-1980s were marked by a series of attacks by the fundamentalists on women?often students?who were ?indecently dressed? (either because they were not wearing a hidjeb or their dress was too short). Hundreds of girls and young women were subjected to insults and beatings and some were sprayed with acid by these men of God.

Similarly, clashes between left and right activists, especially at the universities, became more violent. The most significant of these took place on 2 November 1982 on the campus of Ben Aknoun university in Tizi-Ouzu when fundamentalist students murdered the Trotskyist Kamal Azmal, a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). The anti-fundamentalist repression which followed Azmal?s murder led to a protest meeting being held in Algiers on 12 November at which the text of a Muslim Call to Action was voted on and accepted.⁷

Signed by among others, Abassi Madani, the currently imprisoned leader of the FIS, the document called for the complete adoption of Islamic law (the Sharia) and concentrated on traditional fundamentalist questions such as the defence of private land ownership and expresses opposition to women?s participation in the labour force, mixed schools and ?the degeneration of the family unit?.

The signatories were immediately imprisoned but demonstrations showed the support that existed for them. The organisers of the demonstration, including Ali Belhadj another key FIS member, were then imprisoned.

This repression created the conditions in which the next phase of development of the fundamentalist movement could begin. Under the grip of the ?only party?, the fundamentalists set to work both clandestinely and openly. Making the most of the regime?s complacency, they found that ?in the shadow of the minarets and the makeshift places of worship they were able to plant the seeds of revolt?.⁸

Yet, when revolt did finally rear its head, the fundamentalists were not behind it. Tragically, however, it was they who gained most from the revolutionary period which opened up in Algeria as a result of the mass uprising of autumn 1988 and the regime?s constant vacillations.

The mass uprising in October was first and foremost a protest against the government. The deal it had struck with the IMF over the repayment of the national debt had led to massive increases in unemployment, particularly amongst the youth, as well as food shortages, tax increases and a relentless undermining of social welfare rights. The working class, which had swelled in size from 13% of the population in 1966 to 29.2% in 1983,⁹ was the first to suffer the blows of unemployment. During the 1980s the number of jobs created fell by 40% each year.

This situation was worsened by the slump in petrol prices that took hold of world markets in 1986. Given that petroleum-based products accounted for 98% of the value of Algerian exports, what happened in 1987 was inevitable: state revenue from foreign trade fell by 30%. Constantly seeking an agreement with imperialism and never a confrontation, the FLN got on its knees once more and then passed the bill on to the masses.

The central position of the working class in any revolutionary movement was demonstrated in Algeria during the October 1988 events. A strike in the SNVI industrial vehicle plant at Rouiba involving 10,000 workers was the catalyst that brought together the mass movement of youth, whose repression by the ANP led to the massacre of more than 500 people. A general strike was quickly declared and the youth, starved of food and freedom by the FLN, took to the streets.

One of the toughest battles with the ANP took place around the Bab-el-Oued mosque where Ali Belhadj was a

preacher. The fundamentalists were content merely to follow the actions of the masses, secure in the knowledge that they were well placed to benefit from them. Belhadj, Madani and Co were known to have been vocal in their criticisms of the government and now they were rubbing shoulders with demonstrators. Small wonder they were perceived as the voice of the oppressed in the face of a ferocious and obstinate regime.

Nor was it simply the masses who perceived the fundamentalist leaders that way. In November 1988 President Chadli, deeply shaken by the ferocity of the October revolt, initiated the process of political reform which eventually led to the coup of January 1992. One of his first acts was to meet with the three main fundamentalist leaders, Madjani, Belhadj and Nahnah.

The FLN was already aware of the possibility that the fundamentalists might initiate an independent mobilisation of the masses. Two years earlier, in November 1986, Chadli had issued a warning to fundamentalists and municipalities about mosque building without planning permission.

To counter the fundamentalists' rise, the government decided to increase the number of imams appointed by the state. In Constantine, for example, the number went up from 100 in 1985 to 191 in 1987.¹⁰ But this attempt to reclaim religion for the state was quite ineffective.

Emboldened by their popular success and by the recognition given them by the regime itself, the fundamentalist leaders used the mosques for their anti-governmental agitation and moved to organise. Their first concern was to set up an essentially religious organisation, the Rabitat al-Da'wa (Preaching League).

This was a far cry from the more political organisation some of them wanted and so, largely under the influence of Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj, the FIS was established in February 1989. Belhadj argued for the creation of a United Islamic Front. The more cunning Madani wanted to emphasise 'salvation' to make the movement's religious side more prominent.¹¹ Those who did not want to fall in behind these rival fundamentalists set up other, supposedly more 'moderate', organisations such as Hamas and Nahdha.

Once censorship restrictions on them had been eased, the FIS launched a fortnightly, El-Mounquid (The Saviour) in October 1989 which they claimed had a print-run of 100,000 copies. The fundamentalists did not waste any time discussing a programme. The FIS's internal structures are totally authoritarian, it has never held a conference and has no intention of ever doing so before an Islamic state is set up.¹² Yet it quickly won influence in the mosques, gaining control over around 80% of them.¹³ It rapidly became the country's main opposition forum, with the support of hundreds of thousands of declassed unemployed youth and sections of the bazaar bourgeoisie and intellectuals.

The FIS is a deeply reactionary, theocratic organisation bringing together a number of diverse political currents. There is a clerical fascist wing known as the Salifiya (fundamentalists) led by Ali Belhadj and Abdelkader Moghni, which is fiercely opposed to elections, with two other, more 'moderate' wings, the Jazara (the 'Algerianists') and the Bennabists (named after a 'moderate' imam who died in the 1970s). It would appear that Abbassi Madani straddles all these tendencies and thus defines the FIS's politics.¹⁴ The differences between the various wings were revealed in the attitude towards the regime, on the question of participating in the elections in 1991 and, after the coup, in negotiations for a settlement with the military.

The FIS is built on a populist basis. It bewails 'the lack of justice which the workers are subjected to' and speaks of 'the urgent necessity to put an end to the disturbing rise in unemployment'.¹⁵ But the purpose of these positions is to conceal the FIS's real politics: the defence of private property,¹⁶ 'the distribution of land to the deserving' ¹⁷ and the 're-examination' of public property (i.e. denationalisation).

The bedrock appeal of the FIS is to the vast numbers of the rural population who flooded into the cities expecting to find a better life. Instead, at best, they found exploitation in the factories but no independent and militant class organisations to fight it. Over the past decade they suffered IMF-inspired austerity measures and a decaying urban infrastructure and bad housing.

For those who did not find regular employment there was the utter insecurity and misery of life in the 'informal economy'. Not finding a militant class leadership, many of the urban poor, the students and some workers fell under the influence of the fundamentalists, who offered a utopian vision of social justice mediated through the traditional rural values of religion.

It is clear enough why this 'opium of the people' should have found ready buyers amongst the deprived, angry and disillusioned youth. It also found converts amongst the formerly 'westernised' intelligentsia and amongst workers, primarily because of the failures of 'Algerian socialism' and Stalinism.

A fundamental element of the FIS demagogy is the rejection of anything western, good and bad alike. Thus Madani, in time-honoured far right fashion, takes up the cudgels against 'modern western thought' which he sees embodied in the writings of Machiavelli and Marx and in the notorious anti-Semitic forgery, the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'.¹⁸

His objective is the reversal of fundamental democratic achievements of the Enlightenment, the bourgeois revolutions and a century and a half of struggle by the working class and the oppressed; namely the exclusion of religious law, morality and dogma from exercising state authority or legal force.

The most wretched, lumpenised elements have also been won to the FIS by the authoritarian, neo-fascist line preached by the leadership and in particular by the clerical fascist Ali Belhadj: 'The word freedom is a poison put about by Freemasons and Jews, designed to corrupt the world on a grand scale . . . The idea of popular sovereignty fundamentally contradicts many verses of the Koran.'¹⁹

In place of 'popular sovereignty', Ali Belhadj favours the setting up of a fascist theocracy where the right to change laws: '. . . belongs to neither governor nor people, but to wise men who know the laws of interpretation as well as the temporal conditions in which society lives.'²⁰

This clearly means that for Belhadj the FIS would establish a bloody dictatorship under which all democratic rights would be suppressed and to which the mass popular base of the FIS would give a particular efficacy in smashing to atoms the workers' organisations and hunting down socialist and working class militants.

As Belhadj fulminated from his prison cell: 'If the Berber is allowed to speak, the communist will speak too, along with everyone else, and our country will become an ideological battlefield against the hopes and wishes of our people.'²¹

At the beginning of this year the FIS clearly expressed its vision of an Islamic state at an exhibition in Algiers. According to the FIS such a state would be entitled to 'spread the faith at home and abroad by persuasion and terror'.²² This is a horrendous prospect for women, workers and any member of the population seeking an answer to the current crisis not found in the Koran.

From October 1988 onwards, the FLN found itself caught between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, there were the masses, crushed by the ANP but nonetheless a threat. On the other was the IMF, imperialism's own debt-collecting agent, insisting that there could be no let-up despite the fact that further austerity measures were bound to cause bloody social conflict.

The solution found by Chadli and the FLN was to implement a policy of political reform based on the liberalisation of anti-democratic laws and the promise of parliamentary and presidential elections. This would also win imperialism's approval in its present 'democratic' phase.

At the moment, the USA, France and Britain see pluralism as the best arrangement in the semi-colonies for speeding up de-nationalisation, dismantling protectionism, 'reducing corruption' (i.e. the cost to them of bribing state officials) and generally opening up these countries to political manipulation and economic dictatorship.

Once Chadli's term of office had been renewed for another five years it was deemed safe to amend the constitution.

Press censorship was lifted, political parties, including those on the far left, were unbanned and, for the first time ever, the ANP withdrew from the central committee of the FLN. At the same time, the economy was opened up to foreign investment, indigenous capitalists were given better access to foreign trade and the Dinar's exchange rate continued to plummet. The imperialists, naturally enough, looked on all this very favourably.

The FLN, like its friends in the old Eastern Bloc Stalinist parties, was attempting to undergo a deathbed conversion to 'democracy'. It was also counting on the ability of a fraction of the anti-FIS forces (opposed to the latter's anti-women line) to mobilise the masses against the fundamentalists. Following a demonstration of 100,000 people against fundamentalists' attacks on women in December 1989, the FIS responded with an even bigger demonstration of its own, with thousands of veiled Muslim women at the front of it.

The FLN's deathbed conversion failed to redeem it in the eyes of the masses as the 1990 local elections, the first more or less free elections since independence, revealed. The FIS took control of all the major town halls with 54% of the vote (against the 28% polled by the FLN) mainly on the strength of its denunciations of the FLN and promises about housing.

Profoundly shaken, with the parliamentary elections only twelve months away, the FLN now had its back against the wall. It was counting on two things. Firstly, the FIS's inability to deliver on its electoral promises and secondly, election rigging. It was decreed that ten times more votes would be needed for election to urban constituencies (where support for the FIS was strongest!) than to rural ones (where the FLN could still bribe or coerce the voters).

The FIS, meanwhile, were not without their own problems. It was deeply embarrassed at the beginning of the Gulf crisis when not-so-covert financial backer, Saudi Arabia, was seen welcoming infidel armies onto its 'holy ground'. This had serious implications for the FIS which had presented itself as the incorruptible defender of Islam and the Arab nation.

Eventually, they decided that to lose all credibility in the eyes of the anti-imperialist masses was a greater loss than the Saudi petro-dollars, primarily because the former would be irrecoverable. Thus they won all back by declaring their support for Iraq at a 100,000-strong demonstration. In February 1991, Belhadj went so far as to appear in a military uniform to attack the ANP for its inaction and called for a jihad against the Americans and their allies.

The FLN continued to manoeuvre in the hope of weaning away fundamentalist votes on the strength of its own commitment to 'Islamic values'. Thus, at the beginning of January 1991, a new law was passed outlawing the transcription of Arabic into roman letters. The same law also provided for the Arabisation of the whole of education by 1997 and a ban on imports of roman alphabet typewriters!

In late May 1991, with less than a month to go until the elections, the FIS suddenly changed its line. Having intended to stand for re-election in spite of the FLN's large scale ballot-rigging, they decided to go for a confrontation. Fearful that victory might elude them, they called for a general strike to bring down the government. A demonstration of 100,000 fundamentalists marched through Algiers, calling for immediate presidential elections and demanding the setting-up of an Islamic state.

But the strike was a flop. The FIS had proved its inability to mobilise the workers or to head the opposition forces, and was on the verge of a split. One wing of its ruling council, the Madjliss El-Shora, around Said Guechi (subsequently Minister for Employment!), publicly called for an end to the strike. In total chaos, Madani and Belhadj convinced activists it was now or never and they took to the streets in the hope of getting a re-run of October 1988.

At least one of their wishes was granted: the army attacked the demonstrators killing at least twenty of them. A state of emergency was declared, the elections were called off and the FIS leadership, including Madani and Belhadj, were arrested for their calls for jihad (Madani) and the stockpiling of arms (Belhadj).

Despite significant participation by the youth of the slum towns against the ANP, the FIS was unable either to mobilise the masses or to shake the discipline of the army. The FLN and the ANP had won this round. From June to January,

after the collapse of the FIS's general strike, the situation became clearer. The army installed a 'non-partisan' government headed by Ghazali, a member of the Central Committee, who promised elections 'as soon as possible'.

Differences emerged between Ghazali, backed by ANP commander General Khaled Nazzar, and Chadli, alongside a faction within the FLN. Chadli wanted to do a power-sharing deal involving himself and the fundamentalist party. He thus encouraged Madani to make sure the FIS took part in the elections scheduled for the end of 1991.²³ But Chadli's proposed compromise was anathema to the ANP which was, for several reasons, particularly hostile to the FIS.

The FIS had promised a purge in the ANP's upper ranks and had repeatedly proclaimed itself to be the sole legitimate heir of the war of independence. More significantly, the ANP had played a key role in implementing the rule of the hated FLN. Equally, the FIS's love of things medieval did not endear it to the western-trained ANP leadership, reluctant to relinquish access to the best modern weapons. In an attempt to recover popular support, ANP generals attacked the FIS's authoritarianism, saying that it was 'unthinkable that a government which came to power democratically should be allowed to lead the country into dictatorship.'²⁴

Such words, however, counted for little beside the ANP's anti-democratic record since the founding of the Algerian state.

On December 14, the majority faction inside the FIS won the internal battle and the fundamentalist organisation announced its decision to take part in the elections. It had recently shown its strength in a monster demonstration of 200,000 fundamentalists in early November. The events which followed were almost inevitable. By 5 December the parliament, still dominated by the FLN, had passed a law allowing civic authorities to use the army 'to maintain public order'. The ANP had clearly signalled its unwillingness to see a repeat of June 1991, still less of October 1988.

On 26 December, in an election in which 41% of all voters abstained, the FIS won 188 seats out of 430. Its campaign, conducted on the slogan 'Neither Charter nor Constitution but the Koran and the Sunna (Islamic law)', was supported by 25.4% of all registered voters^{248%} of those who did vote, in all 3,200,000 people. But the FLN were the big losers, receiving only 13.8% of the vote.

Despite the claims of the FIS, in no way could this be interpreted as a democratic mandate to establish a theocratic dictatorship.

In the second round, scheduled to take place on January 16, it seemed clear that the FIS would gain an overall majority of seats despite the fact that less than 26% of the population had voted for it and despite the FLN's bureaucratic attempts to subvert the electoral process. In the first round, voters marked a cross beside the name of the candidate they wished to support. In the second round they had to put a cross beside the name of the candidate they wished to reject!
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Two possibilities were discussed in the smoke-filled rooms of Algiers. Chadli had initiated secret talks between his lieutenant Abdelaziz Khellif and the provisional leader of the FIS, Abdelkader Hachani. This power-sharing proposal was supported by the oppositionist Ait Ahmed. More openly, the bourgeois leadership of the Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (RCD) called for strikes and demonstrations in the hope of provoking the army into intervening to prevent the second round from going ahead.

On 2 January a large demonstration of around 300,000 people was called by, among others, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the RCD 'to safeguard democracy'. Berbers from Kabylia were very well represented, fearful that the fiercely anti-Berber FIS might be about to take power. The UGTA once more showed its class-collaborationist reflexes by supporting the formation of a 'National Committee to Save Algeria' which included sections of the employers. It was correctly attacked by workers at the petrol company Sonatrach for compromising class independence in the struggle against the FIS.

On 11 January, five days before the second round, the ANP brought the waiting to an end. In a coup de théâtre, Chadli resigned, under pressure from General Nazzar, Prime Minister Ghazali and the ANP. A state of emergency was

declared and the ANP took power under the guise of the 'High State Committee' (HCE). Mohamed Boudiaf returned from exile to take charge of a government in which the real reins of power are held by the ANP.

In the weeks which followed, the FLN split, uncertain which position to take in relation to the coup. A few middle class elements and intellectuals were relieved that the FIS threat had been repulsed. To sweeten the pill among the masses, Boudiaf announced a major anti-corruption campaign. After a few weeks, details of the scale of the corruption within the FLN and among sections of the ANP emerged in a series of well-organised leaks to the press. General Belloucif, a former secretary general at the Ministry of Defence, was charged and there were rumours that the same fate awaited Chadli.

Immediately after the coup, the FIS responded to the ANP's provocations with attacks on police stations. Its leadership and more than 5,000 members were arrested and imprisoned without trial. A state of emergency was officially decreed on 9 February. The FIS announced more than 150 dead in the course of the military repression. A few weeks later the FIS was officially banned by the HCE even though a few of its leaders were freed. In May 13 of its members were condemned to death.

The imperialists reacted unenthusiastically to the coup. Immediately, the Credit Lyonnais bank said it would not be allocating the country credit on the agreed date and subsequently refused to allocate credit altogether. In late March, the Algerian Energy Minister went to Paris for discussions with the then Minister for Finance, Pierre Bérégovoy. He turned a deaf ear to Algerian pleas to reschedule an \$8 billion debt, 20% of which was owed to France.

The continued exploitation of Algeria by France—through the purchase and sale of agricultural produce, the provision of heavy goods and of course the debt—was used both as a carrot and a stick to make sure the new government stayed in line. The imperialists' position, from Washington to Paris, is simple: they have no confidence in the long term stability of the country.

They are right. The HCE and its state of emergency cannot last. The FIS is for the moment in a weakened state as a result of the repression. Certainly the enthusiasm of its mass support does not stretch to taking on a still hostile army. Its calls for a protest demonstration (14 February) and for a popular uprising (5 May) have been ignored by the population. Yet all the while the economic and cultural situation of the masses gets worse by the day.

The HCE itself has been obliged to promise that some time in the not too distant future democratic freedoms will be restored. What will become of the three million FIS voters until then? It is highly unlikely that they have had their minds changed by the ANP tanks. The fundamentalist threat is not going to disappear with the wave of a field marshal's baton. Military rule is an impasse.

The assassination of Boudiaf on 29 June, probably the result of a conspiracy of parts of the state machine itself, reveals that the coup d'état did not even resolve the inner differences of the military over how to deal with the growing crisis of their rule.

There is little sign that the designation as new president of Ali Kafi, like Boudiaf a old veteran of the war of independence, will solve this.

However, the coup also seems to have deepened the divisions within the FIS. In its first statement after the assassination it lamely declared itself to be 'prepared to have a real, serious and responsible dialogue' 26 with the government. Two days before, Rabah Khebir, founder of the FIS had emphasised the 'need to forget bitterness and differences, and to work together for an Algeria where Islam will have its place'.²⁷

On the other hand FIS bulletins are more bloodthirsty, calling on the masses 'to kill a thousand policemen and magistrates'. It claims that clandestinity is hardening the organisation and weeding out weak elements. According to *Libération* the Algerianists are getting weaker—one of their leaders said he was surprised they hadn't yet been attacked as 'traitors'. The Algerianists want the armed struggle wing to leave the FIS. At the same time, they urge the government to take up their offer of negotiations by claiming that this alone could really stop their extremist wing from

eventually seizing power.

The growing resort to individual terror and 'armed struggle' shows that this is not just an idle threat. The clerical fascist wing is thus laying claim in deeds to the heritage of the Algerian revolution. Virtually every day sees attacks on the armed forces, especially against policemen. Over 150 policemen have been killed since February. Apparently, there have been organised attacks on post offices and food companies.²⁸

In short, an embryonic guerrilla warfare is developing. Of course, the Islamic clerical fascists are no revolutionaries, any more than was a Hitler or a Mussolini. The terror tactics, like the mass movement, are being utilised to produce a split in the ruling class and in the army high command, not to overthrow them. It is, of course, far from impossible that when they see that the road of repression is exhausted, some forces in the army and in the FLN could open the road to power for the FIS.

Neither the former FLN regime nor the present military dictatorship are capable of permanently halting the growth of fundamentalism in either its 'moderate' or clerical fascist forms. Nor can the FFS, which espouses an even more pro-IMF, neo-liberal economic programme, offer an alternative to Algeria's workers. A popular front of these forces with the unions is a dead end strategy which can only strengthen the hold of the clerical fascist demagogues over the impoverished masses.

A real opposition to Islamic theocracy and the black night of oppression must combine resistance to the brutal economic attack of imperialism with the defence of democratic rights and social gains. Algerian society is in a deep social crisis whose outcome will not be a stable capitalist parliamentary democracy. It will be revolution or counter-revolution. Though the social forces for revolution are strong they are hardly conscious of the need to take this road.

Faced with the rise of Islamic politics, it is necessary to put forward revolutionary solutions capable of meeting the needs of the masses and particularly the unemployed youth, in the spheres of jobs, housing health and education, showing that workers, youth and women can take control of their own destiny and shape a better future.

It is at the same time necessary to boldly defend a democratic and secular social culture where no clerics can interfere in people's personal lives. It is vital to defend the right of all young men and women to read or see what films they like, to dress, dance, drink, participate in sport and organise their own social and sexual lives as they wish. All of this personal and sexual liberation must be linked to the liberation of women.

But there is no separate stage of democratic struggles in countries like Algeria. To fulfill these democratic and cultural tasks requires the control of massive economic resources, resources that can only be gained by taking over the means of production, the imperialist companies, the big landholdings, by renouncing the foreign debt and stopping its repayment and by creating a planned economy in which 'workers' management' is not a hoax. Only the working class striking out to fight for its own class rule can do this.

To achieve this task it is necessary to build a revolutionary vanguard party, rooted in the factories, in the workers' districts and in the shanty towns, which could lead the oppressed and exploited masses in establishing their own power. To organise and mobilise the urban and rural masses a network of factory, enterprise, shanty-town and peasant councils needs to be created. Their delegates need to be elected and recallable by mass meetings of the rank and file with no interference by, let alone privileges for, bureaucrats or mullahs.

Only such democratic organs of the working masses can take and wield state power. Through the creation of a social system based on workers' council power, the Algerian masses can win the fight for emancipation that their parents began four decades ago.

NOTES

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- 3 R. Tlemcani, 'State and Revolution in Algeria?', Zed (London, 1986), p126
- 4 S. Chikhi, 'L'Ouvrier, la vie et le prince, ou la modernité introuvable?' in A. El-Kenz, 'L'Algérie et la modernité?', CODESRIA (Paris, 1989), p181
- 5 S. Chikhi, 'La classe ouvrière aujourd'hui en Algérie?', in Les Temps Modernes 422-433 (1983), p65
- 6 A. Rouadjia, op. cit. p284
- 7 Reproduced in M. Al-Ahnaf, B. Botiveau and F. Frégosi, 'Algérie par ses islamistes?', Karthala (Paris, 1991), pp45-48
- 8 A. Rouadjia, op. cit., p82
- 9 S. Chikhi (1989), op. cit., p179
- 10 A. Rouadji, op. cit., pp86-187
- 11 M. Al-Ahnaf et al., op. cit., p30
- 12 A. Madani, quoted in 'Le Monde Diplomatique?', February 1992.
- 13 Middle East International, 24.1.92
- 14 Arabies, February 1992
- 15 Platform of the FIS, El Mounquid, Number 16. Quoted in M. Al-Ahnaf et al, op. cit. p50
- 16 A Madani, quoted by A. Rouadjia, op. cit. p283
- 17 Economic Programme of the FIS, quoted in M. Al-Ahnef et al, op. cit., p179
- 18 Quoted in M. Al-Ahnef et al., op. cit., p80
- 19 El-Mounquid, Number 23, quoted in M. Al-Ahnaf et al., op. cit., pp90-92
- 20 Ibid, p94
- 21 Le Monde 15.1.92
- 22 L'Humanité 13.1.92
- 23 Interview with Madani in Algérie Actualité 6.6.91
- 24 Editorial in the ANP review, quoted by M. Al-Ahnaf et al., op. cit., p126
- 25 Le Monde 12.1.92
- 26 Libération 13.7.92
- 27 Libération 13.7.92
- 28 Le Monde 21.7.92

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