

'The Algerian tragedy' from L'Humanité (3 November 1954)

Caption: On 3 November 1954, the French Communist daily newspaper L'Humanité defends the legitimacy of claims to independence made by the Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian peoples.

Source: L'Humanité. Organe central du Parti communiste français. dir. de publ. Cachin. Marcel ; RRéd. Chef Vaillant-Couturier. 03.11.1954, n° 3161; 50e année. Paris: L'Humanité. "Le drame algérien", auteur:Feix, Léon , p. 1.

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The Algerian tragedy

First it was Tunisia and Morocco; now there is bloodshed in Algeria.

This is, without doubt, a very serious event and a logical outcome of the Government's North Africa policy. Let us consider the facts.

On 31 July last, the Prime Minister flew from Paris to Tunis to declare 'the internal autonomy of the Tunisian state'.

This decision naturally caused quite a stir, since it met the unanimous wish of the Tunisian National Movement and came just 11 days after the ceasefire in Indo-China. It was applauded by the Tunisians, and by everyone in the Overseas Territories and in France, as the first step in a new policy and a long-awaited departure from the unbelievable mistakes made by Mr Bidault, Mr Martinaud-Deplat and others who were responsible for what was known as the policy of 'force'.

Franco-Tunisian talks had begun in Tunis on 4 September. Discussions had been taking place on a weekly basis in Paris since 15 September. Not much progress had been made, because the French side did not want to give up any of the key privileges of the colonial system.

At the same time, repressive measures were being stepped up in Tunisia. Entire regions were searched, and a real war was fought with tanks, the air force and 'special forces' just back from Indo-China.

Who could be duped into believing that such practices are compatible with genuine negotiations? It is easy to understand why Tunisian patriots, to whom many broken promises have been made, no longer intend to be fooled, especially since they are aware of what is taking place in other North African countries, particularly Morocco.

Enough has been said about the foolhardy policy that led to the overthrow of Sultan Mohamed ben Youssef in August 1953 and his replacement by the puppet ben Arafa. It was such a crazy operation that the current Government has, for some months now, been pretending to ask how it can possibly get out of the trap in which it finds itself.

This search for an 'acceptable' solution to the dynastic problem has not stopped the Government from acting. It did exactly the same as in Tunisia, with more repressive measures extending to entire parts of Port-Lyautey, Meknes and Casablanca and even to a city such as Fes, which has more than 200 000 inhabitants. There, the siege that began on 10 August 1954 lasted for more than a week and ended with the profanation of a Muslim holy site. No doubt this is what *Combat* described yesterday as 'the cooling off sought by Mr Lacoste'. This is not, nor can it be, what the Moroccan patriots sought.

Turning to Algeria, the Minister of the Interior has just visited the country. He made a lot of speeches. He even made what he called a 'policy statement' in which, according to *Le Monde*, he underscored the 'primary role of economic and social measures as part of the tasks to be carried out in Algeria'. That goes without saying for all those who consider Algeria to be 'three French départements'.

But Algerians of all stripes and backgrounds know that this is a meaningless slogan which is aimed solely at camouflaging the colonialist reality and is contradicted every day by events on the ground.

Mr Mitterrand spoke about housing, wages and economic development. All these issues are of great interest to Algerians. But they are well placed to know that these problems will not be solved under a system whose 'benefits' they have been able to gauge for the last 125 years.

Mr Mitterrand did not say a word about what the vast majority of Algerians desire above all: an end to the colonial regime.

By denying the existence of a political problem in Algeria, the Minister of the Interior must have been aware that he was adopting exactly the same position as his predecessors. That position was condemned by all political parties in Algeria, as well as by many of the country's inhabitants of European origin, and by those who are simply honest and reasonable individuals.

Algerians have been deeply shocked by other steps that the Government has taken: for example, the Prime Minister's statement on the building of Franco-German arms factories in their country and in the Sahara. Of course, there is no question of asking the Algerians what they think about these plants. But that is not how the Algerians see things. When will it finally be understood that these methods are outdated? This is particularly true when it comes to establishing — in a country that wants to throw off the yoke of colonialism — another type of imperialism, German imperialism, whose doctrine is based, as it was twenty years ago, on odious Hitlerian racism.

The Government was well aware of where that policy was leading. For several weeks, Mr Chevallier, Mayor of Algiers and Junior Minister for the Armed Forces, has been visiting the Constantine area to 'put law enforcement units in place'. A fortnight ago, the Resident-General of Tunis and the Governor-General of Algeria met in Constantine to coordinate repressive measures in both countries. Last week, the *Alger Républicain* newspaper announced major troop deployments to the south and south-east of Constantine. So, given those facts on the ground, why describe current events as 'surprising' or, even worse, as a 'new earthquake', as the newspaper *Franc-Tireur* so hypocritically calls them?

In actual fact, the events in Algeria, like those in Tunisia and Morocco, are the result of the harmful policy intransigently adopted on the other side of the Mediterranean. And the imminent massive use of force will not solve anything. On the contrary, it will just make things worse.

As we have always said, the only solution is to respect the legitimate demands of the Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian peoples for freedom.

The sole course of action possible in Tunisia is to ignore the complaints from a handful of people who are profiting from colonialism and to take the first step, which is 'internal autonomy'. All that has to be done is to turn the fine words spoken in Tunis last 31 July into deeds. But the Prime Minister is not doing that.

In Morocco, talks could start straight away with the qualified representatives of all the national political parties and movements, not just about 'municipal reform', as the Resident said, but on the basis of the Moroccan people's desire to manage their own affairs.

In Algeria, there is certainly no lack of potential negotiating partners, provided that the parties agree to discuss current political problems. It must also be understood that these problems cannot be resolved without the people who are the most affected and who, at this moment, are not sitting in a gerrymandered Algerian Assembly.

That is the way forward. It is the only just and reasonable way and the only one that corresponds with the interests of the countries of North Africa and France. It is the only way to convert these people who have been oppressed into the 'friends and allies' about whom Maurice Thorez spoke last February.

On 9 June 1954, before becoming Prime Minister, Mr Mendès France addressed the National Assembly thus: 'We have every reason to change our policy in North Africa so as to avoid a tragedy that would be worse than that in Indo-China.'

The peoples of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria will not make do with promises.

Today we are confronted with a tragedy.

Here, as on the question of German militarism, the Government has an overwhelming responsibility. In this, as in many other areas, it is up to our people to make their voice heard, and to make it heard so clearly that

no one can ignore it.