

The Soviet Union and National Liberation

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A number of our readers have requested more information concerning the Soviet Union's relations with the national liberation movements and her assistance to peoples struggling for their national independence. We are therefore publishing some short studies, each of them devoted to a different country. These studies will in no sense be an overall analysis of the struggles in these countries, but simply a short account of the role of the Soviet Union in relation to these movements. The first of these studies is devoted to Algeria.

I. THE SOVIET UNION AND ALGERIA

IN the course of the current discussions in the international Communist movement, allegations have been made by the Chinese comrades concerning the policy adopted by the Soviet Union towards the struggle of the Algerian people.

Thus, in their document *Apologists of Neo-Colonialism*, prepared by the Editorial Departments of *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*, October 22, 1963, the Chinese comrades attack the leadership of the C.P.S.U., alleging that during the Algerian war they "actually took the side of French imperialism." This incredible charge is false and utterly without foundation.

Right up to the end of the Algerian people's war of liberation, the Soviet Union supported the Algerian national liberation movement—morally, politically, diplomatically, and materially.

For obvious reasons, much of the information concerning this support could not be given during the liberation war—and even now the full details of this assistance are not available. But there is enough information available, including the testimony of Algerian leaders, to show the extent of Soviet help to the Algerian people's struggle.

Algerian Recognition of Soviet Help

A number of leading Algerian figures have spoken of the solidarity extended to them by the Soviet Union in the difficult period of the liberation war.

Thus, Mr. Abdelhafid Boussouf, Minister of Armaments and General Relations in the Provisional Government in 1962, stated in March 1962:

"The Soviet Union, like all democratic countries, has always effectively supported the struggle of the Algerian people for freedom and independence. The Algerian people express their satisfaction and gratitude to the Soviet people and their government for their support for the Algerian Revolution. The Soviet Union supports the struggle for liberation

in view of its principles and ideology. It always comes to the assistance of the peoples in their struggles." (*Soviet News*, March 22, 1962.)

Dr. Mohammed Yazid, Minister of Information in the Provisional Algerian Government in 1962, stated (April 1962):

"The material, political and diplomatic aid which the U.S.S.R. and the socialist countries had never ceased to render the Algerian people in their struggle for national liberation will enhance our people's gratitude to all who have helped them in their struggle and with whom they will maintain friendly and fruitful relations after winning independence." (*Soviet News*, April 18, 1962.)

Z. Belkasem, Mayor of Ouenza, and former guerilla fighter, said in welcome to Soviet guests (September 1963):

"We know and love the Soviet Union. It has always rendered us assistance in our difficult days and we remember it."

In a message to Nikita Khrushchov, October 1962, Ben Bella stated:

"The ties of friendship and real solidarity, which were forged in the course of our difficult liberation struggle, are a reliable earnest of fruitful co-operation between our two peoples." (*Pravda*—quoted September 12, 1963, in *Daily Review of Soviet Press*.)

During his visit to the Soviet Union in April-May, 1964, Ben Bella repeatedly stressed the great help which the Soviet Union had given to Algeria during its struggle for independence as well as since.

"As people who have liberated themselves from the age-long yoke of colonialism as a result of a prolonged struggle, characterised by sacrifices and unheard-of losses, we felt the moral and material support of the Soviet Union and all the other socialist countries. This assistance was a sacred contribution to the cause of victory over imperialism.

". . . On behalf of the government and the people of Algeria I express our warmest gratitude to the great Soviet people and their government for the

assistance they have given us during the long war for national liberation and also after we became independent." (Ben Bella, speech at Vnukovo airport, Moscow, April 25, 1964.)

In a further speech on April 27th, Ben Bella referred to the friendship of the Soviet people for Algeria "which we already felt back in the time of our war for independence."

Addressing a Soviet-Algerian friendship meeting in Moscow on May 6th, Ben Bella declared that

"the Soviet Union was Algeria's best and truest friend, because it had already given extensive material and moral support to the Algerian people during the war of liberation against the colonialists . . . Thanks to the Soviet Union, Algeria had not been left to fight alone against imperialism."

(*Soviet News*, May 7, 1964)

In this speech, Ben Bella paid special tribute to Comrade Khrushchov:

"I am paying this tribute to Khrushchov for what he has done for you and also for us, for his profound humanism, which is so characteristic of him and which so endears him to us."

Forms of Soviet Help

The forms of help provided by the Soviet Union were manifold. To the Algerian refugees in Tunisia and Morocco, the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the U.S.S.R. sent food, clothing, blankets, medicines, etc. As soon as it was possible to send supplies direct to Algeria, the Soviet Union sent food ships to Algiers, bringing wheat, sugar, vegetable oil, tinned fish and condensed milk.

Military help was also given. In his recent interview to a number of journalists on questions concerning the national liberation struggle, N. S. Khrushchov stated:

"The Algerian people drove out the French colonialists after many years of bloody armed struggle. Their heroism won the admiration and respect of all freedom-loving peoples. They always had the full sympathy and support of the Soviet people. Nor was this purely platonic support. The U.S.S.R. dispatched large quantities of weapons to the Algerian patriots free of charge."

(*Izvestia*, December 21, 1963, quoted in *Soviet News*, December 23, 1963)

Confirmation that this support was given has been provided by non-Soviet sources. Thus King Hassan of Morocco, in addressing a press conference on October 24, 1963, revealed that during the Algerian war of liberation, Morocco freely allowed the import of Soviet arms, ammunition and military equipment which was then shipped to Algeria. Soviet pilots, he said, trained Algerian pilots in the use of Soviet helicopters on Moroccan territory.¹

¹ Press conference summarised in *Guardian*, October 25, 1963.

The U.S. Defence Department, according to a Reuter report, says that the Soviet Union supplied the Algerian national liberation movement for its war of liberation with howitzers, helicopters, small arms, field guns, rocket firers and other equipment—all of it free of charge.²

The extent of Soviet military help to Algeria during its war for liberation is widely known in the Arab countries and is often referred to by Arab leaders and journals.

"Every Communist and every Arab patriot well knows that the weapons with which the Algerian people fought and with the help of which they won their independence . . . were first of all Soviet weapons."

(Statement of the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party, published in the Lebanese paper, *Al Akhbar*, September 1963.)

"The Soviet Union gave every support to the heroic Algerian revolution, providing arms and other assistance. The U.S.S.R. acted as host to Algerian fighters, both military and civilian. Some went to the Soviet Union to perfect their skill in warfare; others went there to study; and still others went to heal their wounds sustained in the struggle. Every Arab knows this. We also know that as soon as independence was won, the Algerian Army, equipped with Soviet military equipment, advanced into the country's hinterland."

(From an article by Mohammed Rashid Ashraf, published in *Al Akhbar*, April 1964.)

The Soviet people also campaigned throughout the struggle on behalf of the Algerian people. On March 30, 1958, for example, Algeria Day was marked throughout the Soviet Union by mass demonstrations in towns, factories, institutions, etc.³

On September 24, 1958, a mass meeting of Moscow trade unionists was held in solidarity with the struggle of the Algerian people.⁴

On October 31, 1960, a mass meeting in Moscow, marking the sixth anniversary of the Algerian war, passed a resolution declaring:

"In the name of the Soviet people we declare the readiness and determination of the many millions of our people to support in every way the people of Algeria who are fighting heroically under the leadership of the provisional government of the Algerian Republic for the liberation of their motherland from the yoke of French colonialists."

(*Soviet News*, October 13, 1960.)

Trade Union Solidarity

An important aspect of the solidarity given to Algeria in its liberation struggle was that given by the

² Quoted in the Ceylon journal, *Forward*, November 1, 1963.

³ *Soviet News*, March 31, 1958.

⁴ *Soviet News*, September 26, 1958.

international trade union movement. In 1958, on the initiative and with the full support of the World Federation of Trade Unions (in which the Soviet trade unions play an important role), an International Trade Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and People of Algeria was set up. It held its first meeting in Cairo, in September 1958, its second in Varna (Bulgaria) in May 1959, its third in Havana in October 1960, and its fourth in Casablanca in June/July 1962. This Committee, at its fourth meeting in 1962, was able to announce that it had the support of 37 trade union organisations. In addition to the W.F.T.U. and to some of its affiliates (in socialist countries, in Western Europe, especially the powerful Federations of Labour in France and Italy, in Asia, and in Latin America), there were also represented trade unions not affiliated to the W.F.T.U., such as the International Conference of Arab Trade Unions, the Moroccan Labour Union and the General Union of Algerian Workers (U.G.T.A.). (Until recently, the latter two were members of the I.C.F.T.U.). Trade union organisations of Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Dahomey were also represented.

Some indication of the extent of the support provided by this international trade union solidarity committee (apart from the international campaigns it helped to initiate) is provided by this extract from the Report of its Secretariat in July 1962:

"In general, one of the main tasks of solidarity performed by our Committee was to extend material help to the innocent victims of this war which was mercilessly waged by the French colonialists against the whole Algerian people. Most of the member organisations of the Committee have expressed their active solidarity directly to the U.G.T.A. both through national campaigns organised in different countries and through the Red Cross and the Algerian Red Crescent.

"The workers and trade unions of the socialist countries have extended to the U.G.T.A. particularly substantial material help in various forms, in addition to the effective political solidarity they have always shown to the Algerian cause. On the basis of an agreement or at the request of our Algerian brothers they offered their assistance mostly in gifts of kind. They sent large quantities of foodstuff, medicines, clothing, blankets, tents and so forth for the refugees and orphans; ambulances and equipment for hospitals; cars and tractors, machines and instruments for technical training centres; study equipment for children's homes and so forth.

"As regards medical treatment and rehabilitation of the wounded and sick and holiday facilities for Algerian orphans, the trade union organisations in the socialist countries did their utmost to help the victims of this cruel war.

"The U.G.T.A. naturally had to deal with many problems in organising technical training because the people need help to overcome more than one

century of colonial backwardness caused by colonial domination. In many of the socialist countries technical courses were arranged."

(*Trade Union Press*—Bulletin of W.F.T.U., July 15, 1962.)

Other trade unions, apart from those in the socialist countries, also gave help, but the trade unions in the socialist countries, especially in the Soviet Union, provided a substantial share of this material assistance.

Diplomatic Assistance

There has been some misunderstanding regarding the Soviet Union's recognition of the Algerian Provisional Government during the war of liberation.

This Provisional Government was formed in September 1958. China, which had no diplomatic relations with France, had no difficulty in giving full *de jure* recognition to the Algerian Provisional Government. The Soviet Union, which had full diplomatic relations with France, granted *de facto* recognition to the Algerian Provisional Government. The difference between the form of recognition given by China and that given by the Soviet Union was *diplomatic*. In actual practice, as has been shown above, the Soviet Union gave complete support to the Algerian liberation movement throughout the liberation war, and later to its Provisional Government. At no time did diplomatic considerations prevent the Soviet Union assisting the Algerian people; neither did the *form* of recognition of the Provisional Government stand in the way of this assistance.

In March 1962, when France and Algeria agreed on a cessation of hostilities, the Soviet Government immediately sent a message to the then Prime Minister of the Algerian Provisional Government, Mr. Ben Khedda, announcing Soviet *de jure* recognition. The French Government immediately protested and issued a statement to the effect that the maintenance of diplomatic relations between the U.S.S.R. and France at Ambassadorial level was impossible. France soon had to retreat from this position and accept the facts of life.

In September 1962, the first government of the independent Algerian People's Democratic Government was set up, under the premiership of Ben Bella. The Soviet Union immediately gave it full diplomatic recognition.

Aid to Independent Algeria

Towards the end of 1963 it was announced that the Soviet Union had agreed to grant Algeria a long-term low-interest loan of £36 million. In December 1963, a delegation from Algeria visited the Soviet Union. The delegation was headed by Mr. Hadj Ben Alla, member of the political bureau

of the National Liberation Front and chairman of the Algerian National Assembly. As a result of discussions with the Soviet Government an agreement was signed by the two countries on economic and technical co-operation. Under this agreement, the Soviet Union undertook to help Algeria in developing agriculture, in restoring and building a number of industrial enterprises, in carrying out geological surveys and in helping Algeria to train technicians and specialists.

In addressing a joint meeting of the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., on December 19, 1963, Mr. Hadj Ben Alla said that the "Algerians know that they have long enjoyed the friendship of the Soviet people." He added that they would "Never forget the concrete manifestation of this friendship during the long struggle for our national liberation." (*Soviet News*, December 20, 1963.)

In April-May, 1964, President Ben Bella and other Algerian leaders visited the Soviet Union. At the conclusion of their visit a joint communique was issued (May 5, 1964), in which it was stated that the Soviet Government had agreed to grant Algeria new long-term credits amounting to 115 million roubles (about £45 million), which will enable the Soviet Union to construct for Algeria a metallurgical plant with annual capacity of 300-350,000 tons of rolled steel, with a complete cycle for the production of agglomerated ore, coke, pig-iron, steel and rolled metal, and also chemical products, including ammonium sulphate. In addition the Soviet Union will establish in Algeria as a gift from the Soviet people, an oil and gas institute, together with a special technical school, the two establishments to have 2,000 students altogether; and, in addition, a textile school for 500 students.

No account of the various forms of aid given by the Soviet Union to Algeria would be complete without mentioning the action of the Soviet Government in providing personnel to de-mine the areas of Algeria which had been heavily mined by the French imperialists during the liberation war. A number of Soviet citizens have already laid down their lives for Algeria in the course of carrying out this dangerous work. This selfless action has been so highly appreciated in Algeria that Ben Bella drew attention to it in almost every speech he made during his recent visit to the Soviet Union. Here are two typical references:

"Our people watched how the Soviet technical experts tirelessly worked to de-mine our borders, how they worked in this way to help rid our country of the consequences of the war. Our people saw how a number of these experts shed their blood in order to save our children and our peasants from falling victims to exploding mines."

(Ben Bella, speech in the Grand Kremlin Palace, April 27, 1964.)

"... from the beginning of the fight we are now waging for socialism, blood was not only shed by Algerians, but also by ordinary Soviet people. I have in mind the great help the Soviet Union is giving us now in de-mining wide areas of our territory... (I have in mind) the blood of ordinary Russian people, of people from simple families, who have voluntarily come to Algeria and, exposing themselves to danger every hour, every day, are de-mining extensive areas of our land... Herein, I believe, lies the secret of our friendship, which no force in the world will ever destroy."

(Speech by Ben Bella, Kremlin Palace, May 1, 1964.)

In view of the extensive help given by the Soviet Union to Algeria at each stage of its struggle—for independence, for post-war rehabilitation, and now to construct socialism—it is unforgivable that the Chinese comrades should spread their slanders concerning the Soviet Union's attitude towards Algeria. What makes it doubly unpardonable is that the Chinese comrades themselves know, as well as anyone, the extent to which the Soviet Union has aided Algeria.

The statements and facts cited above have been almost entirely drawn from speeches and declarations of the leaders of the Algerian people. They are in a better position than anyone to assess the value of the Soviet help they have received, and their high appreciation of this aid is a complete refutation of the false allegations of the Chinese comrades.

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