AT AND AFTER EVIAN

JEAN LACOUTURE

North African Correspondent of 'Le Monde'

THE end of the Algerian war is at last in sight. But the opening of negotiations at Evian on May 20 does not yet mean that the fighting is over—this will only come about after long and delicate discussions—or that Algeria can now resume a normal life, social peace and psychological disarmament, devoting itself to the task of reconstruction. One may now hope, however, that this state of underhand war, part civil and part international, which has been raging for almost seven years in this distracted country, may soon be replaced by primarily political debates in which violence, if present, will no longer be the only law.

Years will be necessary before the establishment of a real peace in Algeria; hatreds have been heaping for too long, the influence of the former régime is still too strong, and strong also are the illusions of those who think that it is possible to revive the past and wipe out the Algerian revolution as if it had never existed. First, it will take months before an agreement is reached between the French government and the leaders of the Algerian rebellion. Numerous divergences still keep them apart—deriving from the fundamental difference between the conceptions of the colonisers, even when determined on decolonisation, and the former colonised, even when equally determined not to drive their former masters to their ruin.

The background to Evian is a strange one. The French authorities are in apparent control of Algeria itself, except on extraordinary occasions when the crowd breaks through any barrier raised against it. The French army is everywhere, at least by day, and the F.L.N. forces have stopped all significant military operations, to limit themselves to underground work and terrorist activities at least as effective as their previous campaigns.

Whoever travels in Algeria today may seriously doubt the whole reality of the war, except for the enormous number of French soldiers quartered in the country. And yet, although the French seem to have won the battles, they must withdraw from the war, not only because of the influence exerted by the political and military cadres of the rebels on the mass of the

population, but also because of mounting international pressure; from the West, to prevent France from endangering the Western powers in a conflict with the Afro-Asian world, and from the East, with the threat of increasing intervention—if only through the arming and training of F.L.N. cadres—by the Communist countries.

In Algeria, therefore, there are three intertwined wars. First, there is the military struggle, between the French army and the rebels. This has been won by the French, as far at least as regular forces can do so against guerrilla fighters. The success of the British in Malaya was more thorough, but then the F.L.N. is far more developed than the Malayan rebels were and is furthermore assisted by neighbouring nations.

The second is a political war to win over the population to its very soul. There the rebels have registered the successes, in spite of the extraordinary efforts, sometimes generous, sometimes cruel, of officers who, after reading Mao Tse Tung, thought that with a few récipes and enough good will, they could "win over" a population. They forgot that the success of the Chinese revolution was due to revolutionary convictions, the desire to redress wrongs, to overcome poverty, to build a better society. They forgot that Mao's first quality in the eyes of the Chinese peasants was to have been born in a Chinese village, like themselves. Colonel Argoud* cannot say he was born in a Kabyle village. . . .

The third war is a diplomatic one. This too has been won by the F.L.N., but not completely; for France has managed to prevent a formal condemnation at the United Nations, to keep her allied support—which Portugal lost at the first alarm—to win even the confidence of Arab governments, such as that of Tunisia. But Paris cannot afford more cruel retreats. What has been lost is already too great, what could be gained through peace is too important. To prevent the diplomatic calamity of a rupture with its allies or direct intervention from the East, turning Algeria into a new Spain, Paris wants to put an end to this huge hunt, in which the cries of the hunted can be heard by the whole world.

But deciding to end the war is not the same as stopping it. Another strange aspect of this conflict is that it does not take place between two opponents but between several. The F.L.N.

* Former Chief of Staff to General Massu, a brilliant theorist of the 'revolutionary war', and one of the leaders in the last putsch.

and the majority of the Algerian population face the French State with its army, faithful on the whole but with strong dissident elements. These elements can still produce a crisis similar to that of April 22, as they enjoy the favour of Algerian settlers—or roughly one million people, excluding the ten thousand or so 'liberals' who have already accepted Algeria's independence—as well as a small fraction of the Muslim population.

That a few Muslims, part of the army and most Europeans in Algeria, either by intrigue or inertia, should still oppose a radical change in the control of the country makes it very difficult indeed to bring the change about. The details of a cease-fire, of a provisional administration, of a State that would respect the rights of its minorities, can be agreed; but if all these forces join together against such a programme, they may sabotage it once more or in any case hamper it. All would reasonably agree that the two real contenders are General de Gaulle and M. Ferhat Abbas. But both are so placed that, to prevent bloodshed, they cannot go to the capital, Algiers, at the present moment and probably not for several months. It is a strange situation. Here is a house. It is to change owners, but neither the old owner nor the new one can enter it to hand over or receive the keys. . . .

What may be expected from peace in Algeria? What régime is likely to be established there? What sort of links may still exist with France? What are the chances of a Maghrebin union, to encompass the new republic, Tunisia and Morocco? What consequences will the coming of this new State have on the fragile balance of power in Africa?

When asked, the Algerian leaders are quick to explain the nature of the power they want to establish. They all answer that they want their country to be unitarian (no federalism based on communities, as in Lebanon, or on territorial principles, as in Switzerland), really independent and free of diplomatic orientation (not bound, for example, by the Atlantic Pact), and 'socialist'.

Socialist? But how far? Are they thinking of a planned economy and rapid industrialisation? Or of some rural Marxism such as the sort Fidel Castro is trying to introduce in Cuba, an attempt which deeply interests all young Africans? But answers vary according to the people asked, as the Algerian revolution is far too complex not to shelter the widest range of tendencies, from

'Bourguibism' to 'Nasserism', from the admirers of the Chinese experiment to the admirers of the Guinean one. In fact, the most frequent answer is this: "As long as the fighting persists, we cannot put forward any specific programme. It might divide us at the very moment that unity is vital. We will see later. . . ."

If these answers reveal anything at all, they reveal a strong, although not too precise a tendency towards some form of socialism, mostly agrarian, based on land reform, reconversion of investments into industries, rigorous planning and mobilisation of the masses.

What is probably more important is the desire for that diplomatic independence, 'non-engagement' if not neutralism, which is so common among the newly emancipated peoples. This intention may, of course, clash with French wishes, and more manifestly and explosively so than plans for land reform or the redistribution of riches. For the association General de Gaulle will try to make the Algerians accept necessarily includes diplomatic independence; but it also includes certain common responsibilities towards security and foreign policy. Is it on this particular issue that the hardest battle is to be fought at Evian? Perhaps. 'Bases' have had a bad reputation in the Afro-Asian world, especially since Suez. . . .

The French, of course, have not yet surrendered the principle of 'association'. This is not only a response to clear realities in the social and economic situation of Algeria, but it also makes it impossible for General de Gaulle to conclude the war and recognise independence without having his action considered as an abandonment or a disaster. Whether it is a transitory formula, a diplomatic trick, or a régime corresponding to the reality of Franco-Algerian relations, the association of the two sovereign States will be the objective that the French negotiators will propose to the Algerians as the common principle both Paris and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (G.P.R.A.) could present to the voters in a referendum, following a formula which General de Gaulle made more or less official on May 8. In an article published on the same day by the '*Gazette de Lausanne*', the Swiss journalist, Charles H. Favrod, who at present appears the best informed observer of Algerian intentions, wrote that the F.L.N. leaders were considering this offer as one of the possible solutions, provided it really preserved their independence.

The Algerians will be able to experience such an association

to a certain extent during the "transitory period" which the Evian negotiations have to fix and which would make it possible to bring back some calm to Algeria under a joint government until the referendum. During these 12 or 18 months, it may be possible to see if, after a cruel seven years' war and in spite of hatreds accumulated between the two communities, co-operation can still be accomplished which may lead to a time-honoured association.

To many Frenchmen, at least to those who only consider peace in Algeria as a liquidation of all overseas engagements and an opportunity to concentrate upon the development of France, this formula of association could mean a regrouping of Paris, Tunis, Rabat, and Algiers. It would lead up to a 'great Maghreb', leaning in freedom on France. It is known that, during his recent trip to the United States, M. Bourguiba recalled that his aim was to get the three countries together and that he was ready to head them if he was asked to do so. The Tunisian leader added that the links of such a community with France could only be economic and cultural. Did he really reject any forms of permanent political co-operation? Certain previous declarations he has made enable us to doubt it. The rather hectic situation bound to emerge with the looming of this new State in the middle of the Maghreb may induce the Tunisian and Moroccan governments to look for assistance, stability and friends on a firmer ground.

The Maghreb, if at all formed, cannot help turning towards Paris. Not only because geography encourages it, but also because economics advise it and because French culture is deeply rooted in all three constituent countries, which share the same language and a recent history lived together under the French colonial system. Algeria alone could perhaps be more naturally independent from France than her two poor neighbours, whose need for assistance will doubtless be greater at first if they join their poverty than if they play their own cards separately. This may explain why a number of neo-colonialist elements, both French and European, so strongly wish for the creation of the Maghrebin union.

With Nigeria, of all the countries achieving emancipation, Algeria is the least poor in the middle cadres—graduates, foremen, local administrators—which are the most apt to accept the responsibilities inherent in freedom if its unity is to be preserved, once the problem of the presence and co-operation of Europeans

can be settled peacefully. A dynamic country, whose struggle towards self-government has held the whole world's attention and raised the regard of the younger nations, Algeria has already played an important diplomatic part at international conferences, especially inter-African ones. If the Chinese revolution had been able to "learn its way about" on an internal level in Yeran long before getting to power, the Algerian Republic will have served its diplomatic apprenticeship on the international stage. Yet this may be dangerous. Algeria's prestige, a little artificial, external, may create illusions and produce internal disappointments. It is less difficult to make a brilliant speech in Accra or Cairo or win a vote at the United Nations than smoothly to run a country or provide work for the peasants.

But those who have gone through the rough experience of the resistance movement will overcome such temptations and weakness more easily than others. After all, men who have gained their freedom by such dangerous means may well outshine those who achieved it after a few months imprisonment like Dr. Nkrumah, or on a bold vote like Sékou Touré, or after a successful conspiracy like Colonel Nasser. Men coming down from mountains, whether in Kenya or in Kabylia, always make a great impression on the people of the plane.

(*Translated from the French*)