

Algeria, cont'd

Lecture No. 0038 (April 29, 1974)

Transcript digitized in 2026 by the [Harvey Goldberg Center](#), a project of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Department of History.

Preliminary remarks

... The other thing has to do with the fact that it's been an immensely long year — that is, it began in August, if you recall, the academic year — and I am just very flamed out. And you know, it seems to me that it's come to the point where everything's really moving over my nerve ends, and something's got to give. And I think it's obviously the society [*laughter*].

Anyways, I'll note very briefly that the issue that I raised to you and the interrogations that we have made over the most recent period — now, it is, you know, any university administration (or the structures of bureaucracy anywhere) are really an undifferentiated Kafkaesque universe: you walk in but you get no answers; nobody says yes or no; you don't know who has what, who ordered who to do what, and so forth and so on. It's all one of those strange, mystical things, like being packed every day in the earth in an igloo in Nome, Alaska, obviously.

It suffices to say, however, that the constabulary on campus acted with a certain kind of initiative, apparently, in terms of sending people over to investigate that particular film which was banned [the 1973 X-rated film *It Happened in Hollywood*]. And then they ran a report. Now, those people are not great experts on film, and even the content of that film seems to have left them a little bit mystified. And consequently, if things were done on the basis of that, then I would think it is rather serious.

We have, by sheer coincidence, the reporter who broke the whole thing in *The Capital Times* here [Ron McCrea]. Do you want to say anything? [*McCrea simply replies no; laughter*].

I'm sort of glad I hadn't shown you the film [*laughter*], and I assure you that I'd be acting my normal self when I'm Jack the Ripper [*laughter, applause*]. In fact, I'd find it very boring, like most... [*inaudible; laughter*].

Lecture

Why linger yet one last minute on the question of the trajectory of the Algerian revolution and the struggle for Algerian independence? Why spend any more time discussing that particular question? For a very good reason, and that is that we have no more searing commentary than

Algeria — not even India, not even Ghana, not even Egypt — on the tragic limitations of decolonization.

You see, that Algeria is a commentary. It is a commentary on the brute fact that national fronts are, after all, coalitions of antagonistic classes that are brought together only temporarily and in an ephemeral way to do a specific thing: to break the bonds of a colonial rule. That it is a commentary, in the second place, on the illusion that that kind of a national front can really convert itself into a revolutionary government, and can chart the road to socialism without really having at its center a revolutionary party that is disciplined, that really is serious, and that consequently can control and dominate that movement. And Algeria is, in the third place, a commentary on some kind of a very brute axiom. And that is that the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie are the leaders, generally, of national front movements, and that what they look forward to is an independence in which they control the places and the honors in the new society; and that, consequently, once that independence is established, what they do is to contain the political capacity of the masses, and to begin to defuse and to drain away its revolutionary energies.

And it is a commentary, finally, on what is surely one of the most important and brute axioms about our contemporary world. And that is that imperialist powers, after all, have had little to fear from formal independence in the Third World; that decolonization and neo-colonialism have gone hand-in-hand; that it has been perfectly easy for the ruling classes in the imperialist countries to co-opt even those leaders, after all, who claim to be rather socialist in their outlook, like an [Ahmed] Ben Bella or like a [Kwame] Nkrumah — and if not to co-opt them, then to oust them, and finally to get more favorable regimes.

What I am talking about is fundamental to your understanding. And that is that the deep contradictions in this world — the contradictions in this world between rich nations and poor, between those that are the underdeveloped societies and those that are the consumer-mad predators in the world — that those contradictions will never be resolved until there is the second revolutionary round in the Third World that moves from independence to socialist space. And it is in those terms that the question of Algeria becomes important to us. And we talk about the tragedy of Algeria, and what we really mean is that ideological confusion which is really at the very heart of that whole enterprise of the struggle for independence, and then, finally, of the new nation — an ideological confusion that we can come to grips with in a number of ways.

Think of it, for example, in the first place, in terms of the fact that all of those nationalist parties and groups in Algeria until the year 1954 could not and would not pose the question of armed insurrection, of an armed struggle for independence. Remember that those organizations were urban-based; that they were cut off from the rural masses; that they were dominated by bourgeois

or petty-bourgeois elements that really were looking for place and honor in a new and independent society. And you surely get that with the party of Ferhat Abbas. Ferhat Abbas formed in March of 1946 his party called Friends of the Manifesto of Algeria, and that party was composed of bourgeois in its cadre. And there were the liberal intellectuals, they were the ones who were the functionaries in the French administration, and what they wanted was to avoid confrontations like Sétif in 1945. They wanted to sit in those elected assemblies and use those as a pressure group in order to force the French to negotiate.

But what is interesting to us is that it's not only those *moyens-bourgeois* who are that way, but also the party of Messali Hadj goes that particular direction too. And that MTLD — that Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, which Messali Hadj founds in November of 1946 — is petty-bourgeois in its leadership and in its rank-and-file cadre, and comes to be increasingly cut off from the idea of direct action until it, too, ends up wanting those elected parliaments in which it can sit and consequently force the French to negotiate.

And, you see, that all of that growth and all of that foundered on the rock of a very hard French reality: that the French would not negotiate. And that was apparent in that tragic effort to satisfy the Algerians with the statute of the 20th of September of 1947. The audacity of it — that you come through that resistance, and you come through the Second World War, and you offer the Algerian people that? And that law, after all, which had a resident minister superior to an assembly in Algeria, which did not even permit the Algerian Arabs to have more than 50% of the people in that assembly. No, no; it couldn't be accepted. And not only could it not be accepted, but it couldn't even be a forum for propaganda. Because in 1948, when there were elections to that assembly and when those nationalists might have won, and when they might have won and when they might have had a place to stand, it is a good Socialist resident minister, Edmond Naegelen, who comes to Algeria and fixes the elections, and makes them so fraudulent that the nationalists have no place to stand. And that poses the issue of the armed struggle, and there is no other way.

And that comes in 1954, and it comes with a division or schism in the MTLD, in the party of Messali Hadj. And the younger cadre — petty-bourgeois but more militant, hungry, angry — they now mount a new organization called the CRUA (the Comité révolutionnaire d'unité et d'action, the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action), which goes to the hills of Algeria and mounts an insurrection in November 1954. But look at that, because the ambiguity is built into that. They didn't go like the Chinese Communist Party, they didn't go like the Vietnamese Communist Party, with any idea of who would join them, how many or whether they could succeed; it was a piece of adventure, and that it worked only showed how desperate the peasantry of Algeria was. But note it well: there is no real party that is at the root or the back of this particular insurrection in the Aurès mountains in November of 1954.

Or approach that question of ambiguity in a second way: approach it from the point of view of the strange coalition of classes that gathers under the banner of the FLN. Or think of it in terms of the Congress Party in India; think of it in terms of [Gamal Abdel] Nasser's party in Egypt. And they're all the same: that strange coalition of classes, gathering under the banner of the national grouping or the national party. Look: that what imperialism does in a country is not to create development — we have said that a thousand times — but what it does do is to dislocate the traditional class structure; it makes for a bastardized class structure.

And so in Algeria under French imperialism, the class structure is differentiated. And you do have a certain number of large Arab landowners who own more than 50 hectare of land, who are left the land that the French *colons* don't want because it's inferior; you do have a certain number of liberal professionals; you do have a whole raft of petty-bourgeois types who have to work in the offices for the French. And so in 1962, at the time of independence, in an active population — in other words, the employed population of 2.5 million in Algeria — there were 50,000 bourgeois, there were 25,000 landowners of 50 hectare or more, and there were 170,000 petty-bourgeois. You see, that is interesting, because it means that you will have a problem if you get a revolution that really reflects the masses and does not reflect the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois aspirations of these particular types.

And that FLN becomes terribly confused in 1955 and '56, when Ferhat Abbas and his party join it, and they began to dilute the populism of the countryside; they dilute what is going on in the mountains where the peasants are getting radicalized. And back in the cities, the FLN itself is, after all, a compromise with the bourgeoisie. You see the point.

The point is that the Algerian revolution will have to go in one of two directions. Either there will have to be an interior struggle in that liberation front, and you will have to have a revolutionary avant-garde that will oust those bourgeois elements and speak for the mass; or the Algerian revolution will be what it was and is: a struggle of clans — a struggle of clans for power on the basis of a struggle for independence and for liberation.

And it is fascinating that there is no program of the Algerian revolution until June of 1962 — that you go through the entire seven-year war and there is no program of what a postwar Algeria will be; that all one talks about is independence. And so then you get, in June of '62, a meeting in Tripoli in which the Executive Committee of the FLN meets. And they have to, because the Évian Accords have been signed on the 18th of March of 1962, and those Évian Accords, after all, give Algeria her independence. Well, hell! If you are independent, you have to know what you are, and consequently they go to Tripoli to decide. And it is our good friend Mostefa Lacheraf who writes that program. And it's tough, because the program is a terrific criticism of what the FLN has been. And I didn't know anything about that, and I had been really militating

in France with those people who were for that FLN and taking what own, piddling risks I was taking, not knowing anything about that absence, even of sheer conception. And Lacheraf writes it out. And he says, you see, the trouble with the FLN is that it is authoritarian, it has no real confidence in the mass; that it is rhetorical and manneristic. It talks revolution, but it doesn't give it a content — that it is really cut off from the masses.

And, you see, what Lacheraf was doing was summing up a reality of the 1950s, because that war of liberation is cut into two chronological periods: it is cut into the period '54 to '58, and then in the period '58 to '62. And if you go back, just even most superficially, and see the problems, you understand what Lacheraf is talking about in 1962, and you understand a lot about what went wrong with that revolution. Between '54 [and '58], it was obviously a question of going to the hills and forming the "six wilayas" — the six wilayas, which were the military districts. And the militants of the FLN went out into Algeria and they divided the land into those wilayas, and they began a grassroots movement in which the cadre were close to the people. And it is the populist period, between '54 and '58. But it operated on two illusions that got it into very deep trouble. One illusion was that if you organize the countryside, that the French army would really give up, and that was surely not true. The French army hadn't yet developed a tactic for guerrilla warfare, but it was settled into those cities.

And so you know what happened, because you've seen that film *The Battle of Algiers*: there came an over-optimism in which the leadership thought it could fight pitched battles in the cities with the French. And it got clobbered in 1957 and '58, and had to take to the hills again. And the other illusion: that the French left, in some manner, would operate around the FLN, that it would really support it. And, of course, the organized left wouldn't, and wouldn't touch it. And it is one of the great commentaries that really enriches your understanding of May of 1968 in France. The Socialist of the Party, no — the Socialist Party was a progenitor of that war. It was Guy Mollet in 1956 who was the architect of the policy of pacification; it was Robert Lacoste, a Socialist, who went down to be the most repressive resident minister. No, no; not the SFIO [French Section of the Workers' International] at all. But what about the Communists?

Well, the Communists: they supported full powers for the government in 1956. They voted those extraordinary powers. And in that very same year, when there were conscription riots in France — something that there had never been — when the young conscripts refused to go into the army and made riots at the conscription centers, they were attacked by the Communists. The Communists, after all, didn't want to get, as they say, too far in front of the mass. And the mass was for Algeria. And if you are a mass party, you must go where the mass is, even if it's guarding concentration camps. And consequently, the Party said no. And there was even division in the Party. Now, I lowered my voice because this shouldn't get out [*laughter*]. There was division in the Party, and it came from the famous Sorbonne cell, the cell in the University of Paris, where

they were close to the young people and close to a feeling against the war. And by 1958, in June, the Sorbonne cell sent a letter off to the Party saying, "We know it's difficult to oppose the war in Algeria because the masses are what they are, but that's the function of the Communist Party." The leadership didn't answer that, and so the Sorbonne cell published it, and of course the resolution of that crisis was to expel the people who wrote the letter. So the Party would not support that.

And, parenthetically, I had that very discussion with somebody in the Party in 1960, in a conversation that was my first real confrontation with this intransigent position: that if you are an electoral party, you really do what the people are trained culturally and acculturated to do. I'd been invited to dinner at the house of a man named Paul Vienney, who at that time was the lawyer for the CGT [General Confederation of Labor]; he was a Communist. And in the course of the conversation — well, you know I'm a reasonably polite type, and consequently, you know, there's an old line of [Georges] Clemenceau which has always been a standing kind of directive for me, which runs that if you are invited to dinner, you don't spit in the soup — so, I mean, I wasn't going to say, "You fascist, why don't you support Algeria?" *[laughter]*. But I said it less firmly, and got around to it, at any rate. And he said, "Oh, but you know," he said, "after all, we are a party of the people, and we cannot really detach ourselves from them." And I said, "Yes, but aren't you also a party to teach the people or to raise consciousness in some way?" He said, "Yes, but that comes slowly." I said, "Well, this is 1960, you've been in business forty years. What have you been doing?" He said, "Well," he said, "Monsieur, you must understand that there's also the Socialist Party, and we want an alliance with it, and we cannot offend their electors too much." So it all got wound up, you see, in that electoral politics.

And the FLN really operated on that illusion. That gets you into the second period, you see, between '58 and '62. Because that is the period that's crucial, and what Lacheraf is talking about. Because then it is perfectly clear that there will not be a quick victory: that the war is a war of attrition, and it may last a long time, and that perhaps you will really have to negotiate. So that what happens in that period is that certain foci of power develop within the structure of this liberation struggle, and those foci of power are exactly what I call the clans that begin to go into conflict with each other. You get established, on the 19th of September of 1958, the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, the GPRA. And that is established because De Gaulle — who has come to power by seizing power in May of 1958, and establishing the Fifth Republic — because De Gaulle has been dashing around, talking about extending liberties to the Algerian Arabs; in other words, co-opting them into the French system. And so the Algerians feel that, to block that solution off, they must say that they already have a provisional government, and they establish one in September of 1958. But that provisional government is based, of course, in Tunis, and it is diplomatic; in other words, it is very remote from the struggle. And it has a delegation at the UN, and it thinks of itself really as the elite of this revolution.

Then there is the Army of National Liberation. And the Army of National Liberation, a second foci. And that Army of National Liberation is bordered on the Algerian-Tunisian border under the command of Colonel [Houari] Boumédiène, of whom we hear much more later, of course. And Colonel Boumédiène is himself interested in taking power, and considers the general staff of this liberation army to be another focal point of power. Then you have the six wilayas, the six military districts, and each of the commanders there feels himself entitled, really, to be the director of a new Algeria.

And finally, there are the famous "five prisoners": the five prisoners, the ones who the French seized in 1956 in one of those incredible episodes, you know, that shoots through this kind of war. That there were five nationalist leaders of the FLN who were flying from Rabat in Morocco to Tunis, and the plane was piloted by a Frenchman who was getting instructions from military headquarters in Algiers, and took the five nationalist leaders to Algiers and not to Tunis. And there they were all arrested, including Ben Bella, and put into a French jail, and they sat the war out in a French prison. And when they come out, they're *les pures* — they're the "pures" because they haven't been involved in anything in those years, and they constitute yet another focal point of power. It's a mess [*laughter*].

The result is: you have a government ultimately founded without very much of a program, on the basis of conflicting interest. Does it have an ideology? Lacheraf gives it one in that Triple-E Program of June of 1962, and it is a program — roughly socialist. Because what it says is that Algeria must quickly overcome the legacy of colonialism. By which we mean, of course, development; by which the program talks of industrialization; it talks of planning; it talks of nationalization. It also talks about populism, about the fact that the people must have power — that there must be some effective participation of the mass in power.

But you read that program carefully and you see what's wrong. Because in that Triple-E Program — for all there is talk about overcoming subordination, overcoming feudalism, and so forth — there is nothing about politics. In other words, we don't know what kind of a party will direct this; we don't know how it will create the political education or the political consciousness of the Algerians; and we surely don't know what kinds of institutions the masses will manifest themselves through. And what happened?

What is the story of Algeria — *en bref*, very briefly — from independence proclaimed the 5th of July of 1962 down to now? Look at it this way: that there are certain variables that you cannot deny. One variable is that it's not the kind of revolution that will exclude imperialism; in other words, that the French have maintained their foothold in Algeria. And I read you from one of the negotiators at Évian, Jean de Broglie, in 1968, six years after the accords. And he says, "France pinned her hopes on a political solution, which she hoped would give her a privileged place in

Algeria. Six years after the Accord, we can say that, in terms of economic and technical relations, this French hope has been more than realized." In other words, what he's saying is that the French oil interests in the Sahara were surely not touched. And those French oil interests, very rich, because those royalties paid to the Algerian government only half of what the average was of royalties in the Middle Eastern area. Add to that the fact that, in return for technical aid — \$800,000 worth of technical aid in the first three years of Algerian independence — France fixed her most favored nation status in Algeria very fundamentally. So that by the time you come to the end of the decade, by 1970 — note it — that 75% of all of the trade composition of Algeria is with France in terms of her exports and imports. And that means that the French position remains very solid.

Consider, in the second place, that the avarice of the bourgeoisie really never was abated: that actually it was whetted, and it manifested itself from the beginning. That there was, you see, in 1962 and '63, a tremendous exodus of the French from Algeria; that the *pieds-noirs* left to the tune of almost a million. And they left behind them land and buildings; they left stores; they left cinemas; they left landholdings; they left lodgings and so forth. And all of those were placed upon a market. And I tell you that, in the early months of Algerian independence, there's something that really is like a paradigm — and it's very painful — which is a transactional spirit: people are buying at low prices, grabbing up things for which they'll get a tremendous profit or which will yield them tremendous profit. So that the cafes and the shops and the cinemas of the city, all grabbed up now by this Algerian bourgeoisie. And those landholders began to take over the land that the French had left and that they were able to buy at a very low price.

But, you see, they were blocked by the peasantry itself. In other words, the landless peasants began to occupy vacant land already in the summer of 1962: began to go into that vacant land and simply make collectives, simply make cooperative farming, refused to get out. And note that, from the 24th of August 1962, the provisional executive of the Algerian government makes a decree that says that there can be no random occupation of the land, that all of this land that is left has to go at ordinary market transactional relationships. It already is a mouthpiece for that Algerian bourgeoisie.

But we know it's not that simple. Because, you see, on the 26th of October of 1962, the prime minister is Ahmed Ben Bella. And the Ben Bella period, which goes until the 19th of June of 1965, that's supposed to be the socialist period of Algerian history. And, you see, all of this has to do with Nasser; all of this has to do with Nehru; all of this has to do with Nkrumah; it has to do with all of these *soi-disant* socialists of the Third World. And they all are, after all, those kinds of people who have no real parties behind them, and who have as much demagoguery about the question of socialism as they have programs. So much, then, for my admiration for Ben Bella. But it suffices to say that Ben Bella — okay, good type — became prime minister in September

of 1962. And he makes, you know, that extraordinary speech on the 29th of March of 1963, an extraordinary speech on radio and TV which launches what are called the March Decrees. And that's the famous "worker control" decree: "Algeria will be socialist, but with its own style; Algeria will be socialist with worker control." All of the things everybody ever wanted, right there in North Africa.

And the speech said that all of the vacant land, all of the vacant properties of the cities, all of the vacant industrial enterprises, plus the enterprises seized from traitors and collaborators during the war — all told, 2.7 million hectare of land, 400 industrial enterprises — they all are the socialist sector of Algerian society, and they will be anchored in worker control.

And how to evaluate that? Evaluate it, first, in terms of the fact that the reality never touched that myth. That to this very day, the major sectors of the Algerian economy are not in the socialist sector, but in the private sector: that in land, in industry, and surely in commerce. Note, secondly, that the capacity of workers on the land or in these industrial enterprises to understand what worker control was was at the nadir: there was no real political education, no party to animate these people. Sure, they were told that they were supposed to go into the *assemblées générales des travailleurs*, into general assemblies of workers, and these on the land and in the factories would really run the thing. But, you see, the state then sent in a director to each enterprise, and so these workers simply felt that they were working for the state rather than working for some kind of a private employer. And add to that the fact that that socialist sector — and it's unfortunate to say — has been the least efficient sector in Algeria: that there has not been technological proficiency; that there has not been the making of skills that would enable that socialist sector to work.

What we are talking about is a kind of falsification of how you build a socialist society...

[audio cuts out]

... the cul-de-sac is that the *élan*, the terrific kind of revolutionary spirit that is born in the war, dissipates and dies. What proof do you need more than that when there is a coup on the 19th July 1965 — and [Abdelaziz] Bouteflika and Boumédiène lead a military coup against Ben Bella, and take over and really shift the whole regime to the right — that there is no popular reaction? No more than there was when Nkrumah fell [in Ghana]; no more than there was when Sukarno [in Indonesia] fell; and so it's a cul-de-sac. So it gets back to that very interesting idea about the fact that you really have to go to a second round in the Third World, and that the rumblings of it are really worth listening to. But let me say one more word before we leave Algeria.

It's a funny thing that, you see, if it's a cul-de-sac in Algeria, it was a breakthrough in France —

one of those strange ironies — a breakthrough in terms of political perception, a breakthrough in terms of political patterns. And since I don't really have time to discuss with you the whole programmatic of the Singer book [*Prelude to Revolution* by Daniel Singer], it is extremely important that you should note that May '68 did not happen in thin air: that there is a history that goes behind it; that there are other ways in the making; and those other ways begin during the Algerian War.

Let me tell you something parenthetical, you see, a little personal story — and I don't know where I was supposed to go with that [*laughter*] — but it suffices to say that I had that feeling, you see, about Vietnam. And I had the feeling that no matter what the Vietnamese got out of their particular struggle, that they would never get as much as we got out of it: that the Viet Cong was really going to do us more to start on a path and give us more cultural good than anything that was imaginable in American history.

And consequently, when Hồ Chí Minh died [in 1969], I was in Paris, and I was asked to go up and speak at a huge kind of war thing, or commemoration, for Hồ Chí Minh. And Madame Binh was going to be there and Xuân Thủy [both North Vietnamese negotiators at the Paris Peace Talks], and all of those people. And I got to that hall, the Mutualité [conference center], and it was *bondé*, as the French say — it was just absolutely packed to the rafters. And when I saw that, that didn't bother me, but I saw those blue coats and I didn't like that, and all these cops were everywhere around, and the room was just kind of an inferno when I went in. And I'll tell you, when I speak in public in French, I'm really very uptight. Because, you know, I have a reasonable speed when I speak, but in — you know, in a foreign tongue you get always into all these immense kinds of dead ends and you have to work your way out [*laughter*]. And so my French is certainly this way.

And consequently, I was really — I mean, there was just tremendous turmoil in my stomach when I went into that thing. And I was sitting there in the front with Maria Jolas, who is just an absolutely great woman — she's a real *force de la nature* — this is the woman who was the executrix of the Joyce papers, and yet has done more as a woman of eighty-two for the peace movement against colonial wars in Europe than any American, certainly, residing and living there. Anyway, Maria was there; she's an old Kentucky woman, but she's lived sixty years in France so it rubbed off a bit. And anyway, I was sitting with Maria, and she said, "How do you feel?" And I said, "I'm just scared... I'm scared stiff!" And she said, "No, no," and she said, "it'll be alright," she said. And then she whispered something in my ear, which I had heard only attributed to Muhammad Ali, but apparently it comes from all Kentucky people. And she said, "Dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee" [*laughter, applause*].

But the point — the point of the lecture was to go there and to say that the reason that I was

commemorating Hồ Chí Minh was that I had thought he had discovered America. And there was this pitter in the audience. And then I explained myself, which was that fundamentally, until somebody forces you to look in the mirror, until you take a real good cultural look yourself, until you're forced to stop — and stop running especially, which is, of course, the great routine in America — then you never have an opportunity to assess what the options are, where you came from, where you might possibly go. In that sense, Hồ Chí Minh was far more the father of America, or the discoverer of America, than Columbus or Washington or any of those people who go around under false pretenses [*laughter*].

But it suffices to say, anyway, that that is the conception that I have about this Algerian thing: that ultimately, if it was a cul-de-sac in Algeria, the French really discovered something about it. You see, the parties were so atrocious. The parties wouldn't handle the question of Algeria, and so people who understood what was at stake had to go outside the parties. The capacity to criticize electoral machines, the capacity to criticize traditional political behavior, the capacity to invent and devise extra-parliamentary behavior — all of which is so very rich in the period of May of '68 — all of that you find in the Algerian experience.

And there's something parenthetical about that and, it seems to me, that you ought to understand. And that is that if a cause is lost — as surely the struggle of that Algeria was lost for those militants who were against it — what happens is that the lessons that are learned in the struggle may really well beneath the surface; they may be like some kind of a stream, but at a later time they do surface. And I tell you that because somebody at lunch yesterday really challenged me on the question of why it is, for example, that after continuing these things — when I had seen these great clashes and these great movements of the period of the late '60s, and it all seems so somnolent and so forth at this point — that I really have this feeling about underground streams, and that the *dramatis personae* in the second act are never the same as they are in the first, and that the process finally leads to a reactivation with even more relevance of those lessons that are learned at an earlier time.

Well, essentially, you see, what happened as far as the French are concerned — when you begin to link Algeria and May of '68 — what happened was that, first, you got in '56 that rather ad hoc and random action of young men at the conscription centers simply saying they wouldn't go. And that lasted for about six months until it died down. But what was more important was the emergence of a very radical intellectual left.

You know, I lived in France a great deal in those years, and there was this kind of strange de-politization in the Fifth Republic; De Gaulle had made that a de-politized country. But there was feverish political space. If you took the Latin Quarter in those days (the area that went from [Université] Paris-II all the way down to Saint-Germain-des-Prés), it was absolutely a fever sport

of political activity, and that because of these ad hoc intellectual left-wing groups who no longer were *bons*, as the French called them; in other words, just great intellectuals signing petitions, but were down in the street. The point is that you can't really be a militant intellectual until you know what it is to be with other people, and until you know what it is to practice something; you can't learn about that just by reading. And consequently, there was a freer intelligentsia of artists and of writers and of people who were out of the university — much freer than those liberal professionals who had traditionally signed petitions.

And the issue that really roused them was the issue of torture. Now, the issue of torture surfaced with the case of Maurice Audin, and the Audin case really becomes something of an important turning point in the whole history of how you behave politically. Maurice Audin was a young mathematician, and he was teaching in the faculty at Algiers; he was a mathematics assistant in the faculty in the University of Algiers. And he was called down, of course, to military police headquarters on the 11th of June of 1957. And he was called down because he had been in favor of the FLN, and they thought he was running a certain kind of network of support for the FLN. That's the 11th of June. The 21st of June, his wife is informed that he escaped, and they didn't know where he was. The 4th of July, she issued a warrant against X — which is all you can do when it's the government — against X, and that was against the military police for having voluntarily slaughtered her husband.

Well, that didn't get back to France until a man named Henri Alleg wrote a book which really made the day. And the book that Henri Alleg — who himself was a newspaper editor, and the editor of a paper called *Alger républicain*; who was a Communist, just as Audin was a Communist — and Alleg was also picked up in June of 1957, brought down, and tortured mercilessly by the military police. But he got out, and he wrote a book about it. And the book is called *La Question (The Question)*, the English translation of which I have here — which was really a contraband item in France; you were caught with *La Question*, you went off to jail. And there was an introduction by [philosopher Jean-Paul] Sartre in this particular book that really goes to the heart of the matter. Listen to this:

"During the war, when the English radio and the clandestine press spoke of the massacre of Oradour, we watched the German soldiers walking inoffensively down the street and would say to ourselves, 'They look like us. How can they act as they do?' And we were proud of ourselves for not understanding. Today, we know there was nothing to understand.

"The decline has been gradual and imperceptible. But now, when we raise our heads and look into the mirror, we see an unfamiliar and hideous reflection: ourselves, appalled. The French are discovering this terrible truth: that if nothing can protect a nation against

itself — neither its traditions, nor its loyalties, nor its laws — and if fifteen years are enough to transform victims into executioners, then its behavior is not more than a matter of opportunity and occasion. Anybody, at any time in this society, may equally find himself victim or executioner."

Which was right to the heart of the matter. If that's the kind of society you have, why are you better than the ones whom you resisted against in the course of the Second World War? But the interesting thing is that Aleg mentioned Audin, mentioned those torturers, and consequently it got out into the French Party. Now, the Party should have handled it; it was a Communist Party militant who was at stake. But the Party doesn't like little ad hoc groups, because others that are not Communist get in them, and they can't control it or handle it. In addition to which, they had just been defending repression in Hungary, and consequently it was a bit embarrassing. In addition, they wanted to make a *front populaire* with the socialists, and it was embarrassing to talk about Lacoste; they kept hands off. And so the people went outside the Party. That's the point.

You see, we don't have a Party, and it's a play. But if you have too much Party, it's the other play. And with the French, it was all machine and all rigid. And so at the end of 1957, they founded the Comité Maurice Audin, the Maurice Audin Committee, which was headed up by Pierre Vidal-Naquet and that great mathematician Laurent Schwartz — terribly courageous guys — and it became a clearing house for information on torture. Finally, January of 1959, they give the truth to the public that on that 21st of June of '57, Audin had been killed by strangulation by the head of the military police himself. And so a lot of little newspapers grew up in the wake of that, and papers that were not licenced and movies that were not licenced. And then you go to the next level.

And the next level is to break the law. One of the best ways to militate; it's like baptism [laughter]. And consequently, there was, quite obviously, something for these Cartesian French to think about. As much as they had rhetoric, they had form, and the form was being broken — and note it well for May of '68. And what I'm talking about are networks (*réseaux*, as they're called) to help deserters and to help draft dodgers. And for the French, trained in that heavy patriotism and loyalism, that was really something. And so, you see, in 1960, in July of 1960, they discover around Lyon a network called Jeunes résistants, the Young Resistant Network. And they bring several people to trial, and they send them off to jail. But the big thing for us was [Francis] Jeanson. And I've told you about Jeanson, the one who wrote a book called *L'Algérie hors la loi* in 1954; Jeanson, a philosophy professor, and around him a real network to run guns to the FLN, to hide their militants in France. But more than that: to encourage young Frenchmen not to go into the army, or if they did go into the army, to encourage them to resist, and finally really to desert the army.

And so finally, on the 5th of September of 1960, the French brought twenty-two people to trial of the Jeanson network, of whom sixteen were French, six were Algerian. Jeanson was not among them because he was in hiding, and they never did pick him up at that particular time. Now, once that trial opened, Sartre made a deposition. And it's really an interesting thing, because you see a certain sort of style beginning to develop here. And he sends this deposition to the Jeanson trial: "If Jeanson had asked me to run weapons to the FLN or to hide Algerian militants or to house a French deserter, I would have done so without hesitation. The left is impotent, and it will remain so if it doesn't openly support the only force which is struggling against the common enemy of justice in Algeria and France — and that force is the FLN." In other words, what was being said is that you have to do exactly what some people finally broke through and did in the United States: said, "Let's hope that the Vietnamese liberation front wins the war, because it really defeats the same and the common enemy." And that's what Sartre said here, in the Jeanson trial, here in 1960.

But, you see, what exploded and what made it fascinating: that once that trial opened, came the famous *Declaration of the 121*. Every French intellectual who you know and admire is on that petition of the 121. It's a petition that was drawn up originally in July of 1960 by Dionys Mascolo, who was a sociologist. And in that petition or in that declaration, it is declared that this war is in nobody's interest but a kind of fascist military force. And consequently, it ends the *Declaration of the 121* with these very ringing words:

"Today, it is mainly the will of the army which is perpetuating this criminal and absurd war. We therefore respect, and we consider it justifiable, to refuse to take up arms against the Algerian people. We respect, and we consider it justified, for Frenchmen to provide aid and protection to oppressed Algerians and to do so in the name of the French people. The cause of the Algerian people, which is contributing in such a decisive factor to bring down the colonial system, is the cause of all free human beings."

One hundred twenty-one people signed that.

Now, immediately, all the people who were *fonctionnaires* — all the people who were in state employ and signed that petition of the 121 — were dismissed from their positions. And that included some of the great professors in the University of Paris system. And so you get, for example, Laurent Schwartz. Now, Laurent Schwartz had just won a Nobel Prize in mathematics, but that didn't matter; even though he was professor at the École polytechnique at that particular time, it didn't matter to the man who was at that time the minister of the army, or the minister of war. And that minister of war at that time — I mean, life is so circular; it's got such a great kind of coherence — that minister of war was Pierre Messmer. And Messmer sends this letter of revocation to Laurent Schwartz, in which he says in this particular letter, "It would be contrary to

good sense and to any standard of honor to permit you, Monsieur Schwartz, to continue as a professor in the École polytechnique."

And this is the answer that Schwartz writes to Messmer when he's fired from his job:

"You have just fired me from the École polytechnique. I regret having to abandon my students, but that's hardly the question. You have felt it necessary to accompany your decision with a letter saying that it would be 'contrary to good sense and to any standard of honor' to permit me to continue teaching. If I have signed the *Declaration of 121*, it is in part for having seen torture go unpunished year after year and the torturers rewarded. My student, Maurice Audin, was tortured and assassinated in June of 1957, and it is you, *Monsieur le ministre*, who signed the promotion papers for Captain [André] Charbonnier, who strangled him. Coming from a minister who has taken such responsibilities, your considerations on honor leaves me cold" [*murmuring*].

It suffices to say, at any rate, that Vidal-Naquet lost his position in that particular thing. But, you see, it was a kind of confrontation; it was a kind of correction; it got out of the idea that you must always wait either for the electoral act or for some kind of program to be drafted by a party leadership.

All of which really lacks one element, and that is to move to collective action. And collective action comes through UNEF [Union nationale des étudiants de France], and note that well, because that is very closely linked to May of '68. UNEF is the National Union of French Students, U-N-E-F. And in 1956, it passes what are called the *politicos* as against the corporatists. The corporatists were the ones who wanted to keep the student organization just on student questions; the political people won control in 1956. By 1960, UNEF, the student organization, is beginning to think, "It's so late, it's so late, and nobody is doing anything about Algeria. There must be an animation; let it come from the student movement." They begin to make contact with Algerian students, and then they plan, in October of 1960, the first mass manifestation in Paris against the war, in which the banner will read, "Let no Frenchman fight in this war." And they call on all the other organizations, and of course the Communist Party thinks they're crazy, won't have anything to do with it; the CGT calls them adventurers.

And finally, the state steps in and says, "Look, you say you want a manifestation in the Place de la Bastille. We can't let you do that." And so they say, "We're going to do it anyway." And finally, there's negotiation, and it will be in Mutualité, in that hall. And so, on the 27th of October, an historic date of 1960, there are 20,000 people outside the streets of Mutualité, packed in as they could get into that hall, to hear his vigorous denunciation of the war. They then move out into the streets, down into the Gobelins, all the way over to Denfert-Rochereau, and

there they are attacked mercilessly by the police with literally hundreds wounded. The important thing is that the Communist Party and the Socialist Party were not there, and it was very strange to militants that they were not there. And you have an important link and an important bridge to perceptions about how you are to make the issues viable in France.

And so it is, after all, a remarkable Claude Lefort who writes in *Le Monde* on the 3rd of November of 1960, summing up a few conclusions of all of this:

"The political parties and the big trade unions — who are prisoners of their past policies, more concerned with watching one another than with action, busy justifying the totality of their theories, conserving or strengthening their party machines — they have lost the habit and the freedom to confront events. There is no use expecting from them anything that they cannot give, or expecting nothing at all from them in the vain hope of a movement which would do spontaneously what one wishes. Realism exists no more in the ruse of the monarch or in this or that party leader, but in a new mode of thought, a new mode of conduct, a continual dialectic."

Well, you see what that means about '68, because that's what '68 is about, and that's what the whole post-68 problem is about: the problem is that you finally "perceive by practice." Practice was restored, after all, at the level of so many groups that had been told that they were political, and they really were not. And I read you just from random documents about how this kind of practice gets people into the most incredible kinds of things. Listen to this as a document that comes out of May of '68, that comes out of the summer of that year, and that comes from women. And women had not been heard:

"In the negotiations between unions, employers, and government, no one formally demanded equal wages for women and men, no one mentioned the creation of collective services and day nurseries to lighten the burden of women in this dual workday. In the enormous discussion which is taking place throughout the country, in the great constellation of structures and values, no voice has been raised to declare that change in relationships between men also means change in relationships between men and women. Students and young people, in general, want the same ethics for girls and boys. This is one aspect of change, but it is only one aspect. We must break with all of the other taboos."

How do you say that, unless, after all, you are in the throes of process in France? Or consider, for example, this rather extraordinary thing from *cadres*; in other words, from the white-collar people, the technicians, the ones that are way up there, and never really think they are workers: "The movement launched by the students permits us to fill our longings with a breath of freedom

to which we are no longer accustomed. The impossibility of obtaining satisfaction for grievances oriented toward the future, the repeated refusal on the part of the employers to reply to requests for negotiation, the scornful attitude of the political authorities toward union organizations had created an increasingly heavy atmosphere accompanied by mounting pressure."

Consider this, for example, from the architects: "Considering that architecture, which is a public service, must satisfy the needs of society, the fundamental objective will be to find a way of limiting, then of abolishing, the all but absolute control of financial power, through its economic system, now exerts over the planning and producing of built-up areas."

Consider this from the old and blind people: "Will the new society forget no one? The academics, *cadres*, all employees and workers have ceased their activities: they have gone into the streets, they're occupying the factories, they're demanding fine things. What of the millions of old and disabled persons that then pose a problem" — Oh, Christ, you see, everybody had a voice.

Well, Fénelon. And [François] Fénelon wrote in 1713 to the Académie de l'histoire of that eighteenth century, and he wrote a famous text on history, and he said, "A good historian is a man beyond time and beyond space." A thousand times no! Pernicious as hell — a good historian is in time and space. And if he isn't, let him get out. [*applause*]