

THE ALGERIAN MILITARY COUP

Part I: Castro Speaks

Fidel Castro*

IT is not pleasant—and usually dangerous—to pass judgment on events in other countries. This is even more painful when it is a matter of events taking place in a country whose people have heroically won the support of all the world; when it is a matter of events taking place in the midst of a revolutionary process which has aroused the interest of the peoples struggling against colonialism and imperialism . . .’ Fidel declared that by expressing opinions on events there was no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of another country. ‘But we do reserve the right to analyse events which affect the rest of the world, which affect the revolutionary feelings of the world, and because in this particular case, the events in Algeria affect us all.’

Fidel Castro mentioned the case of Egypt ten years ago, of General Gamal Abdel Nasser and the events which led to the overthrowing of King Farouk, aimed at the achievement of independence in the face of an oligarchic regime. This action could be qualified as a revolutionary military action from the very beginning. The mere fact that the action was against the anachronistic form of government and against the vested interests which exploited the country, justifies the description of this action as revolutionary. ‘The circumstances prevailing then were radically different to those existing at the time of the Algerian events.’

Analysing the situation in Algeria, he declared that the military coup is ‘in the first place a painful clash in the revolutionary ranks . . . in which the weapons and force are turned against revolutionaries, not against a feudal king, not against the representatives of imperialist interests . . . but against the representatives of the Algerian revolution, against a revolutionary and anti-imperialist fighter, against a fighter whose standing in the world, in the struggle of the peoples against imperialism, grew within a few years to one of considerable prestige, in his country and abroad. The weapon of the revolution and the people are turned against he who was, without doubt, supported by the people, against he who undoubtedly represented the majority wish of the people.’ These were not opin-

*Summary of a speech made in Havana, reproduced from Prensa Latina.

ions but clear facts, for who can deny the rôle Ben Bella played in the Algerian revolution and the struggle for independence? And referring to charges that Ben Bella was not a revolutionary and that he was a conservative, a reactionary and a despot, Fidel asked, 'what government, what party had said before the overthrowing of Ben Bella' that he was all these things?

He went on to say that the Afro-Asian Conference and the Youth Festival were to have been held in Algeria and not in a country governed by pro-imperialist agents such as South Vietnam, South Korea, Formosa and Malaysia, by the unanimous decision of the progressive and revolutionary movements of the world. When the *coup d'état* took place in Algeria a difficult situation was created for Cuba because the latter had always had very good relations with the government overthrown 'in which we saw the real representative of the revolution. Our relations with the President Ben Bella were simply the expression of our relations and our sympathy for the Algerian revolution and the Algerian people.'

The Cuban people would never forget, declared Fidel, how on the eve of the international crisis of October, 1962, Ben Bella accepted an invitation to visit Cuba in spite of imperialist pressure. He recalled Ben Bella's visit and that they had explained to him the strategy Cuba was following to meet the U.S. attack. Fidel then mentioned the question of the strategic weapons and their presence in Cuba at the time and said that history will in the end clarify all the facts in this connection. As far as the Cuban-Algerian joint communique issued at the end of the visit was concerned, it was Ben Bella, and not the Minister of Foreign Affairs who maintained a clear and radical stand.

When Algeria and the revolution faced great difficulties, Cuban aid, in the form of men and arms, arrived to help the Algerian revolutionaries. 'And when our men went there,' he continued, 'they who have turned their arms in fratricidal struggle against Ben Bella were at his side.' In this way, he declared, Cuba had fulfilled her duty of proletarian international solidarity.

Fidel pointed out that in the international arena, the most revolutionary positions were always sustained by Ben Bella and not by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdel Assis Bouteflika, 'whose insubordination marked the culminating moment' of the ousting of Ben Bella. 'And let no one doubt it,' declared Fidel on the position of Bouteflika, 'that seditious Marshal is a right-winger and he is known as such by the whole world. He is a right-winger, an enemy

of socialism and the Algerian revolution' even though, in the proclamation issued by the leaders of the coup, a revolutionary vocabulary is used, for in that proclamation no mention is made of the liberation of the peoples, for which cause Ben Bella never denied either help or solidarity.

Fidel explained that while Ben Bella had been head of the government, a group of military officers had been gradually formed around the person of Colonel Houari Boumedienne and that they had manifested their opposition to Ben Bella. Fidel described Boumedienne in the following words: 'We reserve our judgement on what he has done so that history may judge him for what he has done and for what he may yet do, but there is no doubt that he is sparing in words, and it is difficult to know what he is thinking about.' He then noted that his friends were certainly not silent and that in the face of Ben Bella's noble and generous stand, they had carried out their plans without allowing the people to resist the military blow.

The Prime Minister declared that Cuba cannot renounce the ties it had with the deposed government since that would be an act of the most repugnant political opportunism. Neither can Cuba support the coup, since given the revolutionary conditions which existed in Algeria, there is no possible justification for the way the generals proceeded. If they thought that Ben Bella should be removed they did not have to resort to treason. Why did they not raise the question with the people and the Party of the Algerian Revolution?

He condemned the violent repression of the demonstrations in support of Ben Bella. 'We, as Marxist-Leninists, can not support this barracks movement against the masses and the party,' he affirmed. 'As the news, the cables and accounts come in we can see and believe that events will increasingly demonstrate how unjustified the action was and the very painful consequences it will have for Algeria.' Continuing in his analysis of the Algerian situation Fidel pointed out that in spite of the measures taken to oppose the popularisation of the Army, the latter does not constitute a military caste and cannot serve as a weapon for repression because of its patriotic origin in the midst of a revolutionary process.

Fidel declared that Cuba views with grief the situation in Algeria and hopes that this sister country may save itself from the tremendous abyss which has opened out at her feet. If the present leaders who perpetrated this adventurous act understand the true consequences of their action, if they are courageous, capable and understand that it is not possible to go forward with the revolution without

the people, they would have a difficult path to follow, but it would not be an impossible one.

‘Our attitude will be determined by events and will be based on principles. It is our wish that they should understand the barbarity of what they have done. If they are incapable of doing this, let them have the courage to show by their deeds that they are more revolutionary than the men they have overthrown. If they decide to break relations with us they would not be the first barracks movement to do so. . . . We do not act as opportunists but as Marxist-Leninists.’

He affirmed that if facts and events show that the new leaders are anti-imperialist, revolutionary Cuba would not deny them support.