

The Party of Truce, Albert Camus

The Party of Truce

The time is approaching when the Algerian problem will require a solution, yet no solution is in sight. Apparently, nobody has a real plan. People are fighting about the method and the means, while no one pays any attention to the ends.

People tell me that some in the Arab movement are proposing a form of independence that would sooner or later result in the eviction of the French from Algeria. But the French have been in Algeria long enough and in large enough numbers that they, too, constitute a people who cannot tell others what to do but by the same token cannot be made to do anything without their consent.

Meanwhile, fanatics among the colonists break windows to cries of "Repression!" and postpone any possibility of reform until after the victory. In practical terms, this is tantamount, morally speaking, to suppression of the Arab population, whose identity and rights cannot be denied.

These are the doctrines of total war. Neither can be called a constructive solution. A more fruitful proposal, to my mind, is the one approved yesterday by the Socialist Congress, which said that there can be no unilateral negotiation in Algeria. Indeed, the two words are contradictory. To have a negotiation, each party must take the other party's rights into account and concede something for the sake of peace.

Two things make this confrontation difficult. The first is the absence of any Algerian political structure, which colonization prevented, whereas the protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco at least paid lip service to the indigenous state. The second stems from the absence of any clearly defined French position as a result of our political instability. In a clash between passions, no one can define his own position in relation to that of his adversary. Escalation then becomes the only form of expression.

We cannot create a new political structure in Algeria overnight. That is precisely the problem that needs to be resolved. But the French government could clarify its position by recognizing the need to negotiate with duly elected interlocutors and to state clearly what it can and cannot accept.

Today, what the government cannot accept is clear. Succinctly stated, the situation is this: yes to an Arab identity in Algeria, no to an Egyptian identity. With the government tottering, there is no majority in France in favor of the strange coalition that has formed against us, uniting Madrid, Budapest, and Cairo.

On this point, the no must be firm. But the stronger that no is, the more steadfast must be the commitment to treat the Arab people justly and to conclude an agreement to which they can freely assent.

This cannot happen unless French opinion in Algeria evolves considerably. The bloody marriage of terrorism and repression is no help in this regard, nor is the escalation of hateful demagoguery in both camps. Those who are still capable of dialogue must come together.

The French who believe that a French presence in Algeria can coexist with an Arab presence in a freely chosen regime, who believe that such coexistence will restore justice to all Algerian communities without exception, and who are sure that only such a regime can save the Algerian people from death today and misery tomorrow must at last shoulder their responsibilities and preach peace so that dialogue might once again be possible. Their first duty is to insist with all their strength that a truce be established at once in regard to civilians.

Once such a truce is achieved, the rest might follow. In Algeria it is not only necessary for individuals to come together, it is also possible. A clear and steady path toward justice, a union of differences, and confidence in the possibilities of the future—all of us, French and Arabs alike, should be able to get behind a party based on these principles. The party of truce would then become Algeria itself. What is at stake is life itself.

I experience the current situation as akin to the war in Spain and the defeat of 1940—events that changed the men and women of my generation and forced them to recognize the uselessness of the political nostrums that had previously guided them.

If, through some concatenation of misfortunes, the unwitting coalition of two blind enemies were to result in the death, in one way or another, of the Algeria for which we hope, then we would have to take stock of our impotence and reconsider all our commitments and positions, for the whole meaning of history will have changed for us.

The hope remains, however, that we will be capable of building the kind of future we have in mind. The difficult and exalting task of nurturing that hope lies with the French of Algeria, the French of France, and the Arab people themselves.

The End