



The Roundtable, Albert Camus

The Roundtable

Political problems cannot be resolved with psychology. Without psychology, however, problems will certainly become more complicated. In Algeria, bloodshed has driven people apart. Let us not make things worse through stupidity and blindness.

Not all the French in Algeria are bloodthirsty brutes, and not all Arabs are fanatical mass killers. Metropolitan France is not populated solely by passive officials and generals nostalgic for battle.

Similarly, Algeria is not France, though many people, superb in their ignorance, continue to insist that it is. Yet it is home to more than a million French men and women, as is all too often forgotten in certain quarters. These simplifications only exacerbate the problem.

What is more, one justifies the other, and together their consequences are lethal. Day after day these simplifications prove, in a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*, that in Algeria the French and the Arabs are condemned either to live together or to die together.

Of course, if despair becomes overwhelming, one may choose to die. Yet to dive into the water in order to avoid the rain would be unforgivable, as would dying because one sought to survive. That is why the idea of a roundtable around which would gather representatives of all tendencies, from colonizers to Arab nationalists, still seems valid to me.

It is not good for people to live apart, or isolated in factions. It is not good for people to spend too much time nursing their hatred or

feelings of humiliation, or even contemplating their dreams. The world today is one in which the enemy is invisible. The fight is abstract, and there is consequently nothing to clarify or alleviate it.

To see and hear the other can therefore give meaning to the combat and just possibly make it unnecessary. The roundtable will be a time for accepting responsibility.

This will not happen, however, unless the meeting is fair to all sides and open. It is not in our power to ensure fairness. On principle I would not leave it up to the government to do so.

But the fact is that the matter is today in the government's hands, and that makes us anxious. In any case, the roundtable must not be part of some new round of useless bargaining intended to maintain in power men who evidently chose to go into politics in order to avoid making policy.

That leaves the matter of publicity, about which we can do something. I will therefore devote several articles to the simplifications I alluded to above, explaining to each party to the talks the reasoning of its adversaries. Objectivity does not mean neutrality, however.

The effort to understand makes sense only if there is a prospect of justifying a decision in the end. I will therefore conclude by taking a stand. And let me say at once that it will be a stand against despair, because in Algeria today, despair means war.

The End