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Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria

and of All Countries

Situationist International

July 1965

“Proletarian revolutions ... pitilessly scoff at the hesitations, weaknesses and inadequacies of their first efforts, seem to throw down their adversary only to see him draw new strength from the earth and rise again formidably before them, recoil again and again before the immensity of their tasks, until a situation is finally created that makes all turning back impossible.”

—Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

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Comrades,

The disintegration of the revolutionary image presented by the international Communist movement is taking place forty years after the disintegration of the revolutionary movement itself. This time gained for the bureaucratic lie—that supplement to the permanent bourgeois lie—has been time lost for the revolution. The history of the modern world pursues its revolutionary course, but unconsciously or with false consciousness. Everywhere there are

social confrontations, but nowhere is the old order liquidated, even within the very forces that contest it. Everywhere the ideologies of the old world are criticized and rejected, but nowhere is “the real movement that suppresses existing conditions” liberated from one or another “ideology” in Marx’s sense: ideas that serve masters. Everywhere revolutionaries, but nowhere the revolution.

The collapse of the Ben-Bellaist image of a semi-revolution in Algeria has just given a striking expression of this general discomfiture. The superficial power of Ben Bella represented the moment of rigid balance between the movement of the Algerian workers toward the management of the entire society and the bourgeois bureaucracy in the process of formation within the framework of the state. But in this official¹ balance the revolution had nothing with which to further its objectives-it had already become a museum piece-whereas those in possession of the state controlled all power, beginning with that fundamental repressive instrument, the army, to the point of finally being able to throw off their mask, i.e. Ben Bella. Two days before the putsch, at Sidi Bel Abbès, Ben Bella added the ridiculous to the odious by declaring that Algeria was “more united than ever.” Now he has ceased to lie to the people and the events speak for themselves. Ben Bella fell as he had reigned, in solitude and conspiracy, by a *palace revolution*. He was ushered out by the same forces that had ushered him in: Boumedienne’s army, which had opened the road to Algiers for him in September 1962. Ben Bella’s regime ratified the revolutionary conquests that the bureaucracy was not yet able to repress: the self-management movement. The forces so well hidden behind the “Muslim Brother”, Boumedienne have this clear goal: to liquidate self-management. The June 19th Declaration’s mixture of Western technocratic jargon with the pathos of a reinforced Islamic moral order defines the whole policy of the new regime: “to get out of the general state of stagnation which is already manifesting itself in a lowering of productivity a decreasing economic profitability and a disturbing

withdrawal of investments" and "to keep in mind our faith, our convictions and the secular traditions and moral values of our people."

The astonishing acceleration of practical demystification must now serve to accelerate revolutionary theory. The same society of alienation, of totalitarian control (here the sociologist predominates, there the police), of spectacular consumption (here the cars and gadgets, there the words of the venerated leader) reigns everywhere, in spite of the variations in its ideological or juridical disguises. The coherence of this society cannot be understood without a total critique, illuminated by the inverse project of a liberated creativity, the project of the domination by all people over their own history at all levels. This is the demand in *acts* of all proletarian revolutions, a demand until now defeated by the specialists of power who take charge of revolutions and make them their private property.

To revive and bring into the present this *inseparable*, mutually illuminating project and critique immediately entails appropriating all the radicalism borne by the workers movement, by modern poetry and art In the West (as preface to an experimental research toward a free construction of everyday life), by the thought of the period of the supersession and realization of philosophy (Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx) and by the emancipators struggles from the Mexico of 1910 to the Congo of today. To do this, it is first of all necessary to recognize, without holding on to any consoling illusions, the full extent of the defeat of the entire revolutionary project *in the first third of this century* and its official replacement, in every region of the world and in every aspect of life, by delusive shams and petty reforms that camouflage and preserve the old order. The domination of bureaucratic state-capitalism over the workers is the opposite of socialism-this is the truth that Trotskyism has refused to face. Socialism exists wherever the workers themselves directly manage the entire society, it therefore exists neither in Russia nor in China nor anywhere else. The Russian and Chinese revolutions were defeated from within. Today they provide the Western prole-

tariat and the peoples of the Third World with a false model which in reality counterbalances the power of bourgeois capitalism and imperialism

A resumption of radicality naturally entails a considerable deepening of all the old liberatory attempts. The experience of their incompleteness in isolation, or their inversion into total mystification, leads to a better grasp of the coherence of the world to be transformed; and once this coherence is rediscovered, many of the partial researches developed in the recent past can be salvaged, enabled to attain their essential truth (the liberating content of psychoanalysis, for example, can be neither understood nor realized outside the struggle for the abolition of all repression).^{*} The understanding of this reversible coherence of the world-its present reality in relation to its possible reality-exposes the fallaciousness of half-measures, and the fact that there is essentially a half-measure each time the operating pattern of the dominant society-with its categories of hierarchization and specialization and corresponding habits and tastes-reconstitutes itself within the forces of negation.

Moreover, the material development of the world has accelerated. It continually accumulates more potential powers: and the specialists of the management of society, because of their very role as guardians of passivity, are forced to ignore the potential use of those powers. At the same time, this development accumulates generalized dissatisfaction and objective lethal dangers which these specialized rulers are incapable of permanently controlling. The fundamental problem of underdevelopment must be resolved on a worldwide scale, and first of all by the revolutionary overcoming of the irrational *overdevelopment* of productive forces in the framework of the various forms of rationalized capitalism. The revolutionary movements of the Third World can succeed only on the basis of a lucid contribution to global revolution. Development must not be a race to catch up with capitalist reification, but a satisfaction of all real needs as the basis for a genuine development of human faculties.

and hidden, of the critique of present societies, and new forms of struggle; and also the irreducible moments of all the old revolutionary history that has remained in abeyance, moments which reappear like *ghosts*. The dominant society, which prides itself so much on its constant modernization, is going to meet its match, for it is at last beginning to produce its own modernized negation.

Long live the comrades who in 1959 burned the Koran in the streets of Baghdad!

Long live the Workers Councils of Hungary, defeated in 1956 by the so-called Red Army!

Long live the dockers of Aarhus who last year effectively boycotted racist South Africa, in spite of their union leadership and the judicial repression of the Danish social-democratic government!

Long live the “Zengakuren” student movement of Japan, which actively combats the capitalist power of imperialism and of the so-called “communist” bureaucracies!

Long live the workers’ militia that defended the northeastern districts of Santo Domingo!

Long live the self-management of the Algerian peasants and workers! The option is now between the militarized bureaucratic dictatorship and the dictatorship of the “self-managed sector” *extended to all production and all aspects of social life*.

New revolutionary theory must move in step with reality, it must keep abreast with the revolutionary praxis which is starting up here and there but which yet remains partial, mutilated and without a coherent total project. Our language, which will perhaps seem fantastic, is the very language of real life. History continues to present ever more glaring confirmations of this. If in this history the familiar is not necessarily known, it is because real life itself only appears in a fantastic form, in the upside-down image imposed on it by the modern *spectacle* of the world: in the spectacle all social life, including even the representation of sham revolutions, is written in the lying language of power and filtered by its machines. The spectacle is the terrestrial heir of religion, the opium of a capitalism that has arrived at the stage of a “society of abundance” of *commodities*; it is the illusion actually consumed in “consumer society.”

To the sporadic explosions of revolutionary contestation, an international organization of repression responds, operating with a global division of tasks. Each of the blocs, or of the spin-off splinters of blocs, ensures within its sphere of influence the lethargic sleep of all, the maintenance of an order that remains fundamentally the same. This permanent repression ranges from the military expedition to the more or less complete falsification practiced today by every constituted power: “The truth is revolutionary” (Gramsci) and all existing governments, even those issuing out of the most liberatory movements, are based on lies inside and out. It is precisely this repression that constitutes the most resounding verification of our hypotheses.

Revolutionary tentatives of today, because they have to break all the rules of false understanding imposed by the “peaceful coexistence”, of reigning lies, begin in *isolation*, in one particular sector of the world or in one particular sector of contestation. Armed with the most minimal definition of liberty, they attack only the most immediate aspect of oppression. Thus they meet with the maximum of repression and slander (they are accused of rejecting one exist-

ing order while necessarily approving of an existing variant of it) and the minimum of aid. The more difficult their victory, the more easily it is confiscated by new oppressors. The next revolutions *can find aid in the world only by attacking it in its totality*. The freedom movement of the American blacks, if it can assert itself effectively, will call into question all the contradictions of modern capitalism; it must not be sidetracked by the “black nationalism” and “black capitalism” of the Black Muslims. The workers of the United States, like those in England, engage in “wildcat strikes” against the bureaucratized unions that aim first of all at integrating them into the concentrated, semi-regulated capitalist system. It is with these workers and with the students who have just won their strike at the University of California at Berkeley that a North American revolution can be made; and not with the Chinese atom bomb.

The movement drawing the Arab peoples toward unification and socialism has achieved a number of victories over classical colonialism. But it is more and more evident that it must finish with Islam, manifestly a counterrevolutionary force as are all religious ideologies; it must grant freedom to the Kurdish people; it must finish with the Palestinian pretext which justifies the dominant policy in the Arab states, since this policy insists on the destruction of Israel and thereby perpetuates itself since this destruction is impossible. The repressive forces of the state of Israel can be dissolved only by a *model of a revolutionary society realized by the Arabs*. Just as the success of a model of a revolutionary society in the world would mean the end of the largely sham confrontation between the East and the West, so would end the Arab-Israel confrontation which is a miniature version of it.

Revolutionary attempts of today are *abandoned* to repression because it is not in the interest of any existing power to support them. We *passively watch* their combat and only the illusionist babble of the UN or of the specialists of “progressive” state powers accompanies their death throes. In Santo Domingo US troops dared to intervene in a foreign country in order to back up fascist

army officers against the legal government of the Kennedyist Caamaño, simply for fear that he would be overwhelmed by the people he had had to arm. What forces in the world took retaliatory measures against the American intervention? In the Congo in 1960 Belgian paratroopers, UN expeditionary forces and the Mining Association’s tailor-made state [Katanga] broke the impetus of the people who thought they had won independence; they killed Lumumba and Mpolo. In 1964 Belgian paratroopers, American transport planes, and South African, European and anti-Castroist Cuban mercenaries pushed back the second insurrectional wave of the Mulelists. What practical aid was provided by “revolutionary Africa”? Wouldn’t a thousand Algerian volunteers, victors of a much harder war, have been enough to prevent the fall of Stanleyville? But the armed people of Algeria had long before been replaced by a classical army on lease to Boumedienne, who had other plans.

The next revolutions are confronted with the task of *understanding themselves*. They must totally reinvent their own language and defend themselves against all the recuperations prepared for them. The Asturian miners’ strike (virtually continuous since 1962) and all the other signs of opposition that herald the end of Francoism do not indicate an inevitable future for Spain, but a choice: either the holy alliance now being prepared by the Spanish Church, the monarchists, the “left Falangists” and the Stalinists to harmoniously adapt post-Franco Spain to modernized capitalism, to the Common Market; or the resumption and completion of the most radical aspects of the revolution that was defeated by Franco and his accomplices on all sides. The human relationships of socialism were realized, for a few weeks, in Barcelona in 1936.

The new revolutionary current, wherever it appears, must begin to link up the present contestatory experiences and the people who bear them. And along with unifying such groups, it must at the same time unify the *coherent basis of their project*. The first gestures of the coming revolutionary epoch embody a new content, visible