

State bureaucracy and the politics of development in Algeria : 1962-1978

Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to examine the emergence and development of state bureaucracy which gained control of the means of production and administration after the political independence of Algeria. Administrative control and the control of means of production play a role equivalent to that of the ownership of the means of production. The bureaucrats strengthened their position through the model of development which Algeria had adopted and which was based on heavy industry which was given priority.

Dr. R. KABACHE

Department de Sociologie
Université Mentouri
Constantine, Algérie

It is argued that bureaucracy is also a system of control. It involves a hierarchical organisation in which superiors control the activities of subordinates. State bureaucrats can direct the economy for their own benefit. The mass of the population is seen to have little opportunity to participate in or control the state administration. That is to say, the term bureaucracy is used to refer to a social category, the officials, who are often ascribed the defining characteristic of any social group, namely a collective material interest.

With the declaration of cease-fire in March, and political independence in July 1962, Algeria faced a severe political and economic crisis. The new Algeria confronted with the consequences of massive destruction. More than one million Algerians died during the seven year war of liberation 300.000 refugees lived in neighbouring countries, there was a rural exodus of nearly 700.000 people, 8.000 villages were destroyed (1). Moreover, the extensive colonial destruction of the rural areas dispossessed of their means of production, impoverished and homeless. In the mean time, underemployment and unemployment formed serious problems facing the Algerian society. In addition to the fleeing Europeans who did not merely leave vacant properties, but also vacated administrative and professional activities.

ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى توضيح الدور الذي لعبته بيروقراطية الدولة منذ بداية الاستقلال في الجزائر في تسييرها للاقتصاد والمجتمع. وكيف أنها من خلال مراقبتها للتسيير تشكلت وظهرت كبيروقراطية دولة استطاعت أن تتمتع برقابة وسائل الإنتاج والإدارة، وزادت توسيعا لسيطرتها وتدعيما لمواقعها وذلك من خلال نموذج التنمية الذي أعتمد على الناعات الثقيلة كخيار استراتيجي.

Immediately after independence many opportunities for upward mobility were available to members of certain classes especially the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. The Algerian bourgeoisie under the colonial period had very limited access to sources of capital mainly because it was confined to areas considered unprofitable by the settlers. After independence the Algerian bourgeoisie started buying up industrial, commercial and other properties from the terrified settlers. The petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, café-owners, artisans and other small traders tried to purchase small commercial establishments and in some cases took over without authority, properties and estates in the cities and towns. The big landowners contemplated the possibility of purchasing estates settlers. In six months almost four fifths of Europeans, or 800.000 persons emigrated, including almost all the country's technicians (2). Thus, these vacant positions were the target of the Algerian new bourgeoisie, which was the sole beneficiary, a fact which led to an increase of the number of civil servants from 30.000 in 1955 to 300.000 in 1963 (3). It was this take over of the bureaucratic and technocratic positions which led to the emergence of a dominant managerial bureaucrat class, originated from the urban bourgeois families.

The urgent task was to build completely new political and economic institutions. It was pressured by its direct relationship with France. The Evian agreement which Algeria signed with France to end the war compelled her to remain dependent on France, «the Evian agreements had assured France a privileged position in independent Algeria in return for a sizeable amount of aid. The Algerian nationalists had been forced to guarantee respect of French interests in the Sahara oil fields and protection of all other French properties in the country... for its part, the French government had pledged to maintain for three years an aid programme... and to provide Algeria with considerable technical assistance» (4). Till a political and economic programme was drawn up in a conference held in June 1962 which came to be known as the Tripoli programme, a new platform was created defining the basic tasks of the new phase and outlining the path of Algeria's future development. It advocated the construction of a socialist society devoted to the service of Algerians. It called for genuine political and economic independence and social transformations. It recognised that the active forces of the war had been the peasantry and the workers who had given it its essentially political character. The Programme was full of socialist principles and ideas such as the abolition of exploitation of man by man and the land to those who work it. A new economic system was to be based on the principles of socialist planning which in practice meant that the state would exercise control, that is to say, economic planning and the control of the economy by the state, with the participation of the workers. Through planning the accumulation of capital required for industrialization would be possible. A programme of agrarian reform would be implemented through the creation of state owned farms and co-operatives. To achieve the objective the premise of the land to those who work it, the programme set forth the following principles :1) Prohibition of transactions in land and in the means of agricultural production. 2) Limitation of property according to

crops and yields. 3) Expropriation of areas surpassing a fixed optimum. 4) Free distribution of lands thus recuperated to landless peasants, or to those possessing insufficient land. 5) Democratic organisation of peasants in production co-operatives. 6) Creation of collective state farms on a proportion of the expropriated lands with the participation of the workers in management and benefits (5). A close look at the Tripoli Programme reveals that its ideology was based on unity and national solidarity rather than «class struggle». Thus, it overlooked the possibility that after independence the various classes could become antagonistic competitors for political and economic power.

Therefore, the Tripoli Programme was an immediate reply to the Evian Agreement which tried to link Algeria to France and to assure the maintenance of the close dependent relationship of Algeria with France. And also a response to the G.P.R.A. which favoured a capitalist way of development. After drafting the Tripoli Programme the issue was who would rule the country, i.e. which group within the FLN. The conflict was between two main forces. On the one hand there was the provisional government (G.P.R.A) which had emerged from the Tripoli Conference headed by Ben Belle ; one of the FLN founders who spent most of the war in jail. Ben Belle joined the military wing led by Boumedienne with his armed forces brought Ben Belle to power in 1962 and kept him in power against all rebellions made by competing contingents of the war time FLN during the 1962-1965 period. Having kept the G.P.R.A out of power and having silenced by the armed forces all the opposition, the only two forces which survived were those of Ben Belle and Boumedienne. Ben Belle was in favour of socialist experiments ; he advocated a socialist approach in the construction of an independent Algeria, leaning on a group of foreign leftist advisers who stressed a marxist analysis of Algerian history and contemporary society. This orientation became clear in his promulgation of the decrees of march 1963 for self-management. On the other hand Boumedienne was keen on the specificity of Algeria and her islamic character. He claimed Algeria's islamic heritage and condemned imported socialism demanding that the theoretical bases of Algeria's socialism should rest on arab-islamic doctrine and not on foreign ones (6). Furthermore, Ben Bella and Boumedienne came from a similar background and both favoured the peasantry and the urban workers. So they competed for the support of the same social classes. However, Boumedienne had secured the support of the army whereas Ben Bella had not yet improved the conditions of the peasantry and the urban workers. Ben Bella felt the strength of the military and he tried to limit Boumedienne's power by reducing the jurisdictions of the latter's friends forcing ministers of interior and foreign affairs to resign. Ben Bella progressively concentrated power in his hand by taking over the duties of the ministers of the interior, finance and information. Boumedienne who was the vice-president and minister of national defence was running the risk of being forced to resign. He had Ben Bella arrested and on 19 june 1965 power was assumed by a revolutionary council headed by Boumedienne.

The main justification for the « coup d'état » was that inefficiency and unplanned socialism were leading the country to economic chaos. Ben Bella was accused by Boumedienne of being responsible for financial crisis (7). According to the new regime it was not socialism which was not accepted but the regime's inefficiency which had been renounced. Boumedienne stated a few months after the « coup d'état » that « Socialism is not this incoherent collection of improvised measures and personal reactions that for three years gave the people only an erroneous idea of socialism. Socialism is a long and laborious process of construction that requires the elaboration and application of a comprehensive plan » (8). The support for the « coup d'état » came from the petty bourgeois elements who were threatened by Ben Bella's nationalizations of small shops and services which Boumedienne handed back to their owners after the « coup d'état ».

And before that time, the professional educated elements, former colonial civil servants, FLN bureaucrats from the provisional government (G.P.R.A.) occupied the administrative structure of the state apparatus. The colonial administrative structure was merely reactivated by the post-independence bureaucracy without any radical changes. That is to say, Algeria inherited the colonial bureaucratic structure which was based on capitalist norms of government. The Ben Bella government along with the ideology of socialism and its drive towards economic self-efficiency was compelled to convert the colonial bureaucratic structure to serve the intended new socio-economic goals. The bureaucracy was stratified as follows: the high echelons of the administration came from a bourgeois background. The middle echelons were recruited from the petty bourgeoisie who had been employed by the colonial bureaucracy. This personnel had been trained by the French administration to serve administrative functions within the framework of the « Constantine plan »: in the late fifties a socio-economic programme was introduced aiming at bringing guerilla warfare to an end.

An official census held in 1963 of the civil servants operating the new state gave the following figures: 13,729 french civil servants came from France under the auspices of technical assistance « Cooperation technique »; 22,182 Algerians of the colonial administration and 34,097 members of the FLN and the FLN Algerians recruited after 19 March 1962. According to this census the top positions of planning, decision-making and managerial positions were French and Algerian bourgeois (6). So, it was not surprising that the administration after independence « was still the cumbersome and overcentralised one that the French had set up » (7). Post-war bureaucracy did not only inherit the colonial structure but also inherited values, norms and attitudes characteristic of the colonial civil service, which was indifferent to and disdainful of the situation of the Algerian people. It was this new dominant bureaucracy, in direct or indirect alliance with different bourgeois class fractions, which operated in various forms to prevent any progressive attempts towards the construction of socialism. Concerning the self-managed sector, the Algerian agricultural and industrial workers took advantage of the vacuum left by the war and the departure of the europeans to obstruct the way to the

Algerian bourgeoisie. They moved simultaneously, without waiting for any directive from above to take control of the main means of production : land, industrial, enterprises and commercial establishments. The agricultural labourers employed on the colonial estates began taking over control of production. They formed self-management committees. The big Algerian landowners were thwarted in their attempt to purchase these properties.

The FLN cadres and the state bureaucracy were threatened by the growing influence and militancy of the U.G.T.A. which had enlarged its base to include the agricultural labourers. The U.G.T.A. considered itself the only organisation entitled to represent the interests of the working class and defend the principles of workers self-management in industry and agriculture. The U.G.T.A. could mobilise the workers to resist growing pressures exerted upon them by the FLN cadres and the state bureaucracy. As early as december 1962 they forced the government to sign an agreement to respect the U.G.T.A.'s autonomy. Despite this agreement, the U.G.T.A was still under the pressure of the party (FLN) and state bureaucracy. An official report stated emphatically the U.G.T.A's opposition to attempts made by the FLN and the administrative bureaucracy to impose upon the workers state socialism which « allows the petty bourgeois spirit to persist and allows the exploiters to profit from the situation in reinforcing their privileges and consolidating their political positions » (8). The leadership of U.G.T.A. went on the rapid establishment of light industries in order to create immediate employment rather than the emphasis on capital intensive and labour saving industry. The report concluded that « certain party officials who are not unionists and probably have personal motives have tried to take over the structure of the U.G.T.A. and its constituent organisations » (9). In response to this open criticism the government put it under FLN control.

The « coup d'état » of 1965 was not anti-socialist attempt. Boumedienne was also committed to nationalization of foreign firms and promote development . Right after the « coup d'état » the Boumediene group recognised the inefficiency of the existing state apparatuses, so it started a policy of decolonisation of the bureaucratic structure and the introduction of new organisations of public function to be consistent with the needs of the country : Algerianisation and socialism.

So, it was believed by Boumedienne's group that the reconstruction of the country and its economic independence could be achieved through nationalization of the natural resources, especially gas and oil, and by the state control of economy. Unlike Ben Bella who had nationalised relatively small concerns and had encouraged self-management by endorsing the workers initiative of taking over settlers agricultural and industrial enterprises, Boumedienne went on to tackle international corporations that controlled oil, gas and other resources. He started by nationalizing banks, insurance companies in 1967, and by the end of 1971, the major natural resources were under Algerian state control, and due to Boumedienne's strong belief in expertise and efficiency, he accepted the existing bureaucracy which he inherited from Ben Bella and brought into it those technocrats and specialists most of whom had been trained abroad especially in France. He believed that

they could rationalise economic planning. And he also believed that the state must take control over any activity. The basic justification of the central state control was that the government was in a process of laying the basis for an effective participatory socialism. The self-management sector was allowed to continue in existence but it was increasingly subjected to centralized control. It was not dismantled because the government found it very difficult, mainly because of its serious political repercussions.

And when the government concentrated on the techno-bureaucrats to rationalise the planning and run Algerian administration, it did not take into account that these techno-bureaucrats might become a social category with interests and values of its own which would set it apart from, and in opposition to the interest of workers and peasants. As it was the government concentrated on its nationalism, viewing high bureaucrats and technocrats as public servants with special talents to serve the cause of the Algerian nation. The techno-bureaucrats strengthened their position through the model of development which Algeria had adopted and which was based on heavy industry which was given priority. Having adopted this policy of heavy industry, the government attributed 45 percent of its budget to industry and allotted only 15 percent to agriculture in its four-year plan of 1970-1973 (13). The argument ran that if an industrial base was not established by the time the mineral resources ran down the country would quickly slide back to a state of backwardness. Thus industrialization was considered as the sole remedy to develop the country. Boumedienne argues that «heavy industry... will be the locomotive which will draw behind it agriculture light industry, and other carriages on the railroad of our economic life » (14).

There was also an attempt to give consideration to other aspects of economic development besides industry, e.g. to social and political development to involve the masses of the Algerian population. The new measures were aimed at the achievement of socialism in terms of building a new kind of Algerian person and new social relations of production by democratizing and decentralising the decision-making process in all aspects of Algerian society. Through education, it was believed, to prepare new Algerians to well-developed sense of social and political responsibility: by respecting the higher interests of the nation and the concept of public property and to be active participants in decision-making. The process of democracy and decentralised decision-making were expected to be developed within the political structure, an autonomy from the central government was to be developed in the communal assembly.

In 1976, the year of the introduction of the national charter «la charte nationale», an ideological reference document, the government felt that the material basis of economic development was set up. The next step to be followed was a transition from strict state control, which we call state capitalism: in a sense that the major means of production were owned and run by the state that also meant a privileged class gathered the benefits of state ownership, in which it was the prime beneficiary, through which it became economically dominant, to participatory socialism. The major difficulty of the

transition from strict control to an effective participatory trend stemmed from class nature of the policy of state capitalism itself. In other words state centralised control of the whole economy and the management of the means of production led to that economic power being concentrated in the hands of the state officials who run the state owned enterprises and administrative organisation. This was made possible by the government's emphasis on technical efficiency and material productivity as the prime ends saw the success in terms of profits «so the most efficient technically competent and profit motivated person were brought to the fore in the state bureaucracy and promoted as the new rulers of the society in Algeria they became state capitalists» (15).

The point is whether state bureaucrats like ministers, general managers of state enterprises, high officials of the FLN and the army leaders constituted a class or not, is highly problematical. But I consider them a class not in the classic capitalist sense: they might not own the means of production, but they do had monopoly control over the means of production and they also managed the state structure. They had a life-style that was distinct from the workers and peasants, in terms of material privileges and social contacts. The basic argument is that although in the state enterprises «the ownership was that of the state but the management was characteristic of capitalism» (16). Although Akkache's argument was before the introduction of the scheme of socialist management in enterprise of 1971, it is still valid. Because the bureaucrats who directed the massive state enterprises behaved in the same way as capitalist owners, since they had the exclusive right to set wages and direct economic development. And as lazreg argues, they extracted surplus out of the workers, the latter received a fixed wage incommensurate with the amount of work supplied (17). The same applies to the self-management estates which showed that the agricultural workers did not participate in management of the finances of the estates nor did they marketed their products. This situation leads us to conclude that administrative control and the control of the means of production played a role equivalent to that of the ownership of the means of production. Most significant, this class (techno-bureaucrats) because of functions and roles it fulfilled succeeded in capturing the administrative control had constructed a system of state capitalism. It usually used its position to spread its power and perpetuate the conditions for its existence. Actually, this was achieved by a mystifying ideology of national unity rather than class struggle. This mystifying ideology was confirmed by the national charter «la charte nationale» published in 1976. This national charter affirmed nationalism and negated class struggle under the pretext that the term of class struggle cannot be applied to Algeria's internal situation but it had only external applicability. That is to say, Algeria and other third world countries were viewed as proletarian nations. But internally it can and should not apply. The reasons given were: 1) French domination had oppressed and prevented an indigenous bourgeoisie to develop (18). 2) The national charter viewed the concept of class struggle as divisive and against the so-called unitarian perspective. Instead the religion of Islam was used to support a unitarian vision

of the Algerian society and to disguise the real conflict between classes : «islam is the religion of the state». The vision of solidarity was also supported by the claim that during the liberation struggle any emphasis on class differences among Algerians would have benefitted only french colonialism. Therefore the class struggle approach according to this ideological document was unnecessary.

Furthermore, the freedom of the Algerian private bourgeoisie was limited by the rise of the state owned enterprises and also by a strict monopoly of the Algerian state over all imports. Loans and foreign capital of any nature. And the private bourgeoisie was legally restricted to light industry and other activities considered as not very crucial to the economy. However, it is very evident that the private sector was still of major importance. It was reported that in 1976 the private sector contributed 50 per cent of all agricultural production ; 50 per cent of textile and leather production and 80 per cent of retail trade. But the commanding heights of the economy : finance, heavy, industry, importations and foreign trade were under state control. Despite the considerable importance of the private sector it was dominated by the hegemony of the state bureaucracy which had a strict control over vital economic and political areas. Consequently, the state bureaucracy played a dominant role in Algeria because it managed to control the state economy and political power. Therefore it should be pointed out that bureaucracy does not only mean that it was restricted to administrative management, but it was more than that it was a form of political power as well. Or as Benhouria puts it «Bureacracy is a form of political power before being a form of administrative management» (19). Thus, there were no grounds for considering the phenomenon of bureaucratisation simply as a technical error due to the incompetence of some cadres, and that this technical error resulted in a lack of coordination among different organisations as the regime claimed. But, it was essential to the understanding of the Algerian model of development to realise that bureaucratic management and control were political consequences of the domination of a class. By occupying the state apparatuses, the bourgeoisie took a new form, that of state bourgeoisie. In this case, state property was an alternative to private property to gain economic and political power. so, the state bourgeoisie was in a position to impose its style of organisation of work that gave prerogatives and rights to control. It was through the bureaucratic structure, which the state bourgeoisie erected, that it ensured its domination. In fact , in Algeria the state bureaucracy acted as a dominant class. It was sharply differentiated from the peasantry and the working class by its relationship to the means of economic and political power.

To all intents and purposes, bureaucracy was a phenomenon which was highly detrimental to the society, it led to the suffocation of popular initiative. It showed itself by the malfunctioning of the institutional apparatus, generating major distortions in the process of development as well as serious disturbance in daily life. The consequence was a waste of energy at every level of activity, and it could be seen as a monster with powerful tentacles which could throttle development in the society.

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