

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The devolution of Algeria

Since the passing of Boumedienne, this north African nation has become a playground for the 'Stone Ages' crowd.

Former President Ben Bella of Algeria, who was overthrown by coup d'etat in 1965 and has since been under house arrest, is being revived by London as a symbol of political disaffection in Algeria.

Ben Bella, who emerged as president in the years after Algeria's independence in 1962, is known as an advocate of small-scale industry and Yugoslavia-style "self-reliance" in economics, a strategy that was reversed in favor of heavy industrialization and oil technology when Houari Boumedienne took power in 1965.

Now, under President Chadli Benjedid, that strategy is again being reversed in favor of World Bank-authored programs for making Algeria into a model of deindustrialization.

Recently, Ben Bella—who is still confined to his house and supposedly unable to meet with visitors—held a meeting with Ken Coates of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. Coates and the Russell organization were instrumental in the British operation that toppled the Shah of Iran and put into power the Khomeini regime.

Coates was immediately taken into custody by Algerian security officials who, however, did not explain how Coates could have gotten to see the heavily guarded Ben Bella. His visit was an indication that forces behind Ben Bella were willing to violate strict security laws to bring about the meeting.

At the same time, the Amnesty International organization has made the Ben Bella case a cause célèbre, rallying the Geneva-based human-rights mafia to support his case. It was Amnesty International, working with the Russell group, that started the movement against the Shah in 1977.

The same Amnesty International is now heavily involved in the destabilization of Korea, in the service of the British and American governments' 'China card' policy.

According to Arab sources, the Ben Bella case is being used as a symbol to rally Algerian dissidents against the remnants of the old regime. Leaders of Algeria's early-1970s industrialization drive have been purged by the new regime, including Belaid Abdessalam, the former minister for heavy industry, and Said Ahmed Ghozali, the head of Algeria's petroleum and gas company, Sonatrach. Now, Sonatrach has been dismantled and broken down into four separate small entities.

Further, it is expected that the next Algerian Five Year Plan, to be released soon, will make the final, formal break with the program developed by Abdessalam under Boumedienne. Algeria, now a leader of the price-hawks in OPEC, is thus a tool of the Brandt Commission's effort to capture Arab petrodollars for "appropriate technology" projects that will enforce backwardness throughout the Third World in the

way the new regime is doing to Algeria itself.

The battering ram to ensure that Algeria maintains its course of anti-industrial policies is the threat of riots and separatist movements by the Muslim Brotherhood, which runs Iran, and by the Berber tribal minority. Recently, riots against the government broke out in the Berber-populated Kabylie region. For years, the Kabylies have been a source of trouble in Algeria and have kept their ties with especially British intelligence.

The Kabylie troubles follow recent riots by the Muslim Brotherhood, which—since the Iranian revolution—has gained influence in the Algerian student population. Libya is suspected of sponsoring some of the movements in Algeria, in the south and east of the country in particular.

Earlier this year, widespread riots reportedly led by the Muslim Brotherhood broke out in several towns in central and southeast Algeria, including along the border with Tunisia and Libya, where Libya's Col. Qaddafi is said to have built up an important influence. The Libyans, together with fundamentalist Muslim groups in Cairo, have established a network of mystical cultists of the Sufi variety in that part of Algeria, many of whom listen to pirated cassette tapes of Egyptian fanatic Sheikh Kishk.

The leaderships of these movements are said to collaborate with student groups at several of Algeria's universities. They were bolstered during the ill-advised campaign to restore Arabic—as opposed to French—as chief language in Algeria, a move that strengthened all radical and fundamentalist sects in the country.