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Book review of David Porter's "Eyes to the South; French Anarchists and Algeria"

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self-determination struggles. But there is much more of use in this book, worth reading and studying.

- wayne price

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worked very well, especially with some state aid. Instead of using this as the basis for a new economy, the nationalists undermined it through government overregulation and market manipulation, until it failed.

His book goes up to "the present" and covers more recent evidence of class struggle and the drive of the popular classes toward a libertarian, communal, future. He discusses Berber and urban revolts, and the Kabyle autonomy movement, and the responses to them of the French anarchist movement.

Were They Wrong?

Were the anarchists wrong, those who sought some way to express solidarity with the Algerian insurrection, despite its nationalist leadership? I do not mean to ask whether any specific tactics were right (such as smuggling guns) but whether they were right to show solidarity in some way. I think they were right, in principle, even though the Algerian state turned out to be what anarchists had feared it would be. First, because it is only by being on the side of the rebellion that it was even a possibility of making contact with Algerian workers and peasants and showing them that anarchist revolution was the only way of really achieving their goals. Secondliy, because, morrally, anarchist revolutionaries are always on the side of the oppressed. This did not require support for the nationalists and the state they wanted to create. It does require solidarity with the workers, peasants, and small businesspeople of the oppressed nation when they fight against their imperial oppressor.

In conclusion, this is an interesting and a valuable book. I have focused on one aspect of it, namely its coverage of the French-Algerian war and the reactions of the French anarchists. I believe that this aspect can provide much food for thought when considering the vital question of how anarchists should view national

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national liberation struggles … it is wrong to be silent since our basic criterion is genuine movement toward human emancipation and we are all citizens of the world … It is not a betrayal to speak with courage and lucidity about unsatisfactory aspects of the struggle" (p. 48). And in fact he wrote a detailed critique of the wartime struggle. He also praised the work of Franz Fanon, who participated in the Algerian struggle, but wrote powerful critiques of the limitations of post-independence nationalist states.

Porter only covers the Algerian war for independence in Part I of a V part book. As anarchists had warned, after the revolution, Algeria became a one-party, military-dominated, poverty-stricken, religion-influenced, neo-colony. That this happened does not mean that the anarchists were wrong who expressed solidarity, in some form, with the rebelling Algerians. It does mean that it would have been wrong to hide criticisms of the authoritarian nature of the nationalist movement (the way US radicals have done in the past in regard to Vietnam or Central America). It is unclear from this book whether the anarchists made many efforts to reach out to Algerians, to spread anarchist ideas or organization (which would have faced the double repression of the French authorities and the Algerian nationalists). It does say that French anarchists did have "many direct political discussions" with militants of the various nationalist organizations and that "certain…militants were even close to joining" an anarchist group" (p. 39), but leaves it at that.

Very interestingly, the post-revolutionary economy was not simply a mix of private investment and state ownership (traditional and state capitalism). There also developed a fairly widespread self-managed (autogestion) sector, of factories and large farms abandoned by the fleeing colons. The workers took them over and started to run them. This was essentially spontaneous, by the workers, with almost no theoretical planning. (It was a sign of the implicit second program, the program of the workers and peasants, as opposed to the official statist program of the nationalist leadership.) The level of efficiency varied, of course, but some enterprises

government came down very hard on this wing of the movement, causing its main group to officially disband.

Porter also covers the views of activities of two individuals: Albert Camus and Daniel Guerin. While Camus was close to the anarchist movement for a while, he does not seem to ever really have been an anarchist. Guerin, however, played an important role. Many readers will know him from his book on anarchism and his anthology of anarchist writings. He evolved from a quasi-Trotskyist background to revolutionary anarchism (although believing that anarchists could use certain aspects of Marxism, an opinion which I share, at least in principle). He was also a Gay activist (not mentioned in this book). At the time of the war, Guerin was a "public intellectual," in the same general category as Sartre and Camus. Porter compares him to Chomsky, today. Guerin was "probably the best-known politically engaged French intellectual critic of colonialism by 1954. … He would eventually become the single most prolific French anarchist writer on Algeria" (p. 43).

Guerin expressed his solidarity with the Algerian people in insurrection, and he was for their nationalist organizations when they fought against the French state (which is not the same as endorsing their politics, which he did not). In 1956, he wrote,

> "As long as French troops … trample Algerian land, every wrong will be on our side. Whatever attitude Algerians adopt toward us or whatever they undertake or do against us will be right … What can we do if the program of the most extreme Algerian [nationalists] is from our social point of view, reactionary and tending to allow the anti-popular aspirations of the bourgeoisie to triumph? It is for their peasants, not us, to explain this to them" (quoted on p. 47).

He improved this last perspective later, in 1959. As summarized by Porter, his view became, "While European anti-colonists typically refrain … from criticizing the problems and contradictions of

How did French anarchists deal with the Algerian revolution? How did anarchists in an imperialist country react to a war for national liberation? What does this tell us about how anarchists today should relate to current struggles for self-determination of oppressed peoples?

From 1954 to 1962, a vicious, war raged between the people of Algeria and the French state. Anarchists in France played a small but significant role in opposing their government's colonial war. Their activities and views are covered in this exceptional book, along with anarchists' attitudes toward post-war Algeria. The ways French anarchists opposed the war, and the varying views they held about it, may help today's antiauthoritarians (in the US and elsewhere) in thinking through our views about struggles against national oppression.

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The world remains divided into nations. Most nations today have "their own" states, with their own flags, money, and postage stamps, not to mention armies and presidents (although there are still exceptions, such as Puerto Rico, Palestine, and Tibet). But they are still integrated into the world market, which remains dominated by the international corporations based in the imperial countries. And they are still integrated into the power structure of the world's states, which may turn into military invasion and occupation by the major powers at any time. As I write, the US state is occupying Afghanistan, waging "covert" war on several other coun-

tries, such as Pakistan, and threatening imminent war against two other countries, Syria and Iran, while expanding its military bases around China. So issues of imperialism, nations, national wars, national oppression, and nationalism are far from "over" or irrelevant in today's world.

There has been some coverage of anarchists in oppressed nations. Hirsch & van der Walt (2010) has a set of essays on anarchist and syndicalist organizing in "the colonial and postcolonial world". They cover Egypt, South Africa, Korea, China, Ukraine (Makhno), Ireland, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the Caribbean. There is a fine book by Ramnath (2011) on anarchism and India. She focuses not so much on self-identified anarchists as on libertarian, near-anarchist, trends in the Indian freedom movement (for example, Gandhi and Gandhism were not anarchist, but were decentralist).

But I find Porter's book especially interesting because it concerns the role of anarchists within the imperial nation, opposing that nation's policies. Their issues are close to those faced by the movements US anarchists have been directly involved in (although I think they would have interest for anarchists currently living in oppressed nations).

First, let me clarify some terms (I have learned that this is often necessary when discussing national issues with anarchists and antistatist Marxists). By "national oppression" I mean that a people (self-identified as a nation) is dominated and controlled by the state and capitalists of another nation. (Nations are, of course, socially constructed out of people's actions and beliefs; most — but not all — of its people are workers, peasants, and small business people.) In general the world is divided into a minority of oppressor nations and a majority of oppressed nations, although this is not a razor-sharp division. "National liberation" is the goal of a people to be free of this foreign domination. "National self-determination" means that a people has the right to decide its own future, its own political and economic organization (including whether to have a

side, disgraceful torture from the other…" (quoted in Porter, 2011; p. 80). But even this statement put the burden on France to "initiate a ceasefire since it is the colonial conquest, the stupid racism, and the spite of privilege that made this war inevitable" (same).

Others came close to this view of condemning both sides in the war. They focused on opposing their own imperialist power, but were largely critical and pessimistic about an Algerian victory. They pointed out that this would lead to a new state, a new capitalism, new oppressions, and likely religious intolerance. (All of which came true.)

But one group made a clear comment. "We have not chosen between two governments. We've chosen the camp of oppressed people in revolt, those who, for over a century have been insulted, robbed, and reduced to misery in there own country… They are not anarchists, they carry out a war of national independence. And how could it be otherwide?" (quoted on p. 61).

Another group of anarchists declared, "National independence of the colonial territories…creates — in protecting a people from the repressive apparatus of an imperialist state, all the while weakening that state — the possibililties for this people to make its revolution by suppressing its own exploiters" (quoted on p. 53).

Some anarchists chose to explicitly side with the Algerian rebels and their nationalist organizations. George Fontenis was later to comment that his group's public stance of clear support to the Algerian revolution "'saved the honor' … of the proletariat and the anarchist movement" (quoted on p. 36). They supported all the Algerian insurrectionists against the French state, but they did not take sides in conflicts between the two main Algerian national organizations (which sometimes ended in killings). In addition to the other anti-war activities of the rest of the anarchists, they provided direct help to the Algerian armed forces, working in support networks which smuggled guns and money, found printers for their literature, provided safe houses in France, arranged for lawyers for Algerian prisoners, and did other services. Naturally the French

French Anarchist Positions

Porter puts the French anarchists' anti-war positions in the context of their overall development. I am not going to summarize his overview of specific organizations. For further background, see Berry (2009), who takes the history of French anarchism up to 1945, when Porter begins his story. Skirda (2002) gives an overview of European anarchism, from the point-of-view of "platformism", including a chapter on the French during this period.

All the French anarchists were against the war waged by the French state. They stood against the Socialists and Communists, as well as against former members of the Resistance who now used fascist methods against the Algerians. They organized demonstrations and mass meetings, petitions and newspaper articles. They built alliances with other anti-war and radical organizations (pacifists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Catholic leftists, etc.). They opposed conscription and helped draft evaders and deserters. The government responded by banning meetings and demonstrations, attacking them with police, fining their organizations, and jailing their members. It was particularly dangerous to oppose the draft and supposedly sow dissatisfaction among the soldiers. However, almost 600 military evaders were smuggled to Switzerland by an underground railroad (Skirda, 2002).

But the area of controversy among anarchists was the attitude to take toward the Algerian struggle. It was one thing to be "against" waging war on the Algerians. However, the Algerians were de facto in two or more competing organizations, with their own army, aiming to set up their own national state, and fighting with their own methods (including, at times, terrorist attacks on civilian colons). They were not anarchists or any kind of libertarian socialists.

One possible approach was to condemn both sides of the war as equally bad. For example, in 1960 some anarcho-pacifists condemned the "…war [which] has raged between France and Algeria. For six years, it's proceeded, encouraging blind terror from one

state or no state, whether to be capitalist or state socialist or libertarian communist). The freedom to make decisions for yourself does not, obviously, mean that peoples (or individuals) will make the right decisions at first. Hopefully they will learn from their mistakes.

"Nationalism" is not a synonym for "national liberation." Instead, it is one (only one) possible program advocated to achieve national liberation. It says that a people can be free if they win their own state and their own capitalist economy (sometimes state capitalism). It declares common interests between the upper classes and the working classes of the oppressed nation and overlooks various divisions within the nation (of gender, religion, minority nationalities, etc.).

Anarchists and other libertarian socialists do not agree with this program. At best, it would result in the workers and peasants of a formerly oppressed nation being exploited by their "own" nation's capitalists instead of by foreign capitalists. But actually, we say it will not even achieve this goal. There will be no real national liberation. Even winning its own state, the nation would remain oppressed within the imperialist world economy and great-state power politics. Only the revolution of the international working class and its allies can end all national oppression, by creating a nonstatist, libertarian socialist, and federated world. Anarchists may have a "negative" agreement with nationalists, in that both are "against" national oppression. But what the two trends are "for," what they think will truly end this oppression, is quite different.

Finally, there are some ignorant anarchists and libertarian Marxists who regard "national self-determination" as something Lenin thought up. Not so. National self-determination is part of the traditional bourgeois-democratic program (of, say, the U.S. and French revolutions). It goes along with freedom of speech and of association, with land to the peasants, with the election of officials, with equality before the law of gender, race, and religion, and so on. Of course, the bourgeoisie never has lived up to its program, not con-

sistently. Lenin thought that advocating such democratic demands would strengthen his party and lead to (his version of) socialism. What was wrong with Lenin was not his support of democratic demands! That is not what anarchists reject about Leninism.

The French-Algerian War

After World War II, the French rulers sought to re-establish their empire (which says something of the nature of that "war against fascism"). They tried to rebuild their colony in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. The Vietnamese people drove them out. But they were more persistent about continuing to rule Algeria in North Africa. Algeria, they claimed, was not even a colony, but was an integral part of France. There were about a million French settlers (*colons*) who had made their homes in Algeria, 10 percent of the whole Algerian population. Meanwhile the actual Algerians were treated as aliens in their own homeland, or as second-rate "citizens" at best.

Unlike Vietnam, the national rebellion was not led by "Communists." Its leaders were more-or-less "for" socialism (understood as state socialism, which in practice has always meant state capitalism). Much of the leadership was secular but they made an alliance with Muslim forces which wanted a religious state. The movement was, as Porter writes, "…largely a coalition of competing personal and regional cliques and political factions, with leadership…committed only to an independent nationalist and populist regime with greatly enhanced opportunities for personal gain and power" (p. 31).

As usual, what the leadership intended and what the workers and peasants wanted were different, implying different programs. "Meanwhile, radical egalitarian expectations inevitably emerged at the grassroots level ….While such radical hopes among Algerian workers in the cities and prosperous colon farms implied some sort

of modernist socialism, the poor peasantry — the great majority of ALN soldiers — was communitarian in a more traditionalist sense" (same).

The settlers were violently against any reform, however mild, in their rule over the Algerians. They were tied into right wing forces in the French army. But the organized left was no help to the oppressed. The president of France was Guy Mollet, a Socialist, elected on a program of peace. Instead he expanded the war, directing that it be waged by terror, massacre, and mass torture. The Communist Party supported the Socialists in the government and therefore the war, up until almost the end — the Soviet Union sought an alliance with the French government! (Previously Communists had supported France's war in Vietnam.) In 1958, the Socialists were booted out and de Gaulle brought in, to win the war. De Gaulle came to realize that this could not be done. He ended the war in 1962, ceding independence (in a Nixon-goes-to-China fashion).

After 8 years of war, the number killed were estimated to have been between 300 thousand to a million Muslim Algerians (out of a population of about 9 million). The wounded or missing were even a larger number, and about 3 million had been displaced. The after-effects of the widespread use of torture by the French cannot be measured. Among the colons, the number of killed or missing was probably 50 to 60 thousand (about 5 percent of their population). After independence, around 90% of French Algerians fled the country, fleeing a people they had made into an enemy.

Porter provides a concise and clear overview of the politics within the French empire and within the Algerian nationalist forces — during and after the war. I will not review this, since I am most interested in his overview of the French anarchists' reactions to the war.