

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

LCB-8 The Left-Wing Intellectual -- Moroccan Style

Lexington, Massachusetts
22 January 1962Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Morocco: Population -- over 10 million. Area -- 160,000 square miles (slightly larger than California). Form of Government -- Absolute monarchy. Religion -- Sunni Islam. Native Language -- Arabic with large Berber speaking minorities. Economy -- 65% of the active population engaged in agriculture. Education -- roughly 35% of the primary school age children are in primary school. Recent History -- After several centuries of decadence, Morocco fell under European control by becoming a French Protectorate in 1912 (a small part of Northern Morocco was placed under Spanish protection). Final French "pacification" was achieved only in 1934. In 1956 Morocco gained political independence. In 1960 King Muhammad V who had ruled since 1927 died and was succeeded by his son, Hasan II.

What does it mean to be a man of the left, a member of his majesty's not-so-loyal opposition, in such a country? One could begin to answer this question by travelling about Morocco -- getting hopelessly lost in the winding markets of historic Fez, founded in the early years of the 9th Century, watching the snake charmers, fortune-tellers and Negro dancers in Marrakech, talking to the sardine fishermen at Mogador and Safi on the Atlantic, visiting a native handicraft center in Azrou in the Middle Atlas Mountains, or driving through the Rif Mountains where Abdel Krim held the French and Spanish armies at bay in the 1920's.

One could begin this way, and it would be a fascinating trip revealing much about Morocco, but he would get only more confused in his quest for the modern Moroccan leftist.

For the Moroccan leftist is a product of France -- of French education, of new urban, industrial centers such as Casablanca which were created by French capital, and of Moroccan trade unionism which grew out of the French Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT). The Moroccan leftist does not represent his country in any statistical sense of a representative sample, but he is very much in the fight to represent the Moroccan people as their accepted spokesman. Nor need this cause any surprise. We have become accustomed to seeing the man from this part of the world who has mastered the modern techniques of the West come home and wrest power from the village

elder, the religious shaykh and the traditional urban bazaar merchant.

To understand the Moroccan left one need hardly leave Casablanca. Visit the eight-story headquarters of the Moroccan trade union organization, the Union Marocaine du Travail (UMT), read for several weeks the daily press of the UMT and of the opposition political group, the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires(UNFP), and get acquainted with the ideas of UNFP leaders such as Mehdi Ben Barka (now in self-exile) and Abdel Rahim Bouabid, and you will soon have a general idea of what the left thinks.

The main points are somewhat as follows:

The Moroccan leftist is a socialist, and he has a pretty good idea of what he means by that term. He is not at all concerned about what should be the limits of state ownership or control. Rather, all his energies are devoted to the problem of how the state apparatus can get things done. He is the planner, par excellence. Planification is the kingpin in his economic thinking. The opposite of planification to him would be not free enterprise but simply neglect.

The Moroccan leftist is strongly influenced by Marxism, but he would not think of himself as a doctrinaire Marxist. The experience of other underdeveloped nations has convinced him that socialism is more efficient. The example of Latin America, so Bouabid would argue, shows that Capitalism as an alternative is a failure. Note that the Moroccan leftist is not interested in the experience of the United States or of Western European countries under capitalism. That is too remote, too far away in time and cultural space. However, Latin America exists as a 20th Century underdeveloped region. Capitalism has been tried there. It has failed. Ergo,...

On the other hand the nation which offers the most effective model is seen as Communist China. As Ben Barka observed, here is the nation which started from a position most similar to that of Morocco and other underdeveloped nations and which is well on the way to development. China, Ben Barka continued, serves as a better example than India. The former is engaged in a "full revolution in the true sense of the term." India is undertaking a "legislative revolution, modifying the established interests instead of destroying them."

The Moroccan leftist is anti-traditional and future-oriented. A conservative like Allal al Fassi will create myths of a pre-Protectorate golden age, but the leftists admit that there is much in the experience of the French Protectorate they want to keep and to build upon. A Ben Barka can note with satisfaction that the Moroccan labor movement is well ahead of the Middle Eastern because of intimate experience with the French CGT.

The Moroccan leftist does not have much respect for traditional patterns of authority in his country, and he does not choose to work through them even for tactical purposes. He is an anti-monarchist as he dares to be (and he has become more daring since the death of Muhammad V). He is disinclined to sacrifice a modern, Westernized education in order to facilitate a more rapid conversion to instruction in Arabic instead of French.

In the same way the Moroccan leftist, though operating in an orthodox and intense Islamic environment, is a secularist. Here the French influence is again marked, for it was not necessary to adopt this road in order to achieve the desired economic and social aims. From the time of Shaykh Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905) right down to the contemporary Egyptian shaykh Khalid Muhammad Khalid there have been Muslims trying to show how Islam is perfectly consistent with the most advanced ideas coming from the West. These apologetics were not always logically consistent, they were not even always completely sincere; but this form of insinuating new ideas into a traditional society resistant to any change has proved effective. The Moroccan leftist will have none of this. Asked his opinion about "Islamic socialism" Bouabid stated, "Islam is not inconsistent with various forms of socialism if they insure justice and well-being for all, but we do not believe Islam has stipulated the means to be followed in the economic development of the age in which we live today." He went on to insist that the term "Islamic socialism" was used by those who, having nothing but "empty expressions and programs which lead nowhere," wanted to "exploit the religious feelings of the people."

Significant also is a political cartoon which appeared recently in the UNFP's daily Al Tahrir showing their opponent and Minister for Islamic Affairs, Allal Al Fassi, squatting on the ground, dressed in the traditional jellaba, and counting his prayer beads. The choice of such symbols for satire explains a lot about the leftist attitude on religion.

The Moroccan leftist has a healthy realization that the essential problem will be resolved according to what the Moroccans themselves do. Therefore, just as he refuses to make the French colonial experience the scapegoat for present shortcomings so also does he refuse to rely on foreign aid as the panacea for the future. Bouabid insists that foreign aid must have a "complementary, not a basic character." The Moroccan leftist can also be severe on empty sloganeering. "Those who limit themselves," affirmed Ben Barka, "to what one might call the sampling of stray, impulsive attempts are asking for cruel tomorrows. I consider it criminal to let the popular enthusiasm which resides in peoples on the road to development be lost and to lull them to sleep by such slogans as industrialization, economic development, mass education, community development without any of this being translated into reality or concrete results."

The leftist interpretation of recent Moroccan history might serve as a good recapitulation of their views: The nation as a whole entered into the struggle for independence. As with most formerly colonial countries this was both a generalized resistance to domination and a search for the national "personality." This national struggle was also a social struggle, because the entire Moroccan nation was a single exploited class vis-a-vis the colonizing power.

Nevertheless, the original leadership of the independence movement was not fully aware, unable to think beyond negative concepts of political independence. If this group had remained unchallenged they would have followed the route of the Wafd party in Egypt or the

Chinese Kou Min Tang. However, the leftists, seeing this danger, have taken a stand against such short-sightedness. They realize that true independence comes only with achieving the domestic social revolution, with putting the nation on the route to economic independence and development.

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Now for the necessary practical question -- Can we Americans work with the Moroccan left? Do we want to? Do they want to work with us?

They are more or less Marxists. They are much more concerned with national economic development than individual liberty. There is a genuine feeling for the "people" but it remains abstract and collective. It is certainly not impossible that they would be willing to break a few eggs in order to create their omelette. The nation they are most impressed with at the moment is Communist China.

On the other hand, they seem to be practical, realistic people demanding more of themselves than of others. They are surely the most dedicated and the best equipped to achieve the social, economic improvement so necessary in Morocco. They seem to be genuinely interested in carving out for themselves a position of political and economic independence, being thus subservient to no nation or bloc. They appear the most likely to succeed on the Moroccan domestic scene.

This group might prove an interesting test case for a pet American theory. Do we really believe that helping nations become economically viable and politically independent is a good step which lessens the dangerous appeal of Communism? If so, there is room for limited cooperation between this country and any future Moroccan government of the left. It looks like the best bet in view of the available alternatives in Morocco.

However, as is invariably the case, there is just no easy, clear-cut answer. This is what makes diplomacy so exciting if one has the wits, stamina and (most important) historical perspective to play the game.

Sincerely,


Leon Carl Brown

Note: The quotations from Bouabid are all found in an interview he gave which was later published in Al Tahrir, 24 October 1961. Those of Mehdi Ben Barka come his book, Problemes d'edification du Maroc et du Maghreb, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1959.