

**THE ESSENCE
OF POLITICAL REFORMS IN ALGERIA
1962-1992 ***

Ammar Bouhouche

Professor

The Institute of Political Science — University of Algiers

THE ESSENCE OF POLITICAL REFORMS IN ALGERIA 1962—1992 *

Ammar Bouhouche
Professor

The Institute of Political Science — University of Algiers

ON JULY 30, 1991 Mr. Ghozali, the former Prime Minister of Algeria between June 1991 and July 1992, organized a meeting between his government and 45 political parties in Algeria. The meeting lasted for 3 days. His aim was to appease Political forces in the country and to set up the rules for the coming legislative elections which took place on December 26, 1991. What was interesting in this meeting is the conversation which took place between him and Mr. Nordine Boukrouh, the leader of the PRA (Party of Renovation in Algeria). Mr. Ghozali reminded the leaders of political parties that his government is neutral and came mainly to hold a free election only, but he presented long and short plans of his government which require at least 20 years to put those plans into effect. Mr. Boukrouh, leader of the PRA, sensed that Mr. Ghozali was behaving like someone who wanted to stay in power forever, like his predecessor in the same office in the era of the FLN. So, he asked the Prime Minister to refrain from exploiting the economic problems for the purpose of staying in power for good. Mr. Boukrouh made it clear that Ghozali's program was ready since 1979 when he was in power. In Boukrouh's judgement, Mr. Ghozali was seeking revenge from his opponents.(1)

This introduction reflects the dilemma of the Algerian Political scene from the beginning of the revolution in 1954 until 1992. It became a traditional cycle, each leader wants to make the rules of the game by himself and takes the final decisions on political matters without any contest so that he can stay in power forever and topples his opponents from top positions.

This is the case of Messali El-Hadj, Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediene and Chadli Ben Djedid who was forced out of office on January 11, 1992 by the same authorities who put him in the post of President. The reason why all those leaders were forced out of the leadership of Algeria, either by the military coup d'état or by death, seems to come from the lack of consensus on policies and the insistence on the part of each leader to pursue policies based on autocratic rule. This bitter fact in the political history of Algeria, probably, will enable us to understand and become aware of the fact that the political reforms in Algeria have never been introduced in order to serve the interests of the state and its citizens but rather came in order to strengthen the personal power of each leader. As a consequence of this attitude, whenever the leader goes out of the political arena, his reforms which he envisages, disappear with him, and new process of trial and error starts again. As one of the authoritative experts on Algeria said one day : « *The Algerian political elite has been composed of numerous clans, factions and cliques, none of which has been powerful to dominate the entire political system* ». What has contributed to this instability, in his judgement « *was the fact no one within the elite other than the army had the support of powerful groups within the society* ». Thus, the elite positions depended primarily on personal relations with elite members.(2)

THE POLITICAL REFORMS IN THE ERA OF BEN BELLA

In the first republic of Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965), one has to admit the fact that it was not a question of reform but rather a question of establishing law and order in the country. Since August 8, 1962 when the leadership of the Algerian provisional government (GPRA) was forced to give up its authority in favor of the Political Bureau and eventually the government

* This paper is prepared for delivery at the 26th Convention of the Middle East Studies Association, held in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., from October 28 to 31, 1992.

(1) Al Massa, daily newspaper, issue of July 30, 1991

(2) William B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership : Algeria, 1954 - 1968* Cambridge, Ma The M.I.T Press 1969, pp 11-12

formed by Ben Bella in September 1962, the new leaders of Algeria did not have a common strategy. They disagreed on the new political institutions of the state which are entitled to make final decisions in matters of policy making.

Ben Bella, as the head of the government, insisted that the executive must have the upper hand in policy making and the role of the Parliament should be limited and allowed only to give its point of view on bills and policies initiated by the government. He asserted that the main task of the new Constituent Assembly is to help the government in elaborating a new constitution. In his judgement, the deputies are selected by the unique party (FLN) and it is the party which gives approval to policies initiated by the government. This view was rejected by his ally against the GPRA, Farhat Abbas, the President of the Constituent Assembly who saw the assembly as the ultimate source of authority in the Political system. Abbas advocated the idea of separation of powers, with the Constituent Assembly in charge of drafting the new constitution and making laws which would be executed by the government.⁽³⁾ But Ben Bella forced Abbas to resign when the executive decided to introduce the new project of the constitution after a preliminary debate by the officials of the FLN. Abbas argued that the militants of the party had no right to approve or disapprove the constitution of the state since they are not elected by the people and, therefore, have no right to deprive the Constituent Assembly of its legislative powers. In this way, the attempt by Abbas to establish an independent parliament failed and it was the party which designated the list of candidates to the new parliament. Abbas resigned on August 14, 1963.

In the same manner, Ben Bella used the Political Bureau, where he had the majority, to exclude Mohamed Khider from the party on April 17, 1963. Mr. Khider who was the architect of Ben Bella's victory in 1962 was in charge of the FLN up to April 1963 and he succeeded in winning the support of the newly elected members of the congress of the General union of Algerian workers (UGTA) in January 1963. For the first time, the labor forces in the country accepted to work under the authority of the Political bureau of the FLN. But when Khider advocated the idea of extending the authority of the party to the public sector and keep the state employees under the influence of the party, Ben Bella decided, on the level of the Political Party, to subordinate the party to the executive branch of the government. He made it clear that he was not in favor of holding the first national congress of the party, as Mr. Khider had asked. Furthermore, Ben Bella made a calculated move to play the various factions off against each other, and he was able to weaken them.⁽⁴⁾ In order to isolate Khider, Ben Bella sought the alliance of Boumediene and the left wing groups. he informed Khider that he was against the idea of allowing the party (FLN) to control the activities of the state and remained silent about Khider's proposal to get the army out of politics. Thus, he took side with Boumediene. On April 3, 1963 he made a speech in which he indicated his full support to the policy of self-management. By favoring this policy, Ben Bella gained the support of the left-wing groups. Thus, Khider's efforts to strengthen the party vis-à-vis the government received a final setback when he sought the support of the 5 members of the Political Bureau for his ideas, but failed to convince them, and Ben Bella succeeded in forcing him to resign from his post of Secretary general of the party on April 17, 1963.⁽⁵⁾

After his successive moves to bring the Parliament and the party under his control, Ben Bella seemed to have secured the full powers he needed to make the economic and political reforms in Algeria without any challenge, from either the party unique or the parliament. In the autumn of 1963, Ben Bella turned to his third rival and source of opposition, the leader of the army.

On November 16, 1963 Ben Bella announced that he intended to hold the first congress of the FLN, and two days later, he installed the committee of 44 members which prepared the texts of the new charter of Algiers. It was clear from the beginning that he wanted to strengthen his powers at the expense of Boumediene and his colleagues who thought the time was not ripe for holding such convention. Naturally, the leaders of the army objected to any move to weaken

(3) Ibid, pp 182-183

(4) Hugh Roberts, "The Politics of the Algerian Socialism" in Richard Lawless and Allan Findlay. North Africa : Contemporary Politics and Development. London : Croom Helm Limited, 1984, p 9

(5) Harve Bourges, L'Algérie à l'épreuve du pouvoir Paris : Editions Bernard Grasset, 1967, p. 98.

the army and exclude them from power after their bitter fight with the GPRA to bring Ben Bella to power. In fact, Ben Bella had already offended his rival when he got in touch with Colonel Mohaned Oulhadj and negotiated with him directly the question of solving the problem of rebellion in Kabylie without even consulting the Minister of Defense, Houari Boumediene. The military officers reacted in a negative way by offering their resignation from the committee in charge of preparing the platform of the party. However, Ben Bella sensed their resentment and refused their resignation. He encouraged them to stay on and make their point of view clear in the congress of the party.

On April 16, 1964, the congress of the party opened in cinema Afrique in Algiers. Ben Bella made a conciliatory gesture to his former opponents by inviting them to the conference and hoped that they would support him to retain the power in his fight against the army. Unfortunately for him, most of the prominent personalities, like Ben Khedda, Abbas, Khider, Bitat, Boudiaf and Ait Ahmed, refused to attend the congress of the party. Thus, Ben Bella and his left wing advisors found themselves face to face with Boumediene and his group. During the whole week of the conference, the Minister of Defense listened carefully to the critical comments of the army and its leadership which was accused of favoring the officers who served in the French army. At the end, Boumediene answered his critics by saying that he did not differentiate between the Algerians and indicated that any individual needed and qualified in his field would be welcome to serve in the army. He reminded the delegates, however, that he would exclude the former officers who served in the French army if the delegates decide and want him to do so. In a way, he appeased them and proved to the delegates of the party, his discipline and his desire to avoid confronting them. In brief, Boumediene took this occasion to remind the delegates that he would prefer to work with the Algerians than to work with foreign advisers who infiltrated the government.(6)

In July 1964, Ben Bella began to make the reforms he wanted in matters of national security. He decided to create a new military force which functions under his authority, and separated from the Ministry of Defense. Then, the president decided to weaken Boumediene by dismissing his close friends from the government. In a note to the Walis (governors), Ben Bella asked them to report directly to the Presidency instead of reporting to the Ministry of the Interior so that the military group will be stripped of their authority over the police. On May 26, 1965, the president sent Boumediene to Cairo to attend a conference and, in his absence, Ben Bella decided to dismiss Bouteflika, an ally of Boumediene, from his post of Minister of foreign affairs.

In brief, by June 1965, Ben Bella did not focus on the economic and political reforms the country needed most, but focused on the issue of making himself the ultimate source of power in the country. He became Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister of Finance, Minister of Information, and general Secretary of the party.(7) In fact, some close friends to Ben Bella warned him on May 15, 1965 that if he did not purge the army from the former French officers, as soon as possible, Boumediene will take over and eliminate him from power. But Ben Bella answered them with certainty that Boumediene will never succeed in making a coup d'etat because, he said, « *I made him and I helped him to reach that position and he is very grateful to me* ». Then, he added, « *I am supported by the masses and they will never support anybody else* ».

He concluded his remarks by assuring his listeners that « *the Afro-Asiatique conference is going to be held in Algiers in the near future and nobody will dare to interrupt this conference, and I can assure you that, after the conference, I will put Boumediene in the place where he is supposed to be* ». (8)

On June 19, 1965, Ben Bella was overthrown and the struggle for power between the army, on the one hand, and the party and the government on the other hand, was over for good.

Thus, Ben Bella's efforts to make the reforms which would have transferred all powers to the presidency, ended in failure.

(6) Quandt, op cit: p. 224

(7) Bourges. Op Cit. p 117

(8) Si Lakhdar Bourekaa. An Eye witness on the Assassination of the Revolution Alger Dar El-Hekma. 1991. pp 135-137

THE POLITICAL REFORMS OF BOUMEDIENE (1965-1978)

The big change in the era of Boumediene (1965-1978) was in the style of running the government. He seemed to be interested, in the beginning, in getting rid of personal power, excluding left-wing advisors from government and creating a collective work. But on July 5, 1965, he named the 26 members of the Council of the Revolution and that was sufficient enough to indicate that Boumediene did not trust civilian cadres and he was determined to keep all the powers in his hands as well as in the hands of his colleagues who became members of the Council of the Revolution. Apparently, Boumediene hoped that the members of the Council who replace the head of state, would be the supreme authority in the country, responsible for policy making, and the Council of the Ministers would be in charge of the execution of policies made by the council of the Revolution. But in reality, the council of the Revolution had never been converted into a collective body of collective work because it was very difficult for its members to create consensus on most issues and Boumediene could not overcome the cleavage between his close allies in the council. While the council remained as a symbol of supreme national authority, but in reality, its limited number of officers played merely a ceremonial role. The real power was in the hands of members of the Council of Ministers, who were influenced by the head of their council, Houari Boumediene. In a way, the Council of the Revolution resembled in a great deal the Political Bureau in the era of Ben Bella.

Thus, Boumediene suspended the constitution, the Political Bureau of the party and put an end to the parliamentary system after the coup d'état of 1965. He reduced the party to a mass organization and never relied on its members to mobilize masses for the support of his policies. He relied instead on the Commissariat-Politique of the ANP (army) which became involved in policy explanation and social work on the level of the masses.

It is interesting to note that Boumediene's approach to political and economic reforms was completely different from that of Ben Bella. He used nationalism to unify the Algerians by nationalizing foreign banks and mines in 1967, and oil in 1971. He moved quickly to create stability and credibility of the state by investing in heavy industries and creating jobs in all sectors, and by such means he created support for his regime among the workers.

Furthermore, in order to secure the support of peasants, he introduced dramatic measures in the field of agriculture by introducing the new revolutionary Agrarian reform in 1971. In the field of education, he devoted 35 % of the state budget for training and providing education for every young cadre. What facilitated his tasks in carrying such policies was the soaring price of oil in 1973. Up to 1976, Boumediene did not make any significant reform in the political system except on the municipal level in 1967 which was limited in method and scope.

The dilemma of Boumediene was that he succeeded in saving Algeria from the intrusion of foreign advisers who seemed to be determined to use Algeria as a field of experience for their ideological theories, and he was able to save the interests of the army by getting rid of the personal rule of Ben Bella. But he did not have a political base outside the armed forces. This explains his inability to create a collective leadership and rally the political forces in the country behind him. The left wing militants turned against him and insisted on the continuation of the socialist policies of Ben Bella. When he refused to yield to their pressure, the socialists defected to the opposition and Boumediene was forced to turn to technocrats who could help him introduce his own reforms and solve the economic and political problems of Algeria.⁽⁹⁾

Another source of trouble for Boumediene came from within the military leadership in the person of the ANP chief of staff, colonel Zbiri, who accused Boumediene in 1967 of consolidating his personal power and relying heavily on the advice of the « Oujda group » who worked with him outside Algeria up to 1962. In the same year, there was another attempt to assassinate Boumediene, and he was forced to govern through the Council of Ministers, and relied heavily on military officers who were often appointed to important positions in the civil administration.⁽¹⁰⁾

(9) Harold D. Nelson, *Algeria : A Country Study* Washington, D.C. : Government Printing Office, 1986, p. 85.

(10) *Ibid.* p. 86

In brief, Boumediene's era may be described as a period of building bureaucratic state in which powers were given to ministers who reported to him and no one was allowed to evaluate their performance other than Boumediene.

When the industrial projects and the agricultural revolution failed to meet the needs of the Algerian society, and Boumediene's policies proved to be running into difficulty, the ministers were divided on most issues, and they became critics of their leader. By 1976, Boumediene found himself isolated and his close friends turned against him. In 1972 Kaid Ahmed lost his job in the party when he criticized Boumediene for his inability to revitalize the FLN and giving him a share of authority. In 1974 it was the turn of Ahmed Medighri, minister of Interior, who disappeared from the political arena because he wanted a parliamentary system and more authority for the state governors who worked very closely with the Minister of the Interior. In the same year, Bouteflika, Minister of Foreign Affairs, came under attack from the left wing group, and he was accused of representing the bourgeoisie and the corrupted people who were interested in making money at the expense of the state. In a speech on June 6, 1974 in Constantine, Boumediene who sympathized with the left-wing elements, warned his critics by saying « *we have to be aware of the bourgeois tendencies which are beginning to infiltrate our society* ».

He said the Revolution needs a party of credible individuals who are militants and socialists (11)

The genuine change and political reforms in the era of Boumediene came in 1975 and 1976. In his speech of June 19, 1975 marking the tenth anniversary of the so called "*Revolutionary Rectification*" of 1965, Boumediene declared that he will draft a National Charter, new constitution, create new parliament and establish a presidential system. The debate on the National Charter in 1976 revealed the weaknesses of his regime and his entourage. He allowed the people to criticize the officials and convince the public of their inefficiency and corruption in the government. Boumediene used such criticism as a pretext for getting rid of his critics and sending them either to the party or to the newly created parliament. At the same time, he designated, in 1977, Colonel Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui as co-ordinator of the party (FLN) and asked him to give new blood to the party and mobilize the masses behind the regime. This new method of work was merely an experience and, in Boumediene's mind, « *The FLN was to be confined to symbolic functions* ». (12) The newly created parliament (APN) of 252 seats which was brought into existence officially on February 25, 1977, never played a key role in policy making and the Presidency remained the strong hold of power in Algeria until now. In order to ensure that he remains the undisputed policy maker in Algeria, he was elected by the people in December 1976. This election or popular legitimization for his power as head of state may be viewed as a counterweight to the national parliament. In short, Boumediene emerged from these reforms in the 1970's as the architect of government policy, a statesman of international stature who conspicuously dominated his ministers. (13)

THE NEW OUTLOOK IN THE ERA OF BEN DJEDID

The death of Boumediene on December 27, 1978 created new conditions for work. It was clear from the beginning that the new leader has to come from the Council of the Revolution. But the tendency was to select a moderate person who accepts the principle of collective leadership and not powerful enough to dominate the political arena in Algeria as it was the case of their former boss. As a compromise candidate, Chadli Ben Djedid was acceptable to leading decision makers at that time. On January 27, 1979, the first Congress of the FLN was held and approved the designation of Ben Djedid as the next President of Algeria, and automatically as a Secretary General of the FLN according to the national constitution of 1976. On February 7, 1979 Ben Djedid was officially elected by the people, and two days later he was sworn in as President.

(11) El Moudjahid 8 juin 1974

(12) Nelson, Op Cit; p 86

(13) Roberts, Op. Cit. p 24.

Since Ben Djedid was chosen by his colleagues in the Council of the Revolution and the Party (FLN) and confirmed by the people in his position as President of Algeria, he did not mind to work within the framework of the party, and as a matter of fact, he appreciated the efforts to debate policies and to create consensus within the party on crucial issues. Unlike his predecessor, Ben Djedid favored the idea of creating a Political Bureau and a Central Committee and induced the militants of the FLN to be involved in policy making instead of remaining on the sideline and waiting for the Presidency to tell them what decisions are taken by top officials and they have to justify them to the masses.

By accepting the idea of sharing power, Ben Djedid changed the political outlook of Algeria. He demonstrated that he was willing to pursue policies adopted by his predecessor, and relied on the co-ordinator of the party, Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui who was named by Boumediene on October 30, 1977 in that post. But the crucial problem which faced Ben Djedid was not the new method of using the party as instrument to curb and control the bureaucracy, but rather the question vis-à-vis his colleagues in the political leadership. (14)

Thus, the real reforms in Algeria began in the first Congress of the FLN on January 27, 1979. It was in that meeting that the party decided to modify the constitution of 1976 and establish a new criteria of work. According to the new policies, the party will hold its Congress regularly every five years, the Central Committee of the FLN becomes the supreme authority of the party and its political bureau was recognized as the executive authority which carries out decisions taken by the leadership of the party. Furthermore, the 3,298 delegates to the first Congress of the party, gave their approval to the new policies of rectifying anomalies in the agricultural sector and urged the government of Ben Djedid to introduce new measures of efficiency in the economic field.

In March 1979, Ben Djedid made his first move in policy making and formed his new government, in which he brought in new faces, and retained only 4 ministers (out of 28) from the previous government. Influential personalities in the era of Boumediene, like Bouteflika and Ben Cherif, were dropped from the cabinet and Ben Yahia succeeded Bouteflika as minister of foreign affairs, a post Bouteflika occupied since 1963. Sid Ahmed Ghazali was also removed from his strategic post of Minister of Energy and Petrochemical industries, a post he enjoyed since 1965 and as a minister since 1977. Thus, Ben Djedid began to assert his authority and seemed to have received the support of 600 military officers, out of 3,298 delegates participated in the first congress of the party. He was also encouraged by his colleague, Colonel Mohamed Ben Ahmed Abdelghani who assumed the responsibility of Prime Minister.(15)

Immediately after his move to make the necessary adjustments in the economic field and agrarian reforms, Ben Djedid was challenged by his former colleagues in the Council of the Revolution, Bouteflika and Yahiaoui. As members of the Political Bureau of the FLN, Bouteflika put pressure on Ben Djedid to liberalize the economy and pave the way to private sector.

Yahiaoui, on his part, wanted the President to strengthen the party by establishing its political control on the bureaucracy and tightening the influence of the party over the administrative apparatus of the state.(16)

This diversion and latent struggle for power virtually paralyzed the Political Bureau and made it very difficult for Ben Djedid to take any action, especially when he faced at the beginning of his era, growing social tension among students in universities who wanted total arabization after the arabization of high schools. At the same time there was the unrest in Kabylie where the people sought the recognition of their language as a second national language.

(14) Ibid, p. 36

(15) The Guardian, February 1 1979

(16) Roberts Op. Cit. p. 36

In order to get out of this impasse, Ben Djedid called for an extra ordinary meeting of the Congress of the FLN, which was held from June 15 to 19, 1980. It was in this Congress that Ben Djedid succeeded in persuading the 4,000 delegates to get rid of the co-ordinator of the party Yahiaoui and revise the status of the party. In that Congress, he proved to be skillful in choosing members of two commissions from outside the Political Bureau and induced them to propose to the delegates to grant sweeping powers to the secretary General of the Party. It was in that extraordinary meeting of the Congress of the FLN that Ben Djedid secured the approval of his plans to retain only 7 (out of 17) in the Political Bureau and to choose them instead of proposing them to the Central Committee of the party.

The second radical change and reforms came in June 1980 when Ben Djedid proposed Abdelhamed Brahimi to the Central Committee of his party and eventually he named him Minister of planification. Ben Djedid relied very heavily on this man who became the architect of his economic policies in the 1980's. With the background as economist critical of Boumediene's socialist policies, Brahimi worked very closely with Ben Djedid to elaborate the new five year development plan (1980-1984) which was approved by the extraordinary Congress of the party on June 19, 1980, and reflected Ben Djedid's ideas to liberalize the economy, to encourage the private sector and to induce foreign enterprises to invest in the Algerian economy. Furthermore, Ben Djedid asked Abdelhamed Brahimi to restructure national enterprises, reduce them in size and make them efficient.

Following the extra ordinary congress of the party in June 1980, Ben Djedid decided to eliminate the post of coordinator of the party and by this decision left Yahiaoui jobless or without any function in the party. He instead named Yahiaoui's opponent Mohamed Cherif Massadia as head of the Permanent Central Committee of the party. He also dropped kasdi Merbah, one of the strongest men in Boumediene's era, and named Mostefa Beloucif in his place as Secretary General of the Ministry of Defense. He also removed colonel Abdellah Belhouchet from the first military region of Blida and nominated a trusted ally in that post. In another move, Colonel Mohamed Ben Ahmed Abdelghani, a powerful leader in the era of Boumediene, was dropped from the Ministry of Interior and Boualem Ben Hamouda took over that ministry.

In short, all Boumediene's strongmen were removed from their key positions by new elements loyal to Ben Djedid who became the head of state, Minister of Defense, Head of the Council of Ministers and Secretary General of the party (FLN).

After this radical purge in the leadership, Ben Djedid turned to the left wing and right wing elements within the party who resented his reforms and criticized him openly in the meeting of the Central Committee of the FLN which was held from December 29 to 31, 1980. The President made his decisive move against agitators from the left who infiltrated the FLN but kept their loyalty to the Communist party. It was in this meeting that the officials of the party decided to apply article 120 of the statute of the party which prohibits any member of the FLN to belong to another party. Thus, all members of the organizations of masses have to sign papers in which they commit themselves to the FLN, otherwise they will not be eligible to any position in any elected assembly. In short, total loyalty to the FLN is a necessity for any political representation in Algeria. This policy was exactly the opposite of what Boumediene and Yahiaoui hoped to achieve, that is to ensure a degree of popular control over the state apparatus, but in Ben Djedid's era, what has happened was the subordination of the popular will to that apparatus.⁽¹⁷⁾

Furthermore, he strengthened himself by appointing the 31 heads of Mohafada (department) of the party in the 31 governorships (wilaya) in the country who became the chairmen of the Council of Coordination in the 31 provinces of the Country. Those councils which functioned as policy making and co-ordination between state agencies on local level, were composed of the chiefs of the military sectors, the presidents of the elected local assemblies (APW). Thus, the

(17) *ibid*: p. 38

party has the upper hand in policy making and the wali (the local governor) became the executive authority of the council of coordination.

In an unprecedented move, Ben Djedid proposed to his colleagues in the Central Committee of the party in that meeting of December 1980 to create a committee of Discipline which will judge those members who do not conform to the decisions taken by the party. As a chairman of this committee, Ben Djedid used this committee as a powerful weapon in his hands to dismiss his opponents from the party and sent their files to the state tribunal (la cour des comptes) which is specialized in judging corrupted officials who were accused of stealing state money. This was the case of Bouteflika who was accused of stealing 60 million Dinars in August 1980 and Teybi Larbi who was accused of stealing 2 million Dinars in December 1983.

As for the opponents of Boumediene, they were either released from jails or pardoned and allowed to come back to the country. For instance, Ben Bella was released from prison in April 1979 and became completely free in October 1980. Mr. Zbiri, the leader of the abortive coup d'état of December 1967, was pardoned and came back from exile.(18)

In the beginning of his rule, Ben Djedid impressed most citizens by his decisions to : abolish the system of visa for travel abroad, open accounts in hard currency inside Algeria, increase allowances in hard currency for travelling abroad, allow citizens to import small items or spare parts for cars from abroad and the state would pay for them in hard currency.

The great shift in the political and economic reforms in the era of Ben Djedid, came in the beginning of 1984. It was on January 16, 1984 that Ben Djedid appointed Abdelhamed Brahimi as his prime minister and asked him to direct the economy toward the social needs of the Algerian society.

The new slogan became « *better life and better future* ». Mr. Brahimi's strategy was to shift from investment in heavy industry to investment in light industry. The focus of the new government was aimed at improving productivity in the sector of agriculture and providing better services in the areas of housing, medical care and education. In December 1984, the leadership decided to make the administration closer to the citizens by raising the number of wilaya from 31 to 48. It was hoped that the shift from state centered strategy of development to greater role of private initiative and better use of country's natural resources would achieve food self-sufficiency.(19)

According to recent information revealed by Abdelhamed Brahimi, it was in 1984 that Ben Djedid asked Brahimi, his prime minister from 1986 to 1988, to come up with a project in which the President would share his powers with the Prime Minister. Brahimi claimed that the entourage of the President refused the idea of any political reform. When he complained to the President about the lack of co-operation he received from his entourage, Ben Djedid told him that he was not ready yet to delegate his powers. He reminded his prime minister that from the legal point of view of the constitution, the President is the head of government.(20) In fact, Brahimi confirmed the fact that the Prime Minister was powerless and did not have any influence in the government.

As an example, he mentioned the fact that in 1985 the President appointed him as a chairman of a subcommission in charge of preparing a comprehensive plan of development which was a part of the new chart of 1986, animated by Mohamed Cherif Massaadia of the Party (FLN). But he found out in 1986 that everything was arranged on the level of the President and his entourage, and he could not do anything about it. He said it was his intention to resign from his post as Prime Minister. But the people he talked to, advised him to stay because his departure would make things worse.(21)

(18) Le Monde du Premier Novembre 1980

(19) John P. Entelis, Algeria : The Revolution Institutionalized Boulder, Colorado Westview Press, 1986, p. 149.

(20) Abdelhamed Brahimi in an interview with the daily newspaper Assalam, issue of August 22, 1991

(21) Idam.

THE LACK OF CONSENSUS AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW CONTENDERS OF POWER

The turning point in the current political crisis in Algeria is the year 1986. In that year, the prices of oil dropped and the state could not provide basic needs to the people. Perhaps more important than this was the internal struggle for power within the regime. The resistance to Ben Djedid's reforms came from the state bureaucrats who disliked the growing political strength of the party at their expense. As we have indicated early, the leadership of the party became involved in policy making and was eager to move to the arena of policy execution in order to overcome the slow process of implementing the economic reforms approved by the leadership of the party.

At the same time the Ministry of Interior, suddenly became very powerful and its chief acquired a great deal of power after the decision of the President to modernize the institutions of the state and transfer all matters of security to this ministry. However, the entourage of the President and influential advisers were opposed to such move and did their best to block the transfer of power to police.

There was also in Ben Djedid's administration another tendency opposed to the policy of close co-operation between Algeria and Libya. The French lobby in the administration resented the growing strength of the party and the initiative of its leader Mohamed Cherif Massaadia who was negotiating the projet confederation between Algeria and Libya. He was the first to be removed from his function after the events October 1988. When a top official was asked recently about this issue, he confirmed that Massaadia was in charge of the project of unity with Libya and the leader of the party was told that unity can not be achieved on paper.(22)

It can be said that by September 1988 the President was overwhelmed and caught between different centers of power, each one sought to influence the course of events to its advantage. When there was the showdown in the streets on October 5, 1988, the dissatisfied masses joined strikers and demonstrators who succeeded in creating disorder and chaos in the country, without knowing who is going to emerge the winner. But gradually things began to become clear when the angry demonstrators wrecked the local offices of the party and created spontaneous authority in different localities. The disappearance of local police forces from streets proved that the regime was very weak and the President was forced to ask the army to come to the rescue of his government and re-establish order and security in the country.

Ben Djedid who seemed to have been shaken by the violent demonstrations and public anger, seized this occasion to make sweeping changes and political reforms in his government. He fired his Prime Minister, Brahimi and appointed Marbah as a chief of the government (new post). He also expelled Massaadia from the leadership of the Party (FLN) and brought in Abdelhamed Mehri to take over. The Ministry of Interior which failed in its mission to quell the rebellion of dissatisfied masses lost its bid to be the sole authority in charge of national security. Eventually, the entourage of the President emerged as the leading force in the country and determined to make sweeping reforms in the country.

In November 1988, Ben Djedid changed his style of running the government. He proposed to the people a new constitution which was approved in a referendum on February 23, 1989. According to the new constitution, the executive power is to be shared between the President and the chief of the government. In a way, the President will be in charge of foreign policy and supervising the policies. But the chief of government and his ministers will be working with the Parliament. They were supposed to execute policies approved by the President and the

(22) General Belkhir's interview to Al-Massa, issue of October 30, 1991.

legislative body. This means, in reality, the chief of the government can be dismissed from office if he fails to win the support of the majority of deputies in the Parliament or by the President.

In other words, the ministers work out their policies on the level of the **Council of Government** under the leadership of the chief of the government. The discussion of policies, however, is to take place on the level of **The Council Ministers** presided by the head of state.

In brief, on October 29, 1989 the President designated very quiet man to renew the FLN. he asked the Algerian ambassador to Morocco, Abdelhamed Mehri to take over the leadership of the party and create harmony and co-operation between the dissident members of the FLN.

On November 5, 1989, he picked up Kasdi Marbah who was one of the strongest leaders in the era of Boumediene and asked him to form the government and implement the economic and political reforms of the President. He hoped the experience of Marbah would make the reforms very successful.

The dramatic event came, however, on November 27, 1989 when the President asked all the political leaders of Algeria to the 6th congress of the FLN and tried to create a new method of work in the party. In his judgement, the FLN would no longer function as the party of the state and no longer control organizations of masses. The FLN has to work with the executive and Ben Djedid proposed that new tendencies are to be allowed and tolerated within the party.(23) The President of the Republic and the Party did not present, however, any program for the new FLN which he wanted to lead the government instead of using mass organizations to confront the government. In order to create national consensus (even without any program), Ben Djedid invited the delegates of the Congress to include in the Central Committee of the FLN, former barons (strongmen) who worked with Boumediene (like Balaïd Abdessalam, Bouteflika, Yahiaoui) as well as former members of the Communist Party, in addition to former members of the FLN who were well known for their Islamic tendency.(24) What really surprised many people in the 6th Congress of the FLN, was Ben Djedid's ability to secure the approval of his candidacy to the post of President. On December 22, 1989, he was elected by the people for 5 years.

At any rate, the new technique of creating unity within diversity, did not work out, as it was envisaged by Ben Djedid. If he wanted to strengthen the party, the former barons of Boumediene's era were interested in something else. They wanted to discuss the programme of the party and specifically the economic and political reforms which are needed to save the country from political decay. Furthermore, they wanted change in the leadership of the FLN and seemed to be determined to bring in new credible and competent leaders.

In fact, there was very strong feeling among the delegates of the FLN during 6th Congress of the party which began on November 27, 1988 that in the interest of the FLN and in the interest of the President, Ben Djedid should step down from the party and give chance to a new leader to change the course of events in Algeria. The president also gave the impression that he may leave the party. But, contrary to all expectatins, he outmaneuvered his opponents and succeeded in winning the support of the majority of delegates, not only to be reelected as chairman of the party but also to be designated as the only candidate for Presidency.

When he sensed after 6th Congress of the party that the leading personalities in the FLN were hostile to his reforms and his clumsy method of running the country, Ben Djedid took the initiative and proposed in the Constitution which was approved by the people on February 23, 1989, the multiparty system in the country. This vital issue was never discussed or approved in the 6th Congress of the party of the FLN in November 1988. The general understanding in the milieu of delegates was that political sensitivities will be permitted within the FLN but not outside the party.

(23) Harve Terrel, "Le FLN, objectifs - Conserves le pouvoir" in Algérie, les Cahiers de l'Orient n° 23, 1991, pp. 66-67.

(24) Ibid, p. 68

Naturally, the people voted on the proposed constitution and the multi-party system was appreciated by all groups which wanted to work outside the FLN and present their own programs of reforms to the masses.

Since the introduction of multi-party system in 1989 and Ben Djedid's decision to encourage mass media to present facts to the public on cases of corruption and scandals in the political system, everything went out of hand.

Leaders are accusing each other of corruption and stealing state money. The last victim of this campaign is Ben Djedid himself who was accused by Ben Bella of the embezzlement of 10 or 15 million dollars.⁽²⁵⁾ The case now is in the court. In brief, the hasty reforms of Ben Djedid which intended to allow the mass media to present facts to the public worked against his regime. The free press revealed scandals and corruption in the regime. Such revelations convinced the public that the regime is no longer credible and the people felt the strong need to change the whole system.

THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THE REFORMS

The radical reforms of Ben Djedid in 1988 and 1989 created some hope because he changed the structures of the institutions and created new era of open system. His strategy was aimed at strengthening the state by creating : (1) Multi-party system, (2) Free Press, (3) Constitutional Council, (4) new constitution, (5) envisaging the parliamentary election in June 1991, (6) and sharing powers with the new chief of government who is supposed to face his colleagues in the FLN and solve the problems of Algeria. As President of all Algerians, Ben Djedid reserved for himself the role of arbitrator between political parties, leader of the government; parliament and his party (the FLN).

In March 1989, Ben Djedid induced the army to get out of politics and relinquish its seats in the central committee of the FLN. In another eventual move, he decided in July 1990 to name General Khaled Nezzar Minister of Defense and ended a 25 year practice whereby the head of state was also the head of the military institution. (26) Then, he turned to his new chief of government, Kasdi Marbah, and asked him to present his program of reforms to the parliament for discussion and approval. Although Marbah faced some difficulties in convincing his colleagues of the FLN in the parliament that the reforms are needed, he succeeded in securing their approval of his program. Marbah well known as a man of action and dossiers, turned to his former officers and close friends to help him and to redress the economic and political problems of Algeria. By the summer of 1989, it became clear to the entourage of the President that Marbah was overshadowing Ben Djedid and the latter disliked Marbah's method of work. The president sensed that his chief of government was not committed to the economic reforms and was very slow in implementing them. The tension between the two leaders of the executive authority was exploited by the state mass media which revealed Marbah's failure to overcome inefficiency, waste of state resources and mismanagement in the economy. The entourage of the President relied on their protégés in the state run television and the weekly newspaper *Algérie Actualité* to discredit Marbah's government and accused the chief of the government of contacting leaders of opposition and hindering the economic reforms.

On September 9, 1989, Marbah was dismissed from his office and discovered that the President could terminate his mission without losing the vote of confidence in the Parliament.⁽²⁷⁾ The general feeling in September 1989 was that Marbah did not believe in the success of Ben Djedid's economic reforms and he declined to commit himself to these clumsy reforms. So the President invited Mr. Mouloud Hamrouche to form a new government composed of the same technocrats who were consulted by the Presidency and participated in the process of setting up economic and political reforms. Many people sensed that the President learned a lesson from his short experience with Marbah, that Boumediene's clan did not wish him

(25) See Ben Bella's interview to Paris Match, issue of March 19, 1992, p. 86.

(26) Robert Mortimer "Islam and Multi Party Politics in Algeria" The Middle East Journal, vol. 44, n° 4 (Autumn) 1991, pp. 577-583

any success in his efforts to liquidate the socialist policies and introduce his new liberal policies which are considered to be suitable to the Algerian economy.

Unlike the outgoing government, the new one and its young members of the cabinet, seemed to be motivated to implement the reforms right away. The president was relieved that the new chief of the government was very loyal to him and has no longer to worry about any threat from Kasdi Marbah who turned out to be a rival and an ambitious politician. He also gave the impression that the new chief of the government, the leader of the party (Mehri) and the President of the APN (Parliament) Rabah Bitat, will co-operate with each other and work smoothly toward the success of the economic and political reforms.

When the new government entered in the delicate phase of applying the reforms, defined in the law of January 12, 1988, immediately the reforms have had an adverse effect on the Algerian society and everybody stood against them.(28) The autonomy given to the enterprises meant that the state would not give any financial subsidy and their survival depends on their ability to raise prices and generate some revenue in order to pay the wages of employees.

The state which has monopoly on the imported goods and services did not have sufficient hard currency to import raw materials and the factories were almost paralyzed. At the same time, the experts of the IMF were invited to Algeria in order to help and give advice and ultimately, provide loans to the Algerian ailing economy. The recommendations of the experts were to devaluate the Dinar and let the prices soar to the intolerable level. As a result of those actions by the government and the experts of the IMF, the cost of living soared to the extent that there was no choice for anybody but to turn against the government of the FLN and its disastrous economic reforms.

In the parliament, the deputies of the FLN sensed the need to defend the interests of their constituencies and slowdown the catastrophic measures of reforms which aggravated unemployment and misery on the level of the masses.

By its insistence on giving legitimacy to its economic reforms, the government alienated many deputies. They resented the government's approach that the reforms pass or the parliament would be dissolved (*Ça passe ou ça casse*).

This aggressive policy proved to be costly to the FLN, because it resulted in the resignation of Mr. Bitat from the chairmanship of the Parliament in October 1990. Eventually, he joined the leading personalities opposed to the FLN.(29) Anyhow, the entourage of the President designated Abdelaziz Belkhadem as a successor to Bitat. Like the chief of the government, Belkhadem was a young man, very loyal to the President. This meant the transformation of the parliament into « a chamber of recording » for what the government wanted to do.(30)

On the level of the party, Mehri's gentility did not pay off. Instead of uniting the heterogeneous groups within the FLN, he just watched them fight each other. Abdelhamed Brahimi, Ben Djedid's Prime Minister from 1984 to 1988 asserted in a lecture to students at the University of Algiers in March 1990, that no less than \$26 billion dollars were received as bribes by government officials from international firms in the past twenty years.(31) Kasdi Marbah, Ben Djedid's chief of government from November 1988 to September 1989, decided to withdraw from the FLN and created his own political party (MAJD). His main strategy was to hold early presidential elections and to unseat Ben Djedid.

By the time the municipal elections were held on June 12, 1990, the disillusioned masses were prepared to vote for the new political parties and alternatives presented by the challengers of the FLN. It was evident in June 1990 that the entourage of the President misjudged the mood of the people and underestimated the resentment of the population. Out of 12,841,769 registered

(28) Ibid: p 103.

(29) Terrel, Op Cit., pp 69-70.

(30) Ibid: p 70.

(31) Elizabeth Levy, "La démocratie à couteaux tirés " Jeune Afrique, December 19, 1990, p 8

voters, there were 7,984,788 who participated in the vote (65.2%) and 4,331,272 of the participants in the vote supported the newly created party F.I.S. (Islamic Front of Salvation). That meant, out of 1541 municipalities, 856 of them (55.5%) will be run by the F.I.S. Government's party, FLN, was supported only by 2,245,798 voters (31.6%) and only 486 municipalities will remain under its control. The independents won support in 106 municipalities (6.9%) and the RCD in Kabylia ranked fourth with 87 municipalities or 5.7% of the votes. The remaining 6 municipalities were won by small political parties like, PNSD, PSD, and PRA, each one won in two municipalities.(32)

WHY THE OPPOSITION GAINED GROUND

The success of the opposition, to win the municipal elections of June 1990 and the first round of the legislative election of December 26, 1991 is understandable and can be attributed to several factors which worked for the advantage of this party.

In the first place, one has to keep in mind the fact that Islam has always provided a refuge of collective identity for the Algerians, and the Islamic sentiment was a constant source of anti-colonial resistance. In this sense, Islam is a unifying factor for a factor for all the Algerians and it has always been exploited by the State or by parties for political purposes.

In the second place, the elite in Algeria is cut off from the people. It is a well known fact that most of the personalities involved in politics in Algeria have pursued their education in French schools and consequently have an appreciation of the European values and culture. This means, in reality, there is a gap between the masses and the political elite which are accused of not being able to reflect the ambitions of the Algerian masses.

In the third place, the desire and willingness of the political regime to open up and soften its stand on political expression, has led to the emergence of new leaders from within the masses who communicate very well with the dissatisfied individuals. The aim of the new leaders is to meet the needs of the people and represent the poor individuals. They despised officials of the one party system who lived in comfortable villas and had large cars.(33)

In the fourth place, there is a cultural and educational crisis within the Algerian society. The state has Arabized the schools, but power, authority and influence have remained in the hands of the French speaking individuals. In a way, those who speak Arabic are excluded from jobs and power and feel frustrated. They are viewed, very often, by the francophones as backward and culturally attached to the Arab countries and not to Europe. Thus, the Arabophone individuals, especially the young ones, have embraced Islam to use it as one of the means to get rid of the political regime which excluded them.(34)

In the fifth place, the idea of democracy is well understood by the masses who wanted change. For them, democracy meant the change of leadership by the vote in order to rotate the power and get rid of the old faces in the political arena. The political leaders who wanted to stay in power by all means, thought all what they have to do is to move from one party to another. It was evident in the mind of the voters either in June 1990 or December 1991 that they were going to vote for any party capable of challenging the regime, and that was the strategy of the F.I.S.

In the sixth place, there was an economic crisis which created an ideal opportunity for the F.I.S. to help the unemployed youngsters who could not find jobs and were unable to feed their families. Thus, while the regime sought to implement the reforms approved by the F.I.S. collected funds from worshippers and donors, and reinvested the money in small projects which were very useful to the unemployed youth.

(32) Arun Kapil, "Portrait Statistique des Elections du 12 juin 1990-Chiffres clés pour une analyse" in les Cahiers de l'Orient, n° 23, 1991, p. 45

(33) Mortimer, Op. Cit. p 577

(34) Mireille Duteil, "L'avenir en cinq questions" Le Point, n° 981 du 6 Juillet 1991, p. 21.

In the seventh place, the monopoly of mass media by the state forced the F.I.S. to use mosques as forums for political debates and dialogues. That created a larger audience than the media, and their political messages worked effectively in the mind of worshippers.

+

In the eighth place, the F.I.S. has been very successful in distributing money, clothes, and food among poor people during the Islamic holidays and that was a big factor in creating sympathy and support for the fundamentalists.

In the ninth place, the dull programs of state mass media undermined state authority and influence in the Algerian society. The F.I.S. speeches attracted the masses because they were critical of the regime, very informative, and rich in substance. What is very sad about mass media in Algeria at the present time is that a large percentage of the Algerians learn about their country from the French channels of television which transmit their programs to Algeria directly through the French satellites.

Finally, the F.I.S. has benefitted greatly from animosities and struggle for power between different factions of the FLN. Furthermore, the defection of many politicians to the F.I.S. damaged the FLN especially by revealing or leaking valuable information on the corruption and blunders of officials in the regime. The scandal discredited state officials and the F.I.S. received credits for its ability to inform the public about the reasons for the political crisis in the country.

THE REFORMS ON PAPERS

The first defeat of the FLN in the municipal elections of June 12, 1990 served as a good lesson to the entourage of the President of the Republic.

Ben Djedid revised his strategy because he realized that his economic reforms have resulted in unemployment and soaring prices which have hurt a large percentage of the people. So, he has to slow down the application of reforms and his party must compete and gain political support of the masses. In brief, the President's strategy after June 1990 seemed to be as follows :

1. Get out of the FLN and prove to the barons or former strongmen of Boumediene's era that he is no longer an obstacle to change in the programs of the FLN. Thus, he resigned from his post of chairman of the party and remained only President of all Algerians !
2. Seek the support and loyalty of young reformers in the FLN instead of relying on former bosses of the FLN who proved to be unreliable partners in power and seemed to be determined to make changes in policies.
3. Compete with the F.I.S., on the level of masses and attract young voters so that the Islamists would be weakened and no longer enjoy the support of the unemployed and dissatisfied people.
4. Change the electoral laws and increase the seats in the Parliament from 295 to 542 so that the young reformers of the FLN will get more seats and be candidates of the FLN. By changing the electoral law, the FLN will get more seats the constituencies where the FLN scored victory in the municipal elections of June 1990. Furthermore, the entourage of the President calculated that by introducing the French method of the second round elections, the FLN would make arrangements with the democratic parties and defeat the candidates of the F.I.S. in the second round.(35)

In short, Bendjedid's strategy seems to be based on the assumption that the legislative elections of 1991 would result in a coalition of FLN and other political parties. Probably, they will have to fight each other in the new parliament and he, as President of all Algerians, will be the arbitrator between the divided social forces in the country.(36)

When such envisaged policies entered the phase of execution, the government faced stiff resistance from the FIS and the democratic parties. The so-called barons of the FLN were united, thanks to the initiative of Cherif Belkacem who induced them to work together. Some of them run for election as independent candidates, thus, weakened the strength of the FLN in their constituencies during the elections of December 26, 1991.³⁷ The strength of unity and discipline among the partisans of the FIS proved to be very solid and hard to break. What really ruined the chances of the FLN to win the elections in December 1991 were the deliberate attempts by the independent government of Sid Ahmed Ghozali to discredit the officials of the FLN and accuse them of making reforms on papers³⁸ and lying to the people.³⁹

In April 1991, the strategy of Ben Djedid seemed to have partially succeeded in weakening the F.I.S. and the challenge to the FLN would come from the democratic parties and no longer from the F.I.S. which failed to win the support of workers during the general strike sponsored by the Islamists.

When the attempts by the F.I.S. to block the economic reforms and its campaign to change the electoral law failed, the leaders of the F.I.S. decided on May 23, 1991 to make a general strike for unlimited time and oblige the government to reverse its policies on the vital issues of : (1) returning the dismissed workers who participated in the strike to their jobs, (2) abolition of electorate laws which increased seats in the new parliament from 295 to 542 seats, (3) the organization of legislative and Presidential elections at the same time. The techniques of the F.I.S. to bring together the strikers and organize popular meetings and seating in, in strategic sites of the capital, were very effective. The supporters of the F.I.S. were able to disrupt the economy and create disorder in the whole country. The negotiation between the government and the F.I.S. did not produce the desirable results for both sides. In the morning of June 5, 1991 the army was asked to intervene again, like in the rebellion of October 1988, and re-establish order and security in the streets of Algiers. After the intervention of the army for the second time in 3 years, martial law was declared, legislative elections were postponed and the chief of government was dismissed.

This change in government and in method of tackling the social unrest or violence, meant the leaders of the armed forces became the real holders of power in the country. They made it clear from the beginning that they will not tolerate any disorder in streets. Ben Djedid sensed that he was isolated and dependent on the armed forces which rescued his regime from collapse.

In such circumstances, the need was for restoring order and creating a dialogue with the leaders of the social forces which resorted to violence. The leaders of the army who apparently were unhappy with the failure of leadership to solve national problems and called them to restore order, seemed to have influenced the President to change the chief of government and designate an independent man to form the new government because the former chief of government worked very closely with the FLN and contributed to the unrest and violence in the streets by changing the electoral law. Thus, the designation of Ghozali as chief of government meant the appeasement of fundamentalists if they were willing to refrain from the use of violence in streets. In fact, the new chief of government, started negotiation with the F.I.S. immediately and responded favorably to their demands. He promised that the FLN will not be able to make fraud in the coming elections. The legislative elections will be held in 1991 and the Presidential election will be held before its schedule date of December 1993. The workers dismissed from their jobs will be reinstated and the electoral law will be revised. In exchange for

(36) Mortimer, Op Cit, pp 577-583

(37) Jeune Afrique, N° 1583 Août 1991

(38) Le Soir d'Algérie, 2-3 Août 1991

(39) Al-Massa, daily newspaper issue of December 26, 1991

accepting these concessions, Ghozali hoped that the F.I.S. Will facilitate the task of the army in restoring order and playing its role as a guarantor of security of the state.(40)

The arrival of the new chief of government to power, who was expelled from Ben Djedid's government on October 14, 1979 (41) was hailed by the democratic parties and revived the hope that the democratic process would continue, the FLN will be in trouble in the future because Ghozali was dismissed from the FLN in the early days of Ben Djedid. The President, like others, welcomed the arrival of Ghozali to power because Ghozali is considered to be strong believer in liberal policies and not attached to the FLN.

In the second week of June 1991, everybody was happy and busy celebrating the departure of the last government of the FLN. But suddenly strained relations between the F.I.S. and the Government became evident to the public. The F.I.S. began to remove the signs on municipal government « from the people to the people » and the army which was committed to restore order and security began to arrest what considered to be troublemakers. On Friday June 28, 1991 the leader of the F.I.S. asked the government to remove the curfew, otherwise he would declare holy war. The government reacted angrily to this announcement and defended the action of the army. The chief of the government took this occasion to warn those who wanted to take power by violence.(42) On Sunday, June 30, 1991, the President and Vice President of the F.I.S. were arrested and eventually to be judged by a military tribunal in 1992, and sentences for 12 years in prison.

It was the hope of everybody in July 1991 that the radicals of the F.I.S. will understand that the use of violence does not pay off and the only way open to every party to reach power is the legal way. On July 3, 1991 Ghozali organized a meeting between the political parties and the government. He discussed with them the ways and means by which the government and the political parties work together to create national consensus and general rules for the coming legislative elections. The F.I.S. whose leaders were in jail did not participate in the meeting which lasted 3 days. But other Islamic parties attended the meeting and this was a part of the government's strategy to divide, or at least, weaken the F.I.S.

On September 29, 1991, the government announced that the curfew is to be lifted and the parliamentary elections would take place on December 26, 1991. Furthermore, the government honored its promise to revise the electoral law and reduced the seats in the parliament from 542 to 430.

In the beginning of August 1991, Mr. Ghozali inaugurated a new campaign against the leadership of the FLN and especially his predecessor. In a deliberate attempt to discredit the former government of the FLN, he informed the people that 80 % of the reforms were on paper and 120 billion Dinars, out of 200 billions of the state budget, have been spent on bureaucrats who worked 2 hours a day out of eight hours. He claimed that most of the 2500 economic projects of development in the private sector have been abandoned.(43) In a surprise move, the government of Mr. Ghozali was reshuffled on October 16, 1991 and General Larbi Belkhir, the chief of staff in the Presidency, was nominated Minister of Interior. His immediate duty seemed to be changing the law of public meetings in the country and making it mandatory for any political party to obtain a permission from the government before holding any public meeting.(44)

In the beginning of November 1991, the question which everybody was raising : would the F.I.S. participate in the parliamentary elections and its leaders in jail ? It was a real dilemma to the Islamists especially after the refusal of the courts to allow the leaders of the F.I.S. to be even candidates since they were in jail and could not come to their constituencies to register themselves. But with a great reluctance, the F.I.S. decided to participate in the elections and that was the first surprise to the regime.

(40) Ibid, pp 590-591

(41) Le Monde du 16 October 1979.

(42) Paul-Mane de la Gora, "Algérie : Quitte ou double" Jeune Afrique n° 1593 du 10 au 16, p. 4

(43) Le Soir d'Algérie, 2-3 Août 1991

(44) See General Belkhir's interview to the daily newspaper Al Massa, issue of October 30, 1991

On December 24, 1991 Ben Djedid invited the journalists to his office and confirmed to them that he was ready for co-habitation and sharing power with the new legislative authority. When he was asked what would he do in case the legislative election results in winning elections by parties other than his, Ben Djedid said this option has been taken into consideration, and this is the adventure of democracy. One may win or one may lose. He made it clear that in all eventualities he will remain arbitrator between heads of state institutions. In short, Ben Djedid did not mind if new coalition of democratic parties come to power, he would accept co-existence with them.(45)

On December 26, 1991 came the second surprise. The results of the first round of the parliamentary election widely seen as the Arab world's first fully parliamentary vote gave 189 seats, out of 231 decided in the first round, to the F.I.S. in the parliament or 44 %. By contrast, the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), a secular party, with a base in the barber minority won 20 seats. The FLN which fought for the independence of Algeria and won the war, came in third place with 16 seats only. This left little doubt in the mind of anybody that with the run off elections, the F.I.S. will win the extra 27 seats needed to secure a parliamentary majority in the new chamber of 430 seats. An official of the government described the outcome as « unbelievable but true. It is a catastrophe. God preserve the country ».(46)

Ben Djedid was astonished to discover and learn that his political reforms produced 58 incoherent political parties, 49 of them participated in the parliamentary elections, and proved in these elections, that they were « too weak and far too divided to face up the Islamic current, which continued to gather power ».(47)

THE ALTERNATIVES TO BEN DJEDID'S REFORMS

Naturally, most of the democratic parties which lost in the election turned against the democratic process which did not lead them to power, and a small percentage of them asked for military intervention to deprive the fundamentalists from their legal rights to rule the country. Apparently, this was also the point of view of Sid Ahmed Ghazali since it was his government which jailed the leaders of the F.I.S. Likewise, the leaders of the army were opposed to the transfer of power to the fundamentalists because : (1) in case there will be struggle between elected President and elected members of the parliament, the army will be ordered to restore law again, (2) a weak President and strong Parliament will create a vacuum of power, (3) the new Parliament may legislate and change the role of the army, (4) like in Tunisia, the military leadership wanted a strong President to be effective in his decisions.

The second alternative was to continue the democratic process and establish the basis for a traditional political system of rotation of power. This was the point of view of Ben Djedid, the FFS, the FLN and, of course, the FIS. Ben Djedid advocated the idea of respecting the will of the people and counted on his constitutional authorities which allow him to dissolve the government and the Parliament in critical circumstances. (48) As a matter of fact, Ait Ahmed leader of the FFS, favored the idea that the leaders of the FIS come to power. They will face the reality and lose their credibility. Their experience in the municipal election of 1990 has proved to be catastrophique for them, he said.(49) The leader of the FLN, Abdelhamed Mehri, shared the view of the President and Ait Ahmed and indicated that his party is willing to share power and create a coalition with the FIS. (50)

In the beginning of January 1992, Ben Djedid conceded the defeat of his party and entered in a secret negotiation with the leaders of the FIS, whose real leaders were in jail, and started to pave the way for co-habitation. This move was not acceptable to his military partners in power.

(45) Al-Massa, daily newspaper, issue of December 26 1991

(46) The New York Times, December 28, 1991

(47) Ibid:

(48) Paris Match, issue of March 30, 1992.

(49) Le Monde du 23 janvier, 1992

(50) Achab, Daily Newspaper of the FLN, December 30 1991

They wanted the President to resign because the arrival of the Islamists to power would mean, in their judgement, the end of liberty and democracy in the country.

They told the President that they do not want the country to undergo the situation that is being experienced in certain countries in the Middle East and East Africa. They informed Ben Djedid that they have decided to take time to set up real institutions to lead Algeria toward a real democracy.⁵¹ The President reminded the military chiefs that he has the power to dissolve the Parliament and the government if the Islamists do not stick to the existing constitution. But this argument was not convincing to his allies in power.

On January 11, 1992 the President resigned from his post as head of state. he stated in part : « *We are living through a pluralistic democratic process that is characterized by numerous excesses and tendencies clashing with one another. Thus, the measures taken and the route that must be taken to solve our problems have now reached a point beyond which it is no longer possible to proceed without gravely harming national cohesion, the preservation of public order and national unity* » (52)

On January 14, 1992 there was an announcement that a new body, the High State Council (HSC) has been created and would assume Presidential powers until December 1993 a date when Ben Djedid's term would have expired. In April 1992, the leader of new council, Mohammed Boudiaf, has inaugurated the new consultative assembly of 60 members which assumes legislative powers until 1993. After his assassination in June 1992, Ali Kafi replaced him as a President of the Council.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Algeria is in deep economic and political crisis and it is very difficult at this time to speculate on the fate of the democratic process in this country of 28 millions. What is clear, however, is the urgent need to change the style of running the system. As I have indicated in the beginning, the reforms in Algeria from 1962 to 1992 have been decided by one person, the holder of power, and destined to accumulate authority in his hands so that he can do what he wants. It became a tradition that the holder of power exploits the economic and political crisis in order to stay in power. In the final analysis, the failure of reforms envisaged by one man is not the failure one man show only, but the failure of the whole country to create solid state and its institutions. Likewise, the politics of populism pursued by each political party which is based on the idea of giving empty promises to the masses so that they vote for its leader, will not solve the real problems of Algeria.

What is needed today is to change the mentalities and work together to create a national consensus on critical issues facing the country. Since it has been proven beyond any doubt that the leaders of 58 political parties are behaving like spoilers of the regime, the only practical solution is to rely on specialists (instead of a one man show) to define the new duties of the state and the means of carrying them out in the post era of cold war and regional alliances. Mr Ghazali's confession that the 3 million state bureaucrats are working 2 hours a day only and absorbing 60 % of the state budget for doing nothing explains fully why his government has failed to meet the social needs of the Algerians, and induced the dissatisfied masses to vote for change and rotation of power.

Whatever the intention of the new leaders in Algeria, good or bad, the departure from the constitutional rule in January 1992 is a setback to the democratic process of multiparty system and rotation of power. A return to the former policy of centralized authority and the reliance on left wing elements to run the show, may not achieve the desired results for the elite in power. The real need today is to come up with a consensus on policies, dispersal of power and reliance on well studied strategies studied by specialists to solve the social and economic problems of the country. Any attempt to exclude any social force from involvement in the political

(51) Middle East Watch, vol 4 Issue 2 (February) 1992, P 4

(52) Ibid p 3 or Le Quotidien d'Algérie January 12, 1992

life, will lead to a wider gap between an elite attached to western values and languages, and cut off from the masses who are committed to Ben Badis's slogan « *Algeria is our country, Arabic is our language and Islam is our religion* ».

Therefore, the success in the future depends on the ability of the leaders to change the style of running the system, to rely on collective work and credible leadership capable of inspiring the people to work and meet the needs of the masses.