

PROLOGUE

"A man of truth"

"The only true politics are
the politics of Truth."

EL MEHDI BEN BARKA

During his "forced" exile —since it has been agreed to call the first exile "voluntary"— El Mehdi Ben Barka conceived the project of writing a book on recent Moroccan history, a history of which he was frequently a part and at times the architect. We were all waiting for this book. We had also encouraged it. Not only because it would bring into focus events that were obscure to those who did not live them or clarify the circumstances that increasingly darkened the history of the people's resistance movement, but also because we were aware that this study of history, this examination of events, without concern for immediate happenings, would be a scientific contribution, the kind of knowledge that is required by the intransigence of a leader who is aware of our tasks and of the mission of the popular forces at a crucial moment in the history of the world, the hour of the Third World. Unfortunately for the book, El Mehdi's overwhelming activity on the international plane and, perhaps, his vocation as a man who thinks in order to

act more than to write, prevented the project from becoming reality. If the book had been produced, it would have constituted "this critical history of the Moroccan national movement as a whole," to which his report¹ refers.

El Mehdi came across this report, which until then had been an "Internal Document," while he was doing research for the preparation of the book. He found it by accident; he did not think it was in his luggage, since he had left Morocco legally, intending to return, almost without baggage, but he was forced to lengthen his trip because of the famous 1963 "plot." We know that the plot was woven against the popular forces, was organized with painstaking care that was only paralleled by the ridicule that fell upon the government and its police. According to his custom, El Mehdi continued the text. Events pressed, Casablanca rebelled, the government found itself cornered. He decided then to offer the report to the public so that they could appreciate the March 1965 popular uprising for its true worth. Thus, Revolutionary option in Morocco is a text prepared for publication by El Mehdi himself. We have seen in this preparation an explicit desire. It is for this reason that we offer it now in the state in which it was found at the time of the scandalous kidnapping of which its author was victim. It was also El Mehdi himself who selected the appendices as "documents" that could guide the reader in the tangle of events or in the understanding of the objective economic and social state in which the country found itself at the time of the bloody days of March, 1965.

Nevertheless, the contents of the report are just the Moroccan echo of obligations conceived in the magnitude of the struggle undertaken by all the oppressed peoples. This is why some articles of a more general nature fit in after this text. We have grouped them under the title Political Writings. This heading, which expresses a classification rather than contents, must not obscure the call, particularly clear and determined to a serious theoretical elaboration of the perspectives of any coherent revolutionary policy.

This seeking for consistency which is the exclusive property of all legitimate paths, this investigation of the

¹ See the Introduction by El Mehdi Ben Barka.

concept, tends to remove political action from the free play of uncontrolled day-to-day events, from the unforeseen and uncontrolled fact, from the purely accidental act. This free play is not lacking in calculation, but it lacks coherence and thought and is full of abdication in favor of the immediate, that is, what is imposed. Doesn't he tell us that "in order to make the world development a means of agitation and formation of consciousness, we must first make it into a concept"? And what does forming a concept mean if not producing rigorous knowledge? For the mathematician El Mehdi "The confusion of definitions" is an inner one before becoming translated into "its political consequences." We must also be careful of the easy expedient of resorting to "the vague notion of the speeding-up of history or of the decomposition of colonialism." It is not a mere chance that this "speeding-up," this notion of a continuum in time, is rejected with the introduction of differential analysis to explain Africa after independence, carefully avoiding all the weaknesses of understanding, not because of any evolution but because of the emotional way in which independence was acquired. It is El Mehdi Ben Barka who points up this phrase: "The only issue that must be dealt with is knowing whether these liberations have taken place through victory over the colonizer or in collaboration with him"; knowing whether struggle is leading effectively to the destruction of feudal and semicolonial structures and whether it ends with the onset of a situation favorable to radical solutions. The seriousness of socialist construction is divorced from all false prosperity. Its strength is thus not in happiness, no matter how ideologically the term is understood, it is a rhetorical concept of unfulfilled promises, fanned resentments, mobilized weaknesses, in a word, of all kinds of opportunism. Happiness is the effect and not the cause of development, and causes must not be "confused with consequences." To place "in the forefront national glory, man's happiness or the satisfaction of essential needs" is an "ideological perversion" that empties socialism of all meaning, reducing it to a word. Nevertheless, because socialism is not just a word, in order to establish it, reasoning on the absurd is not sufficient: to set its precise content requires an explanation of social structures and conceptual elaboration.

Perhaps one of the most singular characteristics of Revolutionary Option and the Writings is the insistence on this call to conceptual rigor and analytical precision. Those who are not familiar with it learn it at their own expense, such as that representative who, during the debate on the wording of a motion containing the Consultative Assembly's opinion on the budget, bewailed the fact that no reservations had been expressed. "On the contrary, Mr. President," said El Mehdi. "The reservation exists in the motion in the following phrase: Here it was a case of a semicolon that had escaped the representative's notice and which contained a world of meaning.

Whether it be a question of the program, the action of the party or the "watchfulness and solidarity" of the peoples engaged in struggle, the same call and the same necessity burn in all the writings.

In the opinion of El Mehdi, as he asserts in the conclusions of Revolutionary Option, it is impossible to separate party work —serving the party, he says, is to place oneself at the service of all the Moroccan masses— from conscious effort in the perspectives of the international liberation movement. But is it so natural that a leader formed in the national struggle fill within himself the need for a unification that goes beyond frontiers? Of course not. The road that leads from nationalism to scientific socialism (the only socialism able to provide the concept and enlighten the action that consists of the self development of a newly independent country), is so little natural that a split in the traditional leadership of the nationalist movement has been necessary. But El Mehdi's nationalism is in principle a critical one, and a critical nationalism is an improved one, one that has learned the lesson of the negative adventure of nationalism that has made Morocco's recent history one of usurpation whose victims were the masses of the people and the national resistance movement; thus, it learned from the lie of "national glory" and is sufficiently armed and strengthened to understand that its true vocation against all the whims of compromises of effective alliances with imperialism, its ultimate sense was, and is, socialism.

Perhaps it is not superfluous to indicate that the international vocation of El Mehdi manifested itself very early. Shortly after his return from Algeria, where he did his

higher studies, he became interested in the problems of the coordination of the struggle in the entire Maghreb front, or to be more precise, the political entity of the Maghreb, which has nothing to do with the traditional land of the setting sun, certainly owes much more to El Mehdi than what its history, unknown and still to be written, will be able to tell. He was one of the most solid architects of the first meeting and the first agreement of importance between the leaders of the national liberation movements of the period in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. The idea that the peoples fight effectively only when there is solidarity is one of the first that arose in him. The idea was picked up starting from the facts before it was rediscovered and rethought after independence. It was the fruit both of experience and reflection. In summary, struggle and solidarity among the movements that take part in the same fight is one thing to El Mehdi, a kind of organic idea. To such an extent is this so that the mere fact that the Havana Conference has taken place constitutes an inestimable success for that idea.

We shall allow the reader to discover for himself in Revolutionary Option what is of special interest for Morocco so as to emphasize one aspect to which the author devoted most attention, an aspect that had become a virtually constant concern. It is the risk that in political action the idea may become a slogan. It is a big risk above all at a time when the opportunism of states can force them to a neutrality of maneuver in which "solidarity covers an alliance with colonialism." The simple profession of faith cannot suffice. What does this mean if not that neutralism cannot be a diplomatic game? Against these and other falsifications there must be opposed critical and dynamic analyses, aware of the ambiguities that they dissipate and of the prospects that they open. All throughout the Political Writings the same warning arises, at times so discreet that without having recourse to the political context, it is difficult to perceive their meaning. The article "The OAU in the face of the Congo Test" shows what events have confirmed: the contradiction between popular aspirations that are supposedly manifested in the OAU and the temptations of coexistence carried to the extreme of transforming the organization into "a tool more pliant to reactionary currents

than to the progressive leadership." Is it necessary to add that when El Mehdi said this, no one in Africa shared his opinion and that all the recent trials have been necessary for the progressive leaders to give up the policy of summit meetings?

But I have already said too much. El Mehdi is sufficiently well known because of the scope of his activity to have the floor turned over to him. His words are those of a man of action. We see in him the energy of those teachers of the peoples "in a position to change," as a celebrated author has said, "human nature." More modestly he is a "revolutionary agitator" but one of those for whom Professor Lacan could call by a title that even until recently was reserved to the Solons and Clisthenes, to the mythical founders of cities: A man of truth.

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