

The Minute of Truth¹

“The undersigned, considering that each person must take a stand concerning acts that are henceforth impossible to present as minor news items of interest only to a few individuals; considering that, whatever their location and whatever their means, they have the moral obligation to intervene, not in order to give advice to men who have to make their own decisions concerning serious problems, but to ask those who judge them that they not let themselves get caught up in the ambiguity of words and values, declare:

“– We respect and judge justified the refusal to take up arms against the Algerian people.

“– We respect and judge justified the conduct of the French people who consider it their obligation to provide aid and protection to the Algerians, who are oppressed in the name of the French people.

“– The cause of the Algerian people, which contributes in a decisive way to the ruination of the colonial system, is the cause of all free men.”

Such are the conclusions of the *Declaration on the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War*, signed by 121 artists and intellectuals, which was published at the beginning of September [1960]. Legal proceedings having been immediately begun, and notifications having been sent to the first people to be charged, during the course of September 60 or 70 more people² added their names to the first list; some of these people were known to be quite far from any political radicalism. To break this movement, the government did not hesitate to resort to exceptional sanctions, announced on 28 September. While civil servants (generally in education) were suspended from their jobs, all of the signatories were banned from [French] radio-television, their very names could no longer be mentioned on it, and prohibited from working at the subsidized theaters and on films normally registered by the National Center for Cinema. In addition, at this date, the maximum penalties relative to the offenses recognized in this text were raised from several months to several years in prison. By taking these measures, the government admitted that it could only contain the extension of the scandal through the means of an open war against all cultural freedoms in the country. These extreme actions, moreover, appeared to have had little pay-off, since more than 60 [new] names were added to the prohibited declaration after the 28th – which adds up to at least 254 signatures. And the indictments are being handed down with very slowly.

The effect of the “Declaration of the 121,” thanks to the publicity in France and abroad that the repression has assured, has been far from negligible. One saw the entrenched French intelligentsia count on a noble manifesto that appealed to power to strike quickly and strongly against the anti-France; the spiritual newspaper of the intellectual Poujade³ stigmatized (eight columns on the front page) “the manifesto of pederasts”; and some old specialists of the total questioning of several “perspectives” promptly questioned themselves about their own

¹ Published in *Internationale situationniste* #5, December 1960. Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the NOT BORED! website (notbored.org) in 2007. All footnotes by the translator.

² Including Guy Debord and Michèle Bernstein.

³ Pierre Poujade (1920-2003), a right-wing publisher and politician.

participation in this excess and immediately did their best to divert the signatories towards a respectful petition, through which the Federation of National Education made it known that it desires that the war be ended through negotiations (one thinks here particularly of E. Morin and C. Lefort).⁴

In the cultural sphere, the merit of this declaration is having drawn a very clear line of separation. The signatories in no way represent a political avant-garde, a coherent program, or even an assembly on the basis of which – beyond this gesture – one could approve of the majority of the individuals involved. But all those who, in these circumstances, have not wanted to take sides concerning the shared cause of the Algerians' liberty and [that of] the indicted French intellectuals have, on the contrary, counter-signed a confession that all of their possible pretenses to be concerned with the problems of some kind of “avant-gardism” must now be greeted with laughter and scorn. Thus one is not surprised at not seeing in this gallery the cretins who, several months ago, organized an *anti-trial*, in which their main idea – so as to compensate for their hideous artistic, social and intellectual deficiencies – was that one must reject any judgment for liberty to be truly defended. Faithful to themselves, *they have not judged* that there was some liberty to defend in the case of the 121.

Politically, this declaration has not been without use in the relative awakening of French public opinion over the last three months. The evening of 27 October, despite the dazzling sabotage by the Communists⁵ and the brakes being applied by all of the bureaucratic unions, the youth – students, especially – were able to lead the first street demonstration against the war. After years of mystifications and abdications, a certain awakening is taking place.

On 11 December, the Algerian Revolution⁶ – with the intervention of the masses in the streets of Algiers and Oran – made the people who are the most resolved to be deaf hear that it is indeed “the cause of the Algerian people” as a whole. The scandal is no longer expressed by a tract written by intellectuals, but by the blood of the unarmed crowds. It finally speaks to the French proletariat, the intervention of which can only end the war *quickly and properly*.

⁴ Edgar Morin and Claude Lefort, former members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

⁵ The French Communist Party.

⁶ Not just Algerian independence from France, but Algeria's independence from the global capitalist order.