

The Role of Algerian Workers in the Activities of the National Liberation Front Federation in France - The Seventh Wilayah

Dr. Gharbi Elhaouas¹, Dr. Djenaidi Abdelhamid², Dr. Telibi Mohamed³

¹Professor lecturer A, University 8 May 1945 Guelma (Algeria).

²Professor lecturer A, Annex of Ksar El-Shallala, University of ibn khaldoun (Algeria).

³Professor lecturer B, University Echahid cheikh Laarbi Tebessi - Tebessa (Algeria).

The E-mail Author: gharbi.elhaouas@univ-guelma.dz¹,
abdelhamid.djenaidi@univ-tiaret.dz², Mohamed.telibi@univ-tebessa.dz³

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Abstract:

The emergence of national awareness and vigilance led to the creation of migrant organisations and trade unions in France, which played a role in defending the rights of migrant workers. This article focuses on the Federation of the National Liberation Front and its role in supporting the Algerian revolution.

What role did workers play in supporting the liberation revolution? This study looks specifically at the Federation of the National Liberation Front in France and its role in supporting revolutionary efforts.

Keywords: Federation, National Liberation Front, trade unions, Algerian revolution

Introduction:

Prince Khaled's presence in France played an important role in raising the national consciousness of North African migrant workers in France. In March 1926, he founded the North African Star with the aim of:

- To defend the interests and aspirations of North African workers in France.
- To achieve the complete independence of Algeria, either peacefully or through armed struggle.

By 1927, the North African Star had narrowed its focus to the Algerian cause and its people. Its official newspaper, **Al-Umma**, served as the voice of the movement.

After the dissolution of the North African Star on 25 January 1937, it re-emerged in a new form as the Algerian People's Party in Paris on 11 March 1937. However, the party was dissolved in 1939 because of its opposition to French policies and its refusal to take part in the Second World War alongside France. It resumed its activities after the massacres of 8 May 1945, founding the Movement for the Victory of Democratic Liberties in 1946.

The emergence of a national consciousness led to the creation of organisations and unions defending the rights of migrants in France. This article examines the Federation of the National Liberation Front and its role in supporting the Algerian revolution.

What role did workers play in supporting the liberation revolution? We will focus specifically on the Federation of the National Liberation Front in France and its contribution to the revolutionary effort.

1. Definition of the Federation of the National Liberation Front

This federation was called the “seventh wilaya” to emphasise its link with the six wilayas in Algeria established since the Soummam conference of 20 August 1956. The actual creation of the Federation took place a few months after the outbreak of the revolution in November 1954. The revolutionary leadership entrusted Commander Mohamed Boudiaf with the creation of an organisation called the “Federation of the National Liberation Front in France”. The Federation included prominent revolutionary activists such as Mourad Tarbouch, Ahmed Mehessas, Mohamed Machati, Mohamed Zarrouk and Abdel Rahman Grass, among others. Mourad Tarbouch was the first leader of the federation, and in May 1955 a new body was formed to divide France into regions, each overseen by one or more leaders (<https://www.maghrebvoices.com>).

2. The role of the National Liberation Front Federation in France - the seventh wilaya

The organisation of cells in France by Mohamed Boudiaf in early 1956 marked the beginning of the FLN's activities in France. This led to the creation of the first core of the FLN Federation in France and attracted many workers to the organisation. This allowed the migrants to understand the true situation and clearly recognise that the FLN was the legitimate and sole representative of the Algerian revolution (Nouri, p. 6).

A meeting in Switzerland aimed to unite the Algerians scattered in exile, including Messali's followers, the old centralists, lawyers and all the activists who were tired of the internal conflicts within the party. Mourad Tarbouch's task was to try to lead these groups towards the National Liberation Front (Sari, p. 156).

As the FN's activities in Switzerland intensified, the Swiss police arrested Mohamed Boudiaf. Reports from the FLN were handed over to France, revealing the activities of the FLN on French territory. Mourad Tarbouch was arrested on 26 May 1955 (Qaleel, p. 351).

The National Liberation Front worked to create a new body within the Federation of the National Liberation Front and distributed its responsibilities among the various regions of French territory. The following appointments were made:

- Mohamed Machati in the East of France
- Fodhil Ben Salim Grass in the southern and central regions, particularly Lyon and Marseille
- Ahmed Doum in Western France

The Federation of the National Liberation Front was further strengthened when the Union of Algerian Muslim Students joined it (Saadi, Crimes, p. 18).

Abane Ramdane was appointed head of the Federation, succeeding Mourad Tarbouch. His activities included (Zoubiri, p. 131)

- Establishing links with all supporters of the Algerian revolution.
- Organising the Algerian working class in France.
- Publishing the magazine "Algerian Resistance" in French to publicise the activities of the federation.

In 1956, Mohamed Begawi was appointed as Saleh Al-Wenshi's successor, receiving instructions from Abane Ramdane with the approval of the Executive and Coordinating Committee. He was instructed to carry out the following orders (Saadi, Crimes, p. 18)

- Physically eliminate Messali Hadj.
- Confront French public opinion.

In 1957, Omar Boudaoud was sent by Abane Ramdane to head the National Liberation Front Federation in France until 1962. He was given the following tasks (Boudaoud, p. 100)

- To take the armed struggle to the enemy's territory.
- To manage the conditions of Algerian immigrants living in France.
- Strengthening the finances of the FLN.

3. Operations carried out by the Federation

During this phase, the Federation carried out 242 attacks in France, causing dozens of deaths and at least 188 injuries. Among the most notable operations were the burning of fuel depots in Marseilles, the sabotage of a railway line between Paris and Le Havre, the detonation of a bomb in a vehicle carrying French soldiers and the cutting of telephone lines. The most dangerous operation, however, was the assassination of the Algerian governor, Jacques Soustelle, in Paris, which sent a serious message of threat to the French government of the time. Through these operations, the Federation succeeded in bringing the voice of the Revolution to French public opinion, Europe and beyond. The Federation was also behind the organisation of the peaceful marches in Paris that led to the massacres of Algerian immigrants perpetrated by France on 17 October 1961.

4. Support for the Algerian Revolution by the General Federation of Algerian Workers in France

Attempts by French trade unions (the General Confederation of Labour, CGT) to attract Algerian workers and migrants to France accelerated (Nouri, p. 8). However, the existence of a national union (the General Union of Algerian Workers) complicated matters for both French unions and Algerian workers, leaving Algerian migrants in France in a dilemma between continuing with the old unions or forming their own union (Haroun, p. 87).

In response, the National Liberation Front Federation quickly set up the General Association of Algerian Workers in February 1957 as a branch of the General Union of Algerian Workers to defend their rights against French unions (Nouri, p. 8).

The General Union of Algerian Workers developed links with political and religious circles and anti-colonial movements, and gave strong support to the National Liberation Front. It provided communication agents, shelter, printing

facilities, safe transport for funds and essential hiding places. *L'ouvrier algérien* was first published in Algeria on 6 April 1956, but after 13 issues it was confiscated, banned and prosecuted. It was then prosecuted again in Paris and banned in August 1958, leading to its publication in Tunisia and clandestine publication in Paris (Haroun, pp. 88-91).

The General Association also organised evening classes for migrants and informed French public opinion about the Algerian revolution through its monthly newspaper, ***L'ouvrier algérien*** (The Algerian Worker), which served as the central voice of the General Union of Algerian Workers in Algeria (Boudaoud, p. 115).

Algerian migrants left French territory to escape the French repression against them. Meanwhile, in 1958, to clarify its supportive stance towards the Algerian revolution and its representatives, the General Union declared in its newspaper: "We are not a demand movement aimed at cooperating with the public systems in France; the framework of our mission is the struggle of the Algerian people for its liberation" (Nouri, p. 8).

The Federal Republic of Germany took in refugees from the leadership and members of the association who had been persecuted by the French police. The conditions for their reception were (Boudaoud, p. 115)

- The workers were not allowed to stay there for more than one month under the auspices of the Federation.
- The Federation also paid the transport costs of those who wished to go to Morocco or Tunisia.
- For those who wanted to stay in Germany, German trade unions arranged for them to be employed.

The experience of seeking refuge and interacting with workers and trade unions helped to raise awareness among Algerian workers of the legitimacy of their liberation struggle by uniting their ranks and workers' meetings.

5. Financial support of Algerian workers in France for the Algerian revolution

Algerian migrants supported the Algerian revolution both in terms of labour and financially through subscriptions and donations. Their regular employment and salaries facilitated this support (Bohouch, p. 544).

The subscriptions imposed by the National Liberation Front Federation in France were set at 10 new French francs for each Algerian. In August 1957, these contributions were raised to 15 new French francs for workers. For café, restaurant and hotel owners, the monthly contributions varied according to the importance of their establishments and ranged from 100 to 150 new French francs (Bzian, Crimes, pp. 63-56).

As the revolution escalated, contributions rose from 300 new French francs to as much as 3,000 new French francs per month for each worker by the early 1960s, varying between compulsory contributions and donations (Qaleel, p. 352).

Financial support for the revolution amounted to no less than 16 billion old francs over four years (1958-1961), highlighting the contribution of migrant workers to the Algerian revolution (Bohouch, p. 545).

Although estimates of the financial contribution of Algerian workers in France vary, it is generally agreed that it exceeded 50% of the budget of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic and served as the foundation and pillar of funding during the revolution (Qaleel, p. 352).

6. Activities of the Friends of the Revolution - The Janson Network

The Friends of the Algerian Revolution, particularly the activists Henri Cornial and Francis Janson, played a key role in transferring funds to the National Liberation Front. This led to them being labelled as traitors to France, resulting in the assassination of Henri Cornial (Qaleel, p. 352).

The Janson network, led by Francis Janson - who had visited Algeria before the November 1954 revolution and witnessed the misery and suffering under colonial rule - was instrumental in winning the sympathy of some French citizens, including his wife, Colette Janson (Bzian, p. 176). The network consisted of between 2,000 and 3,000 members who joined out of ideological, intellectual, political or moral conviction (Mongour, p. 181). By 1958, the funds transferred each month exceeded 400 million francs, requiring eight sacks to transport them (Herfi, p. 118).

Janson also collected funds and subscriptions from the Algerian community in France, going from slum to hostel to building, insisting that monthly contributions be made either by persuasion or by force (Herfi, p. 117). He arranged limited accommodation for revolutionaries with some of his friends and worked as a taxi driver to transport activists around the Parisian neighbourhoods (Marie, p. 117).

The network's activities included:

- Buying weapons and sending them to Algeria.
- Financing the movements of the Algerian provisional government throughout the world (Mongour, p. 181).
- Informing public opinion of the realities of the war.
- Facilitating the passage of individuals to neighbouring countries.
- Internal communication through the distribution of pamphlets and newspapers (Boudaoud, pp. 135-137).

Conclusion

It can be said that the establishment of **the National Liberation Front Federation** in France was one of the most important strategies of the National Liberation Front to support the comprehensive idea of the Algerian revolution. It was referred to as the "seventh wilaya" on French territory, which posed a real threat to the French authorities and caused them considerable anxiety and tension.

In addition, financial support for the revolution was one of the many areas in which the FLN was active in France and played a crucial role in sustaining and supporting the revolution inside Algeria.

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