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Author(s): Mahfoud Bennoune

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# MAGHRIBIN WORKERS IN FRANCE

by MAHFOUD BENNOUNE

Since the age of mercantilism the western bourgeoisie have considered colonial expansion as a necessary condition for sustained industrial growth and for the maintenance of capitalism. In accordance with this prescription, the entire Maghrib was conquered by France and transformed into an economic outlet for the extraction of raw materials and a market preserve for manufactured products. The most fertile agricultural plains of North Africa were expropriated from "native" peasant producers and reallocated to European settlers. By 1954 the French state had managed to expropriate under diverse forms 4,825,000 hectares of cultivated lands: 2,703,000 hectares in Algeria; 1,300,000 hectares in Morocco; and 825,000 hectares in Tunisia. The total number of European settlers reached 1.7 million in 1955: more than 1 million in Algeria, nearly half a million in Morocco, and 155,000 in Tunisia.<sup>1</sup>

## The Economic Structures of the Colonized Maghrib

The modern colonization of the Maghrib involved not only this expropriation of land from the indigenous peasant, but also the forcible superimposition of the capitalist mode of production over the predominant pre-colonial social formation. The three Arab states of the Maghrib exhibited strikingly similar colonial economic structures as a direct consequence of the imposition of the colonial system. These economic structures came to be characterized by four functionally interrelated sectors: an extractive industrial sector, a plantation agricultural sector, a commercial sector and a petty commodity sector. The first three were mostly controlled by the European settlers, but the majority of those involved in petty commodity production and exchange were local peasants, artisans and traders.

The first two sectors specialized in the production of vegetable, animal and mineral resources that were exported to the "metropolis" as raw materials. Once processed and transformed into manufactured products, a certain quantity of them was reimported into the North African market outlet by the colonial businessmen who monopolized the wholesale ventures in the colonies. These mercantile networks helped to lock the colonized economies the metropolitan capitalist enterprises. These commercial networks articulated the dependent-dominant economic relationship between the Maghrib and France.

The nature and extent of economic dependence of the colonized Maghrib on France is even better demonstrated by French monopolization of their trade:<sup>3</sup>

(1956)	Algeria	Tunisia	Morocco
Exports	83%	62%	63%
Imports	86%	76.5%	54%

Thus, the intrusion of French capitalist colonialism resulted in the total incorporation of the North African economy into the "metropolitan" capitalist market and generated far-reaching socio-economic changes within the colonized societies.

The pre-colonial Maghribin economy was based, in rural areas, on agricultural activities and animal husbandry, and in the cities on handicraft industries and trade. With the expropriation of land from the peasantry, specifically in the Algerian case, and the thrusting of the Maghribin economy, without any protective tariffs, into the international capitalist market, a severe economic crisis set in. With the introduction of French industrial products, the Maghribin handicraft industries were forced to decline. The decline of the indigenous economic sector coincided with a tremendous demographic increase.<sup>4</sup> The population of Algeria increased from 3.2 million in 1880 to 9.7 million in 1955. Tunisia and Morocco exhibited similar rates of growth.<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence of the constant erosion of the economic base of the Maghribin population a twofold process of pauperization and proletarianization through migration set in.<sup>6</sup> For instance, in 1872 an Algerian peasant had at his disposal an average of 83 ares of cultivated soil; by 1948 this had fallen to a mere 24 ares.<sup>7</sup> The average annual quantity of grain per head fell from five quintals\* in 1872 to less than two quintals in 1951. As a result, the number of small peasant landowners diminished by 20 percent while that of both permanent and seasonal laborers increased by 29 percent.<sup>8</sup> In Tunisia and Morocco, the same changes were taking place.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the forcible removal of the Maghribin peasantry from the fertile agricultural plains to the marginal mountain slopes and semi-arid steppes, followed by a rapid population increase and the destruction of the pre-colonial collective land tenure system, had caused the fragmentation of familial holdings. This resulted in the generalization of microfundia whereby landholdings became too small to be cultivated even by simple pre-industrial peasant techniques. According to René Dumont, in 1951 "about 70 percent of North African Moslim landholdings...were too small to be economically viable."<sup>10</sup>

In the long run, the impoverished peasants and artisans had no other economic alternative than to sell their labor power to the owners of the means of production in order to eke out their

\* A quintal equals 100 pounds.

livelihood. However, for the peasantry, proletarianization implied migration either to the colonial agricultural centers or to the cities. According to Charles Ageron, this is the only possible causal factor that propelled the rural-urban movement.<sup>11</sup> In Algeria the urban population climbed from half a million in 1880 to 2.5 million in 1955 and 3.6 million in 1964, and the trend was similar in Tunisia and Morocco.<sup>12</sup> In the Maghrib, as elsewhere in the Third World, urbanization was neither preceded nor followed by industrialization. Because of the lack of opportunities in the Maghribin cities, an increasing number of pauperized masses were driven by hunger and want to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

### Early Migration of Workers to Europe

The Maghribin emigration of workers to western Europe was initiated by some unknown number of Algerian migrant laborers who appeared in historical records in France and Belgium after 1871.<sup>13</sup> Several thousands of North Africans were reported at work in European coal mines in 1905, and in 1911 French authorities revealed that 3000 North Africans were working in France. The next year an official inquiry revealed the existence of 5000 migrant workers, among them 1500 miners.<sup>14</sup> They crossed the Mediterranean in small, isolated groups. The reason for the slow development of this early migration was the administrative restrictions imposed by the Governor of Algeria. On the express demand of the *colons*, a decree was promulgated in 1876 by the Governor General in Algeria requiring a special travel permit for Algerians going to France. When this special requirement was abolished in 1913, the movement of Algerian workers to France increased rapidly. On the eve of the First World War, 30,000 North Africans were working in France. Among them were many Moroccans employed in the metallurgical industries of Nantes and the mines of Pas-de Calais.<sup>15</sup>

The First World War aggravated France's need of manpower. In mobilizing for war an immense number of its active population, mostly workers, French productive capacity declined drastically. A solution had to be found to keep the war industries running. At this moment the "colonial reserve army" of pauperized masses was brought to work. The forced recruitment of the Algerians was transformed into a "veritable mobilization, a civil requisition that was made possible by the sovereignty of France over the territory of the colony."<sup>16</sup> In Tunisia and Morocco the French authorities resorted to voluntary recruitment of laborers. Once in France, this colonial manpower came under the direct jurisdiction of the Conseil de Guerre that was empowered to try them before military tribunals in the event they refused to work. They were housed in special compounds where they were also obligated to take their meals. This operation of collective recruitment of colonial workers resulted in the introduction into France of 120,000 Algerians, 35,000 Moroccans and 18,000 Tunisians.<sup>17</sup>

The Algerian migratory movement "across the Mediterranean was further stimulated by the war of 1914-1918, for which Algeria provided 173,000 men for the service and about 120,000 workers for munitions and other factories in France."<sup>18</sup> By April 1917 2.7 percent of the Algerian population had been in the French army in France.<sup>19</sup> Tunisia and Morocco also furnished thousands of men for the French war effort. After the armistice a large number of the mobilized men were

sent back home, but many remained as laborers to re-build the war-devastated zones. Since France found itself depopulated and economically paralyzed, the French government again resorted to North African colonial manpower to reconstruct its economy. Between 1920 and 1924, 120,000 Maghribin workers were called to France. In 1924 alone 71,028 Algerian and 10,000 Moroccan workers were imported. This massive out-migration from the Maghrib frightened the colonial entrepreneurs who had up to then been imposing starvation wages on the workers by virtue of the huge army of lumpen-proletarianized peasants. As always, their pressures elicited a positive response from the colonial authorities. Thenceforth a work permit was required before emigrating. This restriction brought a decrease in emigration but, despite these measures, 71,000 Algerian migrant workers arrived in France in 1929 alone. The 1929 economic crash slowed the tempo of this emigration and a large number of the laborers already in Europe were forced to return to the Maghrib. The number of Algerian migrant workers registered officially in the manpower office fell from 65,000 in 1932 to 32,000 in 1936.<sup>20</sup> The consequences of this crisis were felt most strongly by these migrant workers whose socio-economic and legal status was and still is so precarious.

The Second World War provoked far-reaching changes in the nature, form and magnitude of this trans-Mediterranean migration. Although the French Minister of Labor had requested, in January 1940, the dispatch of several thousand Algerian workers, the military debacle which resulted in the German occupation of France put a quick end to this request. With the ensuing disorganization of the French economy, 10,000 workers were laid off and repatriated in the early spring of 1940; Later the German military authorities expelled an additional 16,000. During 1943 and 1944, the French colonial authorities prohibited all migration from Algeria. After the liberation of France, the French *patronat* resorted again to the North African labor force to reconstruct its ruined industries, communications networks, and housing. In 1947, the Algerians were finally transformed into "French Moslim" citizens, a new legal status which allowed them to move freely between Algeria and France.

As a result of the French industrialists' need for manpower, the number of Algerians working in France increased by tens of thousands each year, reaching approximately 400,000 by the mid-1950's.<sup>21</sup> The North African workers in Europe continued to be considered by the capitalist employers as a colonized labor force employed only "in occupations deserted by the European workers...or in the hardest, the dirtiest and the most dangerous tasks." This situation "proves that the 'native' status followed the Algerian worker, even when he passed over the Mediterranean, in virtue of this principle [that] the 'native' status was considered innate, deriving from the [ethnic] origin of the individual and attached to his person wherever he goes and whatever he does."<sup>22</sup> The Maghribin worker was paid the lowest wage in Europe. This fact allowed the capitalists to extort from this colonized proletariat an exorbitant sum of surplus labor: superprofits.

Ninety percent of the Maghribin migrant workers came from a peasant background and usually from the most densely populated and consequently most impoverished rural areas of the



Maghrib. Therefore, the collective historical experience of the millions of uprooted individuals who worked in the French industrial urban centers was one of profound socio-economic disruption from the peasant communities of origin. This experience was bound to bring about revolutionary attitudinal changes and class consciousness in the minds of the majority of the emerging Maghribin proletariat.

It was the basic contradictions inherent in French imperialism that created new objective conditions giving rise to novel dynamic social forces challenging the very foundations of colonialism. The nascent Maghribin proletariat came to the forefront of the anti-colonialist struggle of national liberation, both in France and North Africa, because of the merciless exploitation imposed upon it by the capitalist class. Tunisia and Morocco obtained their formal independence in 1956. In Algeria, because of the deeply entrenched nature of French colonial interests, an eight year war of national liberation had to be waged. This war, imposed upon the Algerian people, brought about the total devastation of the peasant economy. Indeed, the 2.4 million peasants who survived various military operations were driven by force to the Centres de Regroupements, surrounded by barbed wire and mined fortifications. The French "scorched earth" strategy destroyed some 8,000 villages. The livestock of the peasants were confiscated and consumed by the troops.<sup>23</sup> In 1962, when the imprisoned peasants were released from the camps, they had neither elementary tools and draft animals, nor necessary funds to purchase them. Once more migration was the only alternative to starvation.

### Migration after Independence

The post-colonial states of the Maghrib have not yet resolved the basic problems created by colonialism, namely economic underdevelopment aggravated by a demographic "explosion." In 1966 the Algerian population exceeded 12 million. Morocco's population was close to 13 million and Tunisia's just under 5 million. The outflow of migrant workers in search of employment in western Europe not only followed its pre-independence course but increased dramatically after 1962. The total number of North African laborers and their families in France reached 1.1 million in 1973, including nearly 800,000 from Algeria. The total included 105,000 families and 330,000 children.<sup>24</sup>

Since the primordial causes underlying this emigration were deeply rooted in the colonial socio-economic structures brought about by French colonialism, this phenomenon will not vanish before the systematic eradication of the sources nourishing the continuation of the dependent-dominant relationships tying the formerly colonized states to their "metropolis." Unfortunately, neo-colonial relations between France and the states of the Maghrib have been maintained and consolidated in the post-independence period. In the decade between 1963 and 1972, only Algeria has managed to establish a balance of payments surplus, thanks to its oil and natural gas exports. France has maintained its position as the most important market for Maghrib exports and the primary source of imports.<sup>25</sup>

This current state of affairs is conducive neither to economic development nor to politico-economic independence. The

North African countries are still exporting primarily raw materials and labor power in order to import industrial equipment and manufactured consumer products. Algeria is the only country that has made some real efforts at industrialization, but its path of "modernization" has favored a capital intensive and labor-saving developmental approach. This technobureaucratic policy has had paradoxical results: external financial debts and technological dependence have been increasing, and while it has continued to export its unskilled and semi-skilled manpower, it has been importing foreign technicians, engineers, doctors and teachers. In a word, Algerian industrialization is not generating employment for the Algerian deruralized masses.



Maghribin peasants

No North African state has up to the present carried out a thorough land reform in favor of the peasantry. In the case of Tunisia and Morocco the autochthonous landlords managed to buy a large number of hectares from the former *colons*. The new Tunisian ruling class disastrously failed to organize cooperatives in the countryside. In Morocco, the only state programs designed to improve agricultural production were conceived by the new bureaucracy to benefit only the comprador macrofundia owners. "Socialist Algeria" did not really undertake any land reform until 1971. The experience of self-management on colonial farms abandoned by the settlers was nipped in the bud by the post-independence petty-bourgeois bureaucracy who finally opted for state capitalism rather than develop, rectify and perfect worker *autogestion*. The new ruling classes in the Maghrib have failed up to now to resolve the basic problems facing their people: underdevelopment, neo-colonial dependency, social inequality, obscurantism, despotism and the enslavement of women. Migration has been viewed by the French and North African governments as the only safety valve for the prosperity of the metropolitan bourgeoisie and the stability of its satellite regimes in the Maghrib.

The procedures of introduction into France of the migrant workers from the Maghrib differed slightly from one North African country to another. Since the bulk of the Algerian

migrant workers entered France prior to 1962 as French citizens, the various agreements negotiated between the French and Algerian authorities regarding the "export" of this manpower, wines, and petroleum to France guaranteed them a "special status." As for the Tunisian and Moroccan migrant workers, they were exported like all other foreign migrant workers to France, on a work-contract basis tying them for a specified period of time from six months to two years to a French employer.

The post-colonial period in Algeria was initiated by the signing of the Evian Agreement in March 1962. It was stipulated that "every Algerian carrying an identification card be free to circulate between France and Algeria." Moreover, in order to "normalize" the migration of Algerian workers to France, a second Franco-Algerian accord was worked out in 1964. According to this agreement, the number of quarterly contingents would be determined on the basis of the availability of manpower in Algeria and the needs of the French labor market. The applicants for migration were required to pass a medical examination in the "French medical mission" which declared them fit or unfit for departure. In 1968 some revision was made to tighten administrative control over these migrant workers. Henceforth Algeria agreed to furnish 35,000 workers every year. This number was unilaterally reduced to 25,000 in retaliation for the nationalization of French oil interests in 1971. The Algerian Board of Manpower was empowered to recruit migrant workers. Upon the "favor" of being accepted, a permit is delivered to the worker authorizing him to enter France. When he arrives he has a nine month period to find employment. If successful he is automatically granted a five year residence permit which is renewable.

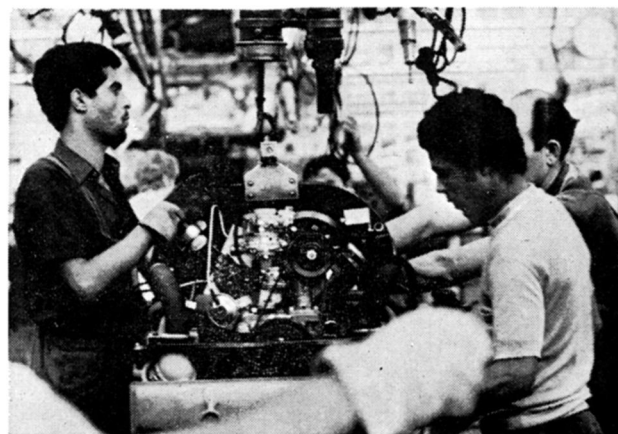
The Moroccan and Tunisian migrant workers are required to obtain work permits and medical clearance from the French National Board of Immigration. The majority of them immigrate clandestinely and are then allowed to regularize their legal status once they find employment. In fact, the majority of migrant workers in France follow this pattern of "spontaneous migration." In 1960 the proportion was 53 percent; in 1968 it was 86%.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of the French immigration authority has been to allow as many workers as possible to enter, so that the ensuing competition for jobs would put a downward pressure on wages and satisfy the increasing needs of French entrepreneurs for manpower. The bulk of the migrant workers fill industrial jobs deserted by the French proletariat because of deteriorating working conditions and low wages.

### The Position of the Maghribin Workers in France

Since the French authorities require employers to hire North African migrant workers only in industrial sectors where there is a French manpower deficit, these workers are automatically relegated to the dirtiest, most painful and risky occupational positions. The migrant workers, and especially the North Africans, are concentrated in certain basic industries: construction, metallurgy, chemical manufacturing, rubber and asbestos manufacturing, and generally industries with unhealthy working conditions. According to the 1968 French census 35.6 percent of foreign male migrant workers are employed in building and public works, 13.5 percent in mechanical and electrical engineering, 9.2 percent in agriculture, fishing and forestry, and 8.1 percent in commerce.<sup>27</sup>

The first and most salient feature in the census statistics is the concentration in the construction sector. The French working class has abandoned these industrial sectors because of the hard working conditions, the necessity to move around, the high rate of fatal accidents, low wages and low social status. The second distinctive characteristic is the difference in occupational patterns of the various immigrant nationalities. For example, 58 percent of the Portuguese, 41 percent of the Italians, 37 percent of the Algerians, and 34 percent of the Spaniards are in construction, in contrast with only 26 percent of the Moroccans and 13 percent of the Poles.<sup>28</sup> Of the women migrant workers, 29 percent are employed in domestic services: 25.6 percent of the Algerian women, 38.5 percent of the Moroccan women and 19.3 percent of the Tunisian women.

Compared to other migrant populations and to the French, the average rate of activity of the Maghribin population is among the highest. 52.5 percent of the total Algerian population living in France is active: 70.2 percent of the males and 4.8 percent of the females. Of this active population, 97.9 percent of the men and 94.9 percent of the women are wage laborers. The Algerian laboring masses are located in two regions: 43.7 percent in Paris and its environs and 18.1 percent in the Rhone-Alpes areas; the rest are scattered in eastern and northern France. Tunisian and Moroccan migrants are similarly concentrated in the major industrial regions of France.<sup>29</sup>



Third World workers in a European auto plant.

Although the North African migrant workers have become an indispensable labor force in the French economy, their socio-economic status, even compared with other migrant nationalities, is the lowest. Their subordinate position is strikingly demonstrated in the results of a government survey on the status of industrial and commercial workers in 1967, which indicate a functional stratification of the migrant laborers along nationality lines. Except for the Portuguese, all Europeans – Italians, Poles, Spaniards – enjoyed a higher socio-economic position. For each over 6 percent of the total were non-manual employees, in addition to a high proportion of skilled manual workers. The Portuguese, though having very few non-manual workers, are represented by a fair portion of skilled workers. By contrast, among the North Africans, semi-skilled and unskilled workers constituted 87.2 percent of the Algerian, 81.4 percent of the Moroccan and 70.3 percent of the Tunisian labor forces.<sup>30</sup>



Thus the qualitative differentiation between the occupational patterns of the migrant workers and the French workers and between the various national groups of the former reflect quantitative differentials in wages and social status. This differential access to socio-economic positions is determined by historical factors, underdevelopment of the Maghrib, and by an official policy of the French government enabling employers to divide the alien workers from the French proletariat and the migrant laborers among themselves. This hierarchization of the various ethnic groups along socio-economic lines corresponds to the actual degree of hostility expressed by the French population to each of them. The Italians are most favorable considered. The Spanish and Portuguese are more or less tolerated. There is very strong prejudice towards North Africans, and especially Algerians.<sup>31</sup> According to a public opinion poll of the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, 62 percent of the sample responded that there were too many North Africans in France. 27 percent thought there were too many Spaniards, although at the time the number of southern European workers far exceeded that of the Maghribins. A poll of French workers found that 71 percent thought there were too many North Africans and 50 percent thought there were too many Spaniards and Portuguese.

These hostile attitudes of the French workers stemmed from the objective socio-economic positions assigned to every nationality represented in France by the migrant workers. The varying degrees of hostility against different ethnic groups are probably determined by historical and cultural factors. The North Africans are rejected on the grounds that they are not only socially and economically "underdeveloped," but also that they are culturally too different and consequently unassimilable. The "Colonial fact" appears to override all others.

All the immigrants are perceived in varying degrees as distinct from the rest of the population, and since they have come to occupy principally the lower layers of the industrial process of production as unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the sectors deserted by the French proletariat, a mirage has been created that the latter have been "integrated" into the bourgeois society. As a direct consequence "the French proletariat lost sight of the fact that the national workers and the immigrant workers have common interests in the face of exploitation."<sup>32</sup> The degree and nature of this exploitation itself is organized along this ethnic gradient stratification. Any attitude, tendency or policy that favors one class, one religion, ethnic or national group over another, and overlooks the objective relationships of all the workers to the means of production, is designed to disunite, weaken and sap the militancy and future revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat. Any misconception regarding the migrant workers in Europe, either as various marginal ethnic minorities or racial groupings or as a "lumpenproletariat" is bound to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo which lies in the systematic political and economic practice of dividing the laboring masses in order to rule them.

The only objective differences distinguishing the French proletariat from the migrant workers lie in the fact that the mi-

grants are imported to work for a specified period of time. They are deliberately rotated in such a way that

many of them remain only a few years, and are then replaced by others so that there are hardly any retired immigrants. Immigrants therefore have a higher than average rate of economic activity, and make contributions to health, unemployment, and pension insurance far in excess of their demands on such schemes. Particularly high rates of activity are to be found among recently arrived groups.<sup>33</sup>

Deprived of their basic civil rights, the Arab workers, like all other foreign workers in Europe, are constantly threatened with deportation if they participate in the ongoing class struggle. While they are in France they tend to slave in silence lest they be expelled. From the above figures, it becomes obvious that the North African and other migrant workers in France form the kernel of the productive process within the primary sectors of the French economy. The French bourgeoisie would not have bothered to attract or to import them if they were not socially, politically and economically profitable.

### Political and Economic Advantages of Immigration

Because of French demographic stagnation and simultaneous economic expansion in the 1960's, the *patronat* turned to its neo-colonial reserve army to replace its shrinking local semi-skilled and unskilled work force. As M. Massenet, the director of population in the Ministry of Labor, declared on television in 1968, "with an active French population of 40%, how could we ensure in France the standard of living of the population, ensure the retirement of the elderly, the charges of the students ensure the social investments for children, without immigration?" Thus the import of a labor force to ensure the welfare of the French population became a vital economic necessity.

In addition to these socio-economic factors, some geo-political considerations came into play. By practicing a *laissez-faire* immigration policy, the French leaders intended to pacify the social contradictions inherent in a class society. As early as 1964 Pompidou, who was then Prime Minister, declared that immigration would allow us to "create a detente in the labor market and resist any social pressure" that can be exerted by the French proletariat.<sup>34</sup> The deployment of migrant labor forces became of utmost strategic importance in order to resolve local manpower penury, to subvert actual or potential class strife, and to exert pressure on wages so that the owners of the means of production will go on extorting exorbitant surplus value from the proletariat. This strategy resulted in the further worsening of working conditions in the principal productive sectors where migrant workers were employed. Since the French workers were either given supervisory positions or transferred to more remunerative occupations possessing a higher social status, the struggle for the improvement of working conditions in the sectors of production reserved for migrant workers ceased to preoccupy the French unions. Given the racist and chauvinistic aura permeating their new industrial establishments, the migrant laborers, either ignorant of labor legislation or merely terrorized by the constant threat of deportation, often resigned themselves to perform equal work with the French workers

even though they were being paid unequal wages. Deprived of basic civil rights and in most cases illiterate and lacking class or political consciousness, the migrant workers could not expose themselves alone to the wrath of their employers and their "law enforcement" agencies. Despite the fact that they constituted the most productive elements within the French society -- engaged in primary activity generating productive branches on which numerous secondary sectors depend -- these foreign laborers are the most exploited segment of the contemporary proletariat in Europe. Although all the working classes are subjected to exploitation, additional exploitative relations are imposed on the migrant laborers.

The French small scale and archaic industries would not have been able to survive the tight competition imposed upon them by large industrial firms without this alien labor force. Through systematic discriminatory employment practices, financial fraud, starvation wages, and all sorts of manipulations such as the constant shifts and rotations of migrant workers, these petty entrepreneurs succeeded in avoiding paying or raising wages in accordance with seniority-rule requirements. As a result, the owners of these firms managed to squeeze enough surplus labor to compete with the highly concentrated and rationalized modern firms. As for the large scale enterprises, they came to base their whole short-run and long-run industrial planning on this alien "banal" manpower whose forced obedience allowed the French bourgeoisie to increase the rate of profits without even the risk of social unrest. Besides, outmigration from the former French colonies played a stabilizing role in freezing social struggle there. Political pressure stimulated by unemployment, which is in itself a consequence of economic neo-colonialism, has been released by this emigration of pauperized masses. The shortage of indigenous manpower, which is a vulnerable economic weakness, has been astutely turned into a powerful political mechanism that permits the French ruling class to channel, through migration, the frustrations and energies of the migrant workers in a way that reinforces its neo-colonial relations with the Maghrib.

The import of a predominantly male alien labor force from these Third World countries was not accompanied by any serious attempt to create an adequate social infrastructure, housing facilities, medical care, and other necessary services. Besides, these migrants did not cost the host society a single penny prior to their entry into its labor market. When a migrant laborer arrived from the Maghrib to France the charges of his upbringing and basic education had already been paid by the exporting society. A migrant worker cannot even leave the Maghrib or be granted a residence certificate if he is not declared by a French doctor to be fit for work. According to the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, "the total cost for the country of a young man to the age of 18, that is, to the level of simple qualification, amounts to 9 or 10 years of work."<sup>35</sup> Thus one of the major benefits of immigration for the receiving country lies in the fact that all the basic social costs up to the working age have been assumed by the countries of emigration.

But as soon as migrant laborers start working in France they are compelled to pay full social security fees on an equal footing with the French workers, even though they receive

in return unequal benefits. It has been calculated that a migrant worker leaves behind him up to 20 percent of his wages in social security.<sup>36</sup> All North African migrant workers whose dependents are left in the Maghrib receive only 60 percent or less of their family allowance. "Many lose even the benefit of this allowance either due to sheer ignorance or because they are rebuked by tedious administrative difficulties."<sup>37</sup> The profits derived from the utilization of the Maghribin laborers are enormous. In 1966 a French civil servant, Yves Chaigneau, calculated the amount of the Algerian workers' contribution to French economic production. He arrived at an estimate of between 2.2 and 3.5 billion old francs. Subtracting the wages paid to these workers, and the social benefits and aid given at that time to Algeria by France, he was able to determine that the balance of profits made by the French capitalists amounted to no less than 1.5 billion old francs per year.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, contemporary migration as a political and economic strategy allows the French bourgeoisie to use the migrant workers as an efficient means to increase the rate of profit, to pacify the fundamental social contradictions inherent in a capitalist society, and to reinforce its neo-colonial hold on the former colonized societies. The "nationalist" regimes found an outlet for their redundant manpower and the French *patronat* is provided with a reserve army which is imported only under the express condition that its finished products will be ensured of the neo-colonial market outlets. Once in France, the Maghribin workers are subjected to merciless exploitation, discrimination and humiliation. Their mere presence threatens a large segment of the French proletariat to the extent that the "foreigners" appeared "to come here to take our bread." These transplanted workers see themselves sinking into a hostile environment. All the costs of this political-economic containment policy are paid in migrant workers' sweat, blood, health, and mental and material misery.

### Housing Conditions

Despite the fact that most of the Maghribin workers are employed in building and construction trades, their own housing is utterly wretched. Overcrowding and lack of elementary hygiene characterize the North African slums, called *micro-madinas* by French sociologists. These conditions are conducive to the over-exploitation of the migrant population by the landlords, or "merchants of sleep." In their quest for a place to live, the Maghribin encounter three major difficulties magnified by an aberrant racism: poverty, lack of basic information concerning the possibilities of accommodation, and the chronic shortage in France of inexpensive housing facilities. Without adequate housing the acclimatization of these workers to a relatively rigorous climate provokes severe impediments to their health.

The preexistence of strong prejudice against the North African migrant workers led to their initial assignment to the lowest socio-economic position by the host society which resulted in low wages and consequently poor living conditions. These abject housing conditions imposed upon them were in turn used to justify the systematic housing discrimination



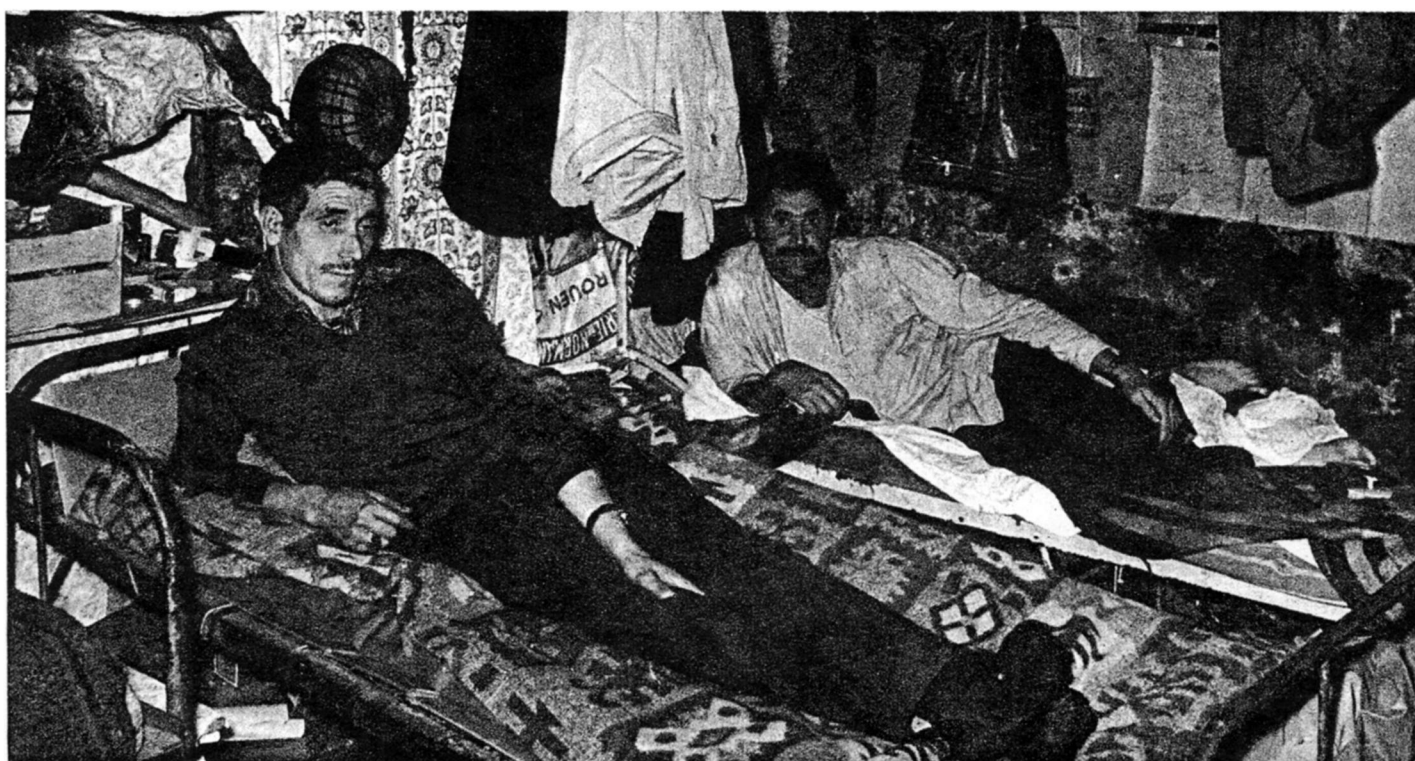
directed against them. This vicious circle was called by Gunnar Myrdal, in his study of racism in the United States, the "principle of cumulation." "White prejudice and discrimination keep the negro in low standards of living, health, education. This, in turn, gives support to white prejudice."<sup>39</sup> At any rate, prejudice and discrimination condemn the North African population in France to live in dilapidated housing facilities that are highly priced. As a Maghribin worker put it, "I am a mason and I don't have a decent place to live. I would like to scream against injustice, but I will always be isolated, and I shouldn't forget that I am a foreigner."<sup>40</sup>

The exploitation of the migrant laborer is multifaceted and omnipresent. In the workshop, in the stores, in the dwelling place it exists. If he dares to protest, to claim his due, he is reminded of his subordinate status: "foreigner." Given the acute scarcity of accommodations, when a migrant worker is housed by his employer, which is a rare occurrence, he must

The housing available to North African migrants falls into three categories: *bidonvilles*, or shanty towns; *hotels meubles*, or furnished hostels; and *foyers sauvages*, slum boarding houses.<sup>42</sup>

1) *Bidonvilles* are defined as "islets more or less extended over open spots on which barracks constructed in old wood, metal, or cars, mushroomed in the peripheral zones of the industrial centers."<sup>43</sup> After 1968, the French government decided, without any necessary preparation, to rehouse these *bidonville* dwellers, to suppress the so-called horizontal *bidonvilles*. The evicted population came together in smaller groupings to reconstruct vertical or *micro-bidonvilles* in the industrial working class suburbs. In fact, the official campaign for the abolition of *bidonvilles* resulted in numerous instances of police brutality directed against the roofless migrant population of these slums.

According to official statistics, which tend to underestimate the number of migrant workers, almost 20% of the Maghribin



Algerian workers in French slum housing.

submit body and soul to the will of the boss. He risks being thrown out unceremoniously any time he attempts to resist. If he tries to look for an independent room to rent, he confronts the ceaseless humiliation of hostile refusals. Sick in his stomach from being constantly turned down, he resigns himself to accepting the rental of a bed in an overcrowded room that he must share with several fellow migrant workers. In a systematic manner, French society forces the foreign laborer to be exploited by the "merchant of sleep" or to take refuge in a squalorous shanty town or *bidonville*. According to an official survey, over one million migrants were living in 1968 in *insalubre* lodgings. Nearly half a million of these workers were in Paris.<sup>41</sup>

workers live in *bidonvilles* and made up about 42% of the *bidonville* population, the rest being mainly migrants from southern Europe.<sup>44</sup> Being considered sub-humans, the North Africans were automatically reduced to a subhuman social condition. Some Tunisian migrant workers describe this situation in the following terms:

What we are leading here is not a life. Even the rats come to eat us. I swear to you that one time A. had been bitten by a rat on his foot while he was asleep. But what do you want, when every one of us remembers his situation before . . . he sleeps on his woes and bears everything.

A second reiterated their condition and psychological strain. "There is no difference between us and the animals. And I



swear to you that even the animals live better than we. From time to time, when I look at the dogs around . . . I get disgusted with life.”<sup>45</sup>

Since most of the Maghribin workers who brought their families with them to France in the late 1950's and 1960's ended up living in the *bidonvilles*, the experience of life there has traumatized and marked forever the youngsters. A young Algerian girl described her experience thus:

My most horrible experience was that of the bidonville where I have lived about 9 years. I was seventeen upon my arrival in France. The location of the bidonville was so close to the Seine that many children were drowned. Others had awful accidents. I have witnessed a six-month old baby half eaten by rats. His nose, chin and the ends of his fingers had been eaten off. He died in the hospital. I shall never forget this. Another one was burned to death. The barrack where he was asleep caught fire while his mother was talking with her next door neighbor. When she saw the flame, she rushed home to save her child, but out of fright he hid himself in the drawer where no one had the idea of looking. During this time, I had run to the manager of the Cite de Transite [transit centers reserved for migrants] opposite to the bidonville, to call the firemen. I explained to him that a child was about to burn alive, would he please let me phone. But he couldn't stand the people of the bidonville, and therefore he refused to call the fire department.<sup>46</sup>

The French administrative bureaucracy has laid down certain requirements constraining the lives of this migrant population. The bidonvilles are not recognized officially as a residential quarter. But the migrant workers living in them are required to furnish at least a certificate of residence delivered by a landlord in order to qualify for the benefits of social security, etc. This obligation forces the *bidonville* dwellers to purchase a certificate in the black market for an exorbitant sum of money. This certificate is required several times a year. In this and similar ways, the migrant workers in France are subjected daily to many kinds of oppression. Moreover, life in the *bidonvilles* is characterized by the total absence of necessities like heating, running water, electricity, elementary hygiene, aggravated by overcrowding and noise pollution.

2) *Hotels meubles* (furnished hostels), are *insalubre* run-down buildings located in slum quarters in the suburbs of large industrial areas. According to the 1962 census, there existed 12,280 buildings of this kind in Paris alone. Of the Algerian migrant population, 22 percent lived in these dwellings. The housing conditions in these slum lodgings are more or less similar to those of the *bidonvilles*: decay, lack of elementary hygiene, overcrowding.<sup>47</sup> The *hotel meubles* are rented by the “merchants of sleep” who are merciless in taxing the migrant workers. There is a wide occurrence of renting a single bed to three different workers, each of them obliged to pay the price of renting the entire room. Every room is crammed with up to five beds. The workers are to arrange their work shifts in such a way as to make it possible for each one to have access to a bed for at least six hours in every 24. Ben Sassi concluded his study of the Tunisian workers in Paris by stating that the number of workers living in each room of these hostels “amounts to between seven and eight persons, and sometimes exceeds twenty in a living space of 15 square meters, without any ventilation except through the door which is closed most often.” In some of the hostels the salon of the cafe is utilized at night as a dormitory. “To aid his compatriots, the owner of one of these hotels lays down mattresses on

the floor in mid-winter as soon as the cafe closes. But he never forgets, of course, to collect 50 francs per month from every worker.”<sup>48</sup>

3) *Foyers sauvages* (slum boarding houses) are old buildings rented to migrant workers by individuals specializing in this booming business. The environment is characterized by “insalubrity, racism, and exploitation.” A militaristic discipline restricts the privacy of the tenants. For example, women are not allowed to enter the rooms. These lodgings constitute a “concentrationary” universe. Within its compound the migrant laborers live under hellish conditions. This is why the French sociologists refer to them as *foyers sauvages*. In Sochaux, 216 Algerian workers are living in such a slum lodging. Every floor is crammed with 36 persons sharing one toilet. Every room is inhabited by an average of 20 to 22 persons and since there is no kitchen they all cook their food in it. But every worker has to pay 45 francs per month. The landlord provides neither bed nor blankets. In Bordeaux, 80 Maghribin workers live in a *foyer sauvage*: three workers per room of five square meters. Every one pays 90 francs per month. They share only three toilets. Not far from there, 974 Algerian workers live in another *foyer sauvage* consisting of only 24 rooms without any heat, and sharing two toilets. The entire building possesses no running water. The rent is 80 francs per person per month.

There are many other forms of lodgings of “fortune” but they all exhibit the same features. In the course of my field research in Alsace and la Lorraine-Thionville, Metz, St. Louis, Mulhouse and Strasbourg — I came across the same state of affairs. In St. Louis a boarding house built during the Franco-Algerian war by the Service de l'Action Sociale en Faveur des Migrants with Algerian workers' funds left in social security as a result of differential payment of family allowance (the Algerians received 40 percent less than the French) had been turned over in the early 60's to a *pied noir* to manage as a real estate enterprise. Given the shortage of housing and the systematic refusal of the inhabitants to rent their attics to the North African workers, this “merchant of sleep” is able to extort 780 francs per month for a single room crammed with five or six people. Ben Sassi's description of the Tunisian migrant workers' housing conditions is representative of all the Maghribin migrant population in France:

we have found that the quasi-totality of the Tunisian workers in Paris and its regions are living in ‘boxes of sardines’, to use their own expression, which are characterized by decay, humidity, and filth. In a word, there is no hygiene, no comfort, and consequently it is devoid of social life...In examining these slums, I asked myself how is it possible to conserve a passable health in such lodgings after 59 hours of work per/week.<sup>49</sup>

## The “Pathology” of Migrant Populations

Motivated by an absolute deprivation—poverty, hunger, misery—to migrate in order to subsist and provide for his dependents left behind in the Maghrib or brought with him to the *mahjar*, the Maghribin migrant laborer in France is, in most instances, overworked in painful tasks but underpaid and consequently undernourished and ill-housed. Furthermore, he is subjected to ceaseless vexations, humiliations and overt hostility of

various kinds. He is compelled by the mere fact of his socio-economic position in the host society to become susceptible to contract mental or physical diseases that quicken his aging cycle, which forces him to retire earlier and therefore without any retirement compensation. This constitutes additional profits for the French social security. As a result of the lamentably deficient living and working conditions, the French doctors reached the conclusion that the migrant laborers and their families in France constitute "a group, with a high risk." <sup>50</sup> for the contraction of both somatic and extrasomatic diseases.

A team of French doctors who studied the health conditions of the migrant population classified its "pathology" into two categories: diseases of acquisition, and pathology of adaptation. <sup>51</sup> 1) The diseases of acquisition are physical sicknesses contracted after their arrival to France. Since all migrant workers have to pass a medical examination either before they leave their respective countries of origin, or before they regularize their legal situation with ONI officials, these French doctors were able to provide irrefutable evidence negating the claims made by the French racists asserting that the migrants have carried over these diseases from their countries. One of the most lethal diseases that attacks a large proportion of the migrant workers and their families in general, and the Northern and and sub-Saharan Africans in particular, is tuberculosis. The Maghribin population in France is often affected by pulmonary tuberculosis which is socially one of the gravest sicknesses because of its rapid dissemination within the migrant communities through contagion. For example, a study was carried out during the 1968-1970 period demonstrating that among the patients who entered the sanatoriums, 51% were North Africans. The migrant workers attacked by tuberculosis while they were working belonged to the lowest strata of the proletariat. <sup>52</sup> Tuberculosis has been considered by the French doctors as the

disease of transplantation which is caused by a multiplicity of factors: malnutrition, under-nourishment, over-working, diverse psychological shocks, over-crowding, confinement, lack of hygiene, frailty, and overcontamination. It is the result of all these causally interwoven factors. The migrant workers are introduced into France in good health but they usually contract this disease after having stayed six to eighteen months. <sup>53</sup>

Besides this, there are other diseases that are the major causes of the hospitalization of many Maghribin workers: digestive troubles such as colitis, cholecysts, gastro-duodenal ulcers, etc. These diseases are also contracted in France as a direct consequence of the subhuman working and living conditions imposed upon them.

2) The pathology of adaptation. The migrants left their countries of origin because of the lack of employment opportunities in a satisfactory mental condition but once in France they are thrown into the labor market without any organized assistance. Racism and overgeneralized hostility harden the initial impact of "culture shock" which is generated by the sudden environmental change, the difficulties of linguistic communication, the stress involved in job hunting, and absence of adequate accommodation. All these manifold factors are bound to trigger severe "psychological shocks" that are prone to undermine the psychic balance of the newly transplanted proletariat. Accord-

ing to Dr. Somia, most of the disease affecting the Maghribin migrant workers are socially engendered.

Of 727 files of North Africans who had been examined in the psychiatric centers of the Parisian region, it was demonstrated that 90 percent of the cases were related to the labor market. Therefore, when there is unemployment or work difficulty, psychiatric symptoms appear, aggravated in this anxious man, who as the responsibility of a family that is not nearby to comfort him. <sup>54</sup>

This pathology of transplantation called also by some, French psychiatrists "pathology of adaptation," exhibits acute polymorphous reactional psychoses. Many newly arrived migrants suffer multivarious neurotic reactions, recurrent depressions, "sinistroses," and a multitude of other psychological syndromes.

According to a group of French psychiatrists, "If there existed no obstacles to the social insertion, there would have been no pathological complication among the transplanted groups. <sup>55</sup>

The situation of the children of the migrant workers is even worse than that of the adults. Forty percent of the infant hospitalizations are represented by the children of migrants while the entire migrant population constituted only 6.5 % of the total population in France. When the social background of these infants was investigated in the hospitals of the Paris region, it was shown that 45% of the families of these children were living in a single slum hostel room, 20% in the bidonvilles, 20% in the "centres de transit," and 15% in worn out lodgings (*logements vetustes*). Consequently, these children were being exposed permanently to all sorts of germs, and injurious animals such as rats which carry parasites and microbes. <sup>56</sup>

This state of affairs does not facilitate the normal schooling of these children either. An inquiry carried out in the six major French cities revealed that only 20% of the children of the migrant workers had succeeded either in obtaining the Certificat d'Etudes Primaires (certificate of primary education), or in entering the sixth grade. 20% failed completely, that is, by the time they stopped going to school, they could not even read and write; 60% failed partially. Furthermore, 75% of the foreign children lagged from one to three years behind their age group. Besides these terrible disadvantages, the French authorities instituted an annual quota system in professional schools. For example, the training centers are obliged to admit only 10% of the students from the alien population. Finally, even those who manage to obtain diplomas as F.P.A. and C.P.A. are, upon graduation, hired by the French employers only as semi-skilled. This systematic discriminatory policy is designed to force the present-day migrant workers to reproduce their kind so that the French patronat will be ensured a cheap "banal" manpower right on the spot.

Successful schooling is predetermined by the children's living conditions at home. Besides the cogent inhibiting factor induced by the absolute deprivation characterizing most migrant families, the racist hostile school environment within which the alien child is being not only educated but enculturated, constitutes sufficient conditions which undermine the intellectual development of any child. Many recent studies on the education of young children have demonstrated that the level of intellectual development of an individual depends to a large extent on the socio-biological environment during the first years of his enculturation. Poverty and malnutrition when combined together



generate cumulative effect on the intellectual development of a child reared in a family relegated to the lowest socio-economic status within a stratified society. Another environmental factor interferes to upset the remaining chances of the migrant child. "Once more we find," wrote Catherine Valabregue, "that the difficulties of the child [in school] are originated by racism. Provided that he has an accent, he will be mocked and scorned by his French classmates. 'do not ask me if I am an Arab', said a small boy, 'it makes me think of "dirty Arab"'. I am a Moroccan'." A French mother is reported to have said to her child, "If I see you speaking to a Moslim, I shall kill you."<sup>57</sup> This hostility is bound to inhibit psychologically the child who becomes so anxious, confronted with this permanent insecurity the migrant child has only two courses to follow: to resort to overt aggressive behavior as a sign of defiance, or to withdraw in order to avoid conflict. Neither of these alternatives is conducive to success in schooling.

### The Cause and Function of Racism

The emergence of racism itself as a sociological phenomenon was brought about by colonialism. Its primary function is aimed at the reduction of the non-capitalist peoples to a sub-human species so that their subjugation and systematic exploitation become justified and desirable. Raciology as an ideology is the offspring of colonialist practices. The armies of the western bourgeoisie overseas resorted to wars of extermination because in the

tropical countries [they] wanted cheap labor and markets and slaves; in temperate countries they wanted the land to occupy as settlers....The natives were regarded as outside the pale of humanity, without religion, law, or morals. Bounties were placed on their heads and they could be freely kidnapped and massacred. They had no redress but to strike back and so to bring upon themselves merciless reprisals. Even these presently became impossible and the native remnants were herded onto reserves or became hopeless slaves in the mines or on the plantations. Those natives were alone fortunate who lived in countries that could not readily be exploited by Europe's traders or settled by her colonists.<sup>58</sup>

The proclamation of "white" superiority over the colonized masses had been formulated during the age of colonialism (XIXth century) to rationalize the dispossession of the Third World. As Ashley Montagu put it, "indeed, even if the idea of 'race' had not already been available, the imperialists would have been forced to invent it. It was the most useful ideological instrument of all, even more valuable than the machine gun."<sup>59</sup> Racism in the modern world is therefore a by-product of colonialism.

Prior to 1945, the currents of migration emanated from Europe to the colonies. The colonial societies that were erected on the ruins of the colonized peoples' social systems gave rise to, stimulated, and provided an ideal milieu for the dissemination and application of racial theorizings. Therefore, with the reversing of the migratory waves in the post-World War II period and an increasing number of pauperized masses being attracted to the European cities, with the deeply rooted racial mythologies existing there, racial discrimination and hostility was bound to develop to the point where racism became as overtly expressed as in the former colonies. As a result of decolonization, the repatriated settlers brought with them their prejudices and bitterness to be spread like conta-

gious diseases among the metropolitan population. In fact, the more violent the conflict of decolonization (e.g., Algeria), the more virulent the racism and xenophobia directed against immigrants from that colony. However, historical evidence shows that racism as a sociological phenomenon is a by-product of capitalist praxis. Consequently, its existence as a social manifestation in France predated the arrival of the deracinated proletarians.

The entire life of the Maghribin workers, due undoubtedly to their historical experience under French colonialism and their decisive resistance against it, is marked and profoundly affected by racism: discriminated against in housing, scorned in public transport and other public places, despised by petty clerks, brutalized by the police. Endless vexations permeated their everyday interaction within the host society to the extent that they seemed to get accustomed to such aggressive hostility displayed by the autochthonous population.<sup>60</sup> The result of this generalized prejudice against the North Africans played a determinant role in maintaining them in a subordinate position. Systematic social discrimination entails unequal opportunity preventing any discriminated against ethnic group from ameliorating its standard of living.

'The Algerians are dirty and they like to be crowded together'; on the faith of which no French landlord would rent to them. It follows that the Algerians find only uncomfortable lodgings which are degraded and in too small a number. They consequently must live in overcrowded conditions. The Algerians are therefore effectively dirty and they actually live in overcrowded condition."<sup>61</sup>

Thus in a racist environment, through a circular process of reasoning, the victim of discrimination is driven into a cul-de-sac.

The typical French racist attitude is expressed in this manner, "I'm not racist, but I find that the Algerians are the rabble that<sup>5</sup> must be expelled; the syphilis that arises like arrows." On the Cote d'Azur a sign proclaimed "Prohibited for dogs and Arabs."<sup>62</sup> In Aix en Provence, close to some large construction sites where there were many North Africans working, the following was written on the wall, "There are too many Arabs in France.

*It is a plague.*" In Strasbourg, two Algerians entered a bar to have a drink; they sat at a table by themselves; there were many different nationalities in the cafe, Germans, Italians, etc. But after a while the waiter still had not come to take their order. When one of them called him, he only came to tell them, "we don't serve Arabs by order of the boss." When they went to see the boss, he did not even deem it necessary to talk to them. He just ignored them as if they did not exist. One of them told me, "I nearly lost my temper and beat the son of a bitch. Fortunately I realized on time that this act would lead nowhere." In 1965, four workers went from St. Louis to Nancy to make their "papers" in the Algerian consulate. On their arrival in Nancy, they wanted to dine. Every time they entered a cafe-restaurant, they were told they they could not be served; they tried five different places and finally resigned themselves to looking for an Algerian restaurant in the Arab *micromadina*. Segregation in public places was still a wide spread occurrence in France in 1973-1974 and it was the cause of many disputes between the North African migrant workers and the French cafe owners.

In 1970, the French journalist, Jean Lacouture, published a series of articles devoted to the manifestation of racism in

France and other European countries.<sup>63</sup> A wave of letters to the editor ensued. One started by warning against “the invasion [of France] by races of inferior men, such as the niggers or Berbers” and “the dangerous admixture with the white superior races of Europe which has established the entire ‘civilization’.”<sup>64</sup> Another correspondent concluded by stressing that there is an “increasing number of niggers and Arabs whose sole contact with the French is repulsive, niggers that do not have a human shape; North African negroids that carry on their faces all the stigma of degenerate races, unassimilable multitudes which constitute a mortal peril for France.”<sup>65</sup> The Arab laborers in France are thus targets for a variegated discrimination and racial abuse. To the increasing racist hysteria and violence, the migrant workers in general and the North African laborers in particular, responded by class struggle, despite the constant deportations of the alleged leaders by Marcellin, the French interior minister, who declared that “expulsions are motivated by the crimes” committed by the foreign workers because they

did not respect the political neutrality....These figures [according to him about one per thousand were deported in 1972] demonstrate that France despite protests and criticisms remains the best country where foreigners are provided with the most liberal welcoming conditions [sic]. This is said, I shall continue to expel all foreigners who will disturb the public order.<sup>66</sup>

The next day the Parisian daily newspaper *L'Aurore* came to support Marcellin's policy of systematic deportation in these terms.

It is a problem of loyalty vis-a-vis our community that is posited by the behavior of these men. Let us make it clear that it is in no way tolerable that the foreign temporary resident and whatever his activity, can raise a political contestation against the French society; nobody constrained him to come to install himself among us. In deporting some agitators who are making trouble, like Cohen Bendit before them, and in announcing that he will persevere in using these methods, which are quite smooth anyway, the Minister of the Interior is responding to one of the most legitimate wishes of the French, which expresses itself in four words: *la paix chez soi* [peace in one's home].<sup>67</sup>

### “They Have Begun to Fight”

On January 19, 1971, in a factory in Lyon a Maghribin worker was smashed into pieces by the chain of a worn out machine in the workshop. This defective engine was supposed to have been removed for security reasons a long time before this accident occurred. The chain of the machine was so weakened that it had broken. On the specific order of the management, the chain was hidden and replaced by a new one in order to exonerate its responsibility in this fatal accident. The workers were threatened that if any one of them dared to give to the investigators a different version to that of the management, they would be fired. However, when the police showed up in the factory a worker defied the management, not only giving the true explanation of the cause of his companion's death, but showing the investigators the location of the hidden broken chain. In protest against the working conditions the Maghribin workers struck for six hours. A second strike was organized on February 9, 1972. It lasted twenty-two days and shook the whole working class movement and the French *patronat*. Thenceforth the migrant workers “have begun to fight for their rights—striking for better wages and working conditions, protesting scandalous rent for rotten quarters.”<sup>68</sup>

In 1973, the combativity of the migrant workers increased in proportion to the aggression directed against them by some fascist groups.

One of the most dramatic expressions of this new militancy was the long and effective strike started in the spring of 1973 by some 370 assembly line workers...[mostly Algerians] at the Renault automobile plant outside Paris. The main demand was ‘equal pay for equal work’. The workers were protesting not only ruthless working conditions, but also the fact that they were getting paid substantially less than the French workers doing similar tasks.<sup>69</sup>

This started as a spontaneous wildcat strike which was immediately followed by 12,000 semi-skilled workers, 9,000 of them migrants. It was supervised by an ad hoc “struggle committee” of laborers. This confrontation with the French ruling class resulted in a partial victory for the Renault workers.

But its real significance lay in the fact that it showed the immigrants finally emerging from their long political passivity and isolation. This new activism has also been demonstrated in struggles in many slum tenements,...immigrant workers have organized rent strikes, refusing to pay the exorbitant rents demanded for tiny unheated, overcrowded rooms, or else banding together to fight arbitrary evictions. Many of these actions have been successful in at least extracting small concessions or thwarting outrageous cases of discrimination.

In opposition to the ongoing struggle for survival organized spontaneously by the Maghribin migrant workers and others, a neo-fascist movement called *Ordre Nouveau* (new order) mounted vicious racist campaigns against the migrant workers. It is an “organization whose leaders boast of their support for



Poster by France's fascist New Order.

the Nazis during World War II.” But despite this, Marcellin allowed a provocative meeting to be held by the *Ordre Nouveau* in Paris on June 21, 1973. Actually the authorization of this meeting was in violation of the letter and spirit of a new French law against “racist propaganda” passed in the Parliament in 1972. The French antifascist youth organization mounted a counter-demonstration against the racist hysterics of the *Ordre Nouveau*. This resulted in the dissolution of the *Ligue Communiste* by the French government and the imprisonment of its



leader Alain Krivine. Despite this law against racist propaganda, racist newspapers such as *Minute* still denounced without any legal suits

the waves of syphilis-bearing, rape-prone undesirables. On June 23—just two days after the Ordre Nouveau rally—shots were fired from speeding cars into several Algerian cafes in the Paris suburbs. On July 3, in Vitry...three racists murdered a Portuguese worker, then attacked an Algerian. In the southern resort city of Nice, on August 2, two Algerian workers were badly wounded in a fight with the owner of the building in which they lived. Racial violence erupted in the city of Toulon, where the municipal council declared a 'state of emergency' on August 10.

This widespread animosity against the migrant workers degenerated into barbarous acts of violence and murder after August 25, 1973, when a mentally disturbed Algerian laborer, whose brain had been damaged earlier as a result of a fight with some French fascists, killed a bus driver in Marseille. This event triggered the French reactionary press in search of any excuse, to launch a hysterical campaign against the Algerian workers in particular, because of their noticeable role in the struggle for the improvement of the alien laborers' working and living conditions, and the Third World migrant workers in general. The major southern French newspaper, *Le Meridional*, led the anti-Algerian crusade in the following terms "we have had enough of Algerian thieves, Algerian thugs, Algerian braggarts, Algerian trouble-makers, Algerian syphilitics, Algerian rapists, Algerian pimps, Algerian lunatics, Algerian killers." The committee for the Defence of Marseille was set up by the local members of the Ordre Nouveau to foment criminal acts against the North African laborers, and to denounce the "brown threat." "The Algerian [who killed the bus driver] was nearly lynched and the local press used the tragedy to whip up anti-Algerian fury throughout the region, where many former *colons* live and memories of the Algerian war are vivid."<sup>73</sup> This isolated crime provided the French fascist groups with a pretext to move to action. From August 26 to September 29, 1973, twelve Algerian workers had been assassinated across France. On December 14, a bomb was put in the Algerian consulate in Marseille in the room where the workers wait while their identification cards and various other papers are processed by the consular clerks. It killed four people and wounded a hundred. As a direct result, the Algerian government decided to cut off the flow of the 25,000 man annual contingent of emigrant workers to France. (This was not the only time that the fascists organized mass murder; in 1971, when Algeria nationalized French oil interests, 21 migrant workers were killed throughout France.) The French police never made a single arrest in connection with these various crimes.

At any rate, the North African workers responded to this 1973 racist hysteria against them by protective reactions to defend themselves. The Movement of Arab Workers succeeded in organizing many strikes and massive street demonstrations throughout the industrial centers of France in the Fall of 1973 and subsequently. It is a pan-Maghribin clandestine organization that spread quickly among the North African workers because it represented their aspirations. In protest against these assassinations, this movement organized a nationwide strike and demonstration. This

day was highlighted by a meeting of thousands of Arab workers in front of the Paris mosque, following a massive walkout of immigrants from the construction sites and factories of the Paris area. For the first time, production was halted at the Citroen plant when

Arab workers there, joined by other immigrants, put down their tools and marched out en masse. Cafes and restaurants in Arab neighborhoods were closed for the day.

The growing racist hostility against the Arab migrant workers in France forced many of them to envisage their return home if employment is made available. An Algerian worker, the father of five children, who has been working in eastern France since 1962, wrote a letter to the personnel director of one of the Algerian state industrial organizations on September 3, 1973, requesting a job as an aid-mechanic. This letter revealed both the eagerness of these migrant workers to return home and their psychological stress in France. "We are fortifying the hand that is oppressing us," this worker concluded. But the director replied two months later only to turn down this request on the grounds that "in order to be reintegrated into our factory you must possess the following qualifications: a certificate of primary education, and a certificate of professional training in general mechanics." This is another way of saying "no employment."



Immigrant workers rally in Paris, September 14, 1973.

The courageous struggle of the Maghribin workers in France for the purpose of defending their interests must be extended to North Africa where the major cause of their exploitation lies. In the final analysis, it is the North African societies that must be changed along revolutionary lines whereby not only the collectivization of the means of production will be carried out, but also of labor itself. The remnants of colonial structures must be destroyed in order to be replaced by genuinely egalitarian socio-economic structures that would guarantee a popular participatory democracy as well as channel, in a very consequent way, the energies of the masses for the construction of just societies in the Maghrib.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Zartman, ed., *Man, State, and Society in The Contemporary Maghrib*, (N.Y.: Praeger, 1973), pp. 494 and 497.

<sup>2</sup>René Gallissot, *L'Economie de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: P.U.F., 1961), p. 41.

(cont. p. 30)

(Benounne footnotes cont. from p. 12)

- 3Gallissot, p. 39.
- 4Mahfoud Benounne, "Socio-Economic Changes in Rural Algeria: 1830-1954," *Peasant Studies Newsletter*, April 1973, vol. II, no. 2, p. 16.
- 5Samir Amin, *L'Economie du Maghreb*, vol. 1 (Paris: Minuit, 1966), p. 35.
- 6Benounne, op.cit. 7One are = 10 metres square.
- 8Pierre Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le Déracinement*, (Paris: Minuit, 1964), pp. 16-17.
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