

Necessities and realities of the Algerian working class presence in France in the aftermath of independence 1962-1964

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Abstract:

This study highlights the transformation of Algerian labor in post-independence France, tracing their shift from 'indigenous' subjects seeking integration or equality to citizens of a sovereign state that safeguards their rights and liberties.

The main findings reveal a consensus among official positions in both Algeria and France regarding the importance of the Algerian workers in France. For the Algerian government, it served as a means of developing the Algerian labor and a source of remittances. For the French side, this workers contributed to economic development and improved the standard of living in France.

Keywords: Algerian workers; migration management; labor force development; remittances; economic development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the early years of its independence, Algeria faced a highly complex political, economic, and social reality. This reality was a legacy of the 132-year French occupation. The greatest challenge for the new Algerian government was establishing security and order in the country, Consequently, it lacked the resources to absorb the millions of unemployed Algerian farmers and workers, especially given the widespread illiteracy and the inadequate training and skills of the workforce, The workforce was largely unskilled and unable to manage the administrative and economic facilities and institutions that had been left vacant after independence, This new reality prompted a large segment of the Algerian workforce to migrate to France in search of employment, particularly following Algeria's independence and the gradual stabilization of political relations between the two countries, Algerian workers were treated as citizens of an independent state, On the other hand, the Algerian government viewed this migration as a solution for acquiring professional experience and developing a skilled workforce upon which it could rely to achieve a comprehensive economic and social renaissance in the future.

- Research Problem:

This research examines the issue of Algerian labor migration to France in the aftermath of independence, Was this migration a choice to improve living conditions and seek better circumstances, or was it an inevitable necessity imposed by the dire political, social, and economic conditions Algeria faced after



132 years of colonization? This leads to a number of sub-questions:

- What are the historical roots of Algerian labor migration to France, and what were the most significant developments it underwent after independence?

- What was the Algerian government's stance on Algerian labor migration to France, and how was it regulated and framed within the context of the Evian Accords?

- How did Algerian labor migration to France affect social and economic life in Algeria?

- What was the French perspective (government, media, intellectuals, and thinkers) on the presence of Algerian workers in France?

- Research Hypotheses:

- Algerian labor migration to France witnessed a steady increase after independence, due to the stabilization of political and economic relations between Algeria and France, and the transformation of the legal status of Algerian workers from "natives" to free citizens under the protection of an independent state that defended their rights against exploitation and abuse.

- The significant Algerian labor presence in France across various services, industrial and professional sectors provided an opportunity to acquire modern training and gain exposure to advanced technical expertise, which would positively impact the Algerian economy upon their return home.

- Remittances from Algerian workers in France contributed to boosting the Algerian economy during a critical phase of

building the independent Algerian state, reaching approximately 72 billion old French francs (equivalent to about 146 million US dollars at the time) in 1964, - French media launched biased racist campaigns to incite French public opinion against the Algerian labor presence in France, but the intervention of the Algerian government and the threat to fundamentally reconsider the Algerian labor presence in France if the actions contrary to national dignity continued, made the French authorities rush to reassure all parties that there was no danger from the Algerian labor presence to the French social and economic system, because they were aware that losing Algerian workers would constitute a severe blow to the French economy.

- Research Objectives:

- This research aims to shed light on a new chapter in the history of Algerian labor activism in France, and its role in supporting the Algerian economy with skilled labor and internal financial remittances during the early years of Algerian independence, This period was one of the most difficult and critical, as the new Algerian government faced a heavy burden left by the legacy of 132 years of colonialism.

- Most previous academic studies have focused on Algerian labor activism and its role in supporting the Algerian War of Independence through labor associations and unions, Therefore I chose to study a new facet of Algerian labor activism in France, examining the challenges it faced and its role in reviving the national economy during the initial phase of independence and the building of the Algerian state.

- This research also aims to highlight the role of the Algerian government during the initial phase of independence and state-building in confronting major challenges both domestically and internationally, particularly in protecting its citizens—Algerian workers in France—and defending their rights, Furthermore it seeks to demonstrate the government's firm control over national institutions and sovereign facilities, a battle no less important than those of the War of Independence itself.

- The methodology adopted in addressing the research problem:

To answer the main research question and its sub-questions, the historical-analytical method was adopted, which is suitable for narrating and analyzing the phenomenon of Algerian labor migration to France in terms of its roots and development through various historical stages and phases, This method also analyzes its repercussions on Algerian society and the internal and external reactions to this migration, Furthermore the analytical method was used to analyze the data presented in the graphs, focusing on the categories of migrant workers, their evolving numbers, and the changes that the situation of Algerian workers in France underwent after independence, Finally the statistical method was employed to enumerate the number and categories of Algerian workers who migrated to France.

2. The Roots of Algerian Labor Migration to France and its Political, Economic, and Social Framework:

2.1 The Roots of Algerian Labor Migration to France:

Algerian labor migration to France occurred in successive



phases over varying periods and with different motivations, It began with the administrative regulations issued by France to confiscate the collective ownership of Algerian tribal lands, Examples include the Clauzel Decree of September 8, 1830; the Decree of June 4, 1843; the Sénatus-Consulte of April 22, 1863; and the Warnier Law of July 26, 1873 (Sari, 1975, p 35), Under these regulations, the most fertile lands were confiscated for the benefit of European settlers, Faced with this new reality Algerians especially those in rural areas, were left with harsh and limited choices, The first was to accept living on lands with limited productivity that barely provided basic necessities, given the lack of means to cope with the continuous decline in land fertility, while their real estate was still being seized by the French colonial administration. The second option was to accept becoming a toiling working class to serve and develop colonial projects in the agricultural and mining sectors, with Europeans dominating all administrative, technical, and professional positions (Rousset, 1975, p 10), faced with this new reality, the most likely option was to migrate to France in order to obtain job opportunities, In this context the French critic and thinker Anatole France stated in 1905, "For the past seventy years, we have succeeded in expelling the Arabs from Algeria in order to replace them with the French, Italians, and Spaniards"(Belloula, 1965, p 23).

Successive French governments since the second half of the 19th century turned to Algeria by turning it into a field to absorb the existing social and economic problems, and a homeland to absorb those of its citizens who wished to leave France, and even political exiles and outlaws At the same time,



the young Algerian society constituted a valuable source of cheap labor that France desperately needed to build its infrastructure and advance its modern industry, In light of the intensification of the policy of repression and extermination and the spread of various manifestations of poverty, famine and epidemics, emigration constituted the ideal solution for a large segment of Algerians, In terms of their geographical distribution, Algerians during this historical period were concentrated around French industrial cities such as Lille, Marseille, Lyon, and the suburbs of Paris (Favrod, 1959, 127).

As the first signs of World War I appeared, France attempted to address the demographic decline it was experiencing during that historical period in order to meet the demands of the war economy, Accordingly the French government enacted a conscription law on February 3, 1912, requiring every Algerian male who had reached the age of 18 to serve in the French army for three years, It also issued another legal text on July 15, 1914, granting Algerians complete freedom to travel to France without restrictions or travel permits, Based on this decision, approximately 80,000 Algerian workers arrived in France in 1915, and their total number reached approximately 250,000 in 1916, Their tasks were divided between wartime works and war-related industrial projects (Kolodziej, 1974, p 485), Perhaps what encouraged the migration movement was the Algerian Muslims' recognition of the national character of the original French, which differed radically from the Europeans and French settlers in Algeria, Most of these were characterized by material greed and contempt for everything related to Algeria and Algerians in their country, After the First World War the upward trend of the Algerian labor migration movement towards



France continued due to the requirements of the Second World War, and the reconstruction of France and the revival of its economy after this war, until the number of Algerian immigrants in France on the eve of independence reached about 450,000 people (Belloula, 1965, p 26).

Following independence Algeria faced a set of difficult economic realities, The central issue was the imperative to engage with the former colonial power in a way that would address the colonial legacy and overcome the comprehensive collapse, including the economic collapse that Algeria was experiencing during that critical period, Therefore the Evian Accords stipulated that the continuation of Algerian-French relations depended on the French authorities assuming full responsibility for reforming their heavy colonial legacy, based on complete respect for Algeria's independence and sovereignty, Analyzing the social and cultural requirements for the continuation of relations between Algeria and France, we find that Algerian labor migration to France and their permanent residence there constitute one of its most important pillars (Tillion, 1958, p 106).

2.2 The political, economic and social framework of Algerian labor migration after independence

After the official declaration of the restoration of Algerian national sovereignty on July 5, 1962, the political and social status of Algerian workers in various French production sectors changed radically, Consequently their status changed from “natives” demanding integration or at least equality with French citizens in terms of professional rights, to free citizens of an

independent state, subject to a national government that defends their interests against any exploitation or abuse imposed on them by the French government (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 145).

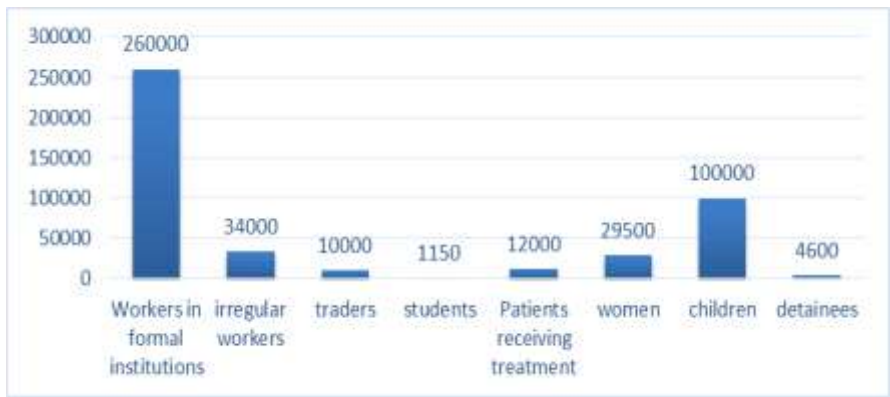
In upholding this principle, Algerian Foreign Minister Mohamed Khemisti, during the first official negotiations between the Algerian and French governments in December 1962, emphasized the need to guarantee all social rights for Algerian workers employed in various sectors of the French economy, The Algerian government representative also demanded that the necessary guarantees be provided to Algerian workers wishing to return to their homeland should their expertise be needed in various fields, particularly industry in accordance with the provisions agreed upon in Evian, It is worth noting that the Evian Accords did not establish specific clauses regarding the status of Algerian workers in France, but the rights demanded by Foreign Minister Khemisti fell under the umbrella of freedom of movement between citizens of the two countries and equality of rights between them (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 145-146).

According to statistics from the French Ministry of the Interior, the number of Algerian immigrants in France on the eve of the signing of the independence agreement was approximately 450,000. They can be distributed according to the administrative districts of Algeria as follows: Algiers district 30% - Constantine district 60% - Oran district 10% (Belloula, 1965, p 47), These immigrants can be classified according to their social status into the categories shown in the graph:

Fig 1: A graph showing statistics on Algerian immigrants in France, and their distribution according to their social activity in



1962.



Source: (Kader, 1974, p 101)

Commentary on the graph: Algerian migration to France was closely linked to labour migration, The majority of migrants approximately 93%, were workers in both formal and informal institutions merchants, and their families (women and children).

The early years of Algerian independence were among the most difficult and critical periods for Algerian labour migration to France, The new Algerian government faced a heavy burden inherited from 132 years of colonial rule, Many questions arose within the Algerian government: How could security and order be established throughout the country? How could millions of unemployed farmers and labourers be accommodated? How could illiteracy be overcome and a skilled workforce developed to achieve comprehensive economic and social development? (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 144).

It is worth noting that the Algerian side in the Evian Accords granted Algerian workers complete freedom to choose

whether to remain in France or return to their homeland, while emphasizing the preservation of their civil rights on an equal footing with French workers, This can be attributed to:

The Algerian negotiator believed that the large Algerian workforce in France, in various services, industrial and professional fields, represented Algerian exposure to advanced technical expertise, which would positively impact the Algerian economy after the Algerian workers returned to their homeland (Charter of Algeria, 1964, p 75).

- In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Algerian economy could only absorb one million jobs across all technical and manual trades, while the supply of unskilled labour in Algeria exceeded 1.7 million workers.

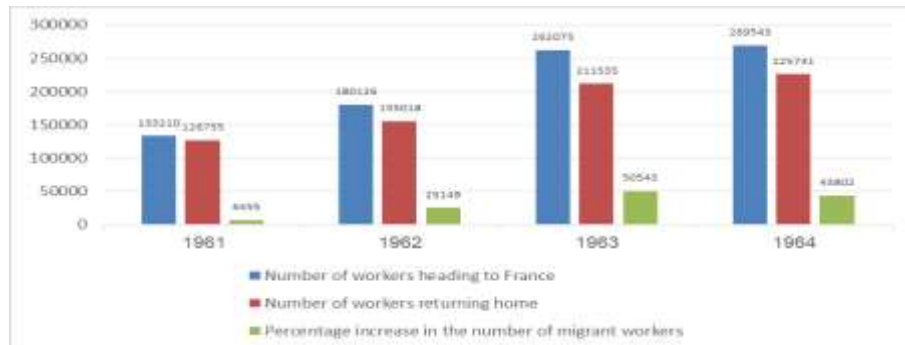
- On the other hand, the Algerian government believed that the return of Algerian workers had to be done in an organized and well-planned manner, as their simultaneous return would cause psychological and social upheaval, given the differences in the industrial professional, and social environments in which Algerian workers had been accustomed abroad, in addition to the general instability that Algeria experienced during the initial phase of nation-building (Belloula, 1965, p 113).

Indeed the percentage of skilled Algerian workers in France increased from 30% in 1958 to 50% in 1963, and most Algerian workers shifted in the early 1960s from the mining and steel industries to more advanced and modern production sectors such as mechanical industries and electrical projects (Belloula, 1965, p 113), The Algerian labor presence in France provided tens of billions of old francs every year in the form of internal transfers, Algerian workers transferred more than half of their wages to



their families residing in Algeria. Statistics published by the French Ministry of the Interior in 1963 estimated that Algerian workers in France were responsible for one million individuals within the Algerian borders, and that Algerian workers received during that period a total wage bill estimated at 120 billion old French francs, equivalent to 24.5 million dollars, of which at least 60 billion French francs were transferred to Algeria, equivalent to 22.25 million dollars, These transfers give us an idea of the role of Algerian workers in reviving the Algerian economy during a critical stage in the building of the independent Algerian state (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 58).

Fig 2: A graph illustrating the movement of Algerian labour migration to and from France during the period between 1961-1964.



Source: (Bouhouch, 1979, p 143)

Commentary on the graph: By analyzing the data in the graph, we note that the situation of Algerian labor migration was closely linked to the fate of the Algerian cause, The number of workers migrating to France in 1958 decreased to 49,299 while the number of workers who returned home in the same year

reached 59,344 That is, the number of those returning home exceeded the number of those going to France by 10,045 This is due to the fact that the Algerian liberation revolution had reached the peak of its strength and spread during this period, and therefore it was in dire need of its sons inside and outside the country, especially the cadres who took on the task of military training medical care, and management During 1964 the movement of Algerian labor migration to France rose again to reach 269,543 migrants, This was closely linked to the stability of the political situation between the two countries, the achievement of the Algerian revolution's goals, and the efforts of the independent Algerian government to protect the rights of Algerian workers abroad.

The benefits of Algerian labor migration to France were not limited to Algerians alone, This presence contributed to the development of the French economy and improved the standard of living in French society, compensating for the severe demographic decline France was experiencing at the time, It is worth noting that the majority of Algerian workers were relegated to arduous jobs for lower wages than their French counterparts, with the wage increase for French workers in the same sector reaching approximately 20% However, the historical circumstances and the socio-economic challenges Algeria faced in the aftermath of independence forced Algerian workers to adapt to this reality in France, From this perspective we can deduce a convergence of views between the Algerian and French sides regarding the issue of Algerian labor migration to France, Maintaining the status quo was in their mutual interest, serving their shared economic and financial interests (Trebous, 1970, p



3. The Evolution of Migration Movements and Reactions to Them:

3.1 Imposing Controls and Regulating Algerian Labour Migration:

The French Ministry of the Interior issued a report counting the number of Algerian immigrants in France, which reached approximately 460,000 by June 1963, This prompted the Algerian government to issue a decree on June 5, 1963, imposing regulatory restrictions on Algerian labour migration to France, Among the most important of these restrictions was the requirement for the worker wishing to migrate to France to provide a certificate proving their unemployment in Algeria, This document was to be obtained from the Algerian National Labour Office Additionally, all workers travelling to or returning from France were required to undergo a medical examination (Braestrup, 1964), However these measures were insufficient to curb the rising trend of Algerian labor migration to France, which saw a significant increase at the beginning of 1964, During the period from January 31 to March 31, the number of migrant workers reached 49,775 compared to no more than 15,000 during the same period in 1963, This wave posed a real threat to the fledgling socialist experiment in the country, especially after the proven reverse migration of skilled labor from Algeria to France, which reached approximately 10% during the first half of 1964, This phenomenon can be attributed to the economic tension that Algeria experienced during the early stages of its independence (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 147).

3.2 The French Government's Stance on Algerian Labor

Migration to France:

Labor migration to France reached its peak in 1964, These changes prompted the French government to take new measures to address the influx of people from the southern shores of the Mediterranean, based on concerns about the economic and social repercussions this migration would have on French society and the economy, This wave coincided with the mass exodus of French settlers to France after Algerian independence, which placed considerable pressure on French institutions and structures (Bouhouch, 1979, p 144).

On the other hand, the majority of the workforce heading to France lacked experience and technical skills, especially considering the high unemployment rate among Algerian immigrants in France during that period. Among the challenges posed by the French government were the difficulty of providing housing and healthcare for this large number of Algerian workers and their families, as well as the fear of a backlash from the French working class in protest against the decline in job opportunities due to the increasing waves of Algerian labor migration to France (Belloula, 1965, p 106).

To find a solution to the problem of Algerian workers' contracts in France, the Algerian Minister of Social Affairs, Mohamed Seghir Nekache, initiated a series of talks on January 23, 1964, with the French Minister of State in charge of Algerian workers in France, as well as the French Minister of Justice, On April 10, the two parties reached an agreement to sign a protocol, which entered into force as a joint law between the two countries and was announced on April 24, 1964. Among the most important provisions it stipulated were (Belloula, 1965, p 107):



- The Algerian authorities are responsible for regulating the movement of Algerian migrant workers to France according to the following agreed-upon terms:

- The number of Algerian workers entering France is capped at 12,000 per year.

- Algerian workers wishing to travel to France must be at least 19 years old and no older than 55.

- Workers traveling to or from France are subject to health checks by a joint team of Algerian and French doctors.

- Algerian workers are given priority in enrolling in vocational and technical training centers.

- Special permits are issued to Algerian workers wishing to migrate to France by the Algerian Immigration Office, provided the worker submits proof of accommodation in France and a certificate of good conduct.

- All categories of people accompanying Algerian workers are categorized and recorded in terms of number, age, relationship, and marital status, Students and businesspeople may stay in France without a visa for a maximum of three months. - Every three months, the French Ministry of Labor issues an official bulletin that includes statistical and qualitative estimates of the needs of the various sectors of the French national economy for Algerian labor, so that Algerian labor migration is in line with the objective requirements of the French economy and its priorities (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, pp 149-150).

The implementation of the provisions agreed upon in the joint law issued on April 24, 1964, led to a significant decline in



Algerian labor migration to France. Just one month after its announcement migration decreased by 40%, It is worth noting that the Algerian negotiator took into account the importance of Algerian labor migration to the Algerian economy, In 1964, 72 billion old French francs (equivalent to US\$146 million at the time) were transferred from France to Algeria thanks to the Algerian workforce there, The average monthly wage for an Algerian worker was approximately 40,000 old French francs, equivalent to 400 new French francs or US\$81.13. The number of Algerian citizens benefiting from these remittances from France was estimated at around 2.5 million (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, pp 150-151).

3.3 The Position of the French Media and Elites on Algerian Labor Immigration to France:

Despite the importance of the Algerian labor presence to the French economy, particularly in terms of filling arduous jobs and those most prone to accidents and occupational diseases in various strategic sectors of the French economy, their presence was subjected to fierce press campaigns aimed at inciting French public opinion against the Algerian labor presence in France and demanding a reduction in their growing numbers, Some newspapers warned of the dire consequences of the Algerian workers' presence in France, such as the newspaper "Le Démocrate" in its issue of April 18, 1964, which warned of the presence of one million Algerian workers who had come to France to re-establish Arab colonialism from southern Europe, as historical revenge for the Battle of Poitiers in 712 AD, The same newspaper claimed that the presence of 300,000 Algerians in the Paris region meant they monopolized 40% of the beds in French



hospitals intended to provide healthcare services to 8 million French people, Furthermore the large number of Algerian workers and their loyalty to their homeland would make them... The future is a rebellious and destructive force (The Democrat, 1964).

Another Parisian newspaper spoke of the Islamic invasion of France: "The Algerian army has established its bases on our lands, enjoying complete freedom to organize and arm itself against us" (New Days, 1964), Another newspaper stated, "There are 50 Algerians arriving in France every hour, meaning that every minute that passes, a new Algerian is added to the number of Algerians in our country" (The Country, 1964), However these fierce press campaigns could not obscure the free pens that analyzed the true dimension of the Algerian workers presence in France, such as the French writer Madeleine Tribou, who confirmed that "the presence of Algerian workers in France or in any other European country is a basic and essential condition for the well-being of Europeans, and without this presence there can be no expansion in production" (Trebus, 1970, p 203).

As for the journalist Loïn Vidal he wrote, "We are often told that Ben Bella exports to us the unemployed of his country, but the one who says this forgets that we are responsible for the state of backwardness in which the Algerian state is in after 130 years of French colonial rule...Algerians have become independent in an independent state and they come to France in search of honest work for a wage" (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 154), In the same context the French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre stated "When we have exploited a country for a hundred years or



more, and then left it in the state of misery that we created with our own hands, it is obvious that we should be bound by strict obligations towards that country” (L'Algérien, 1964).

The Algerian government has officially protested against this illegitimate media campaign, given that it is targeting a social and economic entity established under formal and declared international agreements concluded between the Algerian and French governments, In this context the Secretary General of the National Liberation Front Party stated at the party's first national conference in April 1964: "We will fundamentally reconsider the conditions of labor migration to France if the racist acts that violate national dignity against our citizens working there continue" (Belloula, 1965, p 208), The French government realized that these developments would pose a real threat to the labor market in France, especially since the majority of European workers in France were now preferring other destinations, and that such biased propaganda would make Algerians reluctant to enter the French labor market (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 154), So it rushed to reduce the tension by responding to the French media campaigns by stating that Algerian immigration does not pose any threat to the social or financial balances in France (Muawad Ahmed, 1978, p 152).

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes and discusses the phenomenon of Algerian labor migration to France after independence, This migration occurred under extremely difficult and sensitive circumstances during the initial phase of independence and state-building in Algeria, The dire social and economic conditions inherited from French colonialism, coupled with a high



unemployment rate exceeding 1.5 million workers lacking vocational training and skills, and the Algerian government's inability to absorb this unemployed workforce, created a new reality in post-independence Algeria, This reality compelled many Algerian workers to migrate to France in search of employment. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- In the immediate aftermath of independence, Algeria faced a set of difficult economic realities, The central issue was the imperative to engage with the former colonial power in a way that would address the legacy of colonialism and overcome the comprehensive collapse, including the economic collapse, that Algeria was experiencing, Analyzing the social and cultural requirements for the continuation of relations between Algeria and France, we find that Algerian labor migration to France and their permanent settlement there constitutes one of its most important pillars.

Following the restoration of Algerian national sovereignty, the political and social status of Algerian workers in France changed radically, They transitioned from being treated as "natives" demanding integration or at least equal professional rights with French citizens, to becoming free citizens of an independent state that defended their rights and freedoms against any exploitation or abuse by the French government.

The interests of both the Algerian and French governments converged in the movement of Algerian workers and their activities in France, For the Algerian government, this served as a means of training and developing the Algerian workforce, both technically and professionally, to contribute to the subsequent

economic and social development of Algeria, The government also benefited from remittances sent back to Algeria, This presence in turn contributed to the development of the French economy and improved the standard of living in France, compensating for the severe demographic decline France experienced after World War II, This was particularly significant given that the majority of Algerian workers were relegated to arduous jobs for lower wages than their French counterparts.

The Algerian labor presence in France faced a fierce attack from some French media outlets, arguing that the increasing spread of Algerian workers would pose a real threat to job opportunities available to the French, and that the loyalty of Algerians to their homeland and to the National Liberation Front makes them an entity that threatens political and security stability in France, However the French government quickly intervened to reduce the tension and provide guarantees to protect the rights and freedoms of Algerian workers, Many French intellectuals and thinkers also emphasized the role of Algerian workers in the revival of the economy and the well-being of French society, and they mentioned France's historical responsibility to repair what it had damaged in Algeria during 132 years of occupation.

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