

THE INVOLVEMENT OF NORTH AFRICA IN THE FRONT LINES AND INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract: This text analyzes the strategic and economic significance of the North African region during the First and Second World Wars of the 20th century. It examines the mobilization of the local population into military service by colonial powers (France, Great Britain, Italy) and the allocation of regional resources toward metropolitan industries and frontline requirements. Furthermore, it highlights the establishment of industrial enterprises in the region during the war years and the subsequent impact of these processes on national liberation movements.

Keywords: North Africa, 20th century, world wars, mobilization, metropolis, colonialism, military industry, logistics, raw material base, national liberation movement.

France's new migration strategy, alongside restricting the flow of labor resources, was directed toward two primary objectives: first, reducing the number of foreigners in the country and curbing illegal immigration; second, integrating the permanently settled population into national socio-economic life. In an effort to decrease the foreign population, the French government (similar to other Western European nations) implemented complex mechanisms to encourage repatriation. Within this system, methods such as providing one-time large-scale financial compensation to migrants who voluntarily decided to return to their homelands, as well as organizing vocational retraining courses to ensure their employment in their native countries, were widely utilized.

Simultaneously, a package of administrative and economic measures was introduced to prevent the expansion of foreign elements, consisting of the following:

Imposing special levies (taxes) on business entities for hiring foreign employees;

Maximizing the complexity of the stages involved in processing and extending permits that grant the right to reside and work;

Applying rigorous punitive measures, such as heavy fines and criminal liability, against employers who engage undocumented migrants in labor activities.

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However, the financial support instruments for voluntary repatriation failed to generate the anticipated mass outflow. Practice demonstrated that these incentives were primarily utilized by individuals who had already planned to return to their homeland

and were merely awaiting a favorable opportunity. The low efficiency of these state-mandated measures confirmed that the re-emigration process is intrinsically linked to the economic conditions within the migrant's country of origin. On one hand, the severity of the unemployment problem in the Maghreb region persisted; on the other hand, the majority of immigrants preferred to remain in France for the sake of their children's future. By providing their children with quality education, they sought to ensure that the next generation would not replicate the socio-economic hardships experienced by the parents. This trend facilitated the permanent settlement of the North African labor force within French industrial enterprises and the lower strata of society. Formulating precise and comprehensive statistical data regarding the scale of repatriation processes in France remains an exceptionally complex task. The primary reason for this is that not all migrants departing the country notify the relevant administrative authorities or surrender their documentation. In particular, the near impossibility of monitoring and accounting for the movement of undocumented migrants further widens the statistical gap. Simultaneously, distinguishing between repatriates returning of their own volition and individuals being forcibly deported creates additional methodological difficulties. For repatriation to assume a mass character, essential prerequisites included narrowing the disparity in quality of life and wage levels between France and North African states, as well as ensuring socio-economic stability within Maghreb countries.

The radical shift in French migration policy and the prohibition placed on the entry of new labor forces acted as a catalyst for the rapid growth of other forms of international migration, specifically "family immigration." By the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of family members within the migrant population reached unprecedented levels. As experts (notably A. Perotti) emphasized at a prestigious conference held in Geneva in 1988, approximately 85% of foreigners arriving in Western Europe between 1978 and 1988 entered specifically under the principle of family reunification.

Whereas previously only single male laborers essential for industrial enterprises arrived from North Africa, the migration of entire families now became a common occurrence. This trend led to a sharp increase in the proportion of children within migrant communities, accounting for one-third of the total figure. Statistical analyses clearly demonstrate this transformation: while the ratio of Moroccan workers to their family members was 4:1 in 1970, by 1976, this figure shifted to a 10:1 ratio—meaning ten family members for every single worker. A similar dynamic is evident in the case of Algerian families; the 66,000 households recorded in 1975 rose to 82,000 by 1981. This situation illustrates that North Africans had evolved from being merely a temporary labor resource into a permanently settled demographic stratum within the socio-economic structure of France.

The primary catalyst for the family-based migration from North African countries—former colonies of France—was, first and foremost, the significantly higher standard of living in the metropolis. The well-established social protection system, along with family allowances and extensive opportunities for childcare and education, acted as major pull factors for migrants. For instance, within the framework of the French social support system, guaranteed assistance (RMI) of 405 euros was provided to single individuals without means of subsistence, while families with at least two children received over 850 euros. The minimum wage (SMIC) was set at approximately 1,000 euros, which appeared as immense wealth against the backdrop of the bitter reality where 2 billion people worldwide lived on a mere 20 dollars a month. According to statistical data, in 1985, 439 Moroccan workers arrived in France accompanied by as many as 8,613 family members, implying an average of nearly 20 relatives for every worker. Among Tunisians, this ratio was also high, with 2,339 family members following 153 workers. However, by the early 1990s, a slight decline in the family-based influx from the Maghreb countries could be observed. It should not be forgotten that the integration process of the North African population into France initially began with their recruitment into military service on the front lines and heavy labor in large industrial enterprises, later evolving into this family-oriented economic migration. In conclusion, the two major global conflicts of the 20th century transformed North Africa from a mere peripheral colony into a vital military-strategic arena and industrial base. The participation of the local population on the front lines and the mobilization of the region's resources for supply purposes served as a catalyst for infrastructure development while simultaneously fostering the growth of socio-political consciousness. Ultimately, the large-scale involvement of North Africa in war and industrial processes accelerated the crisis of the colonial system and laid the foundation for the region's nations to achieve independence.

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