

# The Assassination of Farhat Hached, Consequences and Feedback in Morocco in the Eyes of Tunisian Press

Raouda HENI

## أحدث اغتيال فرحات حشاد أزمة شاملة في البلاد التونسية

فعلى المستوى الاجتماعي، أصبحت الأجهزة القمعية قاعدة الحكم الرئيسية لمؤسسة الحماية حيث عمت عمليات التمشيط العسكري الاستعمارية وحملات إيقاف الوطنيين أغلب جهات البلاد، وتكونت في هذه الظرفية السياسية منظمة اليد الحمراء الإرهابية التي استهدفت الزعيم النقابي فرحات حشاد، لكن هذه الأجهزة عجزت عن إيقاف عمليات المقاومة الوطنية التي أخذت من الإضراب والتخريب شكلا لها. أما على المستوى النقابي، فقد شكل غياب فرحات حشاد أزمة نقابية وليس من المبالغة أن نقول أن عبء العمل النقابي كان ملقى على فرحات حشاد وبعض الأعضاء. أما على المستوى السياسي، فإن عجز الأحزاب و التحركات السياسية و مختلف التنظيمات الوطنية المقموعة، عن مواصلة تأطيرها وتنظيمها للقوى السياسية الوطنية المجال أمام عفوية الوطنيين الشبان الذين أعطوا طابعا عنيفا لنضالاتهم، فقد تراجع دعاة إمكانية تطوير نظام الحماية تدريجيا أمام المتطرفين المؤمنين بأن العنف المسلح هو وحده القادر على تمكين تونس من انتزاع استقلالها.

ما إن عملت الحركة الوطنية و النقابية المغربية بخبر اغتيال فرحات حشاد حتى هبت إلى الإعلان عن تضامنها مع تونس في كفاحها، وقام حزب الاستقلال و الإتحاد العام للنقابات المغربية دورا هاميا تعبئة الرأي العام المغربي و في إنجاح الإضراب. هذا الإضراب و هذه الاحتجاجات تدل على أنه رغم القمع المسلط على كلتا الحركتين الوطنيتين فإن التنسيق والعمل المشترك كان موجودا.

## *Introduction*

Tunisia suffered during the modern and the contemporary period from numerous political crises, and not too long ago, it witnessed the assassination of the trade union leader Farhat Hached, which had significant impacts not only on the country itself, but also on several other regions such as Morocco that expressed its support for the Tunisian cause. This solidarity will be highlighted in the following study, which has been already reported in Moroccan and Tunisian sources, but we'll focus on the Tunisian ones, specifically the press.

Gathering the information needed to achieve this study was difficult for the following reasons:

Firstly, the 39th release of the newspaper speaking on behalf of the Tunisian General Trade Union was the last one to be published before its seven-year disappearance. It came again in 1955. It was claimed that the newspaper stopped printing not because of some political reasons but due to financial problems.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the newspaper speaking on behalf of the new Destour party, whose leader was Habib Bourguiba stopped publishing in April 1938. And the La Mission, which was the organ of Tunisian nationalists, was banned by the French authorities. Most of the nationalist leaders were either in jail or in exile: Habib Bourguiba was exiled in the island of Jaltha, Salah Ben Yosuf was moved between several regions and Ali Balhwen in Cairo, Bagdad then in several Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> It shall be noted that the lack of newspapers editions published back then, due to distraction and unavailability, was a major problem that I encountered. Those newspapers are currently preserved in the following places: National Archives, National Library, National Documentation Center and Hached Center.

### ***Farhat Hached's assassination provoked a crisis***

Farhat Hached was born on February 2nd 1914 in the Island of Kerkena. He started working in 1936 as an employee of the Tunisian company of transport of the Sahel, and in the same year, he became a member of the trade union of the transport employees, part of the French CGT (la confédération générale du travail).

In 1940, Farhat and his colleagues of the CGT thought of creating a Tunisian Trade Union, a movement with political and social objectives. In the same year, Hached founded the independent Trade Union in the southern region of the country; and in 1945, he expanded it in the north. In 1946, he combined the two unions into one. In January 1946, Hached directed the founding congress of the Union générale des travailleurs tunisiens Tunisian (General Trade Union) and he was elected as its General Secretary. Then on January 1952, after the arrest of the nationalist leader Habib Bourguiba, he took the responsibility of leading the national struggle.

On December 5th 1952, Hached was assassinated by The Red Hand, a group related to the colonial forces, when he was on his way to a Trade union meeting.<sup>3</sup>

As stated in the American press, an event that particularly incensed the French and increased their opposition and hostility towards the Tunisian Trade Union movement, was Farhat Hached's

1 Mansouri Salem, *Risalat Al Ettihad al Am al Tounsi lel Choghl, 1946-1952, Eftita7iyet Sawt al Amal, Farhat Hachad 1947-1948, Ahmed Ben Salah 1955-1956, Dar Al janoub*, p.13.

2 Ibidem, p.34.

3 Omar Saidane, *Farhat Hachad Batal Al kifah al Kawmi wa al Ejtimai: Hayatouhou wa Madhhabouhou wa Atahrouhou*, Matbaat al Chelli, Sousse, Tunisia p.1.

speech as an honorable guest at the 70th annual convention of the American Federation of labor, held in San Francisco, California in September 1951. The French viewed his appearance as an attempt led by Tunisian laboring and other political elements to line up the liberal elements in the United States against France for Tunisia.<sup>4</sup> As expected, the assassination of Hached provoked a big crisis in the country.

The French have consistently answered all charges of implication in the murder by pointing out that his death was the last thing they would have desired at that time, especially when the United Nations was debating the Tunisian question.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, waves of terror were unleashed on Tunisia.<sup>6</sup> No one knew who was behind them. The Tunisian side was also excluded from the investigation which was seen as mysterious while the French authorities claimed that those informations were classified.<sup>7</sup> Many newspapers reported the panic in Tunis, which was the first city to learn about the assassination. As reported, a strike affected the entire city and this was the same case for the following days until Tuesday. Shops and market activities were restricted to providing the basic daily needs.

Concerning the UGTT (Union générale des travailleurs tunisiens), despite the fact that it was going through disarray, it kept finding a successor to lead the Union on top its priorities.<sup>8</sup> According to the French newspaper *La Presse*, not all of the Tunisian workers were part of the given strike.<sup>9</sup>

Many protests took place in Tunis streets: in Dareljeld Avenue, in Mars Avenue, in Kasbah Avenue. Additionally, female protesters held the protests in Londra Avenue while other young seized the El Melh Avenue.<sup>10</sup> Tunisians expressed their grief, whether it was in mosques or public squares, notably the people of Halfawin Avenue who were opposed by the police forces. In the meantime bombing attempts targeted particularly railway stations.<sup>11</sup>

As responsive countermeasures, Tunis and the nearby regions were held under tight surveillance, the same applied for both Sousse and Sfax.<sup>12</sup>

The given information by Tunisian newspapers was originally gathered from French sources, which explains why expressions like “these are all the informations that we could

4 The Tunisian Office for National Liberation, New York 21, NY, Farhat Hachad: Tunisian Labor Leader, p n/a.

5 *Le Petit Matin* (French Newspaper, edition 2189 – December 10th 1952) / *La Presse*, Edition 5813 / *al Nahdha*, Edition 8822.

6 *al Nahdha* Newspaper, Edition 8821 – December 7th 1952, p.1.

7 *Ibidem*.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 *La presse*, Edition 5811 – December 6th 1952, p.2.

10 *La presse*, Edition 5813 – December 8th 1952, p.2.

11 *al Nahdha* Edition 8823 – December 14th 1952, p.2.

12 *La presse*, Edition 5814 – December 9th 1952, p.1 / *al Nahdha*, Edition 8825 – December 12th 1952, p.2.

retrieve”<sup>13</sup>, or “according to official sources”<sup>14</sup> were mainly used. Concerning the UGTT, the Tunisian press published only a list of delegations and telegrams expressing condolences and disapprovals about the terrible accident.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the Parisian press published “an official list of personalities who were exiled”. The critical situation in Tunisia became even worse due to waves of arrest deployed by the Resident general. Those who were arrested were essentially: Professor Mahmud Messadi, Amor Riahi, Sadok Chaebi, as well as most of the remaining Neo Destour leaders.

Nouri Boudeli, Deputy Secretary General of the UGTT, was placed in forced residence in France. UGTT offices throughout Tunisia were occupied by the police. The Trade Union meetings were forbidden. The few leaders of the UGTT, who were still free, planned three days of protests and mourning. It seemed that the events which occurred in that period witnessed a lot of censorship.<sup>16</sup>

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the burden of the Trade Union activities was carried by almost only Hached and some other members.

Hached highlighted the importance of providing Tunisian agricultural workers with a decent amount of rights and laws. This initiative was supported by several workers strikes against the French settlers.

According to Hached, this kind of laws should be based upon several principles notably the need to establish the basics of both the agricultural and industrial work, classify agricultural workers according to their skills, ensure workers against violations, limit daily work hours to 8 hours and guarantee allowances for agricultural workers. These laws were not effective until several months following the declaration of Tunisia's independence.

Another aspect of the Trade union movement crisis was the opposition in the point of view between both the UGTT and General Union of Tunisian Peasants, a crisis that became worse following the death of Farhat Hached. The General Union of Tunisian Peasant expressed its complaint about the agricultural workers strikes because they didn't only affect the French settlers, but also the major Tunisian agricultures.<sup>17</sup>

Politically, after the arrest of the nationalist anti communist Neo Destour leaders and the aggressive measures which violated rights since the events of the early fifties, Hached emerged as the natural leader of all the people. His own prestige in his own country with his people and his sovereign, the Bey of Tunisia, marked him in the eyes of the French as a most dangerous

13 al Osbou, Edition 313 – December 8th 1952, p.1 / al Nahdha, Edition 8820 – December 6th 1952, p.2

14 al Nahdha, Edition 8820 – December 6th 1952, p.2.

15 al Nahdha, Edition 8821 – December 7th 1952, p.1 / al Nahdha, Edition 8838 – December 27th 1952.

16 Le Monde, Edition 2449 – December 10th 1952, p.3.

17 Hedi Timoumi, *Nakabet al Aaraf al Tounisiyin (1932-1955)*, Dar Mohamed Ali Hammi, Tunis 1983.

man, and one to be gotten rid of.

A consultative Committee of forty members was appointed by the Bey (the sovereign) and Hached was there help study the French reforms proposals and give his opinion as a consultant. The Committee, representing all shades of the Tunisian opinion, unanimously rejected the proposals, essentially because these proposals would guarantee the French participation in Tunisian assemblies without obliging them to renounce their French citizenship. Most of the members of the committee were deported into concentration camps in the south. Their homes were destroyed.

On December 19th 1952, two weeks after the assassination of Hached, the Bey of Tunisia agreed to the French reforms. The assassination of Hached made the armed resistance stronger and more powerful than ever. The supporters of the French colonization stepped back in front of those who believed that the armed violence was the only option to achieve Tunisia's independence.

This movement wasn't only about youth who were a part of political parties and the national organizations, but it also meant an armed struggle.

The vandalism reached all the regions within the country. It also affected the French colonization properties; specifically its economic basis, built upon the edge of Tunisian's simple life and economy: railroads electricity, and water pumps.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Moroccan reactions in the eyes of the Tunisian Press*

When the Moroccan Trade Union first learnt of Farhat Hached's assassination, on December 5th 1952, they expressed their full support for the Tunisian struggle. Both the Tunisian and Moroccan causes started to gain the international public attention. Tunisian newspapers published back then highlighted the Moroccan reactions about the assassination and the sensitization of the Moroccan public opinion by the Isteqlal party. Under the title: "Aggressive workers strikes in Morocco after the assassination of the Tunisian Trade Union leader Farhat Hached", Ennahdha newspaper wrote in its first page that the Isteqlal political party initiated a request to a public strike in Morocco in order to express that the Moroccan people were complaining about colonization.

Accordingly, the Moroccan General Trade Union cooperated with the Isteqlal party and initiated the strike request by publishing flyers which incited to join the strikes movements. In the morning of December, the 7th, the CGT organized a meeting, which took place in Casablanca and gathered many Trade Union leaders who gave speeches inciting to murder, assassination and vandalism in the name of the Trade union movement.

After that, many Trade union members alongside others from the Isteqlal party worked that

---

<sup>18</sup> Mokni AbdelWahed, *Farhat Hached al Mouassess al Chahad al Kaed al Chahid*, Samed lel Nachr wa al Tawzii, p.103.

whole day to plan the strike. The Moroccan people fulfilled the strike request in many cities, specifically the rural districts. Many establishments, as well as markets, were part of the strike. However, it was noticed that employees didn't participate.<sup>19</sup>

The strike became an act of violence between the protesters and the police forces which used lethal force to kill 35 persons. The next day, protests took place in Casablanca, and protesters attacked the police station.<sup>20</sup> Others, who arrived from the Arab district, also attempted to enter the European district but those attempts were prevented by the police which made several arrests. An explosion occurred in the bureau of Al Azima newspaper in the Arabic district at five forty five which resulted in wounding 3 Algerian workers and causing a lot of damage, another bomb exploded at six o'clock in Mersen Soltan pharmacy whose owner was French and which was located in the European district; The explosion caused a lot of damage to the pharmacy medicines stock.<sup>21</sup>

The Tunisian newspapers also mentioned that the clashes between protesters and the French authorities didn't only take place in Casablanca, but also affected other cities as well such as Rabat. It's important to highlight the fact that most Tunisian newspaper sources were the foreign newspapers, especially the French, as well as the international radio stations, which explains the lack of information as well as their precision. That explains why expressions like "official sources reported" were mostly used.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, sources weren't even mentioned in the newspaper.<sup>23</sup>

Other newspapers, such as Al Zahra only published an article related to the assassination.<sup>24</sup> Al Ousbou newspaper published a few lines under the title: "Incidents in Morocco" in its second page on December 15th, 1952.<sup>25</sup> It mentioned in that article that 84 people were wounded and more than 60 killed in Morocco, and that several Trade union leader were arrested. It also pointed that the calm was being maintained that week.

Concerning the policies deployed by the colonial authorities during these events, many decisions were made such as keeping away those who planned the events and incited to violence.<sup>26</sup> Members and leaders of the Isteql party were arrested, including Ali Lyazidi, who was a member of the executive committee of the party, as well his brother Ahmed, the manager of the Rasayel Imaghreb magazine and Kassem Zouhir, the senior editor of Al Alam newspaper. The arrests took place in Rabat, Fess, Meknes and Casablanca. The Resident General ordered to ban the communist party, as well as the Isteql party. He also ordered to prevent any market

19 al Nahdha, Edition 8822 – December 8th 1952, p.1.

20 al Nahdha, Edition 8826 – December 13th 1952, p.1.

21 al Sabah, Edition 566 – December 9th 1952, p.1 / Le Petit Matin, La Presse, Le Monde.

22 al Nahdha, Edition 8822 and later December Editions.

23 al Sabah, Edition 566 – December 9th 1952.

24 al Zahra, Edition 13832 – December 13th 1952, p.1.

25 al Osbou, Edition 314 – December 15th 1952, p.2.

26 al Nahdha, Edition 8826 – December 13th 1952, p.1.

closure in the name of a strike. A state of emergency was also decreed in Casablanca.

The Tunisian newspapers didn't report the events of December, 7th and the 8th, the way they really happened. Even the French newspapers, while reporting "les carrières centrales" events, mentioned that protesters attacked French car and surrounded a building full of Moroccan. A state of emergency was decreed between 8 o'clock and 6 o'clock.<sup>27</sup> They also mentioned the ban of newspapers related to the Isteqlel party, which are Al Alam, Al Maghreb and the weekly newspaper Al Isteqlel. The democratic independent party's newspaper Al Ray Am was also banned. Il Isteqlel party's major leader were arrested, including the co-general secretary Lyazidi Mohamed, who succeeded Belfraj Ahmed, Ben Abdejilil Omar who has recently been in jail, the manager of the political weekly newspaper Rasayel Al Maghreb, El Ghoz Mohamed and the French speaking newspaper manager Bou Abid el Rahim.<sup>28</sup>

In the same matter, Dr. Zaki Mbarek, who talked about the events of the 7th and 8th, December 1952 – based on Moroccan sources – pointed that there were many aggressive protests and conflicts between citizens and French forces. Those which occurred in the Carrière Centrale were the most aggressive and caused the death of 500 persons. Another protest took a place in the road leading to the Trade Union headquarters: Hundreds of persons were killed in that massacre. Violence dominated the events of those days, despite the French forces denial to any use of military forces or airplanes.<sup>29</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The historical and religious similarities and the shared feelings between the Tunisian and Moroccan workers contributed significantly in tightening their relationships but that wasn't sufficient to take these feelings to the next step of the opposition of the colonization forces.

It's important to mention that the assassination of Farhat Hached wasn't the only opportunity that reflected the cooperative between the Moroccan and the Tunisian countries, Marrakech's crisis<sup>30</sup> was also another milestone in the road that put these two countries together to fight all along for their causes.

---

27 Le Monde, Edition 2448 – December 9th 1952, p.1 / La Presse, Edition 5814 – December 9th 1952, p.1.

28 Le Monde, Edition 2451 – December 12th 1952, p.1

29 Zaki Mbarek, *Eghtiyel Farhat Hachad: Roudou al Feel wal Tabiiet fi al Maghreb*, in the first International Congress of Farhat Hachad, p.53.

30 al Horriya, Edition 147 – January 28th 1951, p.5 Kol chay bel Makchouf.