

# MESSALI: Permanent Prisoner

## Messali Now Completely Silenced

On March 29, 1956, the French Government discovered a new use for Belle-Ile, an island in the Atlantic Ocean. To this island it transferred Messali Hadj, father of Algerian nationalism, from his exile in Angouleme—a move explained by LE MONDE of March 30, 1956, as follows: "It is known that he (Messali) was ordered recently not to give interviews to the press or to make any statement which could help the action of the Algerian National Movement, either in France or in Algeria."

Messali is now completely silenced and cut off from the world. Four armed policemen share his dwelling and watch his every personal movement, while outside forty machine-gun equipped soldiers maintain vigilance against any possibility of his escape.

The quarantine of this man for two interviews he gave, one to the New York Times, the other to the German daily DIE WELT, is a measure of the true opinion of France about the man, who according to French propaganda, has lost influence with his people!

The New Statesman and Nation on July 21, shed some light on this seeming contradiction between French propaganda and French action.

"He (Messali) and his principal followers are all in prison, whereas leaders of other Algerian groups, which have, in the past, adopted more moderate attitudes, have been provided with passports and allowed to go to Cairo. The Government has requested the French press to refrain from mentioning the M.T.L.D. (Algerian National Movement) and its activities and to give the widest publicity to the National Liberation Front, the organization with which it hopes, eventually, to come to terms. This was why three months ago it prosecuted Claude Gerard. Her conversations with rebel leaders convinced her that Messali still exercised more authority than any other Algerian."

## Messali, Uncorruptible and Uncompromising

With this vision of a truly free nation for his people, Messali remained unbreakable by years of imprisonment and police torture. In his twenty-year record of prison or exile, is written the history of a completely free Algeria which must be the inevitable climax of the struggle which resulted in a Free Tunisia and a Free Morocco. This is a thought which could be gallantly embraced by yesterday's fighters for freedom of the two countries who are its statesmen today and who are inclined to regard Messali in the light of an "extremist". This, and the fact that it was the resistance in Algeria, largely maintained by his fiery spirit of resistance, which compelled France to liquidate her problem in Tunisia and Morocco so as to concentrate her force upon Algeria.

## 35 Years Ago

Born in Tlemcen, Algeria, on May 16, 1898, the core-year of Western colonialism, Messali entered political life in 1921 when he founded in Paris L'ETOILE NORD-AFRICAINE. Its far-sighted and prophetic platform envisaged freedom for each of the North African areas the three to be combined into a North African Federation.

Now, thirty years later, two of the areas are free, while Algeria stands on the edge of freedom and the Tunisian-Moroccan conference, recently in Tunis, already set the foundation for a federated North Africa.

As president of L'ETOILE NORD-AFRICAINE, Messali attended the Anti-Imperialist Congress in Brussels on February 25, 1927, where he met another emerging nationalist leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1930 he appealed to The League of Nations for the freedom of Algeria, and led a march of 5,000 Algerians to the French Parliament to protest the conquest and enslavement of his people. In 1934 he again challenged French colonialism in its own lair when he organized, in Paris, a mass-meeting denouncing colonial legislation which suppressed prayers in Algerian mosques.

For this he served one year in jail on an "anti-militarist" charge—a symbolic charge in light of the military engulfment of Algeria today!

Freed in 1935 Messali was brought before the courts of Paris and Amiens for organizing mass-meetings against Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia. He never ceased to think in African terms.

In 1936—July 14, the French probably never saw the irony of this date—Messali entered into agreement with Syrian nationalists and took the first step to dramatize Arab solidarity. On that date, when the spirit of the French revolution sweeps through Paris, Messali led a parade of some 50,000 North Africans calling for the "Liberation of North Africa" . . . "The Liberation of Syria" . . . "The Liberation of the Arab World".

## Algeria Was Never France

Soon he carried the fight for liberation into North Africa itself. Returning to Algiers, on August 2, 1936, he addressed some 20,000 followers in the Municipal Stadium denouncing the concept of assimilation (Projet Violette) in the strongest terms, a policy which he defeated. It was then that Messali issued his famous cry of freedom; challenging the whole French juridical concept which complicated the Algerian problem beyond the ordinary difficulties confronting colonial areas. To the French assertion that "Algeria is part of France", Messali cried: "Algeria was never France, is not and never will be France. Algeria belongs to the Algerians!"

Even as late as one year ago, the French

United Nations, only six months later to have the French themselves recognize Messali's slogan to the effect that Algeria has her own, independent personality. It is another testimony to the unerring political acumen with which Messali envisaged the evolution of Algeria within the context of the modern political world.

From the day when Messali raised the concept of Algerian independence above the juridical reservations of France, he emerged as the leader and the mentor of Algerian nationalism. Until then and even thereafter, there were still Algerian leaders and organizations who cowered on this all-out asservation of complete and total freedom. But as time and the inevitable logic of events evolved, the Messali formula penetrated every leading freedom movement in Algeria until today the formula rings out above all compromise and appeasement.

As the struggle for independence continued Messali founded a new Party in Algeria. On March 11, 1937, LE PARTI DU PEUPLE, ALGERIEN again reflected the vision of Messali in banking on the African and Asian nationalist movements as the backbone of the Algerian revolutionary movement. In this concept the spirit of Bandung was virtually born.

## Against Vichy

On August 27 of the same year the French paid high tribute to Messali's new vision, in the only way the colonialists knew. They imprisoned Messali for two years—and the Algerians paid him the same tribute in their way—by electing him "Conseiller General" of Algiers in October, 1938.

It is one of the ironies of colonial history that for Messali the transition of France to the Vichy regime and back again to Democracy made no difference. Freed on August 27, 1939, he was arrested again on October 4th of the same year and held prisoner for 18 months without trial—until finally sentenced by the Vichy Government on March 17, 1941, to 16 years of hard labour and 20 years of exile, with all possessions confiscated. He had declined his support to Vichy.

On November 8, 1943, the Allies landed in



1930: Delegation of Algerian Peoples Party, headed by Messali (front right), on occasion of presentation of charter of demands to French Government.

Algeria and ordered the release of "all" political prisoners. The edict, in a misguided sort of way, was not extended to those who fought for a Free Algeria. Messali was released on April 26, but only to be placed under "house arrest" at Boghari with the promise of complete release in two months.

When the promise was not kept and Messali appealed to General De Gaulle, the leader of the Free French replied by removing him further to Ain-Salah in the Sahara desert where he was placed under military guard!

Even then deep unrest in Algeria already brought home to the French that Messali could no longer be ignored or treated with prison bars. So on January 4, 1944, the nationalist leader was brought back to Algiers to appear before a French Commission on Reforms—as were the leaders of other factions. There, again, while others expressed contentment with so-called "economic" and other reforms with the usual deferment of political settlements, "after the war", Messali reiterated his adamant stand for nothing less than complete self-determination. This position he stated not only as a sacred right but as a right universally proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter, the first proclamation of Allied war-aims, and peace-objectives.

## 40,000 Algerians Massacred

Like other colonial areas in the world, on the eve of European peace, Algeria was reaching the climax of the fight for freedom. In 1945, under the leadership of Messali's new party, the M.T.L.D. (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties), Algeria rose up in one desperate effort to break its bonds ending in a massacre of 40,000 Algerian men, women and children. On April 21, Messali himself was flown on a military plane to El-Golea and subsequently to Brazzaville and for sixteen months transferred from one place to



MESSALI ON BELLE ILE

In July 1946, Messali was brought back to Paris—he seemed to be a danger on any spot in Africa. But the ovation he received from thousands of North Africans compelled the French to send him back to confinement in Bourbaria where he was put under forced residence—but here as in Paris—wherever his foot touched ground, thousands of frenzied nationalists literally leaped out of the earth. Soon Bourbaria became the rallying point of thousands of Algerian nationalists who came to visit this indomitable symbol of their aspirations. From every corner they came until the French, now exhausted of all ingenuity how to deal with him could only resort to the cliché and place him once more under arrest on March 24, 1948—this time in M'vila.

In June of the same year Messali was given permission to go to Mecca for religious reasons. This marked a turning point in his struggle. He met two leading Arab statesmen and patriots, Abdel Rahman Adzam, then Secretary-General of the Arab League, and Emir Feisal. These preparatory talks laid the foundation of the Algerian resistance and the submission of the Algerian Question before the U.N. Security Council by Saudi Arabia in 1955.

## The Permanent Prisoner

The U.N. General Assembly in 1951 brought Messali to Paris, where he was met at the airport by the police. The man who became known as "the permanent prisoner" was taken to a restricted confine in Chantilly. Here despite the heavy guard, delegates of the Arab-Asian group came to pay him tribute. French reaction was prompt and he was again shipped off to Bourzaria. Again his presence caused nationalist ferment and again the French hustled him to France, to Niort, where the sympathy of the people of the town compelled the police to move him to Sable d'Olonnes, and finally to Angouleme where he was placed under heavy guard of police and gendarmerie.

While at Niort Messali heard of the death of his French wife, but despite the personal intervention of Mme. Pandit of India, who was

## TELEGRAM

Hotel Beaux Arts, Room 705-S  
New York 17, N.Y.

February 7, 1957

Text of telegram addressed to UN Secretary-General, February 6, 1957, by Moulay Merbah, Secretary-General of the Algerian National Movement.

Dear Sir:

The Algerian National Movement presents its respects to Your Excellency and urgently addresses itself to you on another crucial aspect of the "Algerian Question" now before the Eleventh Session of The General Assembly.

On February 2nd we received from our representatives in Europe, information confirming the dangerous undermining of the health of the Father of Algerian Nationalism, Messali Hadj, as a result of his cruel confinement by the French Government on Belle-Ile, in the Atlantic Ocean.

The French Government transferred her 'permanent prisoner' from his long exile in Angouleme, on March 29th, 1956, to this complete isolation from the world, allegedly in reprisal for interviews he gave the New York Times and the German daily Die Welte. It was so interpreted by the French paper Le Monde of March 30, 1956, which stated: 'It is known that Messali was ordered recently not to give interviews to the Press, or to make any statement which could promote the action of the Algerian National Movement either in France or in Algeria.'

However, the information we have received of the complete isolation of this 59-year-old freedom fighter (isolation from all humanity except police who hourly watch his every movement under the vigilance of machine guns) together with the lack of heating and electricity to a man suffering from rheumatism and kidney ailments, while medical attention is denied him, in his illness is compelled to attend to all of his personal needs such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and other duties, compel us to believe that France in her desperate struggle aims not only to silence Messali but to destroy him physically.

No other explanation of such inhumana

President of the U.N. General Assembly at the time, he was denied permission to attend the funeral. In March 1956, the police forcibly entered the shabby hotel room of Messali in Angouleme and took away his children . . .

Now Messali is on the island of Belle-Ile, a more isolated prisoner than ever, but closer to the hearts of the Algerian people than ever, and the living symbol of the valiant fighters of the resistance who regard this man, even before the birth of independence, as the Father of their country.

The idea which began in the slums of Paris only 30 years ago, is now a living reality in North Africa, not only in the resistance of Algeria but in the independence of Morocco and Tunisia where the call of his "ETOILE NORD AFRICAINE" is now a new dynamic concept giving new life to the area. More important, in this concept of the inter-dependence of the region it is being recognized that a Free Algeria is the sine qua non condition for real and lasting security to the two independent states. Tunisians and Moroccans are now recognizing that an Algeria less that completely and totally free can become the perilous beach-head for resurgent colonialism, as the adventure in Egypt so clearly disclosed.

## Messali Must Be Freed

Time has only served to emphasize the vision of Messali in demanding recognition of the Algerian personality to the fullest limits of national freedom and sovereignty.

It is this concept which has earned Messali the unceasing persecution of the French and his almost endless martyrdom while France extends passports to other leaders notably those of the Algerian National Liberation to choose their exile in Cairo and Geneva—and to denounce her colonialism!

Any just action initiated by the United Nations must begin with a demand for the equality of Messali at least with this limited type of persecution. For in any fruitful attempts to solve this problem where an Indo-China-like war is festering with all of its international implications, the voice of this 58-year-old veteran of Algerian Nationalism is indispensable in arriving at a just and democratic settlement.

stature in a freedom-aspiring world. This episode emphasizes the cynicism and confusion of French colonial policy in Algeria as portrayed by French Foreign Minister Pineau before the Political Committee on February 4th when he said that The Algerian National Movement, the Party of Messali Hadj, 'seems to us more Western, more realistic and above all, more independent, and stands out as an exclusively Algerian movement.'

How the French Government can reconcile this political appraisal of Messali with its unremitting persecution of him since 1937 defies common sense. But on January 17th, Mr. Jean Cassou, on behalf of "The Committee for Liberation of Messali Hadj" founded in 1957 by French leaders in the political, social, intellectual and religious life of France, issued a strong protest against 'the permanent confinement of the Algerian leader and the cruel conditions and sufferings of his exile.' The same sentiment was generously and unanimously expressed on February 5th by the Afro-Asian group in the United Nations who also decided to intervene in this human tragedy.

Accordingly, Your Excellency, the National Algerian Movement appeals to you, in accordance with precedent, to utilize your good offices with the French Government on behalf of Messali. Specifically, recommend that his exile—lacking any basis of legality—now be ended, and that he be permitted to leave for a neutral country where he can receive necessary medical attention and restore his health in dignity and freedom.

We do this not only on humanitarian grounds, but because of the tragic political impact which the consequences of his persecution could have in hampering the UN negotiations on Algeria and even worsening the critical situation resulting from the bitter war which now engulfs the two sides. If the French Government is sincere in its expressed desires for peace, as stated before the Political Committee, it must be aware that peace in Algeria cannot be achieved without the support and co-operation of the foremost leader of Algerian nationalism.

With my highest esteem,

MOULAY MERBAH,  
Secretary-General