

LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

TRADE UNIONS IN ALGERIA

History, Survey and Options

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Despite its strength and great potential, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) is crippled by its own bureaucracy, which is closely aligned with local and central authorities' political and economic interests.



The future of independent unions will depend on the willingness of the acting players to overcome differences of perspective and leadership conflicts, and on public authorities' response to their activity.



The current developments in Algeria suggest that the trade union environment is set to see a shake-up – be it among independent unions, within the UGTA or at public authority level.

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1

INTRODUCTION

The present study sets out to provide an exhaustive presentation of the Algerian labour movement and its evolution. It covers the progress of Algerian unionism, from settler colonialism, when the right of association was granted to Algerians discriminatorily, up until the cementing of the first experience of Algerian union pluralism at the dawn of the National Revolution. The study explores the key features of political struggle and the demands voiced by the single trade union in existence during the era of the single-party system and of State interventionism after independence. It endeavours to portray the later development of unionism as a whole in the era of political pluralism and relative economic liberalization.

Since 1990, some sixty independent labour organizations have emerged following the recognition of union pluralism alongside the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers), the incumbent Central Organization. The latter performed its standard role of defending employees' social rights in the sectors where the State had preserved its employer status, such as in the energy and industrial public sectors. However, it is now facing new challenges resulting from the new constitutional framework, competition with the independent unions and the present economic and security crisis.

The UGTA is currently experiencing an organic crisis within its very structure, triggered by a variety of multidimensional factors. First among these is the political factor with the advent of political and union pluralism and the emergence of independent trade unions, which have found recruits among the militant grassroots of the incumbent Central Organization, leading to a conflicting relationship with it. Another factor stems from the political affiliation of the Central Organization's leaders, most of whom are members of one of the governing parties, namely the FLN (National Liberation Front) and the RND (National Democratic Rally). This affiliation leads to their submissive attitude towards the powers that be, reflected both in their unconditional support for liberal reforms – despite their opposition to the historical doctrine (privatizations, disorderly market openings...) – and in their overt and active support for political leaders at the various electoral events and other referenda.

The economic factor is also worth mentioning. It relates not only to the growing failure of the public industrial sector, the stronghold of the Central Organization, but also to the

relative economic liberalization which has allowed the development of an insecure private sector involving a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises employing less than five people, most of them on a contract or unregistered basis. This background weighs heavily on the UGTA, which must strive to take root in this field despite the difficulties caused by this state of precariousness.

Independent unions are predominantly active in the public sector, mainly in education (twelve unions), health (around ten unions) and public administration (over six unions). Over time, these organizations have come to play a major role, contributing positively to the social climate in Algeria as economic and security conditions improved at the turn of the new millennium.

Most recently, independent unions have called various long-term strikes, such as the strike organized by the CNAPEST (Independent National Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education) in the education sector in February 2018. Furthermore, these unions were part of various rounds of joint discussions with representatives of the public authorities in the health and education sectors resulting in wage increases and improved working conditions.

This new chapter in trade unionism subsequently led to the emergence of increasingly visible trade union elites making multiple appearances in the media and at discussions. The portrayal of trade union elites is consequently one of the major subjects of this study, especially in the present pluralist audio-visual media context where the State no longer has the monopoly in the dissemination of news and images, as used to be the case. New union figures are now present in the public space and leverage the platform of the main media (some sixty television channels) despite public authorities' disapproval. In fact, despite having been granted legal recognition, public authorities are still reluctant to consider independent unions essential players and fully-fledged social partners.

The present study also sets out to highlight the corporatist nature of the demands of sectoral-type unions. The study explores their level of institutional weakness and their insufficient female representativeness within national or local governance structures despite the significant presence of female workers in the sectors covered by the independent un-

ions (health and education). It measures female absence, whether among the militant factions or in leadership positions, in order to develop guidelines aimed at later correcting the imbalance.

In addition, the study tries to determine the main challenges facing the incumbent and the independent labour movement in the context of global liberalism and goes on to suggest possible future paths for the independent labour movement and the incumbent Central Organization.

Finally, the study attempts to measure the evolution of union presence, as Algeria has been experiencing large mass protests demanding radical political change since 22 February 2019. Independent trade unions and members of the Central Organization are all playing an active role in this mass movement. The Central Organization has in fact seen changes in its executive ranks following the popular protest currently underway with the sudden departure of Abdelmajid Sidi Saïd, who had headed the organization since the assassination of Abdelhak Benhamouda in January 1997.

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EVOLUTION OF UNIONISM IN ALGERIA

Algeria first experienced union pluralism during colonization. It occurred initially under the guidance of the French unions established in Algeria or among immigrant workers in France. Later, different branches of the National Movement founded their own, competing trade unions, reflecting the differences and conflicts in their relationships with each other.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

In France, the right of association was recognized in 1884 with the adoption of the Waldeck Rousseau Law on the freedom of association. Subsequent to this, the first French communist Central Organization, the CGT (General Confederation of Labour), was founded in 1895. The earliest CGT sections emerging in Algeria after 1898 were restricted exclusively to settlers since the Code of Indigenous Status in place at the time prohibited Algerians from joining any association or organization.

In the aftermath of World War I, the number of Algerian workers migrating to France for work increased, reaching 23,000 in 1923. In France – free from the constraints of the Code of Indigenous Status – Algerian workers joined the CGT in increasing numbers. The union opened to these unskilled workers who joined it immediately upon arrival in France. They generally came from underprivileged villages and mountain areas and suffered double persecution: the first due to their labourer status, and the second for being from a country under colonial rule. Many union leaders emerged from this working population consisting mainly of industrial workers. They strengthened union activity despite the colonial State's efforts to undermine and penalize it.

These events contributed to the emergence of radical leanings in the CGT, in particular following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Marxist-Leninist ideas loomed large, calling for revolt against capitalism and imperialism and supporting liberation movements and the self-determination of colonized peoples.

The radical inclination kept developing, leading to a split within the CGT, which in 1921 split into two confederations: the CGT (General Confederation of Labour), which was moderate, and the CGTU (United General Confederation of

Labour), with Marxist-Leninist leanings, gathering most immigrant workers with training in protest union activism.

The arrival of the Popular Front in power in France cemented the unification of all the forces of the left and allowed the CGT and CGTU to be reunified. The Popular Front amended the Code of Indigenous Status, lifting the ban on Algerians to organize. From then on, they started joining the CGT in droves, and the CGT Algiers Section reached the record number of over 250,000 members. However, at the end of World War II and the tragic events of 8 May 1945, which the CGT was careful not to openly condemn, there was a total break with the French trade unions. Soul-searching followed within the MTDL (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) around the need to establish an Algerian Central Organization, leading membership at the Algiers Section to dwindle to 80,000 militants (Weiss 1970: 25).

A few years later, with declining numbers in Algeria, the CGT decided to create an Algerian trade union organization under Algerian leadership. The project materialized in June 1954 with the founding of the UGSA (General Union of Algerian Trade Unions). Lakhdar Kaidi, now calling for equal rights for Algerian and French workers, headed it. When the revolution started, the UGSA expressed revolutionary nationalist demands, with the clear understanding that the problem was not only economic and social but also political (Djabi/Kaidi 2002: 189–191). This development led to the union's dissolution by Governor General Robert Lacoste in 1956.

In the same year, dissensions emerged within the National Movement between Messalists, who were part of the Algerian National Movement headed by a leading light of Algerian nationalism, and the Centrists of the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, who created the FLN (National Liberation Front). These divisions had a strong impact on the labour movement, reflected in the creation of separate central organizations. Messalists created the USTA (Union of Algerian Workers) on 20 February 1956, followed four days later by the FLN announcing the creation of the UGTA on 24 February 1956.

The USTA claimed to represent all Algerian workers, men and women, regardless of origin, religion or opinion. Having failed to establish itself in Algeria, it organized in France, where it succeeded in attracting many Algerian immigrants to its Fed-

eration of Immigrant Workers, which then exceeded 25,000 members, attracting 80 % of Algerian immigrants affiliated to the CGT (Simon 2004). The latter was never dissolved.

As for the UGTA, it assumed the role of mobilizing the Algerian working class for the national liberation struggle. To this end, it organized a large demonstration of solidarity with the FLN on 1 May 1956, during which its leader Aissat Idir was arrested. He was later assassinated in prison. Another key moment in the struggle of the Algerian Labour Movement for national liberation was the call for a general strike of eight days in January 1957, which the masses followed but was savagely repressed by the French authorities. From then on, trade union activity was sidelined as it gave way to the armed struggle for national independence, a priority for all nationalist activists.

POST-INDEPENDENCE LABOUR MOVEMENT

After independence, in order to resist political control, the UGTA restructured while its labour activity was again sidelined, and priority was given to the struggle for independence from the Party and from the State.

Upon independence, the UGTA reorganized, recreating both its central structures and its sections at local level. The political crisis of the summer of 1962 between the Interim Government and the Border Army was an initial test in building the UGTA's relationship with the State. Its outrage towards the fratricidal conflict and its overt stance in favour of an immediate end to the confrontation and bloodshed, along with the general strike it threatened to organize if one of the two protagonists seized power by force, earned the UGTA open hostility from Ahmed Ben Bella. He was the civilian ally of the Border Army, which had triumphed in the conflict, and had been appointed Head of State. This hostility was amplified following declarations by the Central Organization claiming its independence from the Party and the State (Weiss 1970). It also had an impact on the UGTA's first and second Conventions. To ensure the UGTA's leadership was subordinate, Ben Bella intervened personally in the convention proceedings and the selection of candidates (Favret 1964: 49–51).

A few weeks after the second Convention where Ben Bella asserted control, a new political event revived hostilities between the UGTA and the political authorities - the overthrow of Ben Bella and the coup d'état in June 1965 by Houari Boumediene, then Minister of Defense. The overthrow was perceived as a liberal and anti-socialist act, and it contributed to damaging the relations between the UGTA and the government further. A few months later, the UGTA published an offensive and highly critical report on the governance of the country in general and on the Party's attempts to dominate the union.

The tone of the report by no means toed the line of the totalitarian environment imposed by the regime. Among the harsh criticisms voiced by the valiant, determined and unwa-

vering union activists, the following statements stand out: »It is important to recognize that the only ties we have had with the Executive Secretariat of the Party since its creation consist of orders, bans, threats (...) We were never invited to meetings aiming to discuss and solve problems relating to the fight against unemployment, training activists, or indeed the necessary resources to implement self-management in agriculture, industry, and commerce (...) The only guidelines from the Party have consisted of bans on travelling inside the country without informing the Executive Secretariat, on holding conventions with no prior Party authorization, on organizing unauthorized strikes, or on publishing any document, including on the ›Revolution and labour‹, by the relevant body in the Union, without Party consent.« (UGTA 1966)

The report concludes that the Central Organization hesitated between two courses of action in response to the totalitarian policies of the regime. One option was submitting to the Party and losing all credibility, the other meant pursuing the path of resistance and criticism, facing the repression of the established power (UGTA 1966). The latter clear and unambiguous option demonstrates that after independence, the UGTA was one of the few organizations to stand up to the authoritarian regime, when all forms of opposition were side-lined and eliminated.

To regain control over the UGTA, President Boumediene's regime adopted a two-pronged policy.

First, it introduced a policy of polarization based on political discourse and a set of enabling economic and social policies for workers, including socialist management of companies, free healthcare, free democratic elementary education, general worker status guaranteeing substantial legal protection for workers and a very attractive social protection system. Second, the regime adopted a policy of repression entailing shows of force during conventions, violating the values of the Revolution and workers' rights by ordering facilities be closed and arresting the most rebellious among the leaders. The Party had absolute control and even granted itself a right of veto over the selection of candidates for leadership positions in all mass organizations including the UGTA. A few years after President Chadli Bendjedid came to power, an institutional veto was enshrined in article 120 of the Party's statutes, which clearly stipulated that nomination to all leadership positions of the State and mass organizations is contingent upon Party membership. A dramatic purge took place, affecting, among others, 12 federation secretaries (Taleb 1982: 194).

In the space of a few years, the UGTA had become totally subservient to the Party, toeing its line at all times. This did not prevent some social movements breaking out at public enterprises, in particular towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, bringing the number of strikes to 1,334 in 1979 (Chikhi 1986: 108).

From then on, workers' strikes mushroomed, especially as the country headed towards a deep economic and social cri-

sis in the mid-1980s. During the period between 1983 and 1986, 3,528 strikes were organized in the public sector, versus 2,298 in the private sector, so 5,826 strikes across all sectors (Bouzghinz 1994: 134).

Finally, it should be noted that during this period of single-party authoritarianism, the development strategy based on industrializing activities rolled out by the State in a highly centralized way had allowed 1.15 million jobs to be created in the industrial sector by 1983. These were permanent well-paid jobs by the living standards of the time, supported by generous price subsidies and free access to the major public services (education and health). These measures led to the emergence of a working class accustomed to the gains afforded by a conciliatory, supportive State and to a social redistribution often without economic counterbalance and to a rigid wage policy that took no heed of basic economic rules. This situation had inevitable repercussions for labour struggles at a time of liberal economic transformations.

MAIN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The political and economic transition in the late 1980s engendered a number of transformations in the structure of the Algerian working class.

In fact, in the era of economic intervention during the 1970s and by mid-1980s, the public sector was the main job provider, while the private sector, which had been excluded from the development endeavours of the public authorities, contributed only a marginal share of national production and employment.

The economic crisis of the mid-1980s affected most companies whose structural deficit had previously been covered by the Public Treasury. Reorganization strategies were implemented, and half a million jobs shed.

Conversely, opening up to the private sector during the 1990s allowed thousands of small and medium-sized private enterprises to be created, employing more than a million people and developing far ahead of an ailing public sector losing ground when it came to job creation. However, the shift in employment from the public to the private sector led to precariousness being reinforced at the expense of permanent and well-paid jobs in the public sector.

The number of contract workers increased from 300,000 workers in 1990 to 1.3 million in 2000 (ONS 2018), in addition to around one million unregistered workers with no social protection of any kind. As for permanent workers, they were massively concentrated in the public service, which employed around 1.5 million civil servants during the 1990s. The rise in poverty would contribute to weakening trade union activity in the private sector, at a time when public service was set to become the flagship of independent trade union activity, as we shall see.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Following the events of October 1988 and with the adoption of the 1989 Constitution, the first pluralist constitution of independent Algeria, the Algerian political regime passed various political and economic reforms. It established the foundations of a liberal transition founded on political pluralism and respect for public freedoms as well as on a relative liberalization of the national economy.

Concerning the right of association, the 1989 Constitution enshrined trade union pluralism and dedicated Article 53 to the right of association as a right recognized for all citizens. Prior to this, the right of association had been limited to the right to join the UGTA, the only existing union. However, since the adoption of political and trade union pluralism, this right, governed by Law 90/14 of 02 June 1990, extended to the possibility of creating trade unions other than the UGTA and outside its structures in full independence. Law 90/14 in fact defined the necessary conditions and procedures for the creation of trade unions and for their representativeness, with guarantees for the exercise of this right and the protection of union representatives.

Regarding the creation of trade union organizations, Article 3 of Law 90/14 stipulates that paid employees (and employers) have the right to form trade union organizations and to join them freely¹. The creation of a trade union organization is governed by a very flexible procedure. It is limited to the obligation to hold a constitutive General Assembly gathering its founding members, then of filing a declaration of constitution at the relevant authority - namely the Ministry of Labour for national organizations and the Wali (Governor) for local organizations - which is then required to issue a registration receipt within one month. The trade union organization must subsequently make its constitution public in at least one press publication.

This legal flexibility reflects the legislator's desire to accelerate the pluralist process by promoting the creation of independent unions without major constraints, in the same way as for the establishment of a multi-party system through a rather accommodating regulation. One year later, and impacted by the wave of Islamist politics, which had spread to labour relations, the legislator amended the law, insisting on the mandatory independence of trade unions from any association with a political activity in terms of its functioning, purpose or title. Any organic or structural relationship with any such associations was therefore banned and any funding in any form whatsoever prohibited under penalty of sanctions including the trade union's dissolution².

Other forms of protection were also guaranteed, such as simplifying procedures and conditions for creating an or-

¹ The same article grants this right to employers as Law 90/14 is on the right of association of both employees and employers.

² Refer to Articles 5, 27, 30 of Law 91/30 of 21.12.1991 modifying and supplementing Law 90/14 of 02.06.90 on the rules for exercising the right of association.

ganization. This went hand in hand with the various guarantees and protections for exercising this right. Indeed, Algeria had signed Convention 87 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the protection of trade union freedoms. The Convention prohibits any interference by public authorities aimed at obstructing trade union activity, through dissolutions or administrative suspensions, and guarantees the protection of trade union delegates.

Law 90/14 attempted to include these principles. As such, it set forth many provisions to protect trade union freedoms and guarantee the free exercise of union rights. Article 15, for instance, prohibits interference from any individual or corporate body in the functioning of a trade union organization and any obstacle to the exercise of its right is subject to penal sanctions ranging from fines to six-months' imprisonment for a repeat offence.

Concerning union representatives, Article 53 of the same law protects them from any form of sanction for their union activities. They can be neither dismissed, transferred, nor subject to disciplinary action. Trade unionists may not be discriminated against in matters of recruitment, pay, promotion or training on the basis of their trade union activities. They must not be the target of any threat or pressure from anyone (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria 1990)³.

EMERGENCE OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS

A few months after Law 90/14 was enacted, around fifty independent unions were created (see list in the annex). They were almost all in the public service. It is worth noting that pluralism first benefited government employees before it did workers of the industrial sector, with all the political and sociological ramifications this potentially gives rise to for this objective tendency. Civil servants waited for the emergence of pluralism to form independent unions and leave the ranks of the UGTA where they no longer felt comfortable, given the prevailing idealist worker ideology impacting the thrust of demands by the Central Organization.

Although there were not many government employees among UGTA members, they were nonetheless the main beneficiaries of the single-union chapter of history, which served as the basis for their social rise and political mobility. Lower-ranking civil servants, administrators, or teachers – many categories of workers benefited a great deal from this union system. They had given it a clear political dimension by approaching the overseeing authorities to act as mediators between grassroots workers and the State. They specialized in producing, reproducing, and promoting trade union discourse that had taken shape during this single-union era. Civil servants were constantly present to oversee conventions, draft documents, and apply for the various managerial posi-

tions. A privileged group of low-ranking civil servants mastering French and later Arabic played this role head-on. Over time, they settled in the bridging role of a trade union bureaucracy and took great advantage of their status. After gaining access to the Party from the stepping stone of the Union, dazzling promotions could make of, say a schoolteacher, a Party Commissioner, Wali, Minister, Member of Parliament or Mayor; and these were by no means isolated cases.

However, it appears that unions did not serve as a social ladder for government employees. Indeed, when they decided to join, most of them settled for minor positions both at grassroots level and among the higher ranks. The same happened within the Single Party, which then also exploited this social category, which had become a strong political instrument.

Grassroots civil servants with no political ambitions felt abandoned in the era of the single union, though, as it recognized neither their specific professional skills nor their demands, denying the existence of any distinctive features.

As a result, in an age of pluralism, civil servants created a large number of sectoral and professional unions. Later, as if to make up for the past lack of opportunity and catch up with the protest struggle and their exercise of legitimate rights, they organized many successive strikes, which they had not been allowed to do during the single-union period.

In this context, the example of the CNES (National Council of Higher Education Teachers) is highly enlightening (Djabi 2015: 15). The CNES was one of the first unions founded at the beginning of institutional union pluralism. Prior to this, it had had no specific representation within the UGTA. Higher education teachers had been part of the Federation of Education and Training Sectors, as had other categories of teachers and workers in the education and vocational training sectors. This anomaly was quickly corrected soon after the legalization of union pluralism by the creation of the CNES. For Farid Cherbal, founding member of the CNES: »Once the CNES was founded, the stage was set for two union lines to clash internally: one line promoting democratic and protest unionism, and another bureaucratic line, close to the ruling power, for ›in-house unionism‹ and for using the union as a ›stepping stone‹ to achieve political ambitions« (Cherbal 2004). While the other emerging unions were still inactive, in 1996 the CNES began its protest struggle with a general strike of three months (15 October 1996 – 15 January 1997), which was widely followed. Teachers demanded salary increases and that higher education teachers' status be upgraded. The serious economic and security crisis the country was facing, and the lack of financial resources ultimately had the upper hand, convincing teachers to suspend their collective action after long negotiations with the government. The strike had, however, served to reshuffle the top hierarchy of the union with the ejection of the National Coordinator who had countered the decisions of General Assemblies and called to end the strike. For Farid Cherbal this strike signaled the re-appropriation of the CNES by teachers and the rejection of in-house unionism (Cherbal 2004).

³ Law 90/14 of 2 June 1990, on the procedures for exercising the right of association, Articles 15, 53, 59.

Two other major historical protest movements followed this long strike: the 135-day strike in 1998 and another national strike in 2006. For Abderrezak Adel, CNES spokesperson and Head of the East Section from 1996 to 2004, all three movements shared the same guiding motivation, teachers' collective feeling of having had enough. They expressed it through demands that were both socio-professional and democratic. This was accompanied by a feeling of injustice, which explains their radicalization and the length of the strikes, in particular when State bodies mobilized to break up the movement (Adel 2015: 57). For Adel, the success of these strikes enhanced the role played by the CNES at university, but also progressively contributed to its weakening and sometimes militarization, triggered by bureaucracy, leadership issues and political interference (Adel 2015: 61–62).

LEGAL AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS

The adoption of trade union pluralism had the valuable support of flexible legislation promoting the exercise of this right with guarantees for trade union representatives and providing for sanctions against employers infringing trade union freedoms. Nevertheless, some legal provisions continued to hamper the free exercise of this right:

Article 38 of aforementioned Law 90/14 made the recognition of trade union rights conditional upon collective bargaining and upon unions' representativeness for them to be involved in the settlement of collective disputes.

According to the Law, a trade union organization is only considered representative if it meets the following criteria:

- It must have members comprising at least 20 % of the total number of employees within its scope of coverage, and/or delegates constituting at least 20 % of any workers' committee established.
- Every year, it must publish information allowing employers or other administrative authorities to assess this representativeness (Article 35, Law 96/21). If these conditions are not met, its accreditation could be withdrawn.

Employers and supervisory authorities have often utilized the latter condition to great effect to restrict the participatory role of independent unions, contributing to making legally recognized union pluralism meaningless.

Indeed, the 2004 report of the International Federation for Human Rights on the exercise of the right of association in Algeria cites the SNTE (National Union of Energy Workers) as a case in point. It was the only independent union active in this sector, eventually disappearing after the refusal by the executive management of the public works oil company of Hassi Messaoud to recognize its representativeness despite attesting documents submitted in the presence of a court bailiff.

Such practices have also enabled the public authorities to deprive independent unions considered non-representative of the main rights and benefits reserved for unions detailed below (Akkache 2010: 166):

- The right to collective bargaining is restricted to representative unions, thus justifying the absence of all independent unions at trilateral or bilateral industrial talks.
- Involvement in the management of social organizations through seats on their boards of directors (Article 39 Law 90/14) is therefore exclusively restricted to the UGTA, which exercises a real monopoly on the management of social funds, as reflected in the following figures: 18 seats out of 29 at the Board of Directors of the National Social Insurance and Pensions Fund, 10 out of 19 at the Board of Directors of the National Unemployment Insurance Fund, and 15 out of 28 at the Board of Directors of the National Equalization Fund for Social Services. This practice has been denounced by the SNAPAP (National Independent Union of Public Administration Personnel), which rejects this monopoly granted to the former single union in the era of pluralism.

Although legal procedures to create a trade union are extremely simple, the supervisory authorities nevertheless made use of the legal vacuum to prevent their creation. Indeed, Article 8 of Law 91/31 amending and supplementing Law 90/14 on the exercise of the right of association stipulates that, following the submission of the complete application for union constitution to the supervisory authorities, a registration receipt must be delivered by the latter within 30 days of file submission. However, the Law provides for no means of appeal in the event of non-issuance of this registration receipt, which is essential for the union to be legal and to undertake activities. Independent unions in the education sector such as the CLA (Algiers Secondary School Council) and the CNAPEST (Independent National Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education) have long been at a disadvantage because they were left with no legal existence⁴.

The SNAPAP however (National Independent Union of Public Administration Personnel), was not authorized to create a confederation, on the pretext that the law did not provide for this scenario and that its Article 2 only mentioned cases of creating a union by workers of the same profession, branch or sector of activity, and not confederations. Through the SNAPAP, the International Labour Office denounced this ruling, considering it a discriminatory reading of the law since the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) was not subject to this reading (FIDH 2004), with the additional fact that Article 4 of this Law clearly mentions confederations and subjects them to the same provisions as trade unions.

⁴ The decision to extend the CNAPEST to other levels of education was taken at the National Convention held in November 2012 but came into effect in February 2014.

THE UGTA FACED WITH UNION PLURALISM

With the adoption of political and trade union pluralism and the 1990 labour laws, the UGTA held its eighth convention in June 1990 mainly aiming to adapt its statutes to the new political and economic context and to the provisions of the new labour legislation. It removed all references to structural or organic links with the National Liberation Front (FLN), the former Single Party.

Comparing the statutes of the eighth Convention with the seventh held in March 1986, it appears that the main changes consisted of removing all aspects of the FLN's political dominance over the union⁵. Organically, the union had become merely a mass organization of the former Single Party, required to meet the objectives of the Socialist Revolution and fulfil the FLN program and orientations. These were replaced by the objectives of defending workers' rights. Whereas previously, candidates for leadership positions in the union had to be FLN activists, the new statutes only referred to non-participation in acts against the objectives of the Revolution. In addition, funding no longer came from FLN subsidies but from the State.

Amendments therefore attempted to transform the UGTA so that, instead of merely being a mass organization of the Single Party, it became – at least officially – a professional union free from any partisan control. As a single trade union created before the adoption of the 1990 laws, the UGTA was exempt by Law 90/14 from the obligation to submit an annual report on its representativeness; this clause being restricted to newly created unions.

However, activity reports from the various conventions provide information on declines in UGTA membership, which dropped from 1.2 million members at the sixth convention held in 1982, to 900,000 at the tenth convention in 2000. The rate of unionization therefore fell from 66% to only 28% during the same period. This drop can be explained by the emergence of independent unions, which drew members from the ranks of UGTA, perceived by many as an archaic bureaucratic organization inherited from the interventionist system⁶, and by the impacts of the economic crisis on the public sector, which had caused member downsizing affecting more than 500,000 workers.

The UGTA hierarchy was organized horizontally and vertically. The vertical hierarchy was based on professional criteria and breaks down into several trade union sections of companies or units grouped by field of activity in sixteen federations including all sectors of economic activity and governed by the National Executive Commission. The horizontal

hierarchy is based on territorial criteria. It includes 230 local unions, with no less than 4,000 to 5,000 members, which represent the trade union sections of the same municipality or a group of small municipalities. These local unions are attached to 45 Wilaya (Province) unions, themselves subject to the National Executive Commission.

Horizontal structures are highly contested within the Central Organization itself due to past organizational ties with the former Single Party at the time when the local unions of the Organization allowed the local FLN organizations to control it. UGTA officials even believed these were the source of bureaucracy and political interference in the Central Organization, as stated by Mohamed Seddik Kordjani, former Secretary General of the Union of Mechanical Industries. He added that: »Union activity was always linked to professional activities and not to territorial divisions.«

Following the advent of trade union pluralism, and barely a few weeks after its eighth Convention (June 1990), the Central Organization launched its first major national strike. Demands were mainly of two kinds: wage increases, following the fall in purchasing power and the rocketing inflation rate, exceeding 25% in the first two months of the year, and the end of mass layoffs.

The strike was a great success and the UGTA announced a participation rate of around 90% in all professional sectors, bringing the country to a dramatic standstill (ports, airports, railways, urban transportation...). Four days after its outbreak, the movement had hardened further with workers organizing sit-ins at their workplaces denouncing the government's unfulfilled promises. The dispute led to negotiations between the UGTA and the government starting, leading to profitable decisions for the workers. They included increasing the guaranteed national minimum wage and family allowances and using the public treasury to consolidate the finances of economic enterprises and ensure their raw material supply.

Trilateral and bilateral meetings then became institutional, held once or twice a year to discuss and propose alternatives to the various current economic and social problems.

Many other sectoral strikes were organized during the same period of socio-economic crisis, with a record of 2,023 strikes in 1990, affecting around 300,000 workers. Their number rose to 1,034 strikes in 1991 compared to 496 in 1992. The social protests were largely due to the deterioration of the social situation and considered as »benefiting from the democratic spring of the period 1989–1992.« (Djajbi 2002: 53)

Another highlight in the UGTA's protest struggle during the 1990s was the second two-day national strike launched in February 1996 in the public service sector. It followed the decision by the Head of Government at the time, Ahmed Ouyahia, to withhold seven days' pay from civil servants' salaries for a period of eleven months in order to pay wage arrears of 20,000 workers in the public economic sector.

⁵ UGTA; full texts of the statutes of the Organization from the seventh and eighth Conventions (www.ugta.org.dz, inaccessible in January 2020).

⁶ Interviews with several UNPEF (National Union for Education and Training) members, former UGTA activists, during a training seminar organized by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Biskra, December 2005.

RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAMISM

Political pluralism made it possible for political parties of various leanings, including Islamist, to emerge. Indeed, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) succeeded in attracting thousands of supporters from all walks of life and across the country. Its wide support rested on a fiery rhetoric, criticizing the rulers, and touching upon commonly shared sensitive issues, such as faith, injustice, purchasing power and open criticism of public policies. This allowed the FIS to forge such great support that it won the first local elections in the era of pluralism.

The FIS sought to infiltrate the labour environment and created a trade union confederation, aiming to »supervise and train Muslim workers with a view to founding the Islamic State, the ultimate source of workers' well-being.«⁷

The Islamic Salvation Union (SIT) gathered around ten Islamic sector-based leagues. For Ali El Kenz, however: »The SIT and its leagues were created from the top and are only outgrowths of the FIS.« He adds, »This union does not emanate from the will of the workers but derives its legitimacy from the Koran and the prophet's tradition,« (El Kenz 1993: 79–86) as is stated in its own statutes. As a direct consequence, the FIS declared that Muslim workers did not have the right to join any union other than the SIT.

According to a study by Nacer Djabi, in a short period the SIT had succeeded in creating a national activist base with a membership rate of around 14 %. These base activists were quite diverse since, according to the findings of a field study, the membership rate is very high in the Eastern Wilayas like in Constantine at 80 %, in the South like in Ouargla at 81.8 % or in the Centre like in Blida at 78.9 % but low in other large Wilayas, such as in Oran at 22 %⁸.

Ali El Kenz, for his part, holds that »the SIT developed in the towns totally under FIS influence (like Médea or El Oued) and, in particular in the small remote entities, which public authorities and other unions had forsaken. It had penetrated certain large centres, where it competed with the UGTA, relying on its contacts in the party and in some mosques. However, its image of strikebreaker deterred a large section of the working class from following its lead.«

With the rise of increasingly radicalized political Islamism, and of the risks threatening the republican nature of the State and individual and collective freedoms, particularly after the FIS' electoral victory in the first round of the legislative elections of December 1991 and its successive calls for civil disobedience, UGTA leader Abdelhak Benhamouda launched a political initiative in association with other high-ranking national and political figures.

The initiative consisted of creating the National Committee to Safeguard Algeria (CNSA), aimed at preventing the rise of religious extremism and fighting to maintain the Republic and Republican values. Its main demand was to stop the electoral process, justified by terrorist savagery and religious fundamentalism. The latter relied on an ideology of exclusion and took advantage of the economic and social precariousness engendered by the economic crisis and organizational reforms. A few days later, the President of the Republic resigned, the electoral process was halted, and the Islamic Salvation Front dissolved.

A few years later, the UGTA was back on the political scene and involved in the first pluralist presidential elections of independent Algeria in November 1995, announcing its unflinching support for candidate Liamine Zéroual, incumbent Head of State and career soldier, citing him being »the best candidate to defend the values of the Republic against Islamism«⁹ as the grounds for this support.

This political commitment continued after President Liamine Zéroual's electoral victory. Indeed, UGTA Secretary General, Abdelhak Benhamouda, contributed to launching the initiative of creating a mass political party with a view to supporting the President's program and actions. The former UGTA leader had even been touted as potential leader of the party but was assassinated by a terrorist group outside UGTA headquarters on 28 January 1997.

⁷ UGTA, historical background of the Organization (www.ugta.org.dz, inaccessible in January 2020).

⁸ This study involved 1,634 workplaces at 348 companies located in 14 Wilayas and employing 320,000 workers (Djabi 2002: 56).

⁹ UGTA, historical background of the Organization (www.ugta.org.dz, inaccessible in January 2020).

3

OVERVIEW OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN ALGERIA

A severe economic crisis hit the Algerian economy in the 1990s. Economic growth remained below national potential, at an annual average of 3.3 % (from 1996 to 2000). With economic progress hinging on events on the political and social scene, the national economy suffered tremendously from the instability of the political environment and the security problems. The standard of living in Algerian society consequently deteriorated and private initiative was held back, as was the implementation of economic reforms (Tani 2013: 28), leading to the 50 % decrease in the wage bill between 1989 and 2000.

The Algerian economy eventually stabilized but at the cost of considerable sacrifices and at a high social cost; but growth remained low. Unemployment increased, »social and politi-

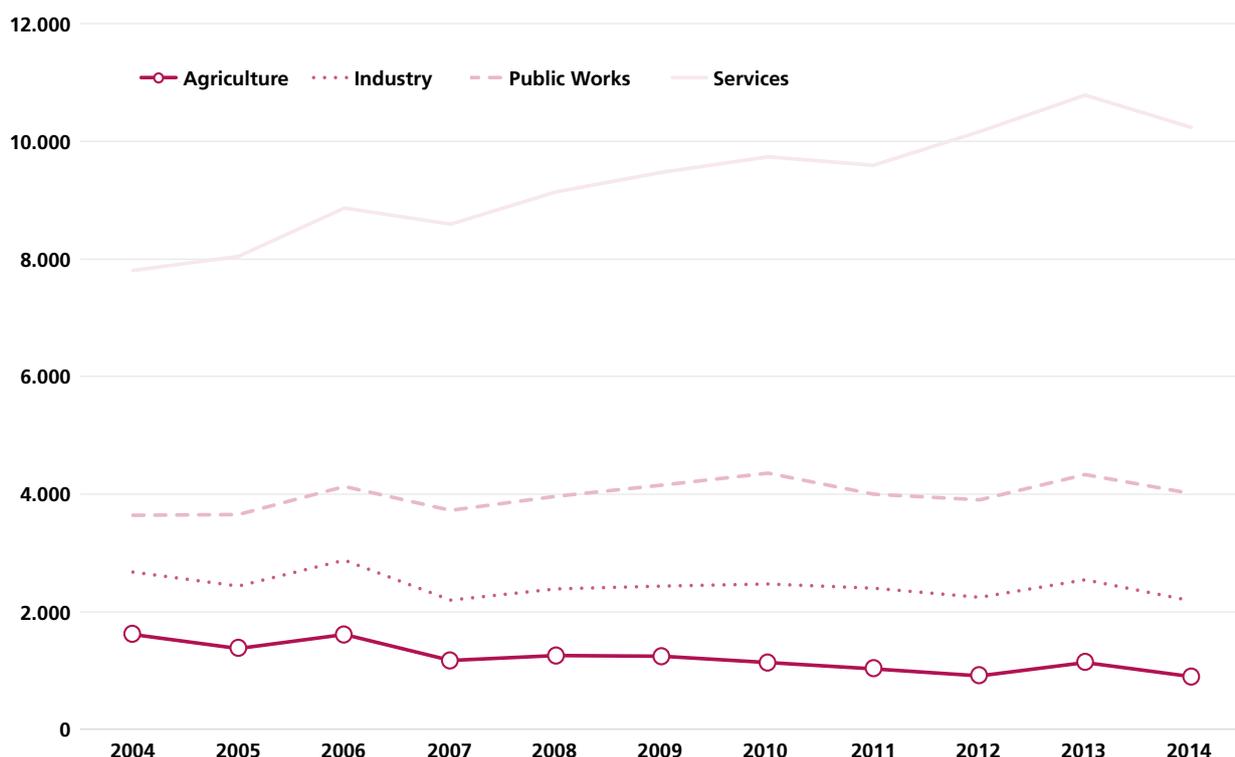
cal pressure (from independent unions and with workers' strikes) resulted in establishing the first public investment program,« (Tani 2013: 28) which coincided with the rise of oil prices on the world market.

EVOLUTION OF THE LABOUR MARKET

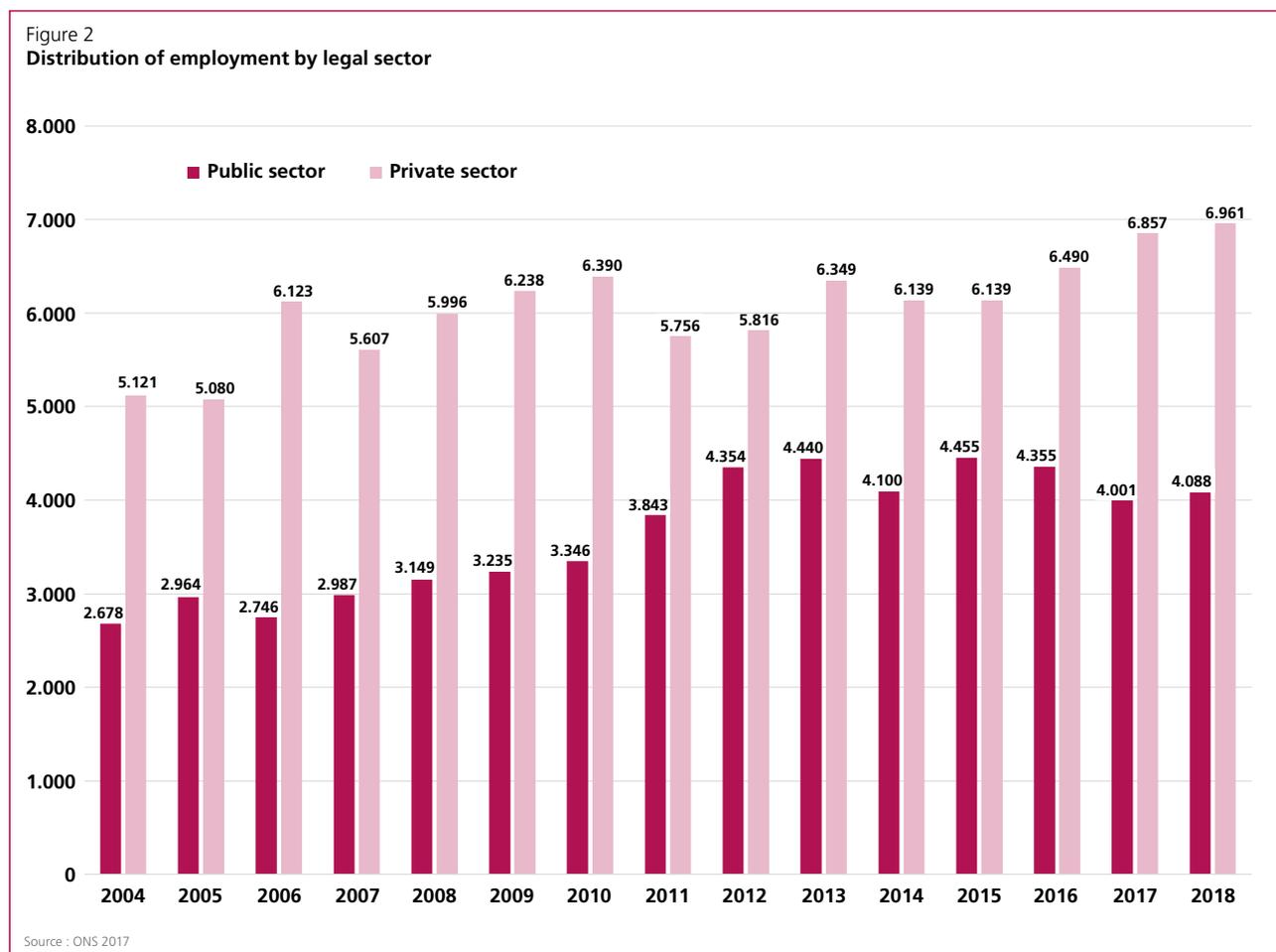
In 2012, the country reached a new stage of economic growth as a result mainly of the performance of the oil and raw materials sector.

It was between 2001 and 2005 that the Algerian economy took off and oil revenues helped boost several sectors of activity like construction and public works, telecommunica-

Figure 1
Development of the number of workers by field of activity 2006–2017



Source : ONS 2017



tions, and services. Thanks to the financial upswing, the authorities launched an economic recovery program in 2001, shored up by a growth consolidation program in 2004 with tens of billions of dollars injected into economy, resulting in a growth rate of 7%.

According to the ONS (National Statistics Office), the private sector employs 6.95 million workers, representing 63% of total employment in Algeria. The public sector, however, accounts for nearly 4.09 million workers, or 37% of the active population, which is around 11.048 million workers.

The 11.048 million workers consist of 9.073 million men (82.1%) and 1.975 million women (17.9%).

The ONS also indicates that nearly seven out of ten employed people are wage earners (69.6%). This proportion is higher among women, reaching 75.3%. Another feature of female employment is also its greater concentration in the public sector, which employs 57.4% of the total female workforce compared to 42.6% in the private sector.

LABOUR INDICATORS IN ALGERIA BETWEEN 2000 AND 2018

Two major factors have influenced the structure of the labour force in Algeria, namely demographic changes, and the economic policy of the country. A high birth rate moved the

dial on the demographic indexes, such as sex, age, and level of education. As for the economic structure, this remained largely dependent on fluctuations in oil prices (Sali/Abdelkrim 2014: 120).

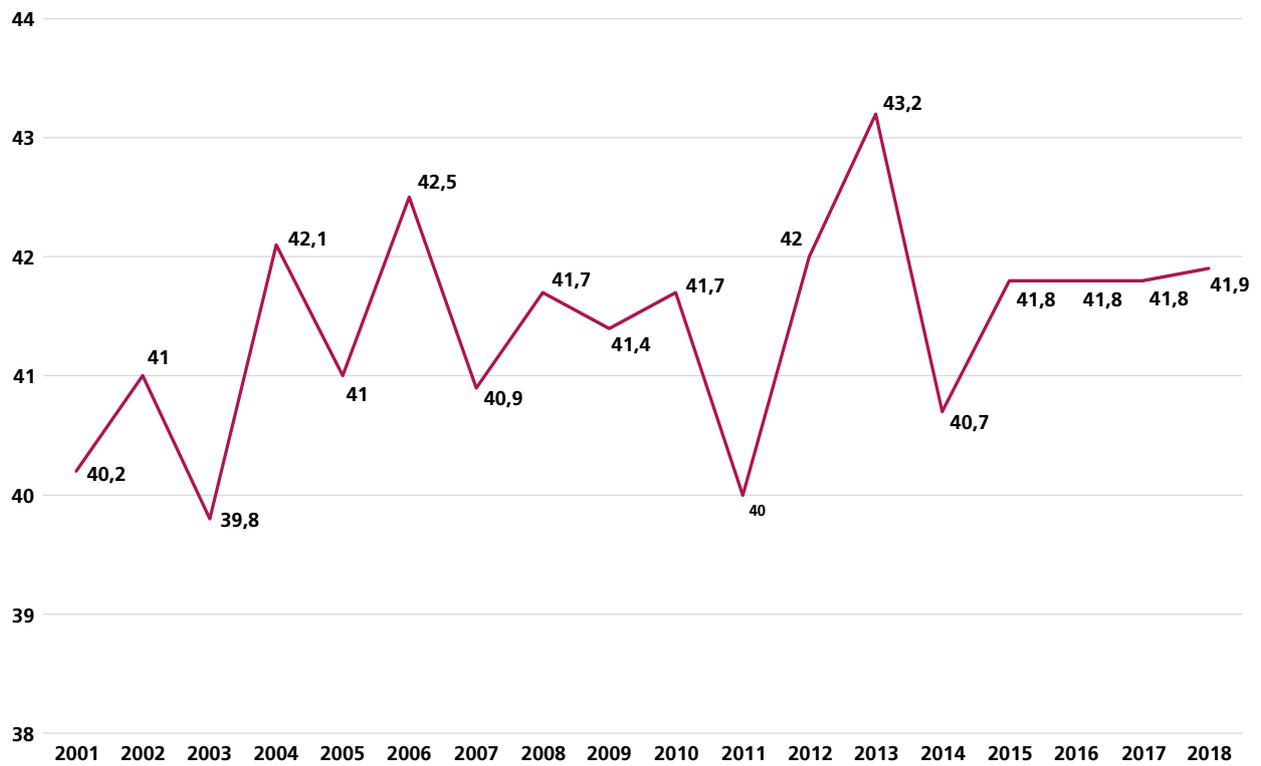
The following graph shows labour force evolution over a period of 18 years, thus confirming the link between the growth rate of the active population and the impact of the economic environment. The rate of activity depends directly on changes in the other economic indicators, mainly in oil prices. The highest activity rate in 2013 was around 43.3%; it then started falling in 2014 reaching 40.7%, to then increase again in 2015 at a rate of 41.8%.

The rate of activity underwent a remarkable decline in 2003 and 2011, which are the years when Algeria experienced significant social movements; prompted either by the independent unions, like in 2003, or by other parts of society (whether organized or unstructured). It also coincided with the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

The unemployment rate in Algeria used to be very high. In 2000, it was around 28.29%. The acceleration of growth in the 2000s helped curb it and average annual employment growth increased in particular in agriculture, construction, and public works (Tani 2013: 32).

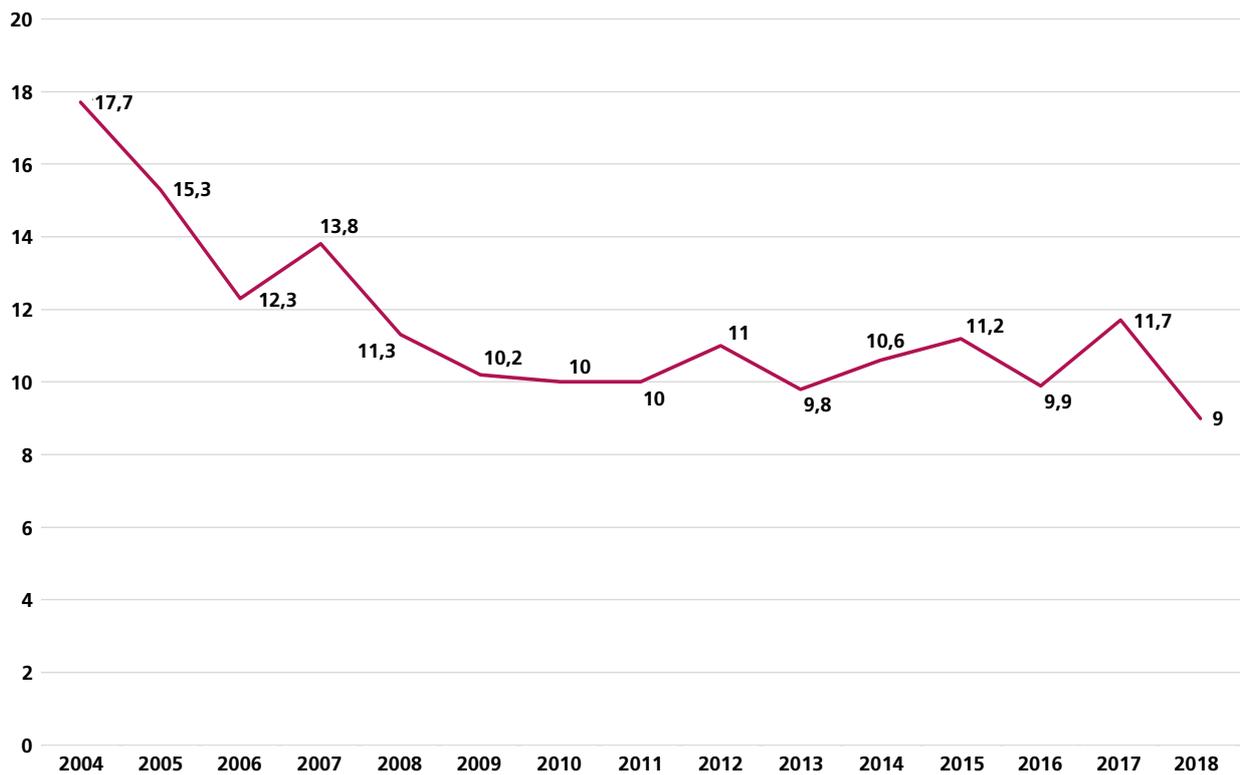
According to the ONS, the unemployment rate rose from 28.3% in 2000 to 28.4% in 2001. In 2005 it was around

Figure 3
Rate of activity from 2000 to 2018



Source : ONS 2018

Figure 4
Rate of unemployment from 2000 to 2018



Source : ONS 2018

15.3 % and in 2007 13.8 %. The lowest average rate of unemployment was reached between 2009 and 2014, at a rate of 9.8 % in 2013. It is worth adding, »this decline can be explained more by an increase in home employment than by an increase in the number of jobs.« (Tani 2013: 32)

SOCIAL PROTECTION VERSUS LIBERAL POLICY

The implementation of the various economic recovery programs in Algeria (from 2000 to 2025) was the outcome of a political decision to meet the multiple economic and social demands by Algerian society, as expressed by its elites as well as through protest movements since the early 2000s. During this period, Algeria saw large protest movements and riots that affected the entire country.

The implementation of reforms also favoured the investment climate in sectors other than oil and encouraged the geographical mobility of job seekers. As a result, all economic and training organizations did their best to adapt to this new environment by aligning training opportunities with labour market demands.

The Algerian government adopted an economic recovery program over four periods. The program aimed to encourage entrepreneurship, support small and medium-sized enterprises, and strengthen employment systems, like at the CNAC (National Unemployment Insurance Fund).

The main objective of the 2001–2004 economic recovery program of US \$ 525 billion was to:

- Pave the way for economic recovery, face the strong competitiveness of European companies and prepare for accession to the World Trade Organization. The public works sector benefited most from this program.
- Improve the standard of living and combat poverty.
- Renovate infrastructure and prepare the necessary conditions likely to attract investment.
- Reduce the unemployment rate by creating new jobs.

The complementary program to support growth from 2005–2009 (The Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria 2010) was designed according to the recommendations set forth in master plans (2005–2025). In particular, it intended to:

- Consolidate the actions initiated in the economic recovery support program (2001–2004).
- Reduce the isolation of around 4,500,000 inhabitants and improve their means of access.
- Reinforce trade and help raise the level of economic growth.

- Create more than 2,000,000 jobs, including 100,000 for the east-west highway project alone.
- Contribute to balanced, equitable and socio-economic planning of the national territory designed for the future, likely to bring stability, security, and prosperity.
- Support activities that create value and jobs.
- Renovate infrastructure.

The 2010–2014 public investment program (The Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria 2010) was allocated funding of \$286 billion. Its main thrusts and objectives were as follows:

- Completion of projects already started under previous programs, particularly in the railways, roads, and water sectors (9,700 billion DA/130 billion dollars).
- Commitment to new infrastructure projects. 40 % of these resources were dedicated to human resource development, with the aim of:
 - Building nearly 5,000 schools under the national education system, intended to open up 600,000 training places and 400,000 accommodation places for students, and 300 training and vocational training institutions.
 - Building more than 1,500 health facilities, including 172 hospitals, 45 specialized health centres, 377 polyclinics and 70 specialized institutions for the disabled.
 - Building two million housing units, 1,2 million of which to be delivered during the five-year term.
 - Building more than 5,000 sports and youth facilities, including 80 stadiums, 160 multipurpose halls, 400 swimming pools and 200 youth hostels.
- Modernizing railways and improving urban transport (2,800 billion DA), in particular with the implementation of tramway projects in 14 cities and the modernization of airport infrastructure.
- Creating and promoting small and medium-sized enterprises through the construction of industrial zones.

The new five-year development plan 2015–2019, which follows on from the 2005–2009 and the 2010–2014 plans, was intended to strengthen the resilience of the Algerian economy in the face of the global financial crisis and to develop a competitive and diverse economy. However, the sudden drop in oil prices forced the government to freeze a number of projects in the new plan.

4

TRADE UNION INDEPENDENCE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

In Algeria there are more than 65 independent professional trade unions, spread across the public and private sectors, in addition to employers' confederations. On the economic and social scene, three actors lead the trilateral social dialogue in Algeria: the government, employers, and the trade unions as a social partner represented solely by the UGTA, excluding the following unions: the SNAPAP, SNPSP, CNES, CIA, CNAPEST, SNAPEST, UNPEF, SATEF, SAP¹⁰.

The emergence of independent unions impacted the balance of power, as power circles had become used to deciding for workers and their union representatives. Despite trade union pluralism, the UGTA maintained its exclusive advantages, including participation on the boards of social organizations. After it recognized the right to create independent trade unions, the State consistently excluded them and imposed the UGTA as the sole representative of workers in trilateral negotiations.

THE MOST ACTIVE INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS

The SNPSP (National Trade Union of Public Health Practitioners): Its first founding General Assembly was held in the Wilaya of Sidi Belabes on 15 May 1991, after the organization had obtained its receipt of registration. It made Dr Bahia Chorfi the First President of the organization. The statutes of this trade union opened membership to general practitioners, pharmacists, dentists, and some specialist physicians. Its Secretary General Lyes Merabet currently heads the SNPSP. The main demands of the union focus on developing a special statute for physicians and on granting qualification bonuses.

From an organizational standpoint, the union consists of a National Office, Regional Offices with regional delegates, a Wilaya Office, and an Office in each health sector. The union holds a convention every three years. The strikes and sit-ins in 1994, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 are among the activities the union has organized. Since its foundation, the SNPSP has demanded improvements in salaries, housing, allowances, and reforms of the health system.

The CNAPEST (National Independent Council for Secondary and Technical Education Teachers)¹¹: The Council was founded on 17 April 2003 at an Assembly composed of delegates from 18 Wilayas. The union representatives submitted their application to the Ministry of Labour, but it refused to issue the receipt acknowledging this. It took them over four years to receive their accreditation, on 10 July 2007, after a long confrontation between teachers and the governing body as well as a sit-in with thousands of teachers in front of government headquarters. Its National Coordinator, Salim Yalha, superseding Larbi Nouar, currently heads the CNAPEST. During the Convention in November 2012, the union decided to expand its presence in middle and elementary education. Their main demands have been a separate statute, early retirement, and social welfare. According to the union's official website, its National Office comprises 11 members, 50 offices in the Wilayas and a membership exceeding 170,000 members.

The SNAPAP (National Independent Union of Public Administration Personnel)¹²: The first independent union to obtain its accreditation in 1990, under number 90_01 and regarded as the most representative organization in public administration. In 2004, the union put its nationwide membership at 768,817. It should be noted that Rachid Malaoui contested its official Secretary General Belkacem Felfoul. At the beginning, the union comprised 18 sections representing many sectors of activity. Subsequently, 8 more were added in a very short period. The emergence of this union seems to have benefited from the support of some high government officials at the time in order to thwart the emergence of the SIT (Islamic Labour Union) affiliated with the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front). For years now, the union has been experiencing an internal crisis, as two factions represented by Mr. Maalaoui and Mr. Felfoul vie for legal control.

The SAP (Independent Paramedical Union): This was the first union representing paramedics and was formed on 22 May 2003. Mr. Lounes Guechi was elected General Secretary. The SAP's main objective is to defend paramedics'

¹⁰ See the list of approved trade unions in the annex.

¹¹ CNAPEST: <https://www.facebook.com/CNAPEST.org/>

¹² SNAPAP: <http://googlesnapap.centerblog.net/4611141-solidarite-international-syndical>

interests, namely: pay rises, a separate statute and a career management plan for this professional category¹³.

The SATEF (Independent Union of Workers of Education and Training)¹⁴: This union was founded in 1990 in the Wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, is currently present in 28 Wilayas and is headed by Boualem Amoura. The SATEF is often critical of the education system in Algeria. Its main demands relate to pay rises and bonuses, tenure for all contract workers, administrative and financial settlement of all pending cases, establishing the right to housing for all workers in education and training, and radical reform of the social services system to implement the principle of »social services for all«, so that everyone can participate in management and elections to allow all workers manage their funds.

The CLA/CELA (Council of Secondary Schools of Algeria): The Council of Secondary Schools of Algiers first entered the scene with its meeting on 6 February 2003 at the headquarters of the Academy of the Wilaya of Algiers. After having long represented the teachers of Algiers, the CLA became a national union at its founding General Assembly on 26 December 2006. The delegates then had to decide on the extension of its geographical scope of action (Beldjena 2007). The organization has since been called the Council of Secondary Schools of Algeria (CLA or CELA) and is known for its main demands: pay rises, retirement after 25 years of teaching and revision of the special statutes governing secondary school teachers. After his predecessor Achour Idir died of a heart attack (just like CLA founder, Redouane Osmane), Zoubir Rouina was elected Secretary General of the CLA in June 2019.

The UNPEF (National Union of Education and Training Personnel): The UNPEF is a union of national education and vocational training workers. Its initial base in 1990 consisted of heads of secondary schools. Subsequently, it expanded to include other categories of people working in the training sector. Presently, Sadek Dziri, elected to replace Ider Mohammed, is at its head. The present Secretary General was elected Coordinator of the new Confederation of Independent Trade Unions. The UNPEF is one of the most active unions in the strike action that has rocked the education sector in recent years.

UNIONISM AND FORMS OF PROTEST

An empirical study on five years of union activity from 2004 to 2010 collated some interesting data and observations (Zobiri 2013: 260). These are mostly observations on the nature of trade union action and on the strategies adopted by independent trade unions to combat the oppressions and policy devices employed by the governing authorities.

Trade unionism first developed in the industrial economic sector and then gained major access to construction and

public works. These sectors hold a large concentration of the working mass and are one of the strongholds of the Algerian labour movement, explaining why these sectors have experienced a higher number of protests and strikes throughout the history of trade unionism (Zobiri 2013: 268).

In the 1990s, the number of strikes and their frequency declined, especially after the adoption of union pluralism, due to the deterioration in the security situation. The defining features of trade union activity during this period were then the content of demands and the fields of activity affected. This graph shows that the unions with the higher strike rate before 1988 are those in the public works and industry sectors (the steel plant in El Hadjar, the industrial vehicle centre in Rouïba, etc ...). The absence of any activity in the administration sector is notable. A shift occurred after 1988, with a sharp decline in the number of strikes in industry and public works, and an increase in the administration sectors (health, education, higher education, etc.).

A survey of unions in Algeria shows that independent unions have no representation in sectors seen as sensitive, such as oil, steel, and heavy industry, where the UGTA is the only union present.

The reference period of 2004–2010 is marked, on the one hand, by a sharp increase in the number of strikes in public administration, higher education, education and health with all its categories (nurses, general practitioners, specialist doctors, etc.) and on the other hand, by the absence of any union action in the industrial and public works sectors.

In other words, a trade union strategy is developing around economic sectors outside industry and public works under State control, namely in an environment with little control by public authorities, and with a higher degree of freedom, making it possible to apply greater pressure on political and regulatory authorities.

In the period 2005–2010, there were 1142 days of strikes, mostly called by unions. It is worth noting that 48.2 % of strikes only lasted one day, while 20.7 % did not exceed six days.

The one-day strike is useful for gauging the »tension« of power and exploring the intentions and reactions of the authorities. It also serves to display the strength of union leadership and the ability to challenge the government and supervisory authorities. Longer strikes, on the other hand, only occur after dialogues between two conflicting parties (unions/employers) end in deadlock. Such stalemates are rare: the rate of strikes of more than six days is 11.7 % and the rate of open strikes is 14 % of the total number of strikes in the period from 2005 to 2010 (Zobiri 2015: 286).

In fact, independent trade unions in Algeria do not intend to challenge political power; resorting to strikes is only a strat-

¹³ Interview with Mr. Lounes Guechi, Secretary General of the SAP

¹⁴ SATEF: <http://satefalgerie.eklablog.com/>

Figure 5
Rate of strikes by field of activity from 1969 to 2002

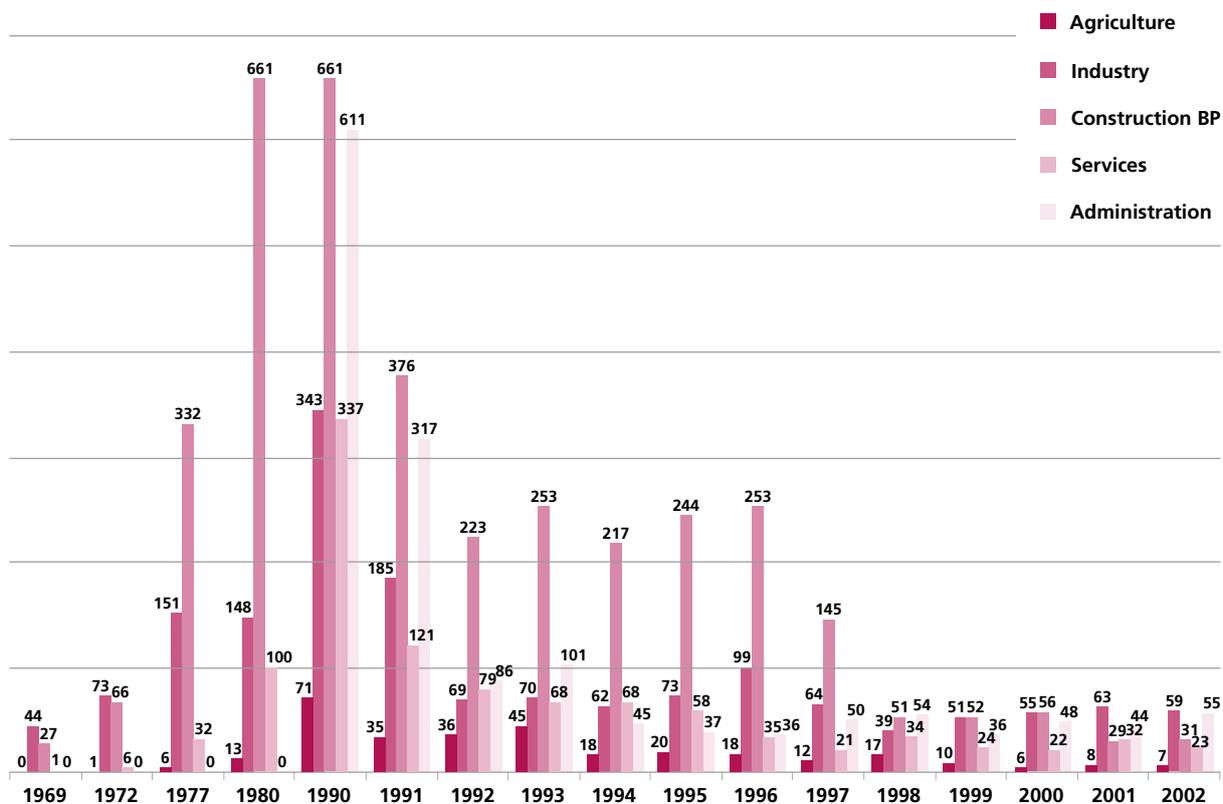
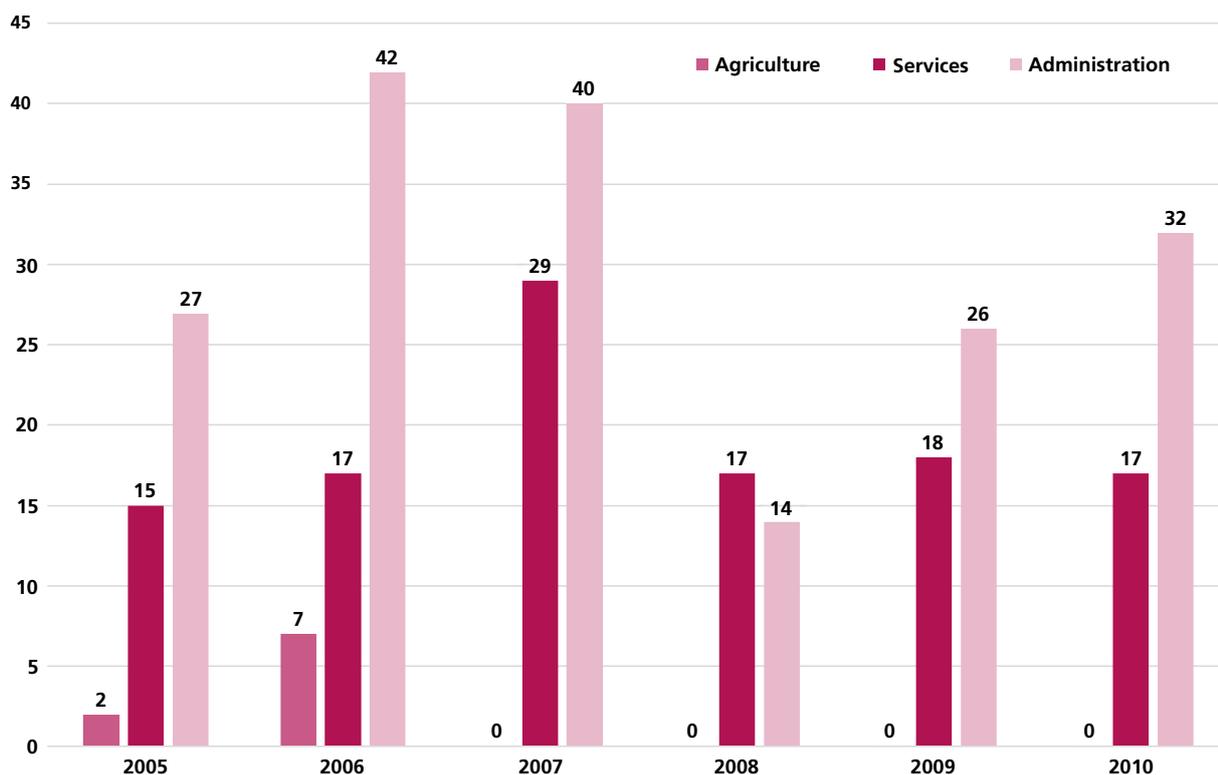


Figure 6
Rate of strikes by field of activity from 2004 to 2010



egy used to exert pressure and increase the chances of receiving the right response to their demands. Strike density is the length of time off work per month, which is in fact also a unit of time measurement.

Admittedly, calling strikes is a response to public authorities' excesses and violations of workers' rights, but the decision to call a strike and the time and month selected stem from the rational and strategic approaches of the union. The periods selected by the UGTA, the single Central Organization (graph 8), for union activity are very specific, occurring at the busiest times of the year (Zobiri 2018: 287).

In Algeria, as elsewhere, strikes generally coincide with the busy season and the mass return of workers to their jobs after summer leave. They occur at sensitive times when public authorities are considering new economic and social measures. The adoption of such measures requires consensus, which makes unions' agreement essential. In turn, unions increase their pressure on the powers that be during this period to achieve their goals. Then they withdraw, leaving the political authority to act as sole actor on the economic and social scene (Zobiri 2013: 288).

In 2011, Algeria experienced a large social protest movement which spared no sector: bakers, SONATRACH of Hassi R'Mel, Hyundai Motors Algeria, municipalities, justice officials, employees at the Department of Housing and Equipment and the Department of Town Planning and Construc-

tion. There were also student demonstrations, the postal workers' strike, a burst of anger by retirees, and strikes by public service employees, journalists, and secondary and technical education teachers.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO UNION ACTIVITY

Several obstacles hamper union activity in Algeria:

- External interference: mainly in the form of unjustified interventions by public authorities in the internal affairs of trade unions and to a lesser degree, interference by political parties (Zobiri/Abdallah 2015: 67).
- Lack of union training: causing members to lose interest in union activity and migrate from one union to another. This factor is one of the biggest challenges that independent trade unionism is presently facing (Zobiri/Abdallah 2015: 66).
- Women: they are less represented in trade unions, especially in leadership positions.
- Representation: independent trade unions are under-represented in the private sector, although it employs 6.95 million workers, equivalent to 63 % of total employment in Algeria.

Figure 7
Nature of strike periods in percentage

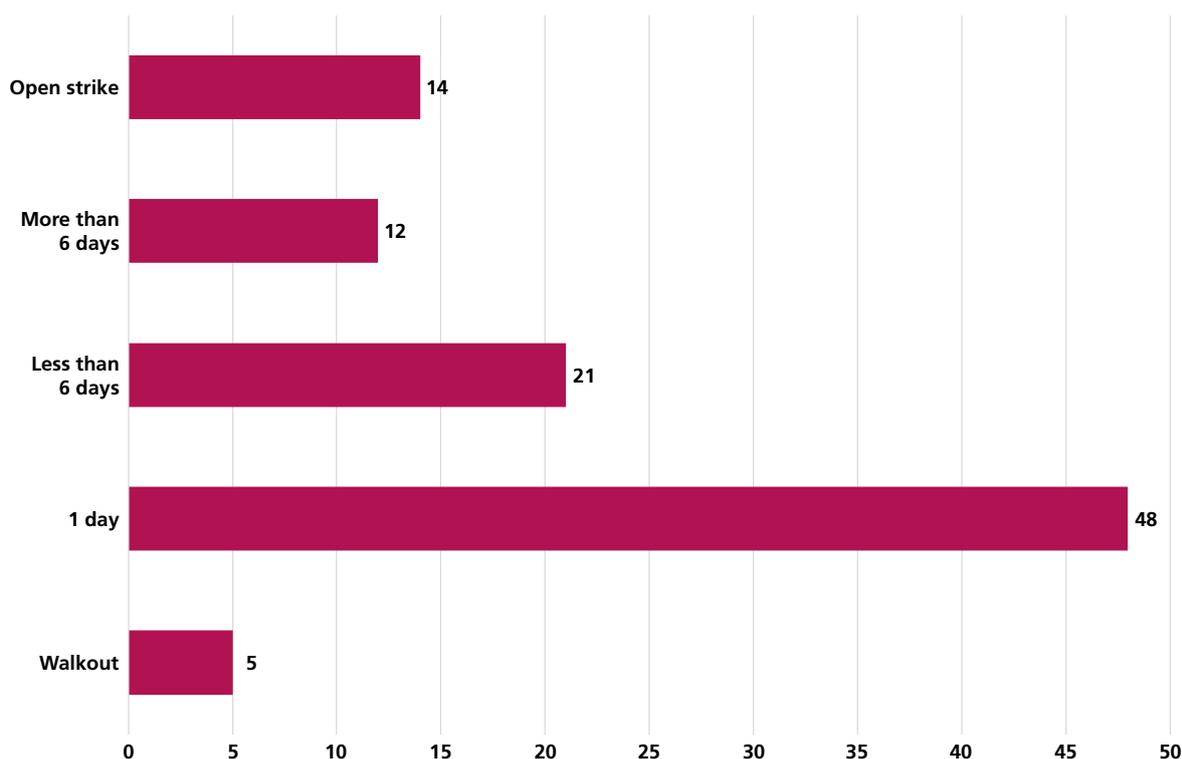
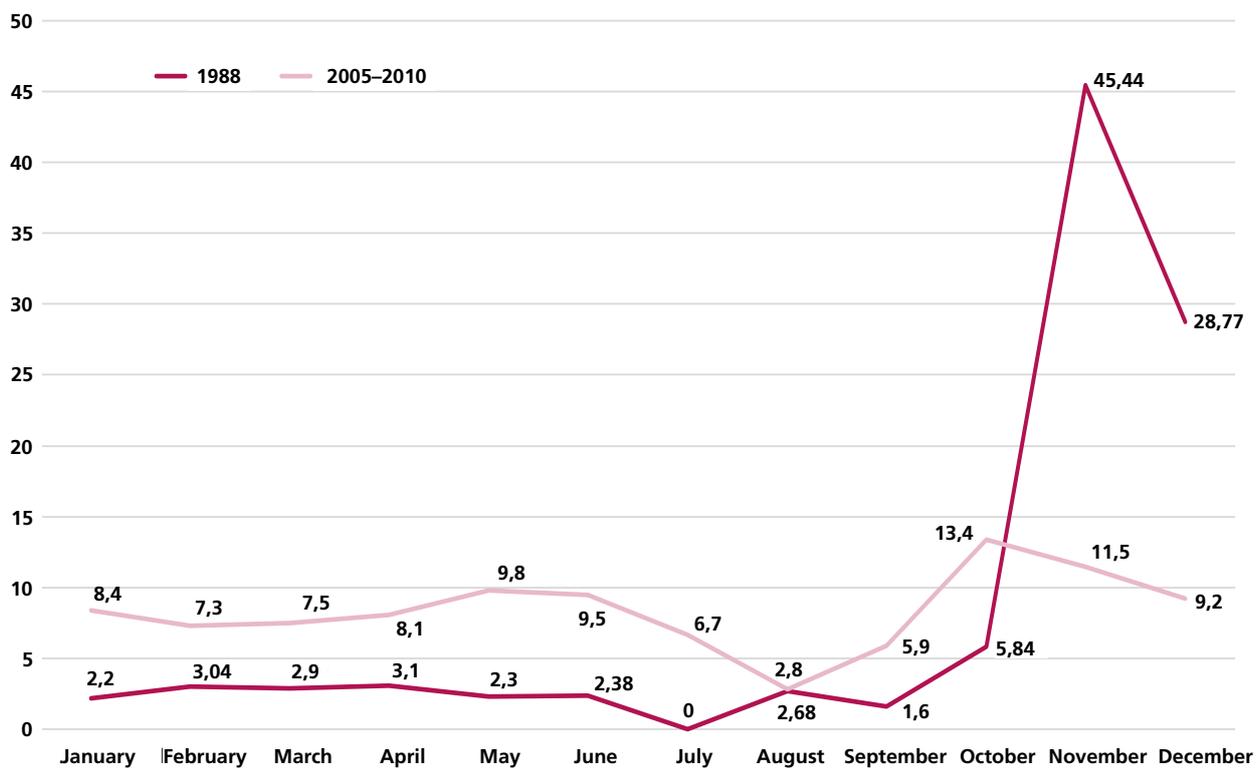
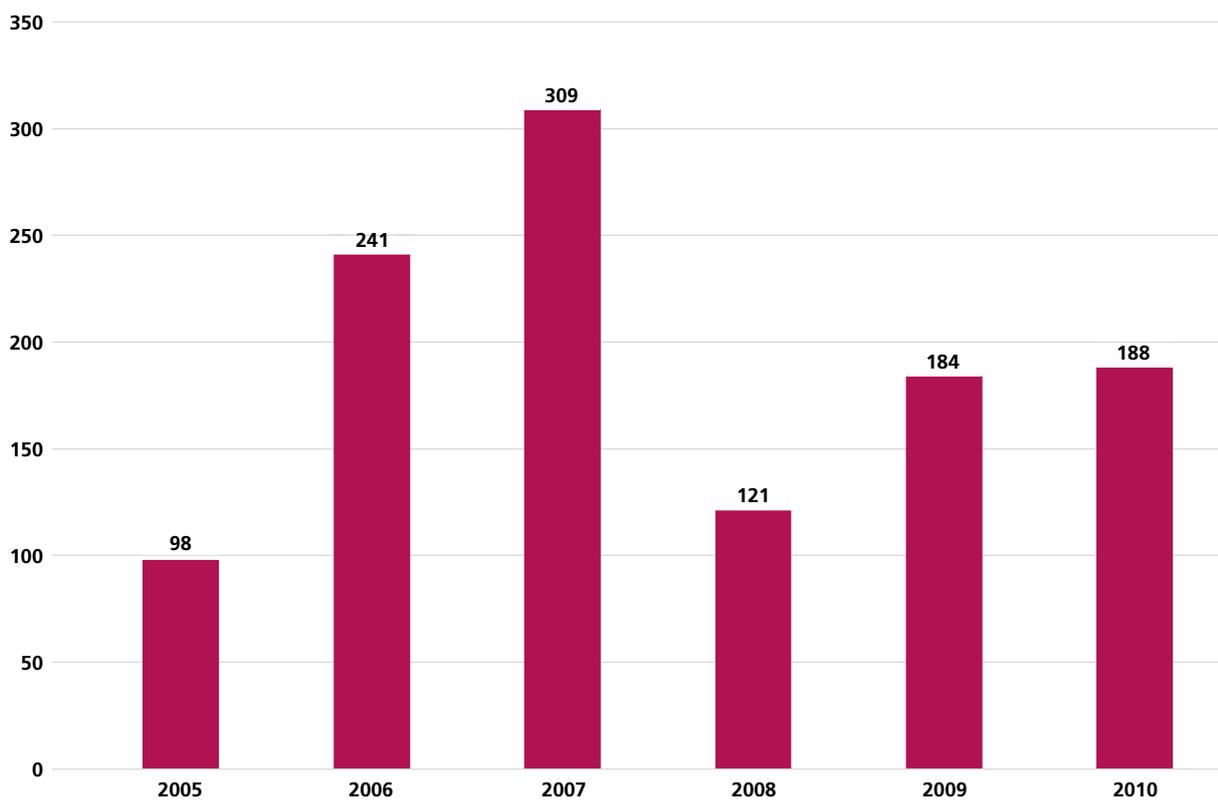


Figure 8
Monthly rate of strikes: comparison between 1988 and the period 2005–2010



Source : Zobiri 2013 : 260

Figure 9
Number of days of strike in the period 2005–2010



Source : Zobiri 2013 : 252

- Financial resources: some independent unions have almost no resources and rely completely on membership fees (Zobiri/Abdallah 2015: 63).
- Representation: independent unions are better represented in the civil service than in other sectors; particularly in the industrial sector, the original stronghold of the trade union movement.
- The autocratic management of trade union organizations: the lack of transparency in their management of internal affairs has caused a multitude of internal problems, leading to the collapse of many organizations or their disappearance (Zobiri/Abdallah 2015: 66).
- Differences and rivalries between unions taking precedence over aspects of agreement and complementarity, as is the case with the coordination of the education unions and the fledgling National Confederation of Independent Trade Unions proclaimed on 18 November 2018.

training. International events enabled them to connect with Arab and African trade union networks. Unfortunately, denials of entry visas to foreign trainers have prevented Algerian trade unionists from benefiting from these training opportunities locally.

WHAT IS THE INPUT OF ALGERIAN TRADE UNION PLURALISM?

- Challenging the UGTA monopoly of representativeness.
- A substantial increase in wages.
- Participation in the management of social services.
- Development of new specific statutes in the education and health sectors.
- Trade union role in developing a social protection policy.
- Emergence of representative trade union elites.

What about independent unions and international relations? Algeria's experience with unions is fairly short and has faced organizational challenges, requiring it to navigate union conflicts on a daily basis while facing public authorities hostile to the presence of independent unions. The emergence of these unions occurred in a historical context marked by political and security unrest that followed the interruption of the electoral process in 1992 and the resurgence of terrorist acts. This context did not help trade union organizations to open to the outside world. The ruling authorities were hostile to any political and union interference from the outside, regarded as a source of additional pressure that could potentially benefit the independent union bodies. Such factors largely explain why Algerian trade unions built few ties with the international trade union movement.

Nevertheless, a few unions – the UNPEF, SNAPAP, SATEF and SNAPEST – did join international federations, become part of Education International and take part in their international meetings. This participation meant these unions' executives (men and women) were able to benefit from

5

INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS FROM 2002 TO THE PRESENT

The 2000s decade is a turning point in the development of trade unionism and trade union struggle in Algeria. The improvement in security conditions and the country's financial upturn encouraged unionists to reactivate demands that most employees had long put aside because of terrorism and the economic crisis that the country was experiencing. This labour struggle »restored its political and social centrality to the labour environment,« (Djabi 2014) particularly after the popular riots of 2001.

All fields of activity did indeed see strikes for pay rises, to defend the public sector against privatization or to promote their professions.

The resurgence of the union struggle marks a qualitative leap and a revitalization of union action in all sectors, particularly regarding independent unions. The intensity of the struggles in this period has inevitably enabled them to gain ground, to achieve important gains and to obtain recognition in the national trade union field as key players.

Over the years, independent unions have gained the lead in the public service sector, at the expense of the UGTA, which has lost most of its membership. The UGTA has, however, retained its majority status in the public sector and at some privatized companies. With the expansion of independent unions and union protests in general, though, relations with public authorities remain confrontational and paternalistic, including with the militant or rebellious sections of the UGTA.

ON THE DIFFICULTY OF SECURING TRADE UNION RECOGNITION

For years after the adoption of the Constitution of 23 February 1989, which enshrines political and trade union pluralism and freedom of association, the authorities consistently kept denying accreditation to some independent unions or for the creation of trade union confederations, in violation of the laws in force and international conventions. Later, dozens of unions emerged and obtained accreditation, but there has been no noticeable change in public authorities' and employers' response to union activity. Many unions still complain of obstacles to the free exercise of the right to organize, of repression and criminalization of union activity.

For years now, the government and employers have been abusively turning to courts to subdue employee strikes and protest movements. This practice has become recurrent in all fields of activity, not only affecting independent unions, as the more militant sections of the UGTA have not been spared either. Often, the latter are even subject to legal proceedings or suspensions and their members to unfair layoffs (as seen at the former customs union). This practice has become »structural« among public authorities and employers (public and private). In some cases, tacit alliances are forged between private employers and the State to defeat union actions.

According to the CNLS (National Committee for Trade Union Freedoms) in its April 2005 report, »through its departments, the Ministry of Labour is guilty of prejudice and interference in the affairs of union organizations. Its departments issued biased correspondence, in violation of the sacred principle of the neutrality of the Administration and testifying to its interference in the internal affairs of the unions. The same departments are guilty of violations of the secrecy of correspondence. It should be noted that, apart from of this type of violation, labour inspections, intended to assist workers and their trade unions in matters of regulation and procedures, on the contrary, harm their interests. The case of the trade union SNOMMAR is a perfect illustration of the matter« (CNLS 2005).

In addition to this array of practices, the authorities also resort to »cloning« unions for the purpose of creating confusion and divisions, hampering unions' organizational strategy and operational independence. The practice of cloning allowed the creation of »puppet« unions, ready to show allegiance and give up on workers' demands¹⁵.

Within the Central Organization (the UGTA), when a federation or an industrial union becomes cumbersome, recovery movements are organized, or the iron fist of the union bureaucracy steps in. Several union leaders have been sued and even excluded from the union for organizing protests or not toeing the line of the UGTA leadership.

¹⁵ »La question syndicale aujourd'hui en Algérie, compte rendu de la réunion débat du 26 avril 2014« (The Union Question Nowadays in Algeria, report of the discussion meeting of 26 April 2014) (<https://www.socialgerie.net/spip.php?breve856>).

REFUSING NEGOTIATION

Of course, social laws require that the employer-State encourage social dialogue in all social and professional disputes. However, in practice, independent unions are excluded from social dialogue, particularly in trilateral negotiations. The State still favours the exclusive relationship with the Central Organization (the UGTA), which is a way of preventing union pluralism from taking shape and being successful.

In the world of labour, in practice the use of negotiation to resolve conflicts rests on the balance of power in the field and on the capacity of union actors to mobilize the workforce of their sector. This mobilization is necessary to impose negotiations in the majority of cases. The attitude of the public authorities in this regard is to first use the threat of punishment, then misinformation, and then negotiation.

As for sectoral negotiation, so far, independent unions have not been invited to take part in the trilateral negotiations that the government organizes annually. Only the UGTA and employers' organizations are admitted to these conclaves. Yet, independent unions no longer need to prove their representativeness, particularly in the public service sectors, which employ millions of people. The latest initiative from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security¹⁶, inviting all union organizations to provide information on their representativeness, reflects this process of exclusion. In addition, some ministries keep receiving union representatives from their respective departments, particularly in national education and public health.

Such practices show once again that the public authorities have no desire for »partner« unions, but rather for union organizations serving the political and economic orientations advocated by the State at the central level, annihilating any attempt to establish trade union independence or to question State policies, however partially.

LACK OF UNION PROTECTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Nowadays, one of the major challenges facing the Algerian labour movement is establishing trade union organizations or sections in the private sector, whether they are independent or affiliated to the UGTA.

Union representation in the private sector is indeed marginal and unionization there hardly exceeds 5 % at a time when the sector is emerging as the leading job provider in Algeria thanks to more than 1.2 million SMEs and around 4 million employees (ONS 2017).

However, almost all private Algerian companies are very small companies with an average of three employees, which

is a real constraint for trade union activity. The small number of employees in the companies precludes creating trade union sections. In addition, the precariousness of the professional situation of most wage earners in the private sector, with 2.5 million among them not registered with social insurance funds, added to approximately 3 million employed on a contract basis, is far from allowing workers to organize collectively and form or join trade unions (Akkache 2010).

Another deterrent is the hostility of private company managers towards the creation of unions at their companies. CEVITAL is a case in point. On 18 January 2012, a general workers' strike was called at different Cevital units, for a pay rise and greater redistributive justice in favour of workers and other low-level executives at the company. This was unprecedented in trade union activity. The strike was massive and paralyzed several production units, forcing the top manager of the company to visit the site in person. However, he was adamant in unequivocally rejecting the demand of creating a union. Another half-day strike was held in April of the same year, but with a far smaller following. This gave the management an opportunity to come down hard and dismiss 16 employees accused of leading the protest movement. A solidarity movement then started in support of the dismissed workers who went on a hunger strike at the entrance to the company.

However, this protest struggle did not end with the creation of a company union but with that of a participation committee where staff are represented, knowing that the participation committee only has a marginal advisory role and no authority. The CEO of Cevital-Agro justified the refusal to authorize the creation of a company union explaining that he suspected it was a source of external interference, and perhaps even political, in the company business. He declared that: »The only difference with our committee is that a trade union would be under the authority of external unionists, who will probably want to bring to Cevital an external policy, with no true knowledge of the company, and to mix it with politics.« (Ait Hatrit 2013)

RISE OF LABOUR STRUGGLES

As previously pointed out, with the start of the financial upturn, the 2000s were a major turning point with a significant rise in union struggles affecting all sectors of activity. Wage demands were the main common aspect triggering these protest movements, especially between 2002 and 2003. Despite their intensity, union struggles remained rather defensive.

In March 2002, a strike by oil and gas workers (UGTA) paralyzed the sector. It was a response to the liberal project to modify the law on oil (Khlil Law). Subsequently, a general strike (2003) called by the UGTA's top management again paralyzed the country. It called for the rejection of the bill on oil and the rejection of a privatization program. In 2002, the National Federation of Education Workers (FNTE-UGTA) had refused to comply with the will of its union base to fight to

¹⁶ See the press release of the Ministry of Labour on 6 March 2018 (<http://www.aps.dz/algerie/70779-les-organisations-syndicales-appellees-a-se-conformer-a-la-loi-en-matiere-de-representativite>)

the end for employees' demands relating to the compensation system and bonuses. In 2003, the workers in the sector started their protest, outside the UGTA. Three general strikes by secondary school teachers were called by the Coordination of Secondary Schools of Algiers (CLA), which announced a general strike from 17 May to 25 June 2003. The collective action was interrupted because of the earthquake that hit the Boumerdes region but then resumed nationwide, this time called jointly by the CLA and the CNAPEST on 27, 28, 29 September of the same year. Teachers demanded a 100 % salary increase, an increase in the index point, the creation of permanent budgetary posts and retirement after 25 years of active service. The action lasted three months and ended with a considerable achievement at the time, namely a 30 % salary increase. Faced with threats of dismissal from the government, several Trade Unions of Education Companies (SETEs) affiliated to the UGTA threatened to strike if the government carried through with its threats against the striking teachers, affiliated to the CLA and CNAPEST.

As for the UGTA, several strikes were organized in the fall of 2003 and then in 2005 and 2010 by workers of the economic sector (ports, customs, SNTF, SNVI, brickyards) asking for wage increases and the protection of their production tools. Workers generally launched these strikes without the approval of the UGTA leadership, especially after 2006 when the UGTA and the Algerian government signed the Economic and Social Pact, establishing a four-year truce in industrial relations.

Other struggles also marked this period. Civil servants' struggles ranked high and gradually spread to all sectors of the public service, despite the various economic and social pacts signed between the government, the UGTA and employers' unions for all civil service sectors: education, health, public administration, civil protection, veterinarians, etc.

In 2011, in the wake of the revolutionary process in the Arab world, workers' struggles extended to several sectors of activity. They included resident doctors, general practitioners and public health specialists, psychologists, midwives, nurses, teachers, education assistants, civil servants, postmen, railway workers, oil workers, steel workers, stevedores, lawyers and clerks, guards, radio journalists, Air Algeria flight crews, national education workers, customs officials, etc. The main and common demands were pay rises and the adoption of special statutes. However, this impetus weakened in the second half of 2011, re-emerging in 2016 with another cycle of union protests and major demonstrations, such as the march on 1 May 2016 in Bejaia.

We can conclude that from 2002 to the present, independent unions have gained in visibility and representativeness in other socio-professional categories, as was the case in national education following the cyclical strikes of 2003 and 2007, with these unions gaining a large number of workers as members. What is also remarkable is the fact that the independent corporatist unions representing the middle classes adopted a radical discourse and means of struggle of the kind used in proletarian workers' struggles.

6

LIMITS OF THE ALGERIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

The Algerian trade union landscape is still very varied, and not only because of divergences between independent unions and the UGTA. There are also divergences among independent unions themselves, beyond their corporatist character. The differences appear mainly in the methods and strategies of the collective action and in the nature of the demands, which makes the gap increasingly wide especially in the health and national education sectors. The issue of social services management in the education sector is the subject of disputes between the unions of the sector, for example. Most unions are against the centralization of social services and accuse officials at the National Commission for Social Services of poor management and a lack of transparency. The two majority unions on the National Commission for Social Services, namely the CNAPEST and UNPEF, are accused of engaging in unfair competition by effectively black-mailing employees to register with them to receive social aid and benefits. This issue is also often used by the Administration to accentuate the divergences and internal struggles between the unions.

Trade unions in Algeria are tremendously fragmented. There can be several unions operating in the same field of activity, such as in health and national education. Each union has its own set of demands, specific to the professions it represents. Each one adopts its own strategies and modes of operation to assert their demands. Each one attempts through negotiation to secure its share of the pie for the benefit of the field of activity it represents, but to the detriment of solidarity with other employees in the same industry. This situation fuels and even enhances a form of corporatist »selfishness« and union rivalry.

According to the former CNES spokesperson, »in terms of protest, competition developed among these unions, expressed through the »every man for themselves« strategy and an often awkward and ambiguous corporatism. The formulation of demands, negotiation, public declarations by union leaders, and above all the links with public authorities reflected confusion, inexperience and temptations which negatively affected the momentum of the industrial action engaged in.«

Other limitations hamper independent unions due to their heterogeneous character: on the one hand »the pragmatic nature of their labour culture, the rudimentary experience of

some, and even sometimes an undemocratic, even bureaucratic way of functioning,« (Adel 2006) and on the other hand, »a partial appreciation of the balance of power« (Djabi 2009) in the face of increasing liberalization. In addition, the labour movement has not succeeded in establishing itself in the private sector, which »neither recognizes union work, nor trade unions as partners, as if Algeria was back in the period of wild capitalism.« (Djabi 2005)

The scattered labour movement also reflects the objective divisions within the working class in Algeria, those who live exclusively on the proceeds of their labour (wages). Other gaps divide the unemployed on the one hand and active workers on the other, and public service workers and workers in the public economic sector. Others still divide these and those in the domestic and foreign private sector, not to mention the ideological and political conflicts that lead to the creation of separate trade union organizations¹⁷.

The structure of the labour market in the national economy also contributes to weakening trade union operations. Contract-based labour, flexibility and insecurity, the high unemployment rate, and the permanent threats to public employment lead workers to be on the defensive. As for company unionism, it is at the lowest level in most cases, due to the »populist« nature of company unions affiliated mainly to the UGTA, the Central Organization (Chikhi 1997: 175–213).

Some of these so-called »independent« unions have become bureaucratic along the way and serve as a means of social advancement and promotion. Their only concern is indeed to leverage membership benefits and to obtain secondments for their allies in the grassroots organizations.

In addition, a form of trade union self-sufficiency is leading unions to turn away from national social struggles and societal issues. Indeed, very few unions express their stance on the issue of unemployment raised by the unemployed movement, or Hargha (illegal emigration), or the environment, or even the mass protests against the rise of shale gas activities in the southern part of the country.

¹⁷ »La Question syndicale aujourd’hui en Algérie, compte rendu de la réunion débat du 26 Avril 2014«, (The Union Question Nowadays in Algeria, report of the discussion meeting of 26 April 2014) (<https://www.socialgerie.net/spip.php?breve856>)

ON THE TRADE UNION ELITE

While the old union elite (1960s–1970s) mainly hailed from humble backgrounds (Djabi 1994), the new leaders of the movement, especially after October 1988, are from educated circles. They benefited from the advantages of mass education and upward social mobility after independence. Socially, they are from the middle classes – they are white-collar workers.

Among the leaders, particularly in the independent unions, many already have union experience, either in the student movement or within the UGTA. Some even have political experience in political parties, including the period before 1988. Therefore, presently, the trade union elite is a heterogeneous group with different ideological approaches varying greatly from one field of activity to another.

These individuals essentially emerged in a rather difficult historical phase from a political, economic and security perspective. They strived to stay outside the process of proletarianization of the middle classes and endeavoured to secure a position amid liberal adjustment and a changing regime, which henceforth relied on other wealthier classes for its stability. In fact, they had to fight for their place in the future social contract. The security conditions and the multiple pressures exerted on the labour force prevented the »normal« development of these union elites, particularly in the face of a Central Organization oblivious to employees' democratic and social aspirations.

The conjunction of these elements largely contributed to shaping the trade union identity of these elites. It partly explains their radicalism towards public authorities, which borders on obstinacy, or indeed nihilism in some cases¹⁸.

WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS

According to official statistics, female workers account for 19 % of formal wage earners in Algeria and are mostly present in the public service. Women have generally played an active and aggressive role in strikes, especially in the education, health, and higher education sectors. However, female representation is low in the executive positions of the unions, except in the Council of Secondary Schools of Algeria, which includes several women unionists in both the National Council and the Executive Board. Most unions do not have women's committees, except for the SNAPAP and the UGTA since the early 2000s. These committees work on raising women's awareness of their trade union rights, on the need to organize and lead union campaigns against sexual harassment in the labour world.

This situation is mainly the result of the patriarchal culture ingrained in trade unionism and to gender stereotypes and

the unequal sharing of family responsibilities. City disorder, limitations of the transportation system and family chores contribute to keeping women away from union leadership levels. They do not help women workers or union members to take part in the day-to-day management and guidance of trade union sections, or to play decision-making roles in labour activity at national and local levels. Nevertheless, initiatives to enhance women's trade unionism have emerged in recent years in some unions, such as the UGTA, UNPEF and CLA¹⁹.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE MEDIA

Trade union actors benefited tremendously from the opening up of the media in the early 1990s as they made workers' demands more visible. Generally, the national press reports on strikes and workers' protest movements across the country. As for the standpoint towards these movements, it differs from one daily newspaper to another, depending on its editorial policy and the challenges of the moment. Trade unions progressively discovered the value of media as a »weapon«, as they disseminate information, emphasize demands, deconstruct employers' arguments and thus win the battle over public opinion.

The emergence of private televisions and the development of social networks were an opportunity for trade unions, especially the independent ones, to gain more visibility by accessing millions of Algerian households and for a number of union figures to emerge in the media. Union-affiliated workers in particular and Algerians in general are now discovering, through these new figures, another fairly aggressive and critical trade union discourse towards the government's social policies. During strikes, union leaders are very busy meeting requests by the main broadcast media to give their views. Some have almost become media stars among large swathes of the working-class population.

Trade unions pay special attention to the media because of their role in disseminating information and generating propaganda. Independent unions are also quite active on social networks, including Facebook, where unions and union sections publish their activities, press releases and media contributions on their own pages.

FROM CORPORATISM TO A UNION CONFEDERATION

Corporatism is the trade union approach which limits its union activity to only defending the interests of workers in its professional sector. This approach does not take into account the general context of the labour world and its impact on workers.

¹⁸ Few studies are available on the nature of the Algerian trade union elite. For greater knowledge on the subject, more in-depth investigations are required.

¹⁹ Presently, no study is available on the issue of gender in trade unions; researchers have disregarded the issue. It deserves more attention in future research projects.

In Algeria, a few actors and observers »do not consider corporatism a deformation or deviation or regression but rather a consequence of the liberal globalization in progress, and of the constraints which the Central Organization (the UGTA) is experiencing. At the start of political pluralism State officials even encouraged it. Corporatism is neither a conservative reaction nor the expression of a lack of social awareness. It reflects the need to defend professions downgraded by the market and yet essential to the development of a backward country« (Adel 2006).

The process of moving beyond corporatism took time to materialize on the ground. Independent unions have come a long way since the experience with the National Committee for Trade Union Freedoms (CNLS) in 2004. Independent unions have come together with the goal of defending trade union freedoms in Algeria.

Several attempts were made to cluster unions in order to set up sectoral union coordination units or union confederations, but these experiments did not last because of administrative hurdles and some unionists' strong urge for leadership.

However, in recent years, independent unions' demands have shown a positive qualitative shift. They now contest finance laws, reject attempts to reconsider Algerian workers' gains in the field of retirement and denounce the draft Labour Code. This is a long way from bonus claims for this or that profession. This development served to accelerate another process with the creation of a new trade union unit around a new trade union confederation in Algeria in 2018.

The Confederation of Algerian Trade Unions (the CSA) includes 13 independent unions from different sectors, including five in education. These are the CNAPEST (Independent National Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education), the SNTE (National Union of Education Workers), the SNAPEST (National Independent Union of Secondary and Technical Education Teachers), the CLA (Council of Secondary Schools of Algeria) and the SATEF (National Union of Education and Training Workers).

The CSA also includes the SNPSP (National Union of Public Health Practitioners), the National Union of Veterinarians, the CNES (National Council of Higher Education Teachers), the SNTFP (National Union of Vocational Training Workers), the Union of Postal Workers, the SNTMA (National Union of Aircraft Maintenance Technicians) and the National Union of Imams.

Indeed, this Confederation is the culmination of a long joint effort by member unions. The process dates back to the beginning of 2010, when several joint actions, including strikes, marches and rallies, took place.

For the moment, this Confederation only comprises the 13 member union's leaderships (pyramid structure). Regional meetings will be held in several Wilayas of the country in order to consolidate the structure of the trade union confederation.

The task will not be easy due to a number of objective constraints, in particular internal and leadership struggles among union leaders at national and local levels. The issue of bureaucracy affects not just the Central Organization but independent unions, too. It could also hamper the expansion of the Confederation if it gets out of control.

7

PROSPECTS

Predicting the future of the labour movement in present-day Algeria is not an easy task. The Central Organization is presently in a state of almost total lethargy because of excessive bureaucracy in its vertical and horizontal hierarchy, with its Executive Management, the Wilaya (département) federations and unions. Despite its strength and great potential, the UGTA is crippled by its own bureaucracy, which is closely aligned with the authorities' political and economic interests at local and central levels. Despite the existence of highly militant sectors in the Central Organization and their yearning for independence, the prospects for UGTA empowerment at present are very slim. The various attempts to democratize the UGTA have not only failed but have also ended in protesters losing their spokespersons.

The development of independent trade unions and of the recent Confederation of Independent Trade Unions will depend on the willingness of the acting players to overcome trade union disputes and leadership conflicts, and on public authorities' response to their activity. Trade union leaders would benefit tremendously from training, in particular to gain awareness of issues at global level and understand the complexity of the labour world and other societal issues. Trade unions must strive hard to gain a foothold in the economy, especially in the private sector.

Whilst the political conditions in the country before the popular revolt of 22 February 2019 suggested that the regime would never have recognized the new Trade Union Confederation, the current political situation may present an opportunity for legal recognition. Independent trade unions could also benefit from this new political context to assert themselves in the future as a true social partner. Current developments suggest that the trade union environment is set to see a shake-up, be it among independent unions, or within the UGTA or at public authority level.

Since 22 February 2019, the country has been the scene of a major protest movement against the ruling regime, demanding fundamental political changes. This process is already affecting the political and trade union field and redesigning it. Since 22 February 2019, all independent trade unions and some sections of the UGTA have shown their support for the process of change. They have been taking part in mass mobilizations and calling for sectoral strikes in the public service and across the entire economy.

Greater involvement and mobilization of unions in this revolutionary process is expected in the future, along with major changes in the Central Organization (the UGTA), where local sections are increasingly moving away from the line of the National Secretariat, demanding the democratization of their organization and calling for an extraordinary convention.

Under this popular and union pressure, the Algerian government has started making concessions on issues such as the recognition of independent unions. A government statement affirmed that it was prepared to «examine trade union applications for accreditation submitted to the Ministry of Labour.» As a result, one might expect future official recognition of the CSA (Confederation of Algerian Trade Unions). Ultimately, the evolution of the trade union landscape continues to hinge on overall political developments, where all scenarios are currently conceivable.

ANNEX: TRADE UNIONS ACCREDITED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR

An exhaustive list of the 66 trade union organizations registered at the end of February 2018 by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, in accordance with Law No. 90-14, is appended.

The Ministry recalls that Law No. 90-14 of 2 June 1990, amended and supplemented, concerning the procedures for exercising the right of association defined the terms and conditions for creating trade union organizations and the criteria for their representativeness in employer organizations and at national level.

N°	Name	Acronym	Registration receipt no.	Issued on
01	General Union of Algerian Workers	UGTA	Article 11 of Law no. 90-14 ²⁰	02/06/1990
02	National Independent Union of Public Administration Personnel	SNAPAP	01	09/09/1990
03	National Union of Labour Inspectors	SNAIT	–	–
04	National Union of Education and Training Personnel	UNPEF	47	07/01/1992
05	Independent Union of Workers of Education and Training	SATEF	25	02/01/1991
06	National Union of Education Workers	SNTE	76	15/04/2000
07	Independent National Council of Teachers of Secondary and Technical Education	CNAPESTE	89	10/07/2007
08	National Independent Union of Secondary and Technical Education Teachers	SNAPEST	90	14/07/2007
09	Council of Secondary Schools of Algeria	CLA/CELA	97	02/01/2013
10	National Union of Common Bodies of Professional Workers in Public Education	SNCCOPEN	96	02/01/2013
11	National Independent Union of Teachers of Primary Education	SNAPEP	99	24/10/2013
12	Union of Workers of Education, Teaching and Training	STEEF	15	29/10/1990
13	National Union of Stewardship and Education Personnel	SNPIE	45	04/12/1991
14	National Independent Union of Academic and Vocational Orientation	SNAOSP	27	29/01/1991
15	Independent Union of Tax Officials	SAFI	42	12/11/1991
16	National Union of Magistrates at the Court of Auditors	SNMCC	68	20/03/1996
17	National Union of Public Health Practitioners	SNPSP	37	15/05/1991
18	National Union of Dental Surgeons of Public Health	SNCDSP	61	11/10/1993
19	National Union of Paramedical Education Teachers	SNPEPM	69	24/06/1996
20	National Union of General Practitioners of Public Health	SNMG SP	79	27/10/2001

²⁰ Law N° 90-14 relating to the modalities for the exercise of trade union rights.

N°	Name	Acronym	Registration receipt no.	Issued on
21	National Algerian Union of Psychologists	SNAPSY	87	14/09/2004
22	Algerian Union of Paramedics	SAP	88	14/09/2004
23	National Union of Specialist Practitioners of Public Health	SNPSSP	63	11/10/1993
24	Union of Health Administrators	SGS	77	14/10/2000
25	Independent Union of Administrators of Public Health Facilities	SAGESP	32	05/02/1991
26	National Union of Health Administrators	SNGS	43	11/11/1991
27	Union Confederation of Productive Forces	COSYFOP	30	04/02/1990
28	National Union of Health Workers	SNTS	14	29/10/1990
29	Union of Algerian Airline Pilots	SPLA	23	22/12/1990
30	National Union of Air Traffic Personnel	SNPCA	41	27/07/1991
31	National Union of Aircraft Maintenance Technicians	SNTMA	48	09/03/1992
32	National Union of Electronics Engineers and Electro-Technicians in Aviation Safety	SNESA	65	10/11/1993
33	National Union of Algerian Commercial Flight Crews	SNPNCA	57	24/07/1993
34	Algerian National Transport Union	SNTA	67	23/12/1995
35	National Union of the Rail Transportation Sector	SNSTF	28	04/02/1991
36	National Union of Air Algeria Ground Personnel	SNPS Air Algérie	74	15/04/2000
37	National Union of Marine Officers	SNOMMAR	80	03/03/2003
38	Architects' Trade Union Group	GSA	51	11/04/1992
39	Independent Union of Foreign Affairs Personnel	SAPAE	08	02/10/1990
40	National Council of Higher Education Teachers	CNES	47	07/01/1992
41	National Union of Vocational Training Workers	SNTFP	94	21/05/2012
42	Independent Union of Archaeological, Historical and Museum Heritage	SAPAHM	35	06/04/1991
43	Union of Television Reporters	SJT	22	21/11/1990
44	National Independent Union of APS Journalists and Persons of Equivalent Status	SNAJAAPS	50	21/03/1992
45	National Union of Algerian Journalists	SNJA	71	02/03/1999
46	National Organization of Algerian Sports Reporters	ONJSA	92	15/09/2009
47	National Independent Union of Postal Workers	SNA	22	21/11/1990
48	National Union of the Industry Sector	SNSI	13	17/11/1990
49	National Union of the Ammonia/Fertilizers Sector	SNSA	29	04/02/1991
50	Union of Textile Workers	STT	31	08/01/1991
51	National Union of Workers in the Electricity and Gas Sector (<i>union dissolved voluntarily</i>)	SNATEGS	101	30/12/2013

N°	Name	Acronym	Registration receipt no.	Issued on
56	National Union of Magistrates	SNM	11	27/10/1990
57	National Union: Union of Algerian Magistrates	UMA	33	19/02/1991
58	National Union of Registrars	SNG	19	07/11/1990
59	National Union of Civil Servant Veterinarians	SNVFAP	86	09/05/2004
60	National Union of the Algerian Inter-professional Office for Cereals	SNOAIC	24	22/12/1990
61	National Executives' Union of the Mutual Benefit Fund for Agriculture	SNCM	58	10/10/1993
62	National Union of Civil Protection Workers	SNTPC	09	03/10/1990
63	National Independent Council of Imams and Employees in the Sector of Religious Affairs and Waqfs	CNAIFSARW	102	31/12/2013
64	National Union of University Hospital Teachers-Researchers	SNECHU	93	16/10/2011
65	National Union of Employed Administrators at Local Public Enterprises	SNAGEPL	66	05/01/1994
66	National Union of Energy Workers	SNT Energie	75	15/04/2000

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TRADE UNIONS IN ALGERIA

History, Survey and Options



At the time of settler colonization, Algerians gained the right of association on a discriminatory basis until the start of Algerian trade union pluralism at the dawn of the national revolution. Following independence, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) was founded as the single union. It has operated and fought its corner both under the one-party system and State-controlled economy and in the era of political pluralism and relative economic liberalization.



Following the recognition of trade union pluralism, some sixty independent trade union organizations emerged after 1990 alongside the UGTA, which proceeded with its traditional missions of defending employee social rights in fields where the State had maintained its employer role. However, the UGTA is now facing new challenges resulting from the new constitutional framework, independent trade union competition and the increasing impact of an economic and security crisis.



The UGTA is now in an advanced state of lethargy. Despite its strength and great potential, it is crippled by its own bureaucracy, which is closely aligned with the authorities' political and economic interests at local and central levels. The development of independent trade unions will, however, depend on the willingness of the acting players to overcome trade union disputes and leadership conflicts, and on public authorities' response to their activity. Current developments suggest that the trade union environment is set to see a shake-up – be it among independent unions, within the UGTA or at public authority level.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://algeria.fes.de/>