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Fourth International

Michel Raptis, the struggle for Algeria and the risks of solidarity

- Features -

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The June 1960 arrests of Michel ‘Pablo’ Raptis and his Dutch comrade Sal Santen in Amsterdam triggered a series of revelations regarding the Algeria-solidarity of Fourth International members. Together with a small number of comrades Raptis and Santen organised material support for the Algerian struggle against French colonialism. One aspect of this work was especially controversial: the plan to counterfeit money. The ‘Raptis and Santen case’ led to fierce conflicts within the leadership of the Fourth International and revealed deep-going political differences.

Santen and Raptis were accused of what today would be called ‘supporting a terrorist organisation’, the Algerian independence movement Front de Libération Nationale, FLN. Algeria had been a French colony since 1830. About a million French settlers lived there. Compared to the poverty-stricken, politically disempowered Algerian Muslims, the settlers, though often not very prosperous, were structurally advantaged and in the majority in favour of colonialism. On November 1956 the FLN launched the armed struggle for Algerian independence. The French state responded with brutal violence, the systematic use of torture, large scale terror. But the left was divided over how to react.

Should they call for ‘peace’ or aid the rebels? Large parts of the left rejected the latter option. The French Communist Party had in 1945 supported the repression of anti-colonial revolts in Algeria. This was in continuity with the popular front strategy it had adopted in the 1930s. To preserve its alliance with bourgeois forces, the PCF accepted colonial rule for the time being. As a ‘theoretical’ justification for continued French rule, PCF-leader Maurice Thorez in 1937 argued that an Algerian nation as such did not exist. Rather, Algeria was a ‘nation in formation’, one that would include Algerian Muslims and Jews as well as European settlers. [1]

The ‘Republican Front’ which came to power in 1956 was a coalition of social-liberal and social-democratic parties, with parliamentary support of the PCF. Prime minister at the moment that the FLN launched the armed struggle was Guy Mollet of the SFIO. The PCF was oriented towards forming a government coalition with the social-democrats and succumbed to French nationalism. In 1956 it voted for special powers for colonial authorities. An independent Algeria, the PCF claimed, would easily fall under US influence.

Organising solidarity

The failure of much of the French left and worker’s movement to support the Algerian struggle showed that the idea of ‘organic solidarity’ of the proletariat of the colonialist countries with colonised peoples was an illusion, FLN member Frantz Fanon wrote in late 1957. [2] Abandoned by large parts of the workers’ movement, the FLN did find support among some radical layers. Progressive Christians, dissident Communists and socialists, anarchists and Trotskyists. [3]

In the late fifties, Clara Benoits, a critical PCF member and Henri Benoits, a Fourth International member, in the Renault car factory in Billancourt, created links with Algerian workers and went on to aid the FLN in organising workers. Different Fourth International members organised political support for the Algerian struggle and also provided practical aid. The know-how of Fourth International members was for example instrumental in producing and distributing the early FLN publication *Résistances algériennes*. [4] The France-based poet and translator Sherry Mangan was assigned to assist the Algerians. [5] In Germany the journal *Freies Algerien* was produced by Fourth International supporters. [6] Heinrich Schüller (1901-1962), doctor and member of the Internationalen Kommunisten Österreichs worked in a FLN-run hospital in Tunisia. [7]

Other Fourth International members in Belgium, France and Germany were 'porteurs des valises', the suitcase-carriers who thanks to their European nationality could more easily smuggle papers, money and sometimes weapons for the FLN. The German Jakob Moneta's position as attaché for the West German Embassy in Paris allowed him to smuggle large sums of money, collected among Algerian workers in France. Michel Raptis, then a member of the International Secretariat, was also heavily involved in this solidarity work. Once, together with his German comrade George Jungclas, Raptis transported 200 million old Francs to deposit in a German bank account of the FLN. The large sum attracted the attention of the bank employees so the two were invited to enjoy a cigar in the office of the branch manager. After all, they must have been important customers. [8]

'Tell us what you expect from us, our means are limited but we will do what we can', Raptis had told his FLN contact Mohammed Harbi when they first met. [9] Harbi represented the Fédération de France, the FLN organisation in France. A self-described 'Marxist in a nationalist organisation', Harbi was especially influenced by the heterodox Marxism of Socialisme ou Barbarie, a group that moved from Trotskyism to councillist positions. Familiar with the European workers' movement, Harbi knew how to cultivate links with the dissident left, whether they were dissatisfied PCF members or the Fourth International. Harbi was especially close with Raptis, remembering him as a generous idealist, someone who loved adventure and was horrified by the idea of being merely a bystander. [10]

Practical, proletarian solidarity

Based in Amsterdam since 1958, Raptis was eager to do more. Raptis considered that by giving support to the Algerian struggle, an important goal in itself, the Fourth International could also build itself and break out of its isolation. [11] Raptis had high hopes about the development of a revolutionary Marxist current inside the Algerian movement. But to be credible in the eyes of radicalising Algerians, the Fourth International first had to prove its worth. Raptis came up with different suggestions for this. But his idea to organise volunteers for the FLN along the lines of the international brigades was rejected. The FLN had sufficient fighters. But it was in constant need of forged papers for its work in Europe. Could Raptis maybe help with this? Through Sal Santen, Raptis' close Dutch associate, the right person for the job was found: Ab Oeldrich.

Oeldrich had an illustrious past. Before the war, he had been a member of the Independent Socialist Party (OSP), a left-wing split from social-democracy that had been one of the organisations signing the 1933 Declaration of Four calling for a new international. [12] During the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi-Germany, Oeldrich was a central figure in the underground organisation Groep Gerretsen. [13] Named after a worker who had been killed by police during unrest in Amsterdam in 1934, Groep Gerretsen played a significant role in resistance activities. It produced a large number of forged documents to aid people in hiding from the Nazis and facilitated the production of especially left-wing underground publications. It was a remarkable efficient organisation: only one of its members was caught by the Nazis, and this arrest was not connected to his work for the group. Oeldrich was not a supporter of the Fourth International but remained a left-wing socialist and did not hesitate when he was asked to aid the Algerian struggle. [14]

In the meantime, the Federation de France of the FLN approached Raptis with the question if he could help producing weapons for its fighters. After some hesitation Raptis agreed and asked Jungclas for aid in the ambitious project of organising the production of weapons. The manufacturing sites would be set up in Morocco. Since 1956, Morocco was independent and the FLN could operate relatively freely there. Part of the necessary machinery was bought in Europe. Other equipment came from China. Jungclas travelled back and forth between Europe and North-Africa to organise delivery of equipment and most of all the organisation of workers for the factory.

From different countries, Fourth International members and sympathisers with the required skills went there to produce weapons such as submachine guns. Jungclas and his comrades found for example members of Die Falken,

a youth movement linked to the SPD, who were willing to work in the improvised weapons factory. Others came from the Netherlands. Among them was a Dutch comrade of Santen and Raptis, Max Plekker. In an interview conducted decades later, he is still full of enthusiasm when recalling the 'practical, proletarian' solidarity he and his comrades organised. [15] Purely militarily, the production was of limited importance but that the FLN was able to produce its own weapons boosted the morale of the fighters and signalled to France their determination to continue the struggle. Photos of Houari Boumédiène, chief of staff of the FLN's military wing Armée de libération nationale (ALN) touring the site were distributed as postcards to the fighters. [16]

A 'Jacobin leadership sui generis'

Raptis and his comrades were a small group and it became increasingly difficult for them to carry out all the tasks that they took on. Raptis did not provide much information about his activities to other FI leaders. Partially, this was for security reasons: the fewer people knew about such activities, the better. But Raptis also had political disagreements with other leaders of the FI, such as Pierre Frank and Ernest Mandel. Core to the political disagreements was how to assess the revolutionary potential of the working class in Western Europe and determining where the chance of a revolutionary break through was most present. A comparison between Mandel's writings and those of Raptis in the late 1950s and early 1960s shows considerable differences between the two.

For Mandel, the heartland of the coming socialist revolution needed to be Europe with its developed workers' movement. A classical Marxist, Mandel saw the industrial working class as the social force that not only had the potential, because of its crucial role in production, to revolutionise society but also an 'instinctive' wish to reorganise it along socialist lines. This resulted from how the working class experienced first hand the contradictions of a production process that became increasingly complex and 'socialised', even as workers remained dominated and profits continued to be appropriated by the capitalist class. Mandel summed this up as how 'on the one hand, the increasing division of labour tears apart total social labour power into innumerable types of private labour' while 'on the other hand, the growing interpenetration of economic life across an ever wider field leads to the objective socialisation of labour'. [17]

Raptis on the other hand put more emphasis than Mandel on the transformative role of struggle and was more sensitive to the radical potential of sectors that were not part of the industrial proletariat. This led him to stress the revolutionary potential of working people who were not part of the industrial proletariat, such as agricultural labourers and poor peasants in the colonised countries. Their deprivation stood in sharp contrast to that of European workers basking in a 'somewhat euphoric economic climate'. Economic prosperity, Raptis claimed, dampened the class struggle. [18]

For Raptis, the Algerian struggle was distinct from other national liberation struggles in Africa. The FLN's fight against French colonialism had taken on a mass character and Raptis considered it 'obvious' that 'both the revolutionary Marxist tendency and the essential forces of a mass Labour Party of tomorrow' would emerge from the 'inevitable social and political differentiation' within the FLN. [19] Raptis expected the plebeian base of the FLN, consisting of agricultural labourers and poor peasants as well as craftsmen and workers from the cities, to increasingly adopt socially radical positions as the struggle developed. Responding in an open letter to the US SWP, who had criticised the FLN, Mangan expressed such views in a particular explicit fashion, writing that it was 'objectively preparing the socialist Algeria and socialist Middle East of tomorrow' by organising the mass struggle for independence. [20] The numerical preponderance of plebeian strata over petty-bourgeois and bourgeois leaders in the FLN was crucial. This would cause the Algerian revolution to be 'far deeper' and far less likely to be controlled by the bourgeoisie. The course of the struggle itself would favour increasing social radicalisation. Or so Raptis thought.

On different occasions, Raptis engaged with the ideas of Frantz Fanon in a critical yet sympathetic fashion. Fanon argued that the most oppressed layers of society would also be the most revolutionary ones. This applied especially

to the poor peasantry: they alone, Fanon stressed in *The Wretched of the Earth*, are revolutionary in the colonised countries 'for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonisation and decolonisation are simply a question of relative strength'. [21] The proletariat of the colonised societies were, in Fanon's eyes, 'among the most protected stratum of the colonial regime'; 'the embryonic proletariat of the towns is relatively privileged.' [22] This would cause it to take only moderate positions in the national movement. In a kind of dialectical reversal, for Fanon the most complete oppression results in the most radical revolutionaries. This approach tended to equate militancy, the willingness to fights, with political radicalism.

In a review of *The Wretched of the Earth* Raptis largely accepted Fanon's interpretation of the role of the poor peasantry and the proletariat, although with some qualifications. [23] Raptis stressed the need for Algeria's revolution to link up with the international workers' movement. In Algeria's case, Raptis thought as well that a 'jacobin leadership *sui generis* with a national-revolutionary ideology', such as that of the FLN, could by basing itself on the poor peasantry, initiate and for a period lead the revolutionary struggle. But a 'revolutionary Marxist leadership should do as much or more'. Raptis expected the 'automatic' radicalisation resulting from the hardships of the Algerian struggle to foster an audience for Marxist politics inside the FLN.

This expectation determined Raptis' approach to solidarity work. He had as his priority winning the sympathy of radical FLN supporters by showing that the Fourth International was to be taken serious as a revolutionary organisation. This meant that when FLN leaders approached Raptis with requests, he saw it not as his task to evaluate their plans but to organise the practical aid they requested.

Betrayal

Raptis received support from a small group of Dutch comrades. In the first place from Sal Santen (1915 – 1998). Santen was the son in law of Henk Sneevliet, the revolutionary socialist leader murdered by the Nazis. Aid also came from Maurice Ferares. Ferares would later say he had done nothing more than 'office jobs' for the two. But according to Dutch police, Ferares played a central role in activities of the group as he handled the money necessary for forging papers and buying equipment for the arms manufacturing. According to police files, the total amount was nearly a million guilders – adjusted to inflation, that would be almost four million euros! [24]

This small group was not able to fulfil all the requests that were made of them but especially Raptis was anxious not to disappoint the FLN. Raptis pressured Santen to find more help, and Santen in turn put pressure on Oeldrich to work faster. Searching for additional help, Oeldrich made a mistake that was fatal for the entire operation.

Without telling others, and against the urgings of Santen, Oeldrich approached Joop Zwart for help. At first sight, Zwart would have seemed a suitable candidate. He had received training at the Comintern's Lenin School before breaking with the Communist Party and joining Sneevliet's Revolutionary Socialist Party. During the Spanish Civil War, Zwart had fought alongside the anarchists against Franco's fascists. Zwart spent most of the Second World War in a concentration camp. The Nazis gave prisoners different tasks in the running of the camp. Because of Zwart's language skills (in addition to Dutch, he spoke German, French, Spanish and Russian), he was made an interpreter and worked in the camp administration. Zwart was able to use his position to help other prisoners by providing information and fudging records. Obviously, if the Nazis had found out anything about this, Zwart would have been killed immediately.

After the war, Zwart had a large network of people he had been able to help in the camp. But this network also raised doubts in left circles. There were persistent rumours that Zwart, who had now joined the social-democratic Labour

Party (PvdA), was in contact with Western intelligence services. Oeldrich was undeterred by such rumours. After all, he himself had also cooperated with the political police searching for Nazis and collaborators. But what was for Oeldrich only a brief episode developed for Zwart into a sustained cooperation, as would become clear later. [25]

The Osnabrück operation

In the meantime, a new plan had taken shape, apparently originating from Omar Boudaoud and Ali Haroun of the Federation de France. [26] In France, 100 Franc bills were about to be replaced and during a transition period, both new and old bills would be in circulation. Would it not be possible to counterfeit Francs on a large scale? It would take some time for people to get used to the new notes, and counterfeit money could easily be circulated through the thousands of Algerians working in France. France was already under high stress, and perhaps a large amount of counterfeit money would lead to even more unrest, maybe even an economic crisis?

With money from the FLN, a secret print shop was set up in the German town Osnabrück. Oeldrich would lead the team that would operate the printing presses. Hubertus Hompe, who had been recruited by Zwart to help with forging, would join him there. Hompe was not interested in politics but was unemployed and had relevant skills. For help in setting up the Osnabrück print shop, Oeldrich reached out to his old German contact Helmut Schneeweiss. Schneeweiss had joined the KPD in the twenties and had been a member of the Red Front Fighters' League (Rotfrontkämpferbund, RFB). After the RFB was dissolved by the authorities in 1929, he continued in the militant organisations of the party. He was expelled from the KPD because, in violation of the ultra-sectarian Third Period orientation, he cooperated with other revolutionary organisations in the organisation of joint defence against the Nazis. [27] Schneeweiss joined the Trotskyist movement and spend the war in hiding in the Netherlands. There, he had worked together with Oeldrich, before returning to Germany in 1945. [28]

But before the first run of bank notes were finished, the police intervened. Hompe, Oeldrich, Schneeweiss and Ahmed Abbas, their FLN contact, were arrested. Less than two hours later, the arrests in Amsterdam followed.

It quickly became clear that the operation had been betrayed to the police. Hompe had told the German police everything. Shortly after his arrest, he was released at the Dutch border without being charged. In his testimony during the trial of Raptis and Santen, Hompe confirmed he had had regular meetings with the police. According to Hompe, Zwart was in contact with Dutch intelligence, the BVD, and had told Hompe to contact the German police. Claiming to have acted on instructions of Zwart, Hompe struck everyone as hopelessly naive. The somewhat pathetic figure of Hompe was a striking contrast to the confident Zwart who delighted in antagonising Raptis with sarcastic remarks. Zwart declared to the police that he had gotten involved in the counterfeiting operation with the goal of gathering the names of the people involved and informing the authorities. [29] During his trial, Zwart was questioned behind closed doors and in December 1961 he was acquitted.

An international campaign

The revelations about the counterfeiting led to unrest among Raptis and Santen's comrades. Could this plan, which seemed to come very close to vulgar crime, be explained to sympathisers of the movement? Was the plan not doomed to failure and what would this mean for the work of the Fourth International and its sections? Maurice Ferares was deeply disappointed by what he considered to be a lack of nerves and mistaken priorities. [30] Raptis and Santen were detained and risked long prison sentences. Ferares had not been arrested but was closely watched by intelligence and worried about reprisals from French colonialists. In several European countries, FLN members and people in contact with them became victims of attacks. And both Santen and Ferares were Jewish and many of

their loved ones had been murdered by the Nazis. The renewed stress brought up existing traumas.

For the trial, a strategy was adopted in which Santen and Raptis would claim not to be involved with forging money, the charge that could bring them the longest sentence, but would express their political support for the Algerian struggle. In court, they two declared that confronted with the horrors of the colonial war in Algeria, they saw no other moral choice than support the Algerians, including with forged papers. The position of Raptis, a Greek citizen, was especially precarious and Santen tried to shoulder as much responsibility as possible.

Ferares energetically set about organising solidarity with the two. If enough attention could be drawn, the trial could serve to draw attention to the Algerian struggle. That way, a defeat could become a victory. Internationally, declarations of support were collected. From Chile came a declaration of support from Salvador Allende, then a trade union leader, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Jorge Amado declared their solidarity, as did dock workers from Sri Lanka and Communist MPs from Indonesia. The strategy of the defence did create some difficult situations. The statements of the defence were worded in such a way that sympathisers could conclude that the accusation of money forging was made up.

In the Netherlands, organising solidarity was a difficult task. Dutch supporters of the Fourth International were a minuscule group. The Communist Party of the Netherlands CPN sympathised with the struggle of the 'Algerian patriots' but obviously harboured the usual Stalinist hatred for Trotskyists. Party newspaper *De Waarheid* wrote suggestively about the 'obscure affairs' Santen and Raptis were involved in.

There were exceptions. Their lawyer J.H. Smeets received help from lawyer and PvdA senator George Cammelbeeck, a left-wing maverick in the party. Further support came from circles of the 'Brug-groep', a group of dissident Communists who would largely end up in the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP) after leaving the CPN in 1958. Despite its name, part of this left-socialist party was not dogmatically pacifist. In the event of occupation, resistance was justified, and support for it did not require approval of all the FLN's methods.

During the trial, the prosecutor and judge declared they were convinced that Raptis and Santen were not out for their own gain. But of course this did not excuse their involvement in criminal activities... Santen and especially Raptis took the opportunity to talk about their political motivations. Raptis emphasised how people fighting against colonialism were in the vanguard of a historic struggle. This struggle would bring the colonised to 'rush through stages' of history, and hasten the coming of socialism. And regarding Algeria, 'were "civilised" Western Europeans aware of what was happening there?', asked Raptis in his statement to the court; 'do they know the massacres and torture of the past seven years, do they know that there are a million dead on the Algerian side', how 'our civilisation is just a veneer that one only needs to remove to discern an incredible amount of cruelty, violence and injustice towards our oppressed and exploited coloured brother peoples?'. [31]

Of the different charges against the two, the court found them guilty only of provoking others to counterfeit money. The two were eventually sentenced to 15 months in prison in 1961, which meant they were released shortly after the trial. The defence of the two had had a card to play: they had access to a mysterious box with documents collected by Oeldrich while investigating Nazi-collaborators for the Political Investigation Service in the aftermath of the Second World War. The information in these documents was rumoured to be extremely embarrassing for several people in high places – even the name of Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld, husband of queen Juliana and former member of the NSDAP was mentioned. [32] In secret meetings with the minister of justice, the defence negotiated a limited sentence in return for the documents.

In the Osnabrück case, where on urging of the FLN the defendants had refrained from political statements and the accused were charged with direct involvement in counterfeiting money, Abbas and Schneeweiss were sentenced to two years, Oeldrich to two-and-a-half.

What went wrong

After their release, Raptis and Santen would soon go separate ways. After Algeria finally gained independence, Raptis became an advisor to the new government led by Ben Bella. Santen idealized Raptis and was crestfallen when, after their release, Raptis did not bring him with him to Algeria. Although no longer a member of the Fourth International after 1965 Raptis remained a revolutionary throughout his life. Sal Santen retired from politics. He described his experiences in his somewhat fictionalised memoirs *Adios Companeros* and became a writer. In his work, he kept alive the memory of the world that he came from, that of the Dutch Jewish proletariat, destroyed by the Nazis. His comrade Maurice Ferares remained active in the socialist left. The struggle against colonialism especially remained an important part of his political engagement. Ferares passed away in 2022, almost 101 years old. After his release from prison, Oeldrich retired from politics. A few years before his death in 1985, Oeldrich and his wife Leny were decorated for their role in the resistance against Nazi-Germany. When they were informed that Prince Bernard would personally hand out the decorations, they asked them to be sent by mail instead.

The Raptis-Santen affair is today often remembered as something of a farce. Surely they could not have thought that a single print shop could destabilise the French economy? The miserable denouement of the whole affair, with accusations of betrayal going back and forth, seemed to show this was the work of a bunch of amateurs. In his novelised retelling of the affair, Ferares has Raptis declare that 'what we are doing is indeed amateurish. Amateurism for lack of the ability to do better. Everyone is letting the Algerians drop dead, literally and figuratively. If we also did not do anything, would that help them?' [\[33\]](#)

But during the war, Santen had been involved with Oeldrich's Group Gerretsen while Raptis had been a central figure in Trotskyist activities in France. Ferares had been a Communist Party member and took part in, among other activities, the February strike. [\[34\]](#) In other words, those involved had experience with underground activities in dangerous circumstances and parts of their Algeria solidarity activities were rather well organised. Oeldrich had, according to German police files, produced thousands of forged papers including cartes nationale d'identité, employee passes and payment slips for Algerians in France, as well as dozens of replicas of official stamps. [\[35\]](#) The arms production, a truly ambitious project, had been a success. As for the money forging, Ferares, Santen and Raptis all, at different times, said they never believed this would actually destabilise the French economy; they had simply tried to realise the plans of FLN leaders. Technically, the operation was rather impressive. The equipment gathered by Oeldrich was first rate, an expert witness declared during the Osnabrück trial. [\[36\]](#)

The ignominious end of the money forging operation has coloured how today the solidarity work led by Raptis is remembered. After the arrests the whole organisation quickly fell apart. After his arrest, as it became clear that Hompe had informed the police, Oeldrich made extensive statements to the police. After hearing this, a furious Abbas attacked Oeldrich in the jail. How could someone who had once faced the Nazis behave in such a way, Abbas wondered. [\[37\]](#)

Oeldrich's behaviour was indeed puzzling. Not only did he make extensive statements to the police, he also described in some detail his difficult relation with Raptis. [\[38\]](#) It seems Oeldrich felt let down by him. Raptis had supposedly promised that Oeldrich's family would be taken care of while the latter was working full-time for the Algeria project, but this promise was not kept. [\[39\]](#) Oeldrich also claimed that Raptis told him to pad the bills of equipment and supplies when declaring expenses to the FLN in order to funnel extra money to the Fourth International. Oeldrich felt that for Raptis, solidarity with Algeria came second to promoting the Fourth International, a political project that Oeldrich had no sympathy for. Confronted with Oeldrich's statements, Santen and Raptis felt betrayed and tried to undermine Oeldrich's credibility by labelling him a habitual liar.

The fundamental cause for the collapse of the project was that Hompe, guided by Zwart in the background, had betrayed everything. Why did Oeldrich involve Zwart, even against the urging of Santen? The history of the Groep

Gerretsen provides a clue to explaining Oeldrich's mistake. One reason why the Groep Gerretsen had been so secure, according to its historian Bart de Cort, is that the organisation relied on the personal relations between people who had met in the pre-war left-socialist movement and had known each-other for years. But the Algeria solidarity work was organised without such a network. Oeldrich had initially approached other former Groep Gerretsen members for help but those refused for different reasons.

Raptis, Santen and Ferares also did not have a network of trusted contacts as they operated independently from other Fourth International members. Even a comrade like George Jungclas, who had played such an important role in organising the weapons production and who had gained the respect of FLN members like Abbas, was kept ignorant of the Osnabrück operation. By 1960, West-Germany functioned as a kind of sanctuary for FLN representatives. Diplomatic activity was an essential part of the FLN's struggle and the West-German government tried to balance its alliance with France with an attempt to maintain contact with the FLN. By this time, it had become clear to West-German authorities that in way or another, the FLN would play an important role in the future of Algeria. A certain understanding had been reached between the FLN and West German authorities: FLN members would not be deported to France, and the FLN would abstain from illegal activities on German soil. [\[40\]](#) The Osnabrück operation obviously violated this unofficial agreement. This is probably the reason why the German comrades were left in the dark about the Osnabrück operation.

Of the other members of the central leadership of the Fourth International such as Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitan, only Pierre Frank would later say that he been made aware of the Osnabrück operation, and this through 'unofficial' channels. Maitan wrote in his political memoirs that he had been unaware of the operation and at the time of Raptis's release, told him about his disagreement with it. [\[41\]](#) Raptis later said that he had informed Mandel. Mandel, whose expectations of the Algerian revolution had always been far more modest than those of Raptis, later denied knowledge of the plan. It is possible that Raptis told Mandel only in broad outlines of it. Had Mandel known the full details of the plan, he would probably have opposed it.

Rather than inform the FLN leaders that their wishes exceeded the means of the Fourth International, or contact his comrades and risk they would reject his plans, Raptis increasingly put pressure on Santen, who in turn looked to Oeldrich. Lacking the necessary resources, Oeldrich fell back on less trusted relations such as Zwart.

Afterwards, suspicions of Raptis and Santen that Hompe and Zwart were not the only ones who were involved with intelligence services were confirmed. Since the mid-fifties, Helmut Schneeweiss had been an informer for the East-German Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the secret police better known as the Stasi. Schneeweiss was one of several informers of Stasi operation 'Abschaum' ('scum') that specifically targeted left-oppositionist groups. He informed the Stasi about developments in the Fourth International and provided detailed information on its Algeria solidarity work, including on the Osnabrück project that led to his own arrest. [\[42\]](#)

What did the Stasi do with this information? During his interrogation, a commissioner told Santen that the police had received information from the other side of the iron curtain. [\[43\]](#) Was this, as Santen thought at the time, only an attempt to intimidate him? Or did the Stasi share information with their colleagues on the other side to ensure the FLN would not be indebted to Trotskyist 'scum'? The Stasi did care enough to have its spy Otto Freitag, who had infiltrated the German Lambertists, in 1962 slander Santen and Raptis as employees of West-German intelligence. [\[44\]](#)

End of the revolution

'I have not met other Marxists who to such a degree made the Algerian revolution into something sacred', Harbi

wrote of Raptis. [45] For Raptis, support for the Algerian struggle had been not only an opportunity for the Fourth International to find new recognition and support. Raptis believed that Algeria and the FLN were becoming the centre of a new, international revolutionary process. As advisor to the new FLN government, he supported a socialist course in which workers' self-government was central. Initially, it might have seemed as if Raptis' expectations could come out. In June 1962, the FLN adopted the Tripoli programme. It declared that 'the inevitable counterpart of totalitarian colonialist oppression thus confronted can only be the immediate and automatic calling into question of the entire oppressed society.' Such questioning would 'simultaneously and unfailingly' be accompanied by a search for 'new structures, new ways of thinking and acting'. [46] With such Fanonian rhetoric, the program proclaimed socialism as the FLN's goal.

But the military leadership, which earlier had been instrumental in bringing Ben Bella to power, favoured a more conservative course and decided to concentrate power in its own hands. The army leadership, in alliance with parts of the state bureaucracy and supported by some businessmen, took power in June 1965. The coup was quickly followed by the repression of supporters of the previous socialist orientation. Raptis and other international supporters of a socialist orientation of the FLN were forced to leave the country and the left-wing of the FLN was repressed. Raptis' old friend Harbi was arrested and put under house arrest. [47]

After escaping Algeria in 1973, Harbi in several books developed a critical analysis of the FLN in an attempt to understand why the hoped for radicalisation towards socialism had never taken place. [48] According to Harbi, the FLN as a movement indeed had as its base largely rural workers and poor peasants, but that peasants made up of the social base of the FLN did not mean they were in control of it and said even less about the political line of the movement. The FLN leadership rather adopted a political line and programme that denied class differences inside the Algerian nation. This leadership came essentially from the rural petty bourgeoisie who claimed to speak on behalf of 'the people'. Such layers were not part of the urban elites who had previously dominated the nationalist movement but, thanks to their class background and education, they were also alienated from the peasants and agricultural labourers who they led and tended to distrust. Such uprooted members of the petty bourgeoisie on the one hand rhetorically identified themselves with the peasantry but on the other hand were hostile to any kind of control from below and led through authoritarian means. [49] Their rhetoric about 'non-capitalist development' had nothing to do with socialism. [50]

As the war continued, the FLN leadership based inside Algeria gradually became less important than the leadership abroad and in the 'army of the frontiers', ALN units based near Algeria's borders. Even before France finally had to admit its defeat, a 'proto-state' was formed that, after independence and a transitional period, in 1965 monopolised power with Boumédiène's coup d'État. Once in power, people like Boumedienne and his second-in-command Bouteflika could easily abandon the Fanonian rhetoric that they previously used to gain legitimacy. [51] The Algerian revolution was 'made by the people, for the cadres', Harbi concluded. But when he was asked years later if he had any regrets about joining the FLN, Harbi answered he had none; there had been no other option. [52]

Raptis had put too much faith in how the demands of the struggle would supposedly facilitate turning nationalists into socialists. At times, he had fallen into romanticising the Algerian people, 'these mountain peasants, as poor as they are proud, these workers from the Algerian towns and from the metropolis', who through their sacrifice and suffering 'leaped in the very heart of the most advanced problems and aspirations of our century'. [53] Carried along by his hopes for the Algerian revolution, convinced that he was right, Raptis had made promises he could not keep, putting his comrades under increasing pressure until the project collapsed. This was a serious mistake, but the ultimate failure of this project should not blind us to the contributions Raptis and his comrades made to Algerian independence.

6 August 2025

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[1] Jakob Moneta, *Die Kolonialpolitik der französischen KP*, Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1968, p. 101.

[2] Frantz Fanon (eds. Jean Khalfa and Robert J. C. Young Anthology), *The Political Writings from Alienation and Freedom*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, p. 31.

[3] Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des frères. Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie*, Paris: Syllepse, 2002.

[4] Sylvain Pattieu, 'Le 'camarade' Raptis, la IVe Internationale, et la guerre d'Algérie', *Revue historique*, 2001/3 n° 619, p. 695-729, p. 701.

[5] Alan M. Wald, *The Revolutionary Imagination. The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983, pp. 228, 229.

[6] *Von der proletarischen Freidenkerjugend im Ersten Weltkrieg zur Linken der siebziger Jahre, Georg Jungclas. 1902-1975: Eine politische Dokumentation*, Hamburg: Junius, 1980, p. 244-246.

[7] Fritz Keller, *Solidarität der österreichischen Linken mit der algerischen Widerstandsbewegung*, PhD thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2010, p. 154, 155.

[8] Claus Leggewie, *Kofferträger. Das Algerien- Projekt der Linken im Adenauer- Deutschland*, Berlin: Rotbuch, Verlag, 1984, p. 104-105.

[9] Mohammed Harbi, *Une vie debout. Mémoires politiques. Tome 1: 1945-1962*, Paris: La Découverte, 2001, p. 228.

[10] Harbi, *Une vie debout*, p. 228.

[11] Hall Greenland, *The Well-Dressed Revolutionary. The Odyssey of Michel Pablo in the age of uprisings*, London/Amsterdam: Resistance Books/IIRE, 2023, p. 86

[12] 'The Declaration of Four, On the Necessity and Principles of a New International', August 1933, online: marxists.org/history/etol/document/1930s/four.htm

[13] Bart de Cort. *De Groep Gerretsen. Kroniek van een verzetsgroep*, Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1998

[14] Sylvain Pattieu describes Ab Oeldrich as a 'libertarian' and a former member of the International Brigades (*Les camarades des frères*, p. 148). This seems to result from confusion with another Dutchman, Joop Zwart (see below).

[15] See the documentary *Ernest Mandel: a life for the revolution* by Chris Den Hond, online: youtube.com/watch?v=LXFFcJQSLrk. The interview with Plekker is around min 20.15.

[16] Leggewie, *Kofferträger*, p. 122.

[17] Ernest Mandel, 'The strategy of transitional demands', 1971, online: iire.org/node/1078.

[18] Greenland, *The Well-Dressed Revolutionary*, p. 90, 91

- [19] Michel Raptis, 'The Arab Revolution', *Fourth International*, 1959, p. 47
- [20] Patrick O'Daniel (pseudonym), 'The Truth about the Algerian Revolution. An open letter to "The Militant"', *Fourth International*, Spring 1958, 2, p. 41-50. Walden, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, pp. 228, 229.
- [21] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, p. 61.
- [22] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 108, 109.
- [23] Michel Raptis, 'Colonials' and 'Europeans', *Fourth International*, 15, May-July 1962, pp. 30-34
- [24] The extensive Dutch security service file on Maurice Ferarès contains a list of transfers made through his account to purchase printing equipment and machinery intended for the weapons production. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst en Voorgangers, Persoonsdossiers, nummer toegang 2.04.125, inventarisnummer 40878.
- [25] Igor Cornelissen, *Alleen tegen de wereld. Joop Zwart, de geheimzinnigste man van Nederland*. Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 2003. Zwart's exact involvement with intelligence services remains unclear – not without reason his biographer labelled him 'the most mysterious man of the Netherlands'. Zwart kept moving to the right and towards the end of his life in 1991 had ended up in far-right and racist circles.
- [26] Ali Haroun, *La 7e Wilaya—La guerre du FLN en France 1954-1962*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986, p. 33
- [27] For Schneeweiss' activities in pre-war German Trotskyism, see: Wolfgang Alles, *Für Einheitsfront gegen Faschismus: Zur Politik und Geschichte der Linken Opposition ab 1930*, Köln: Neuer ISP Verlag, 2022.
- [28] De Cort, *De Groep Gerretsen*, p. 75.
- [29] *De Waarheid*, 1960, 'Zwart drukte valse persoonsbewijzen in overleg met BVD', November 16, p. 4.
- [30] Jan Willem Stutje, Ernest Mandel. *Rebel tussen droom en daad*, Houtekiet: Antwerpen, 2007, p. 155.
- [31] Defense de Michel Raptis (Pablo) devant le tribunal d'Amsterdam, 1960.
- [32] Jan Willem Stutje, Ernest Mandel. p. 159. Prince Bernhard (1911-2004) always denied being a NSDAP-member. In 2023, the royal palace confirmed the authenticity of a NSDAP-membership card showing he was a member from 1933 to 1936: 'Nazi card proves Dutch Prince Bernhard joined Hitler's party', BBC News, October 5, 2023, online: [bbc.com/news/world-europe-67017311](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67017311).
- [33] Maurice Ferarès, *Moussebillines. Vrijwilligers voor de dood*, Arnhem: ABIGADOR, 2007.
- [34] Alex de Jong, 'When Dutch Workers Took a Stand Against Nazi Genocide', *Jacobinmag*, 2022, online: jacobin.com/2022/02/dutch-workers-nazi-genocide-maurice-ferares-world-war-ii-history-strike.
- [35] De Cort, *De Groep Gerretsen*, p. 74.
- [36] Leggewie, *Kofferträger*, p. 135.
- [37] Ali Haroun, *La 7e Wilaya - La guerre du FLN en France 1954-1962*, p. 338
- [38] These statements were used in the trial against Raptis and Santen. The Sal Santen archive in the IISG Amsterdam contains transcripts of the interrogations.

[39] De Cort, *De Groep Gerretsen*, p. 109.

[40] Mathilde von Boluw describes West-Germany as a 'sanctuary' for FLN activists, albeit one that became increasingly precarious. Mathilde von Boluw, West Germany, *Cold War Europe and the Algerian War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

[41] Livio Maitan, *Memoirs of a Critical Communist. Towards a History of the Fourth International*, Dagenham: Merlin Press, 2019, p. 75.

[42] Günter Wernicke, 'Operativer Vorgang "Abschaum". Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MmfS) und die deutschen Trotzlisten in den 1950er Jahren' in: Andreas G. Graf (ed), *Anarchisten gegen Hitler. Anarchisten, Anarcho-Syndikalisten, Rätekommunisten in Widerstand und Exil*, Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2001, p. 281-299, p. 292

[43] Sal Santen, *Dapper zijn omdat het goed is*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Bezige Bij, 1994, p. 19-20.

[44] Lucas Federer, *Zwischen Internationalismus und Sachpolitik. Die trotzkistische Bewegung in der Schweiz, 1945-1968*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022, chapter 5.3, 'Der Fall Freitag', pp. 173-185. Freitag's accusations were picked up by *De Waarheid*, the paper of the Dutch Communist Party, and the French *L'Humanité*. Santen's letter rejecting the accusations against Raptis and him was published in the FI's internal bulletin of April 3, 1962; online: marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/international-bulletin/ib-v01n17-apr-3rd-1962.pdf.

[45] Harbi, *Une vie debout*, p. 228.

[46] Le Programme de Tripoli * Impressions et problemes de la révolution algérienne, par Michel Pablo, Parti Communiste Internationaliste, 1962, p. 10.

[47] See especially chapter eight of Catherine Simon, *Algérie, les années Pieds-rouges. Des rêves de l'indépendance au désenchantement (1962 – 1969)*, Paris: La Découverte, 2010.

[48] Mohammed Harbi, *Aux origines du Front de Libération Nationale: le populisme révolutionnaire en Algérie*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1975 and Mohammed Harbi, *Le FLN, mirage et réalité: Des origines à la prise du pouvoir (1945-1962)*, Paris: Editions j.a., 1980

[49] Harbi, *Le FLN, mirage et réalité*, p. 318.

[50] Mohammed Harbi, *Autogestion en Algérie: Une autre révolution? (1963-1965)*, Paris: Syllepse, 2022, p. 15.

[51] Mirage, *Le FLN*, p. 318.

[52] Adam Shatz, Mohammed Harbi, 'An Interview with Mohammed Harbi', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 301-309, p. 304.

[53] Michel Pablo, 'The Permanent Revolution in Algeria', *Fourth International*, No. 8, Winter 1959–60, p. 58, online: marxists.org/archive/Raptis/1959/12/algeria.htm.