

Tunisian products which used to be sold to Libya; and Algiers' increased contribution to the Arab Maghreb Development Bank. In addition, decisions were taken concerning the development and expansion of joint economic projects in the southern regions of both countries.

The military side of this cooperation was made very visible. On Sept. 4, a Tunisian military delegation led by Defense Minister Salaheddin Baly was received in Algiers. The following day, an Algerian military delegation was received by the Tunisian chief of staff, General Youssef Baraket.

The same strong message was sent on Sept. 4 when Chief of U.S. Naval Operations Adm. James D. Watkins personally traveled to Monastir to meet with President Bourguiba, Prime Minister Mzali, Defense Minister Salaheddin Baly, Chief of Staff Youssef Baraket, and the chief of the Tunisian Navy, Captain Habib Fadhila. Offering President Bourguiba a sword as a "symbol of the continuous support between the United States and Tunisia, and of the deep friendship between the two countries," Admiral Watkins stressed that he was "very honored to meet your very courageous President to express our admiration, our sympathy, and our continual support in this critical moment."

At the very same moment, units of the U.S. Sixth Fleet along with one vessel from the French fleet were being deployed around Tunisia's international waters, in a display of support.

The varying degrees of support Tunisia continues to receive, underscores the fact that the defense of Tunisia has become more than a local problem, and is now assuming international strategic proportions. Tunisia has so far received firm commitments of total support from such countries as Jordan, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. The PLO organization of Yasser Arafat held a press conference on Sept. 4 in Tunis to denounce the expulsion of Tunisian workers. On Sept. 5, Abdel Hamid Bakkoush, head of the Libyan Liberation Organization based in Cairo, also sent a telegram of support to the Tunisian government against Libya.

On the same day as Admiral Watkins' visit, the Tunisian weekly *Ashourouk* wrote that the United States was ready to attack Libya if Tunisia's borders were violated in any way. The weekly reported that the Schiller Institute of Helga Zepp-LaRouche "has indicated that President Reagan has received hundred of telegrams from within the United States and abroad, urging him to adopt a firm position toward the Libyan threats of aggression against Tunisia. . . . These telegrams have confirmed that the United States will, in no way, accept an aggression against such a friendly country as Tunisia!"

There is little chance that Qaddafi's dream of invading Tunisia will ever be realized. However, as the Tunisian prime minister revealed on Sept. 4, the danger of sabotage and terrorism is still very much at hand. On Sept. 6, the Tunisian government presented to the press three Libyan terrorists, arrested with their weapons, who planned to bomb some of the industries around Tunis, including oil depots.

Bourguiba receives

by Thierry Lalevée

As most Tunisians will tell you, the present crisis can be summarized in a nutshell: "Libya began massively expelling Tunisian workers on Aug. 5, the very same day that the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) called for a general strike against the government." Mere coincidence, or convergence, or internationally organized plot? No one within the government has yet come forward with a definitive answer. Pending additional elements, officials are sticking to a denunciation of this "convergence," as did Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali on Sept. 4, before of a several-thousand-strong gathering of militants of the ruling Destour party during a "national solidarity" conference.

However, while the immediate military threat from Libya has been contained, Tunisian officials are gearing up to face the second phase of what they consider a plot to destabilize their country: Libyan-sponsored commando operations and renewed social agitation instigated by UGTT chairman Habib Achour. As a warning, Mzali reminded his audience on Sept. 4 of the proven plots which the government has foiled in recent years: the January 1978 wave of riots which, with full financing from Libya, aimed at destabilizing the Tunisian economy; the January 1980 Libyan commando operation in the city of Gafsa in central Tunisia, which aimed at creating a "liberated" zone for unleashing a full-fledged Libyan-type revolution in the country; and the January 1984 food riots which were manipulated by then-Interior Minister Driss Guiga, who attempted to overthrow the government before fleeing into exile in Paris and London.

Ever since Tunisia's independence, Habib Achour's UGTT, the main trade union associated with the Neo-Destour party of President Habib Bourguiba, has played an essential role in most of these crises. After the January 1978 riots, Achour himself spent a few years in jail before being reinstated as the trade union's chairman. The government, as a good-will gesture, did not oppose this decision, but instead began to build up rival trade union federations. In the same spirit, while Mzali fiercely denounced Achour's policies on Sept. 4, he was careful to draw a line between the UGTT leader, the rest of the leadership, and its membership, who consist of industrial workers from the north of Tunisia who,

popular support

if they are not members of the Destour party, are at least supporters of President Bourguiba.

In fact, during August, at the peak of the crisis with Libya, while Achour continued to call for general strikes in several sectors of the economy, such as transportation, the strikes received very little support. The spirit of national reconciliation or "solidarity" against the external threat, was more widespread in the population than Achour had expected. In warning, the Tunisian government decided on Aug. 30 to cancel the 1% tax which, since independence, had been taken from all wages as a state-imposed contribution to the UGTT. Achour, who should have known better, denounced this move as "criminal."

There are several political calculations behind what is expected to be a head-on confrontation in coming weeks between Achour and the government. Uppermost in Achour's mind is the fight for the succession to President Habib Bourguiba. It is an open secret that Achour covets that position. And if that cannot be achieved, Achour wants another member of his political faction to be nominated. Heading the list is former Foreign Minister Mohammed Masmoudi, who in September 1983 declared Achour his favored candidate for the presidency.

Mohammed Masmoudi, who lives in exile in Paris, was the architect of the ill-fated union between Tunisia and Libya in September 1974, a union which ended in his dismissal, but only after he had received a 2% commission on the first Franco-Libyan military deal in the mid-1970s, which included the sale of 200 Mirage jetfighters. Like Achour, over the years Masmoudi has become a close friend of Muammar Qaddafi. For years Masmoudi has served as Qaddafi's personal adviser, and Achour allowed the Libyan representative of his UGTT to be involved in planning the Gafsa unrest.

Working from his luxurious exile, Masmoudi, whom Qaddafi also appointed as Libyan ambassador to the United Nations last year, is at the center of the international Middle Eastern mafia which backed the failed coup attempt by Interior Minister Driss Guiga. His network includes the likes of Saudi Arabian Prince Sheikh al Fassi and his brother-in-law Prince Turki Bin Abdelaziz, a former deputy defense minis-

ter. This mafia has made millions of dollars on illegal military deals with Ibero-American countries, as well as through the sale of hundreds of captured official Tunisian documents. Both princes were spectacularly expelled from Tunisia in the summer of 1984, for having staged repeated provocations in some of Tunisia's resorts.

Achour is also receiving the dubious support of the Geneva-based International Labor Organization (ILO). In early November, the ILO convened a meeting to discuss the an official complaint against the Tunisian government on behalf of the UGTT and the Soviet-influenced International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The ILO dismissed the International Monetary Fund's pressures on Tunisia as "irrelevant," and insisted that "the government alone is responsible for refusing to negotiate with the trade unions." The ICFTU went on to praise the IMF, and advised that Tunisia should meet all of the IMF's demands—in full knowledge that this would lead to a social crisis, which could benefit only Achour and his friends.

With this international backing, Achour has called for a general strike on Sept. 26, a move which was characterized on Sept. 6 in the Tunisian parliament as a call for the "establishment of a pre-revolutionary state before a Communist takeover." The strike will target the steel industry, the postal and communications system, and the banking system. The significance of this was not lost on Mzali, who compared Achour's call to a mid-1970s book by Gerard Chaliand, *Les Utopies révolutionnaires du Tiers-Monde* (The Third World's Revolutionary Utopias), which described how a revolution can be organized by "destroying the steel sector, a symbol of capitalism, . . . disorganizing the communication system between the government, the outside, and its police and military forces, and creating a financial panic by freezing all financial operations."

Whether such a strike will ever take place, remains to be seen. It has become obvious in the meantime, that the activities of Habib Achour are creating a climate which will be used by more sinister elements. These include the Islamicists of the "Islamic Trend Movement," whose Paris representative, Habib Mokhni, has been shown to be in the pay of the Iranian embassy at the Vatican, a terrorist deployment center headed by Hojatessalam Hadi Kosrowshahi.

Direct Libyan underground activities are also under way. On Sept. 6, the Tunisian authorities introduced the press to three Libyan terrorists, led by Libyan police officer Sabri Mohammed Mahmoud Najeh, who were intending to plant bombs at tourist resorts on the island of Jerba and in Zarzis, as well as to attack industrial installations in the suburbs of the capital. Next, the commando group was to fly to Athens, whence it would have flown to Cairo to launch a new assassination operation against Abdel Hamid Bakkoush, leader of the the exile Libyan Liberation Organization. Bakkoush narrowly escaped a Libyan-authored assassination attempt in November 1984.