



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of the National Bloc in Resisting the French Occupation in Syria

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: Nov 19, 2024

Accepted: Jan 14, 2025

Keywords

National Bloc

Resisting

French Occupation

Syria

The National Bloc in Syria significantly contributed to the resistance against French colonialism, striving for Syrian unification and the abolition of the mandate. It has been involved in legislative affairs since 1928 and shown adaptability in addressing the Constituent Assembly elections of that year. Its members rejected the Ponsot Constitution established in 1930, which split Syria into multiple states. It maintained its political role in seeking unity and independence until it converted in 1932 into the National Bloc Party.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Bloc is one of the most important Syrian political organizations that played a major role in confronting the French mandate. It emerged in the wake of the Great Syrian Revolution that erupted in 1925, and after the dissolution of the existing parties at that time, most notably the Syrian People's Party and the Independence Party.

It is clear from this study that the National Bloc emerged on the ruins of the Syrian People's Party, and its leaders were among the first generation who sought to achieve Syrian independence during the Ottoman era. The goals of the National Bloc were to achieve Syrian unity and get rid of the French mandate.

The members of the bloc participated in parliamentary life in Syria, and in the elections of the Constituent Assembly in 1928. The bloc followed a flexible policy in dealing with the elections, and held several conferences to reopen the Constituent Assembly, after the High Commissioner closed it. Its members opposed the Ponsot Constitution issued in 1930, which divided Syria into several states. The National Bloc was unable to reach the presidency of the elected parliament in 1932, despite the persistent efforts to achieve this goal. The National Bloc was transformed into a party officially called the National Bloc Party in 1932.

The emergence of the National Bloc:

The emergence of the National Bloc differs from the emergence of other parties, and historians differ about its emergence, as some believe that the National Bloc (emerged on the ruins of the People's Party)¹ In 1928 AD, the People's Party was transformed by the joining of small political blocs and a number of independent, educated leaders into a broad group known as the National Bloc, and the common link between all members of the bloc was the jihadist position against the French mandate. This bloc included prominent leaders, most of whom were from the first generation of nationalists, i.e. the men who worked for the independence of Syria during the Ottoman era. Among them were representatives of the largest and most important feudal families, such as Jamil Mardam, Hashim al-Atassi, and Saad Allah al-Jabiri. Hashim al-Atassi was chosen as the head of the bloc and then elected as the head of the Constituent Assembly in 1928².⁽

Another group believes that it: (replaced the secret political societies that worked for the homeland during the Ottoman Empire and during the reign of King Faisal, such as the Young Arab Society, the Independence Party, and the Covenant Society)³.⁽

It is likely that the National Bloc was formed following the dissolution of the People's Party, whose activity disappeared due to the departure of the majority of its members from Syria. As for those who remained in Syria, another group joined them and formed the National Bloc⁴.⁽

The reality of Syria at that time was one of the most important factors that led to the establishment of the National Bloc. After the French struck the Syrian revolution in 1925, and struck the Syrian People's Party, a kind of political vacuum had to occur in Syria, and it had to be filled, even if only partially, by some kind of organized political activity, especially in the tense period that followed their strike. During these events, the nationalists who were not included in the exile and deportation outside Syria formed the National Bloc, the most prominent of whom were Hashem Al-Asasi, Ibrahim Hanano, Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, Najib Al-Barazi, and other members of the Election Boycott Committee who led the resistance of the people to the attempt of High Commissioner Do Jovenel to impose elections in the Syrian states⁵.⁽

Then these nationalists began to monitor the developments of events in Syria and consult among themselves, and this activity began to form a type of relationship between them that can be called a bloc. The direct reason for establishing the bloc was the Beirut Conference that was held on October 19, 1927 to study the statement of High Commissioner Ponsot and respond to it⁶.⁽

The Beirut Conference was held as a result of a series of political activities carried out by the Syrian national leadership. The nationalists Hashim al-Atassi and Mazhar Arslan from Homs, Saeed al-Jazaery, Youssef al-Issa, and Ihsan al-Sharif Solh from Damascus, Najib al-Barazi and Abdul Qader al-Kilani from Hama, and Abdullah al-Yafi from Beirut⁷ decided to begin a new phase of political life in Syria. They held a conference in Beirut on October 19, 1927, and Hashim al-Atassi was elected president of the conference. The participants declared their adherence to the unity of political action

(1) Muhammad Izzat Darwaza, *Solutions of the Modern Arab Movement*, Part 2, Sidon, 1950, p. 42, Zuhair Al-Shalq, *From the Mandate Papers*, Dar Al-Nafayes, Beirut, 1989, p. 109.

(2) Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military (1945-1958)*, translated by Mahmoud Flam, Dar Al-Jamaheer, 1969, p. 63.

(3) Mustafa Al-Shihabi, *Arab Nationalism, Its History, Foundations, and Aims*, Dar Ibn Al-Atheer, 1959 AD, p. 141

(4) Ihsan Al-Hindi, *The Struggle of the Syrian People, from 1908-1948 AD*, Damascus, 1962 AD, 164.

(5) Suhaila Al-Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria, 1920-1945 AD*, PhD Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1978 AD, p. 29

(6) Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Memoirs*, Part 3, Al-Sharqi Press, Damascus, 1948, p. 912.

(7) Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages of the French Mandate and the National Struggle*, Part 1, Aleppo, 1960, p. 65

between Syria and Lebanon and to confronting the mandate. Thus, the National Bloc came into existence and became one of the most active organizations on the political level⁸.⁽

The failure of the People's Party ended the Great Syrian Revolution, and the founders of the National Bloc, when they held the Beirut Conference, had not yet agreed on specific political positions to form a party. The continued ban on forming parties was one of the most important reasons that made them call it a bloc instead of a party, because the bloc does not need a license, while a party must be licensed to be legal.

The state of political vacuum that the Syrians suffered from led to the establishment of the National Bloc and calling it a bloc and not a party⁹.⁽ The National Bloc was a liberation movement, and its members held their meetings, made their decisions, and published their statements according to an unspecified program and an unestablished system¹⁰.⁽

Objectives of the National Bloc:

The National Bloc was active between the years (1927-1932) and drew its political path and worked by all means to achieve the following objectives:

1. Restoring the nation's natural freedom, restoring freedom of the press, forming parties, abolishing martial law, and abolishing the policy of administrative and political exile imposed by the French mandate authorities on Syria¹¹.⁽
2. Seeking to restore the unity of the parts of Syria that the High Commissioner's statement described as disintegrated. Sectarianism was fought for fear of weakness and division over time, and to achieve that unity, the parts of Syria and the four districts must be restored¹².⁽
3. Working to establish a constitution for the country by electing a constituent assembly to be able to lead the country and advance it administratively, economically, and politically
4. Developing the economic situation in the country by pressuring the French administration in Syria, demanding that it pay attention to developing the economy of Syria and Lebanon and the necessity of developing effective plans to achieve positive solutions to the deteriorating economic situation in Syria.
5. Defining the relations between the mandate departments and the local government: The statement of the French High Commissioner had referred to a new organization in the mandate departments, but it did not specify the relations that would be between these departments and the local government or who would be responsible for what the advisors saw fit if a difference or error occurred. The members of the National Bloc believe that the local government until the date of the conference bears the responsibility for implementing many procedures that were not issued from its own idea, and thus the responsibility was lost and the efficiency of the national employees weakened and the transactions in the country were disturbed.
6. The independence of Syria: The members of the National Bloc called on the French people to achieve their national aspirations for complete political independence and the formation of a sovereign state that is guided by the opinion of France in advice and guidance.
7. The members of the Bloc sought to issue a general amnesty for those politically convicted as well as those deported and to allow them to return to their homeland to practice

⁽⁸⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 30.

⁽⁹⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 31

⁽¹⁰⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, p. 53

⁽¹¹⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, footnote p. 67

⁽¹²⁾ Suhaila Al-Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 33, Dhuqan Farqut, *The Development of the National Movement in Syria, (1920-1939 AD)*, Beirut, 1975, p. 156.

their normal lives in their country and to participate in building their country. The French mandate authorities had exiled a large number of political party leaders, such as the head of the People's Party, Abdul Rahman al-Shahbandar, the People's Party, such as Lutfi al-Haffar, and other leaders of the Great Syrian Revolution¹³.⁽ The National Bloc followed a flexible approach in dealing with the French mandate authorities to achieve its demands¹⁴.⁽

The National Bloc was regional in its demands, goals, organization, language and style, and this was clear from the goals we mentioned previously. Its members were from Syria and were members of Syrian parties. Hashim al-Atassi was the head of the Syrian Congress that drafted the first constitution for Syria during the reign of Faisal I. The Bloc used the term "Syrian nation," while we do not find such terms in other Arab parties, such as the Young Arab Party and the Independence Party, which used the term "Arab nation." The goals of these parties were to establish an Arab state¹⁵.⁽

The National Bloc's Position on Parliamentary Life in Syria (1928-1932)

First: The Constituent Assembly Elections 1928

During the period under study, the National Bloc represented the only existing and active political organization inside Syria, which announced its participation in the elections to form the Constituent Assembly after raising a national slogan stating: The use of this right - meaning entering the elections - does not invalidate the right to demand the rest of the rights that they are still demanding and striving to achieve¹⁶.⁽

It seems that there were secret negotiations regarding some of the demands of the members of the National Bloc between High Commissioner Ponsot and the leaders of the members of the Beirut Conference, such as Hashim al-Atassi and Ibrahim Hanano, and between Ponsot and Sheikh Taj al-Din al-Hasani on the other hand¹⁷.⁽

This conclusion is supported by the fact that High Commissioner Bonsu took several steps before the National Bloc announced its position on the election battle. The steps can be summarized as follows:

1. The High Commissioner announced a change in the governmental situation in the country, dissolving the Damad government¹⁸, which resigned on February 8, 1928, and Sheikh Taj al-Hasani was assigned, who convinced the High Commissioner that he could form a government whose majority was prepared to implement French policy¹⁹.⁽
2. The government statement included a call to hold elections for members of the country's Constituent Assembly, after which a treaty would be drafted after agreeing with France on its terms²⁰.⁽
3. The special courts that were established during the Great Syrian Revolution were closed.
4. The High Commissioner issued a (restricted) amnesty that included people who surrendered and surrendered within 30 days. The general amnesty excluded those who

(13) Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 35

(14) Amin Saeed, *The Great Arab Revolt*, Part 3, Dar Ihya Al-Kutub Al-Arabiya, Egypt, no date, p. 539.

(15) Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 4, p. 535

(16) Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 91

(17) Muhammad Taj al-Din al-Husayni: He is the son of the greatest hadith scholar Sheikh Badr bin Yusuf al-Hasani. He was appointed in 1912 as a professor of religious sciences and a member of the Ottoman General Assembly for the states of Syria during the Ottoman era in 1916 AD. See Suhaila al-Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, footnote, p. 185.

(18) Al-Damad, Ahmad Naji was the President of the State of Syria in 1926 AD. Al-Kayali, *Stages*, Part 1, p. 127.

(19) Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 91.

(20) Ghaleb Al-Ayashi, *Political Explanations and Secrets of the French Mandate in Syria*, Idlib, 1954 AD, pp. 369-370.

committed political crimes, and thus the amnesty did not include Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar, Hassan Al-Hakim, Othman Al-Sharbaty, Yahya Hayati, Kamel Al-Qassab, Shukri Al-Quwatli, Nabeeh Al-Azmeh, Nazih Al-Muayyad, Khaled Al-Khatib, Ihsan Al-Jabiri, Saeed Al-Aas, Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash, Saeed Haidar, and many others²¹.⁽ These were members of the Independence and People's Parties and the head of the Great Syrian Revolution.

Although the secret agreement did not fulfil all the demands of the members of the Beirut National Conference, as it excluded Syrian party members, revolutionaries and nationalists from the general amnesty, despite all of this, the members of the National Bloc decided in their conference held on March 26, 1928 to enter the elections on March 28, 1928²² to prove their good intentions towards the High Commissioner and the Mandatory State. As an expression of political flexibility, they wanted to give the Mandatory State an opportunity to reach an understanding with the Syrian nationalists, and the French knew that missing this opportunity would help mobilise the opposition to confront them by all means, and if they agreed, they would gain enormous popularity at home and support abroad.

Second: The National Bloc and the Elections

The content of the statement issued by the Bloc regarding its position on the elections contained the following indications:

1. Resorting to a flexible political approach and avoiding the armed approach.
2. Accepting to participate in procedures and steps that fall within the scope of the French plan, hoping that this method will be a means to achieve the basic goals of the bloc or some of them with a positive logic better than absolute negativity, or in other words, following a policy of take and demand
3. Feeling the danger of this method, and therefore the members of the bloc tried to justify their positions before the people, and they also tried to emphasize that elections are a political right exercised by nations to show their will in determining their internal and external affairs, so using this right does not invalidate other rights, nor does it contradict the national charter, nor does it weaken the power of demanding its full achievement.
4. Silence about the decisions not to pardon many leaders of the parties and the revolution, as pardon was a basic demand²³.⁽

This statement was signed by Ibrahim Hanano, Fares Al-Khoury, Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, Hassan Al-Barazi, Saad Allah Al-Jabri, Afif Al-Solh, Ihsan Al-Sharif, Wasfi Al-Atassi, Salah Al-Din Al-Yafi, Mazhar Arslan, Fawzi Al-Ghazi, Ahmad Al-Lahham, Lutfi Al-Haffar, and Shukr Al-Jundi²⁴.⁽

It is worth noting that there are two contradictory opinions held by contemporaries about the true objectives of the National Bloc and its understanding with High Commissioner Ponsot. Some said that the members of the National Bloc had not shown any signs of opposition to the mandate policy, and that the understanding prevailed between them and Prime Minister Sheikh Taj al-Hasani. This group even asserts that Sheikh Taj himself was a member of the bloc during this period and that he separated from it after the discussion that took place regarding the six articles that the High Commissioner objected to, and that he entered the elections on the national list and the government list.

⁽²¹⁾ Amin Saeed, *The Great Arab Revolt*, Part 3, pp. 539-541.

⁽²²⁾ Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, *The National Bloc's Response to the Statement of High Commissioner Ponsot*, Aleppo, 1933, pp. 66-67.

⁽²³⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, pp. 94-95.

⁽²⁴⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 96

As for the other opinion, it believes that the members of the bloc fought the election battle in the hope of achieving their objectives that were stated in the wording of their response to Ponsot and that Sheikh Taj was never a member of the bloc.

The National Bloc's entry into the electoral battle resulted in some changes in the image of the party reality, as three party phenomena appeared after the elections, represented by the emergence of new parties with new characteristics, short-lived in the face of the National Bloc, and the disappearance of the small parties that existed inside, as well as the remnants of the large parties, and the split of the Executive Committee of the Syrian-Palestinian Conference. However, its effects remained until the convening of the Homs Conference on October 6, 1932, when the Bloc transformed into the National Bloc Party²⁵.

Third: The National Bloc and the closure of the Constituent Assembly

The French High Commissioner postponed the meetings of the Constituent Assembly, which led to a state of anxiety in the country. A few months after this decision, unrest began in early June 1929 in protest against the disruption of parliamentary life, in which supporters of the National Bloc participated. Since late June 1929, members of the National Bloc held several conferences to discuss a way out of the stagnation that followed the postponement of the meetings of the Constituent Assembly.

Members of the National Bloc held their first conference in Damascus on June 23, 1929, attended by people from Beirut, Tripoli, Baalbek, the Bekaa and other regions. At the end of the conference, they announced their support for the National Bloc and the National Charter, and demanded the unity of the Syrian country. On August 11, 1929, members of the bloc called for a new conference in Ain Zhalta, attended by members of the Constituent Assembly. The conference participants concluded by issuing a comprehensive statement on the situation in Syria, which included a demand for a constitution drawn up by the people's representatives, and no external forces may interfere in its drafting.

The Desert Conference was held at the invitation of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash on October 25, 1929. Representatives of the National Bloc and other parties attended. They issued a statement denouncing France's policy in Syria, demanding Syria's independence, protesting the closure of the Constituent Assembly, Britain's policy and the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, and calling for jihad. On March 30, 1930, another conference was held in the suburbs of Damascus because the High Commissioner did not care about the demands and protests issued by the National Bloc. Therefore, a way out of the state of silence and stagnation imposed by the High Commissioner on the Syrian issue after the suspension of the Constituent Assembly had to be found.

After the meeting, they decided to request a meeting with the High Commissioner and handed him a memorandum of protest²⁶. Hashem al-Atassi went to the High Commissioner on March 17 and handed him the National Bloc memorandum, which included: ((... They threatened to declare a strike if the suspended constitution was not released within a short period)²⁷. But Bonsu told al-Atassi that he had a plan that he would soon implement, and that it was based on the same policy of freedom that he had started. Rumors appeared that the High Commissioner was no longer cooperating with the nationalists, and that he would assign al-Rikabi to form a new government, which led to demonstrations in Syria, and they did not subside until the members of the National Bloc asked them

⁽²⁵⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 187.

⁽²⁶⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, pp. 204-206

⁽²⁷⁾ Abdul Latif Al-Younsi, *History of a Nation in the Life of a Man (Shukri Al-Quwatli)*, 1908-1958 AD, Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo, 1959 AD, p. 7.

to remain calm. Then Bonsu Paris decided to dissolve the Constituent Assembly and issue a new constitution for Syria called the Ponsot Constitution)²⁸.⁽

Fourth: The National Bloc and the Bonsu Constitution issued in 1930

The members of the National Bloc were surprised by the Ponsot Declaration on June 14, 1930, a document called "The Basic Law of the Countries Under the French Mandate," which was known as the Constitution of 1930. However, it was not one constitution, but several constitutions, and it organized the affairs of the State of Syria, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, the governments of Latakia and Jabal al-Druze, and the system of common interests)²⁹.⁽

This declaration was an incentive for the National Bloc to deviate from the policy of appeasement, and the people, encouraged by the members of the National Bloc, carried out comprehensive disturbances in Damascus and other Syrian cities. Work was disrupted and demonstrations erupted, reaching their peak on June 11, 1930, which coincided with the anniversary of the opening of the Constituent Assembly. The men of the National Bloc led the demonstrations in Damascus and Aleppo, and held a general national conference in each of them to resist the Ponsot Constitution)³⁰.⁽

The Damascus Conference was held at the invitation of the National Bloc, headed by Jamil Mardam, one of the leaders of the National Bloc, and attended by a large number of political party members. After the meeting, the attendees decided to send a telegram to Ponsot in Paris, in which they protested the suspension of the Constituent Assembly and the decision to divide the country by issuing constitutions that would cancel the country's independence. Another conference was held in Aleppo, headed by Ibrahim Hanano, attended by a large number of supporters of the National Bloc. At the end of the meeting, the attendees sent protests to the League of Nations and the French Ministry of the Interior, demanding the reopening of the Constituent Assembly and the cancellation of the 1930 Constitution)³¹.⁽

As for Ponsot's position on these telegrams, he did not present them to the League of Nations, but rather submitted a statement to the League, which stated: "I affirm that France desires to reach a close agreement with the elements of the population, regardless of their races, and desires to grant them a political system that is compatible with the security of the country and meets the requirements of the current situation." He also attacked the nationalists, the leaders of the Constituent Assembly, and held them responsible for not implementing what France gave them by virtue of the pledges made, and he said: "If Syria had only wanted to be satisfied with incorporating the reservation related to the exercise of the mandate into the heart of the constitution, it would have tried a satisfactory experiment, as it did in Lebanon, and achieved great progress."³²⁽ After these statements made by Ponsot, demonstrations were renewed in Syria in protest against his positions, which do not unite Syria, but rather divide it.

Fifth: The National Bloc and the Advisory Council

The Advisory Council was formed by a decision of Bonsu from the following members:

- Jamil Al-Alashi: Provisional Government 1920
- Haqqi Al-Azm: Governor of the State of Damascus in 1920
- Mustafa Barmada: Governor of the State of Aleppo in 1923

⁽²⁸⁾ Najib Al-Armanazi, *Syria from Occupation to Evacuation*, Cairo, 1954 AD, p. 67

⁽²⁹⁾ Jordan, H., *Syrian Politics and the Military*, p. 64; Ihsan al-Hindi, *The Struggle of the Syrian People*, p. 165; Jamil al-Alwani, *The Struggle of a People and an Eternal Record*, Damascus, 1973, p. 350.

⁽³⁰⁾ Amin Said, *The Great Arab Revolt*, pp. 561-562.

⁽³¹⁾ Ghaleb Ayyashi, *Political Explanations*, p. 387, Ajsan Askar, *The Development of the Syrian Press*, Part 1, Cairo, 1973, p. 62.

⁽³²⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 208.

- Subhi Barakat: President of the Federation of Syrian States in 1923
- Damad Ahmad Naji: President of the State of Syria in 1926
- Sheikh Taj Al-Din: Prime Minister of Syria in 1928
- Rida Bey Saeed: Dean of Damascus University
- Ibrahim Mumin: President of the Sanjak of Alexandretta
- Saleem Hanbart: President of the Aleppo Chamber
- Arif Al-Halbouni: President of Damascus Trade
- Hashim Al-Atassi, President of the Constituent Assembly in 1928 and President of the Arab Government during the days of Faisal in 1919.

The Advisory Council meeting was attended by all members except Hashem Al-Atassi, head of the National Bloc, because the National Bloc refused to participate in this council for the following reasons:

- The National Bloc sent a memorandum to the High Commissioner and did not receive a response from him.
- Because the Council's powers were not updated.
- Because the Council includes members, most of whom support French policy³³.
- Because Atassi was appointed a member of this Council without obtaining his approval and before obtaining his opinion on the matter.

On December 7, 1931, the High Commissioner opened the Consultative Council and delivered a statement in which he defended French policy in Syria and stressed France's determination to replace the mandate with a bilateral contract that it would negotiate and conclude with the legitimate representatives of the nation in accordance with its treaties. He set the date for the elections on December 20, 1931 for the first-class elections and January 2, 1932 for the second-class elections³⁴.

As for the bloc's position on Ponso's decision to hold elections, after discussing the matter among the bloc's members, they decided to participate in the elections, and issued a statement on December 10, 1931, which stated that the bloc discussed Ponso's statement that he delivered in the council, in which he set the date for the elections, and explained the reasons for its acceptance of participating in them. The most important indications contained in that statement are as follows:

1. Pointing out that all the statements of the High Commissioner are limited to France intending to replace the sole mandate period with a bilateral contract negotiated by the legitimate representatives of the nation
2. Explaining the position of the bloc on these statements and the efforts made to conceal ambiguity before starting the elections
3. Justifying entering the elections despite this ambiguity that was specified in the statement regarding the division and not pardoning the deportees
4. The members of the bloc also explained the danger of the new stage, which is the stage of the bilateral treaty system ((If it does not guarantee the rights of the people and ensure the attainment of just national aspirations and does not prevent political and economic development and the desired national advancement, then the bloc will not continue to fight the electoral battle.
5. Calling on the sons of the nation to participate in the elections, saying: (We have no doubt that the noble nation will unite as one front in this dangerous phase, and will grant its

⁽³³⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 127.

⁽³⁴⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 208.

trust to its loyal men. If the elections are free from manipulation, only those with an honest past and good intentions will enter the council)³⁵.(

The preliminary elections began on January 20, 1931, and the mandate authorities resorted to using all means of pressure and terror to rig the elections and ensure the success of those cooperating with them. However, this policy was confronted by all means by the people of Aleppo and Damascus. Members of the National Bloc were able to achieve success in the elections in Homs, headed by Hashim al-Atassi, despite French attempts to overthrow the bloc. In the city of Hama, the High Commissioner suspended the elections due to disputes that arose between the supporters of the candidates. On January 5, 1932, the French administration authorities prepared six thousand soldiers to conduct the final elections, after arresting a number of candidates and a number of their supporters. The elections were repeated in Damascus after the mandate authorities negotiated with the nationalists, and it was agreed after that to nominate six nationalists, namely: Zaki al-Khatib, Ihsan al-Sharif, Fakhr al-Baroudi, Lutfi al-Haffar, Jamil Mardam, and Fayez al-Khoury)³⁶.(and four supporters of the French authority, namely: Muhammad al-Abed, Reda al-Rikabi, Haqi al-Azm, and the deputy of the Jews Linado. The national representatives and three government representatives won, except for Al-Rikabi, and the non-winning candidate was allowed to run again, so the National Bloc candidate, Naseeb Al-Bakri, won)³⁷.(This was in Damascus, but in Hama, the National List won unanimously.

Finally, Paul Fadil was able to win the elections and bring out the results in his favor, as the nationalists won 17 seats out of 69 seats, the moderates won 23 seats, while the supporters of the French won 29 seats)³⁸.(These unsatisfactory results were the result of the policy of political flexibility that the National Bloc followed in the elections.

Sixth: The National Bloc in the Elected Council

The new House of Representatives was called to meet for an extraordinary session on June 7, 1932 AD. The House's agenda included the following issues:

1. Election of the Council President and the Head of the Council Office.
2. Election of the President of the Republic.
3. Certification of the elections.
4. Determining the allocations of the Council President and its members

The members of the National Bloc held several meetings in which they discussed the issue of boycotting the Council or attending its sessions, and they agreed to participate in the Council, attend its sessions and confront the situation. The members of the National Bloc contacted the High Commissioner in order to agree on the distribution of positions, especially with regard to the presidency of the Council, the presidency of the Republic and the presidency of the Prime Minister)³⁹.(The High Commissioner had worked to win over Hashim al-Atassi when he hinted at putting his name forward for election to the Parliament as President of the Republic. However, the distribution of positions did not achieve the demands of the National Bloc, as the two High Commissioners were able to tear apart the members of the Parliament in Aleppo and Damascus during the period that elapsed between the elections and the date of the opening of the Council. The Council was composed of representatives of the northern districts for whom the authorities had achieved victory, and they obtained 28 seats in the Council, headed by Subhi Barakat. The Council included representatives of

(35) Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, pp. 131-135.

(36) Ihsan Al Hindi, *The Struggle of the Syrian People*, p. 166.

(37) Amin Saeed, *The Great Syrian Revolution*, Part 3, p. 57.

(38) Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 215.

(39) Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 215.

Deir ez-Zor and the districts of Damascus and Hauran, and they obtained 23 seats, headed by Haqi al-Azm. The representatives of Deir ez-Zor and Damascus were called representatives of the Southern Bloc, and the majority of them were from the Islah Party. All 51 former deputies were supporters of France, thus ensuring that Ponsot would be a supporter of the President of the Republic.

The National Bloc deputies numbered 17, and they had not agreed on who they would nominate for the position of President of the Republic. Whatever the case, a vote was held to choose the Speaker of Parliament, and Subhi Barakat won the presidency of the Council, collecting 30 votes, while Haqi al-Azm collected 23 votes, Hashim al-Atassi two votes, and 13 blank ballots remained. The members of the Council's office were chosen, and the bloc's deputies did not obtain any position⁴⁰.

The strange thing is that the number of members of the National Bloc in the parliament was 17, but Atassi only got two votes. This raises the question: Was Atassi not a desirable person, or was there a personal enmity between Atassi and the rest of the members of the bloc, which made them not nominate him or withhold votes from him? The other thing is that Bonsu - as mentioned previously - had hinted at helping him win the presidency of the republic, and the result was completely different.

The election of the President of the Republic was to take place in the second session, and this issue was of great interest both among the people, within the parliament, and among the French authorities.

People remained anxiously awaiting the outcome of the elections in the second session to elect a president of the republic, and the people wondered what the position would be if Haqi al-Azm or Subhi Barakat Barakat assumed the presidency of the republic, and they feared the issue of the treaty that would be presented to the representatives, and the possibility of its ratification and the burden of its sin and its burdens being placed on the nation.

People began to go to the homes of the National Bloc representatives, calling on them to withdraw from the council. Their voices rose, saying: "The nationalists should not have entered the elections after they lost the battle in al-Shahba to French fraud and violence. They asked, 'What are you going to do?'"⁴¹

In any case, the results of the council presidency elections were clear evidence of France's position on the national blocs, and that the elections for the president of the republic were an opportunity for the National Bloc to try to overturn the French plan that began with the announcement of the elections, and did not hesitate to falsify them by force, by having the bloc's representatives withdraw from the council.

The cracking of the National Bloc and the victory of the Mardami curriculum

A discussion took place among the members of the National Bloc about withdrawing from the Council or continuing in the membership of the Council. The opinion of Jamil Mardam and the Damascus groups was to continue to remain in the Council and participate in its activities, while the opinion of the other section of the National Bloc was to withdraw from the Council and resort to popular struggle.

Aleppo in particular was directing the High Commissioner and sending protest telegrams to the national representatives in protest against the fake Council and showing its denunciation through newspapers and demonstrations. Some historians believe that what attracts attention is the change in the policy of the National Bloc after it had been resisting the French mandate or refusing to cooperate with it in any way, if it (followed a policy of leniency and compromise), and therefore it is

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, p. 216.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Life in Syria*, pp. 217-218.

not strange that the owners of the first opinion won, the opinion of continuing the policy of appeasement that Jamil Mardam called (completing the struggle after the Bloc had come a long way in this policy) due to the difference of opinions within the Bloc about the position on the Council. This led to the division of the Bloc and the victory of Jamil Mardam's policy calling for continuing to appease the French mandate authorities.

The Free Constitutional Party, which was headed by Subhi Barakat, criticized Jamil Mardam's policy and accused him of being humble with the French, and that his group preferred their own interests over the general interests of the Syrian people. The members of the Free Constitutional Party demanded that the center of political activity and its chambers of commerce be moved to the north⁴².

Given the pressures the bloc faced from the Free Constitutional Party, the High Commissioner quickly reached an understanding with Jamil Mardam to withdraw from the council with his group. It was agreed that Muhammad Ali al-Abed would be chosen as president of the republic, thus excluding both Barakat and Haq al-Azm, and that a ministry would be formed headed by Haq al-Azm⁴³, and Jamil Mardam would be appointed Minister of Finance and Agriculture, Mazhar Arslan Minister of Justice and Education, and Salim Janbart Minister of Public Works⁴⁴. The National Bloc fell into another French trap, even if we measured the results by the standards of Jamil Mardam himself.

On June 9, 1932, the Council convened and the session dedicated to electing the President of the Republic was opened. Several speeches were given, and representatives from the National Bloc and representatives from Hama spoke. All of them highlighted the importance of the position of the President of the Republic and the breadth of his powers, especially in the event of the cancellation of Article 116 of the Constitution. They called for the necessity of electing a new president to exercise those powers for the benefit of the nation.

In any case, the agreement concluded by the Assistant High Commissioner with Jamil Mardam was implemented, and Muhammad Ali al-Abed won the presidency of the republic with 36 votes compared to 32 votes received by Subhi Barakat⁴⁵.

It seems to us from this result that all the National Bloc representatives voted for Muhammad al-Abed, and if some of them had abstained from voting or left their ballot blank as they did in the House of Representatives elections, Subhi Barakat would have succeeded. Perhaps the nature of the competition between the bloc representatives - the representatives of the south and the representatives of the north - is what led to this result.

In that session, the acceptance of the new presidency was approved, and the battle for the presidency of the republic ended. However, the issue of choosing new ministers remained. The representatives of the north - the Shaabani and Subhi Barakat blocs - wanted the ministry to be composed of them, because they constituted the majority in the House of Representatives. As for the bloc of representatives of the south - the Haqi al-Azm bloc - their opinion was to form a coalition ministry to guarantee some positions in it, because their number in the House did not allow them to form the ministry.

The National Bloc deputies wanted to form a ministry from among themselves, despite their small number in the council, based on the people's support for them, and that their election to the council was not contested⁴⁶.

⁽⁴²⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 169.

⁽⁴³⁾ Najib Al-Armanazi, *Syria from Occupation to Evacuation*, p. 74, Ihsan.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Indian, *The Struggle of the Syrian People*, p. 169

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Khaled Al-Azm, *Memoirs*, Part 1, Beirut, 1972, p. 173.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Abdulrahman Al-Kayali, *The Stages*, Part 1, p. 174.

The ministry was formed under the leadership of Haqi al-Azm - a coalition ministry - as agreed upon with Jamil Mardam. Two ministers from the bloc became ministers of finance and agriculture in that ministry, Jamil Mardam, and minister of justice and education, but they did not remain in the ministry for long, as they submitted their resignations from the government in mid-April 1933⁴⁷.

After this rift, the National Bloc was dissolved, and some of its members formed a new organization called the National Bloc Party, and this was officially on November 4, 1932⁴⁸.

RESULTS

The political role played by the National Bloc in Syria in resisting French colonialism is clear to us, since its establishment in 1928 under the leadership of Hashim al-Atassi. The bloc defined its goals and demands as freedom for the Syrian people and freedom of the press, the abolition of martial law, the unification and independence of Syria, and the development of the Syrian economy. It participated in the elections of the Constituent Assembly in 1928, preferring the peaceful method to achieve Syrian demands over the armed method in confronting French colonialism. The members of the bloc also opposed the Ponsot Constitution issued in 1930 because it did not meet the aspirations of the Syrian people for unity and independence.

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⁽⁴⁷⁾ Jamil Al-Alwan, *The Struggle of the Syrian People and an Immortal Record*, p. 353.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Walid Al-Moallem, *Syria from 1916-1946 AD, The Road to Freedom*, Damascus, 1987 AD, p. 565.