

# National Bloc Party in Syria: A Study of Its Origins and Organizational Structure

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## ABSTRACT

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The National Bloc Party made a significant contribution to the political movement that took place during the period of the French mandate in Syria, as it was able to represent the national mass movement and became the sole representative of the opposition. It was also able to take over the reins of power, as this party was able to organize itself in a way that enabled it to deal flexibly with French rigidity, after it had drawn up for itself a relatively advanced internal system when compared to the parties that were with it during the same period, in addition to the political, cultural and economic background of its senior cadres, who were united despite the relative differences between their members to achieve the party's goals.

**Keywords:** Contribution, Rigidity, Relatively.

## Introduction:

The National Bloc Party is one of the important political parties in the important political arena.

## Origin

On October 11, 1926, Ponsot arrived. "Ponsot"<sup>1</sup>, He went to Beirut to be the new High Commissioner after the end of the revolution in most parts of Syria. Upon his arrival, he toured Syria and met during his tour a number of delegations representing all parts of Syria. These delegations presented their problems and programs, which were summarized in the demand for a general amnesty for the revolutionaries, the establishment of Syrian unity, compensation for the losses they suffered as a result of French military actions, and the conclusion of a treaty with France to replace the mandate.<sup>2</sup>

In early November 1926, Ponsot traveled to Aleppo and met with Ibrahim Hanano and Abdul Rahman al-Kayali, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the poor economic situation in the country as a result of the economic policy pursued by France in Syria.

Ponsot returned to Paris to consult with the French government about the outcome of those negotiations and their results. After completing his consultations, he returned again to Syria in June 1927.<sup>3</sup>

On July 26, Bonsu issued a statement about the policy he would pursue in Syria. The most important points of this statement were:

1. France does not intend to give up its mandate over Syria and Lebanon to the League of Nations.
2. France intends to integrate the Jabal al-Druze and Jabal al-Alawite regions with the surrounding Arab-populated areas, while preserving the special rights of the inhabitants.

<sup>1</sup> Ponsot: A French politician, born in 1875. He worked in the Eastern Department of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was transferred to serve as High Commissioner in the Levant in 1926, leaving in 1933. This was the longest period a High Commissioner had spent in Syria. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 113; Abd al-Rahman al-Kayali, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Radwan Al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Rajai Rayyan, Political Parties in Syria and Their Role in the National Movement 1920-1939, Irbid, Al-Kindi Publishing and Distribution House, 2006, p. 110.

3. France's desire to enact a constitution for the country and transfer power to Syrian officials.
4. France will not tolerate any attempt to threaten the mandate and its institutions such as customs, post and telegraph, and foreign companies.<sup>1</sup>

The Syrian political circles did not receive this statement positively, as none of the politicians believed that France intended to annex the Jabal al-Druze and Jabal al-Alawite regions to the other Syrian regions. The statement also did not mention any French desire to conclude a treaty with Syria similar to the one Britain concluded with Iraq, or to establish a national army, which showed France's intention not to change the method of direct rule by which they run Syria.<sup>2</sup>

And internally, the partisan differences intensified, especially between the leadership of the People's Party and the Independence Party, in addition to the internal differences within the two parties, especially after the party leaders who actually participated in the revolution left the country.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Syrian nationalists no longer had many options, and they were forced to adopt more flexible positions in dealing with French policy.

After lengthy discussions, Hashim al-Atassi called for a general national conference to be held in Beirut to respond to the Ponsot statement and to find a way out of the Syrian issue. The conference was held on October 19, 1927, headed by Hashim al-Atassi. A number of national figures in Syria and Lebanon attended the conference, including Mazhar Raslan from Syria.<sup>4</sup> And Najib Al-Barazi<sup>5</sup> And Abdul Qadir Al-Kilani <sup>6</sup> And Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, and a number of Syrian politicians. Ibrahim Hanano did not attend due to illness. It was attended from Lebanon by Abdul Hamid Karami <sup>7</sup>,

And Abdullah Al-Yafi <sup>8</sup>, and a number of other Lebanese politicians.

The conference concluded with several decisions concerning the Syrian political situation. The important result of this conference was the emergence of the National Bloc Party as a new political organization, as seven of the delegates who attended the Beirut conference formed the nucleus of the party: Ibrahim Hanano, Hashem al-Atassi, Abdul Rahman al-Kayali, Najib al-Barazi, and Ihsan Sharif.<sup>9</sup> Mazhar Raslan, and Abdul Qadir Al-Kilani <sup>10</sup>

In March 1928, Ponsot issued a pardon for a number of Syrian politicians who were arrested during the days of the revolution, including Lutfi al-Haffar and Fawzi al-Ghazi.<sup>11</sup> ..and Faris al-Khoury and Saadallah al-Jabiri, who joined the National Bloc immediately after their exit, which contributed to expanding the political base of the National Bloc, and also supported its position in confronting those demanding to play a political role in the country.

<sup>1</sup> The text of the statement is in: Muhyiddin al-Safar Jalani, History of the Syrian Revolution, Damascus, Al-Thabat Press, 1960, p. 540.-544.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945, Beirut, Arab Research Foundation, 1997, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Harb Farzat, the previous source, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> Mazhar Raslan: Born in Homs in 1887, he graduated from the Royal High School in Istanbul. He worked in the Ottoman administration and participated in the founding of the National Bloc. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> Najib al-Barazi: Born in Hama in 1882, he participated in the founding of the National Bloc and became head of the bloc's office in Hama. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan al-Atassi, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Qadir al-Kilani: A Syrian politician and cleric from Hama. He participated in the founding of the National Bloc and was a member of the Constitution Drafting Committee in the Constituent Assembly of 1928. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Hamid Karami: A Syrian politician, born in Tripoli, Lebanon, in 1888. A Lebanese politician, he became the Mufti of Tripoli and later Prime Minister of Lebanon. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan al-Atassi, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullah Al-Yafi: A Lebanese politician, born in 1901. He served as Prime Minister several times and died in 1987. For more details, see: Muhammad Radwan Al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Ihsan al-Sharif: A Syrian politician, born in Damascus and studied at the Sultanate School in Damascus. He served in the Ottoman army and participated in the founding of the People's Party in 1925, then was exiled to Araoud Island. He participated in the founding of the National Bloc and won membership in the Constituent Assembly in 1928, and won membership in the Parliament in 1932. For more details, see: Fayez Salama, Arab Figures in Politics and Literature, Damascus, Ibn Zaydoun Press, Vol. 2, 1935, Part 1, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Radwan Al-Atassi, the previous source, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Fawzi al-Ghazi: Born in Damascus in 1891, he received his primary education there and graduated from the Royal Administrative Institute in Istanbul. He joined the Ottoman army, fought in Iraq and the Caucasus, and was appointed Qaim-Maqam in Hasiba during the Arab government. He worked as a lawyer at the time of the French forces' entry and then became a teacher at the Law Institute in Damascus. In 1925, he was exiled to Araud, then released and exiled again to Hasakah in 1926. He died in 1929. For more details, see: Lutfi al-Yafi, The Great Late Fawzi al-Ghazi, Damascus, Babel Brothers, 1929, p. 8.

However, the French amnesty was not comprehensive, as a number of Syrian politicians remained on the French blacklist, such as Shukri al-Quwatli, who later joined the ranks of the bloc.<sup>1</sup>

On March 1, 1928, the National Bloc held a meeting at Lutfi al-Haffar's house in Damascus to organize its ranks and choose a president who would represent the National Bloc during the negotiations with the French and in various other discussions. Elections were held in which Hashim al-Atassi was chosen as president of the National Bloc, and a statement was issued from the meeting to that effect.<sup>2</sup>

On March 10, Ponsot issued a decision to hold general elections to form a constituent assembly. The bloc held a conference in Damascus in which it announced that the National Bloc would participate in these elections.<sup>3</sup>

Following this announcement, a number of Syrian politicians joined the National Bloc, such as: Fakhri al-Baroudi<sup>4</sup>, Jamil Mardam, and Tawfiq Shishakli<sup>5</sup> And Fayez Al-Khoury<sup>6</sup> These, along with the members of the Beirut Conference and others who were pardoned, formed most of the leadership of the National Bloc.<sup>7</sup>

The National Bloc remained without a written law binding on its members until 1932. The statements it issued were what distinguished its policy without being binding on its members. However, its members, on many occasions, demonstrated the unity of their position regarding the policies decided by the Bloc.<sup>8</sup> The reason for taking the name of a bloc instead of a party is due to getting rid of the problems related to the law on parties, as the decision to ban parties was still in effect, and in order to establish a party, a legal license had to be issued by the French authorities, and thus the French authorities could dissolve the party by a decision of their own, especially since violence was inherent in French behavior.<sup>9</sup>

### National Bloc ideology:

The goals and ideology of the National Bloc can be understood from three main sources:

**Firstly:** The basic law of the National Bloc, which was approved at the Homs Conference in 1932: after Hashim al-Atassi commissioned three members of the National Bloc to draft it, namely Saadallah al-Jabiri and Naim Antaki<sup>10</sup> And Faris Al-Khoury, and it says:

1. The National Bloc is a political organization whose efforts are dedicated to resisting all forms of foreign control and bringing Syria to independence and full sovereignty under a unified government, with Lebanon having the advantage of the right to self-determination but within its old borders.<sup>11</sup>
2. Calling for the establishment of an Arab union, provided that this union does not prevent taking into account the uniqueness of each country.
3. Restoring the unity of the nation in the face of sectarian divisions, achieving equality among all individuals, working to raise the individual's social and economic status, and spreading the national spirit.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Salma Al-Haffar Al-Kuzbari, Lutfi Al-Haffar 1885-1968, His Life and Times Memoirs, Beirut, Riad El-Rayyes Books and Publishing, 1997, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Text of the statement in: the same source, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Fakhri al-Baroudi: He is Fakhri bin Muhammad bin Muhammad Hasan al-Zahir, known as al-Baroudi. He was born in Damascus in 1886, and completed his primary and secondary education there. He participated in World War I with the Ottoman army, joined the Arab Legion, and was appointed as an aide to King Faisal. For more details, see: Daad al-Hakim, The Papers and Memoirs of Fakhri al-Baroudi, Damascus, Ministry of Culture and Information, Vol. 2, 1999, Part 1, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Tawfiq al-Shishakli: A Syrian politician, born in Hama in 1884. He joined the Independence Party and was appointed to the Ottoman army, becoming the chief physician of the Ottoman forces stationed in Syria. He was elected as a representative of Hama in the 1932 parliament. For more details, see: Fayez Salama, the previous source, Vol. 2, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Fayez al-Khoury: He is the brother of Fares al-Khoury. He was born in Damascus and completed his university studies there. He was a member of the literary community and served in the Ottoman army as a judge, winning seats in the parliament in 1928 and 1932. For more details, see: Fayez Salama, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 299.

<sup>8</sup> Dhuqan Qarqout, the previous source, p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Youssef Al-Hakim, Syria and the French Mandate, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dar Al-Nahar, 1991, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> Naim Antaki: A Syrian politician who participated in the founding of the National Bloc. In 1936, he participated in the Syrian delegation authorized to conclude the treaty. He was then appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in Atta al-Ayyubi's government in 1943. For more details, see: Hashim Othman, the previous source, p. 142; Hassan al-Hakim, the previous source, p. 185.

<sup>11</sup> The text of the Basic Law of the National Bloc is in: Najat Qassab Hassan, Makers of Evacuation in Syria, 2nd ed., Beirut, Al-Matbouat Company, 2003, p. 395-402.

<sup>12</sup> Najat Qassab Hassan, the previous source, p. 395.

The National Bloc was characterized by its secular nationalist character. This was due to the fact that the founders of the National Bloc were linked by a common idea with the rest of the politicians of the Arab East due to the links of education, language, and common political culture. Most of these politicians served in the Ottoman army, participated in the Arab Revolt, and worked in the Arab government in Syria during the reign of King Faisal. The most important feature of this common vision was the nationalist idea, of which secularism was the most important characteristic.<sup>1</sup>

Although there was a confusion between religious symbols and nationalist thought among the leaders of the National Bloc, the religious expressions in its call were less clear than the calls for unity based on land and homeland. Moreover, the influence of religious leaders had begun to decline in cities and villages in contrast to the growth of nationalist thought, so the state of religious solidarity no longer controlled the intellectual orientations of the leaders of the National Bloc.<sup>2</sup> The second article of the basic law of the National Bloc came, in which the bloc considered the nation a single state with all its strength in order to be able to achieve its goals.<sup>3</sup>

4. The National Bloc rejects the idea of the emergence of parties, as Article 3 of the National Bloc's basic law states: "The formation of parties is contrary to the unity of the public."<sup>4</sup> The members of the National Bloc restricted the national idea to themselves only and did not recognize any role for others. A number of leaders of the National Bloc expressed this on more than one occasion. Jamil Mardam said: "However, I am surprised that it is said that there are opposition nationalists, as all nationalism has gathered in the National Bloc." Fakhri al-Baroudi said: "We are the nationalists who agree and oppose." Saad Allah al-Jabri said: "We do not recognize any party or organization other than the National Bloc."<sup>5</sup>

**Second: The 1928 Constitution:** This constitution was drawn up in London by a committee composed of leaders of the National Bloc to express the ideology of the National Bloc, which sought to establish a national industry and in harmony with the internal national struggle, global trends, and the ideas of the French Revolution. This constitution clarified the rights of individuals, personal freedoms, freedom of belief and thought, freedom of the press, and the guarantee of education. However, after the 1936 elections, the National Bloc suspended many newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

As stated in Articles 13 and 14:<sup>7</sup> The 1928 Constitution guaranteed economic ownership and prevented the confiscation of feudal property. Article 107 showed that:<sup>8</sup> The desire of the bloc leaders to control the state apparatus and place it at its service, and for economic laws to ensure the development of local industries.<sup>9</sup>

The economic structure of the founding leaders of the National Bloc, which included the descent of most of them from families of merchants, landowners and industrialists, led to the emergence of this exceptional interest in the economy in the ideology of the National Bloc. A number of leaders of the National Bloc sought to establish the foundations of a solid national economy through a number of steps, including the refusal to link the Syrian pound to the French franc due to its instability, reducing the duties imposed on raw materials used in local industries, exempting industrial machines from customs duties, and attempts to support local industries emerging from French exploitation by providing national capital instead of French.<sup>10</sup>

A number of National Bloc leaders established important industrial projects such as the Ain al-Fijah project.<sup>11</sup> , founded by Lotfi El Haffar<sup>12</sup> The National Cement Company, founded by Fares Al-Khoury, and the Syrian Conserve Company, founded by Shukri Al-Quwatli with the support of Damascus merchants and industrialists.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arab Thought in the Renaissance 1798-1939*, translated by: Karim Zaqoul, Beirut, Dar Al-Nahar, 1968, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> Najat Qassab Hassan, the previous source, p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> Hashem Othman, *Political Parties in Syria: Secret and Public*, Beirut, Riad Al-Rayyes Publishing, 2001, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Agricultural Question and Peasant Movements in Syria and Lebanon 1820-1945*, Beirut, Dar Al-Farabi, Vol. 2, 1978, Part 2, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> The text of the two articles is in: Hassan Al-Hakim, *Historical Documents Related to the Syrian Issue in the Arab-Faisal Era and the French Mandate 1915-1946*, Beirut, Dar Sader, 1973, p. 270.

<sup>8</sup> Text of the article in: The same source, p. 384.

<sup>9</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Agricultural Issue*, Vol. 2, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Munir Al-Hamash, *Economic Thought in Syrian Political Discourse in the Twentieth Century*, Beirut, Bissan Publishing, Distribution and Advertising, 2004, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ain al-Fijeh Project: A project to extend drinking water from the Ain al-Fijeh area to Damascus. For more details, see: Salma al-Haffar al-Kuzbari, op. cit., p. 111.

A number of national movements have sought economic and political control to strengthen their commercial and industrial positions.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the leaders of the National Bloc were not willing to use force, as the personal losses suffered by landowners, property owners, and merchants in Damascus during the days of the Syrian revolution had a clear impact on most of the leaders of the National Bloc seeking to adopt non-confrontational policies with the French authorities.<sup>2</sup>

The National Bloc tried to stay away from armed conflict and adopted other policies based on political action, which created a delicate balance between force and moderation, by controlling the rebellious elements with the aim of gaining France's favor without losing the people's confidence, in order to become an acceptable mediator between the two parties.<sup>3</sup>

France's shift to a strategy based on meeting some national demands encouraged the National Bloc to maintain its general orientations, but France's slowness in moving in this direction, especially its hesitation in establishing a treaty regulating relations with Syria and establishing a constitution for the country, led to the emergence of the extremist wing in the bloc. Consequently, the local forces in France began to clarify the importance of the influence of the National Bloc after 1928.<sup>4</sup>

The leaders of the National Bloc sought to establish a freely elected parliament so that they could legally use their political skills to address the deteriorating conditions in light of a situation characterized by economic decline and the weakness of the position of Syrian politicians towards France. They used this parliament to eliminate their political opponents, especially since most of these opponents were heavily dependent on France to ensure their political survival.<sup>5</sup>

The National Bloc was characterised by activity in the political, economic and social fields. It did not separate politics and economics, but rather linked them together and clearly saw the mutual influences between them.<sup>6</sup>

There were several reasons behind the formation of the National Bloc as a political organization that played important roles in the Syrian political arena. The circumstances of fragmentation that occurred in the Arab East as a whole and in Syria in particular, and the establishment of customs barriers between its countries changed economic relations and the directions of industrial and commercial movement, which prompted major industrialists, merchants and landowners to unite to confront the new requirements and to stand up to foreign companies supported by the French in order to preserve their interests.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, France began to prepare cadres of employees prepared to compete with the nationalists for their social and political positions and status in the country.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of the Syrian revolution and the dissolution of the People's Party led to a kind of political vacuum within Syria.<sup>9</sup> Especially in light of Syria's confusion between the political leaderships that were tossing it between the Hashemites and the Saudis who were aspiring to its throne, and the nationalists' fear that this political vacuum would lead to their being kept away from confronting France's new methods after Ponsot's arrival, it was necessary to fill this vacuum with some kind of political activity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The same source, p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Dhuqan Qarqout, the previous source, p. 102.

<sup>1</sup> Munir Al-Hamsh, the previous source, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Labor Movement in Syria and Lebanon 1900-1945*, Damascus, Damascus House for Printing and Publishing, 1973, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Nazir Jazmani, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Movements in Syria and Lebanon*, Syrian Communist Party, 1924-1954, Damascus, Ibn Hayyan Press, 1990, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Youssef Habib Al-Youssef, the previous source, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Labor Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Dhuqan Farqut, the previous source, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> The same source, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> Suhaila Rimawi, *Party Rule in Syria during the French Mandate, 1920-1945*, Amman, Majdalawi Publishing House, Vol. 2, 1998, Part 1, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> The same source, p. 52.

In contrast, France realized that despite its success in suppressing the Syrian revolution, this success came at a high price due to the fierce resistance it encountered.<sup>1</sup> ..as well as the criticism it received from world public opinion, especially the League of Nations, due to its excessive use of force to eliminate the revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, France decided to reduce the method of direct rule and to turn to local forces with wide influence in society to play the role of political leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Ponsot's call for parliamentary elections to form a constituent assembly that would draft a constitution for the country complemented this idea. Following this statement, the nationalists held their conference in Beirut to respond to this statement, which was the direct reason for the formation of the National Bloc.<sup>4</sup>

### **Organizational structure of the National Bloc**

The National Bloc was based on four main formations that formed its backbone.<sup>5</sup> :

1. The Permanent Bureau: It consists of seven members elected by the bloc council from among its members for life. They are: Hashim al-Atassi as president, Ibrahim Hanano as leader, Saad Allah al-Jabri as vice president, Faris al-Khoury as dean, Shukri al-Quwatli, Jamil Mardam, and Abdul Rahman al-Kayali. After the death of Ibrahim Hanano, Lutfi al-Haffar was elected in his place.<sup>6</sup>

The council was the one that managed the daily affairs of the National Bloc, and its members constituted its actual leadership. It was responsible for implementing decisions, issuing statements, receiving complaints, and settling disputes. It was also responsible for the dates of the National Bloc Council meetings.<sup>7</sup>

2. The National Bloc Council consists of the members of the Permanent Bureau in addition to 31 others, including Fayez al-Khoury, Fakhri al-Baroudi, Mazhar Raslan, and Tawfiq al-Shishakli. A number of exiled Syrian politicians, such as Shakib Arslan, were added to the Bloc Council.<sup>8</sup> And Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar<sup>9</sup> ..and Ihsan Al-Jabiri and Nabeel Al-Azma. This council is the one that determines and directs the principles and strategies of the National Bloc, and it is the one that elects the members of the permanent council.<sup>10</sup>
3. The General Conference: It consists of members of the Permanent Bureau and the Bloc Council, and delegates of the main and sub-committees. The General Conference, which meets at specific times, examines the issues presented to it by the Permanent Bureau and discusses the work presented to it after applying the principles of the National Bloc and its general system, "reviving the national idea in the country and demonstrating the strength of the nation." Therefore, the General Conference is the appropriate body for mobilizing the masses whenever the National Bloc desires this in order to demonstrate the strength of its position regarding political crises and in its conflict with the French.<sup>11</sup>
4. Committees: They are the executive body of the National Bloc, as they undertake the process of organizing local work and implementing the decisions of the permanent office in the geographical area that falls under the responsibility of the committee. The committee is responsible for main committees and consists of members of the main bloc branch and sub-committees elected by members of the main branch. The sub-committees carry out the task of collecting donations to cover the expenses of the main branch.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Atallah Al-Zaqout, *Lights on the Great Syrian Revolution of 1925-1927*, Damascus, Aladdin Publishing, Distribution and Translation House, 2000, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Najeeb Al-Armanazi, the previous source, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Saeed, *The Great Arab Revolt*, Cairo, Issa Al-Babi Al-Halabi, Vol. 3, n.d., Part 3, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> Bou Ali Yassin and others, the previous source, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 185; Hashem Othman, the previous source, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Najat Qassab Hassan, the previous source, p. 392.

<sup>7</sup> Nasouh Babil, *Syrian Press and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., Beirut, Riad El-Rayyes Publishing, 2001, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Shakib Arslan: He is Shakib bin Hamoud bin Hassan bin Younis Arslan, born in Lebanon in 1869. He was elected to the Ottoman Parliament and then left Syria for Berlin, where he joined the National Bloc. He founded a French-language newspaper to support the National Bloc. He then returned to Beirut and died there in 1946. For more details, see: Khair al-Din al-Zarkali, the previous source, Vol. 3, p. 173; Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 433.

<sup>9</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar had no influence within the bloc. On the contrary, after his return to Syria in 1937, he became one of the most vocal opponents of its policies. For more details, see: Daad al-Hakim, *Letters of Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar 1879 -1940, The History of a Nation in the Life of a Man*, Damascus, Ministry of Culture, 2002, p. 145-146.

<sup>10</sup> Nasouh Babel, the previous source, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, the previous source, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Najat Qassab Hassan, previous source, p. 399-400.

As for the members of the National Bloc, they are all the people who adhere to its principles and are affiliated with it in registration. The member must have completed the age of eighteen.

His age and good conduct<sup>1</sup>

The basic law of the National Bloc has organized the method of terminating the membership of the bloc members, and this is done in one of three ways: dismissal, resignation, or death. The reasons for dismissal are limited to either violating the bloc's decisions, not adhering to them, or colluding with opponents against the interests of the country, provided that the dismissal decision is made by a two-thirds majority of the members of the General Conference.<sup>2</sup>

The formula in which the basic law of the National Bloc Party was written made it the most organized party at that time and rose to the level of the internal regulations of contemporary parties.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to this organization, the National Bloc was able to reach a degree of stability and internal momentum that no other party or political alliance in Syria had reached in that era. The National Bloc Party succeeded in claiming guardianship over Syria in its struggle to expel the occupier from it.<sup>4</sup> The bloc maintained its cohesion despite the intellectual differences and competition among its leadership, in addition to French pressures.<sup>5</sup>

### **Organizations affiliated with the National Bloc:**

- **National Youth Iron Shirts :**

This organization was founded in 1929 under the name of the National Youth with direct support from Fakhri al-Baroudi as an organization affiliated with the National Bloc. The direct goal of its establishment was to be the nucleus of the National Army in the future to replace the army that was under the command of the French. On January 10, 1936, the fortieth day after the death of Hanano, the Iron Shirts divisions were founded as a part affiliated with the organization by al-Baroudi and Shukri al-Quwatli to be an armed military force affiliated with the National Bloc to confront other political organizations.

Among the influential leaders in this organization were Naseeb Al-Bakri, Munir Al-Ajlani, and Saif Al-Din Al-Mamun, who later became the first official in charge of this organization. An executive body was established for the organization and to supervise the activities and tasks assigned to it.

A basic law was drawn up, prepared by Munir al-Ajlani, whose first article stated that the national youth was an Arab nationalist reality whose goal was to establish the state of Syria within its natural borders and to work to establish a union for all Arab countries. An official salute was also determined for this organization, which was to raise the hand forward with the palm extended, which indicates that the leaders of the bloc were influenced by the fascist movements that spread in Europe, which is something that aroused the wrath of the French.<sup>6</sup>

The members of this organization were university students and urban athletes, starting at the age of 18. These members were trained by former Ottoman army officers, in addition to a number of officers from the Faisal era.

The Iron Shirts branches began to spread in Syrian cities such as Homs, Aleppo, Latakia and Tartous, while the main branch was in Damascus. By the end of 1936, the number of members belonging to this organization had reached approximately 15,000..

The organization participated in the festivals held by the National Bloc, in which a large number of people participated to mobilize and support what it decided and to emphasize the necessity of absolute obedience to it. It was also used to influence the elections.<sup>7</sup>

- **Al-Ayyam Newspaper:**

The National Bloc realized the necessity of establishing its own newspaper to be its mouthpiece and defend its policy and to fill the media vacuum in its apparatuses despite the presence of a large number of newspapers that

<sup>1</sup> Walid Al-Moallem, previous source, p. 569.

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p. 570.

<sup>3</sup> Suhaila Al-Rimawi, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Nasouh Babel, the previous source, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Youssef Habib Al-Youssef, the previous source, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Nasouh Babel, the previous source, p. 110; Ghaleb Al-Ayashi, Political Clarifications and Secrets of the French Mandate in Syria, Beirut, 1955, p. 408.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Rajai Rayyan, Political Parties in Syria, pp. 190, 192

supported it, especially Al-Qabas newspaper and its editor-in-chief, Najib Al-Rayyes, who was a member of the National Bloc.<sup>1</sup>

On this basis, I began working on issuing special approvals from the mandate authorities that granted it approval for that, and the first issue was issued on May 10, 1931. Its board of directors consisted of Hashim al-Atassi as president and Ibrahim Hanano, Lutfi al-Haffar, Fakhri al-Baroudi, and Saad Allah al-Jabri as members.<sup>2</sup> The editorship was entrusted to Nasouh Babel. Who became the Chairman of its Board of Directors after the National Bloc decided to sell it to avoid the French pressure that was being exerted against the newspaper through the decisions to suspend and disable it that were issued against it from time to time, but it remained a newspaper that spoke for the National Bloc, maintaining the same influence.<sup>3</sup>

- Arab Office for Advertising and Publishing:

This office was established in October 1934 by Fakhri al-Baroudi and a number of members of the National Bloc. Its main goal was to provide financial resources to support the activities of the bloc, which had begun to expand, and to provide media publicity for it.<sup>4</sup> However, this project has developed significantly, especially after the establishment of a special internal system and the formation of a council to manage it, which is naturally made up of members of the National Bloc, and the setting of greater goals, which are represented by:

1. External Propaganda: The Arabs must make their cause a major international issue with an effective influence on international public policy through active, ongoing, and organized propaganda, as other nations have done. In countries around the world, especially England and France, there are influential figures and public opinion that will not fail to support the Arab cause if the Arabs agree to communicate with them and explain to them the truth, unadulterated. This calls for "the establishment of an organized Arab office for propaganda and publishing, with branches in the capitals and major cities of major countries."

Internal propaganda: This aims to unite the people in the face of crises, foster a sense of common ground, and strive for unified goals. This is achieved by "striving and working to integrate all sub-groups—whether sectarian, regional, tribal, or global—into the greater, comprehensive national league."

Scientific research: This is done by studying the country's political, social and economic problems in an objective scientific manner and providing the governments, parties, associations and propaganda offices that are intended to be established with correct information and statistics so that they can follow their guidance in their programs and plans. In this regard, the assistance of experts and scholars from the country's people is sought, books and pamphlets are written, newspapers are established in different languages, scientific missions are sent, schools and libraries are established, efforts are made to eradicate illiteracy, prepare the Bedouins, give lectures and hold meetings.<sup>5</sup>

### **National Bloc branches:**

After the emergence of the National Bloc as an organized political party, in addition to the French turning a blind eye to the emergence of the bloc, as it was not legally rejected by the French authorities, and in order to complete the organizational aspect of the National Bloc, it was necessary to form branches for it in Syria<sup>6</sup>

The National Bloc established the Damascus branch. This branch formed the main command center in Damascus and appointed one of its members to manage the branch, namely Adeeb Al-Safadi.<sup>7</sup> ..and with him a group of assistants to manage the various activities of the National Bloc, from issuing statements and publications to organizing demonstrations. He participated with Adeeb Al-Safadi in managing the Damascus branch of the main National Bloc apparatuses that were operating in Damascus.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nasouh Babil, previous source, p. 71; Mona Kazem Abdul Zahra Al-Safi, Najib Mahmoud Al-Rayyes and his cultural and political role in Syria 1898-1952, Master's thesis unpublished, University of Karbala, College of Education for Humanities, 2023, p. 85

<sup>2</sup> Mahmoud Alian Al-Mashout, History of the Syrian and Arab Press, Damascus, New Press, 1986, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> The same source, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Dhuqan Qarqout, previous source, p. 150

<sup>5</sup> Sami Marwan Mobaid, East of the Umayyad Mosque: Freemasonry in Damascus 1868-1965, Beirut, Riad El-Rayyes Publishing, 2017, pp. 193-194; Daad El-Hakim, Papers and Memoirs of Fakhri El-Baroudi, Vol. 2, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Harb Farzat, the previous source, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> Adib Al-Safadi: A Syrian politician, the French authorities issued a deportation order against him to the Hasakah region in 1926, but released him in 1928. He participated in the founding of the National Bloc and became the secretary of the National Bloc's office in Damascus. He contributed to the issuance of statements and publications throughout the 1930s. For more details, see: Salma Al-Haffar Al-Kuzbari, op. cit., p. 185; Philip Khoury, op. cit., p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Mudhik Al-Mubki Newspaper, Damascus, September 18, 1934.



The Damascus branch was the largest and most active, as it included the most prominent leaders of the National Bloc, such as Shukri al-Quwatli, Jamil Mardam, and Naseeb al-Bakri.<sup>1</sup> , Fakhry Al-Baroudi, Lotfi Al-Haffar, and Fares Al-Khoury <sup>2</sup>

The Damascus branch contributed to strengthening the overall strength of the National Bloc through their personal and family relationships with all members of Damascus society. Fakhri al-Baroudi had wide influence among the educated and cultured youth, and was known as their official sponsor.<sup>3</sup>

Naseeb Al-Bakri was highly respected in the neighborhoods of Damascus for his family standing and his participation in the Syrian revolution.<sup>4</sup>

Lutfi al-Haffar's extensive relations with the merchants of Damascus contributed to supporting the policy of the National Bloc through the merchants' financial support for the National Bloc's activities.<sup>5</sup>

Fares al-Khoury was also able to employ the Christians of Damascus to support the policy of the National Bloc, and Jamil Mardam and Shukri al-Quwatli had wide popularity in the neighborhoods of Damascus and among university and school students.<sup>6</sup>

The Aleppo branch was second to the Damascus branch in terms of the amount of influence and impact it could exercise on the Syrian street.<sup>7</sup> Its most prominent leaders are: Ibrahim Hanano, Saad Allah Al-Jabri, and Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali.<sup>8</sup>

These people had wide influence in the Aleppo community, as each of the leaders of the bloc in the Aleppo branch had his own group of supporters in addition to the men of the National Bloc. Ibrahim Hanano was highly respected in all of northern Syria because of his resistance to the French occupation in the early twenties.<sup>9</sup>

Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali and Saad Allah Al-Jabiri also had extensive relations in the Aleppo community thanks to their culture and the influence of their families. The Aleppo branch was also distinguished from the Damascus branch in that it was more rigid in its positions.<sup>10</sup>

### **Party financing:**

The main source of funding for the National Bloc Party was private donations from some of the bloc's senior leaders or through merchants, landlords and wealthy people who had friendly relations with a section of the National Bloc's leadership.<sup>11</sup>

Although these merchants were usually generous in giving, they usually only gave their donations in times of crisis, and they were not given to the relevant financial committees, but rather to one of the members personally. This caused a defect in the financial system of the National Bloc, as the leaders of the bloc distributed the donation money in order to expand their relationships and increase their influence within the bloc.<sup>12</sup>

Fakhri al-Baroudi tried to develop a project to finance the bloc through the Propaganda and Publication Office, which developed the franc project, which stipulated collecting donations from every Syrian citizen in an amount equivalent to five Syrian piasters. This project achieved great success.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Naseeb Al-Bakri: He is Muhammad Naseeb Atallah Al-Bakri. He was born in Damascus to a prominent family in 1888. He received his primary education in Beirut. He joined the Al-Fatat Party and had a strong relationship with King Faisal. He participated in the Syrian Revolution and was appointed governor of Jabal Hawran in 1937. He held several ministerial positions and became a member of Parliament in 1943.-1947: He participated in the founding of the People's Party after the split of the National Bloc. For more details, see: Khair al-Din al-Zarkali, the previous source, Vol. 8, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Najat Qassab Hassan, previous source, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Jamal Barut and others, the previous source, Vol. 2, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Fayeze Salama, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> Salma Al-Haffar Al-Kuzbari, previous source, p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Khoury, the previous source, p. 318.

<sup>7</sup> Abdullah Hanna, The Agricultural Issue, Vol. 2, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Fayeze Qusra, The Arab Revolution in Northern Syria: Ibrahim Hanano's Revolution, Damascus, Ministry of Culture, 2008, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Abdullah Hanna, The Labor Movement, p. 220

<sup>11</sup> Al-Mudhik Al-Mubki Newspaper, Damascus, August 8, 1936.

<sup>12</sup> Munir Al-Hamsh, the previous source, p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> Daad Al-Hakim, Papers and Memoirs of Fakhri Al-Baroudi, Vol. 2, p. 121.

The National Bloc also sometimes relied on foreign aid from some Arab countries such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, but this aid was often conditional.<sup>1</sup>

After the National Bloc came to power after the 1936 elections, the National Bloc began to rely on state resources to secure the funds it needed.<sup>2</sup>

The internal regulations of the National Bloc Party have clarified the party's financial resources, their sources and methods of spending them.<sup>3</sup>

The official source of the National Bloc Party's resources is the membership, registration and donation fees paid by party members. A registration fee of no less than one Syrian pound and a monthly subscription fee of no less than five piasters and no more than twenty piasters are collected from party members. If the amount exceeds that, it is considered a donation. The main committees contribute 20% of their revenues to the expenses of the permanent office. The permanent office can increase this percentage according to the committee's revenues and expenses. The permanent office can also use the resources of the main or sub-committee to assist another main or sub-committee. The permanent office plays the role of overseeing the revenues and expenses of the main or sub-committees by means of observers purchased by the office for this purpose.<sup>4</sup>

The fees taken from members were considered a drawback of the National Bloc, as membership and subscription fees were relatively high, as the poor classes of farmers and workers were not able to pay such an amount, so party membership was limited to the affluent class in the cities and some notables of the districts. It may be concluded from this that the leadership of the National Bloc Party wanted the support of the masses without allowing them to participate.<sup>5</sup>

### **Social, cultural and political composition:**

**1. Social structure:** The social origins of the leaders of the National Bloc show that its members do not belong to a single social class.<sup>6</sup> The merchants, industrialists and the bourgeois classes associated with them formed one of the most important components of the national bloc.<sup>7</sup> And the most enthusiastic groups in confronting the French were

The "feudal" landowners also formed part of the leadership of the National Bloc, and although they did not constitute a majority, the general influence of this class in the country was great, and they were more willing to cooperate with France, which affected the policy of the National Bloc.<sup>9</sup>

A mixture of the two classes above also joined the ranks of the bloc, meaning that they were from the feudal class, but they invested part of their money in the field of industry and trade because of the high profits it generated, and this group had the largest role in making political decisions.<sup>10</sup>

It appears that this group sought to strengthen its ties with the general public, and was the link between the National Bloc and the masses. It also appears that the social fabric of the National Bloc was an alliance between the Syrian bourgeoisie and the feudal class.

This alliance represented about two-thirds of the leaders of the National Bloc.<sup>11</sup> Also, the majority of the members of the National Bloc were from the cities and not from the countryside.<sup>12</sup> ..and their concentration in the cities of Damascus ranked first, followed by Aleppo, then Homs and Hama. The reason for the control of feudalism and the wealthy over the National Bloc is that the national movement in Syria, since its formation in the late

<sup>1</sup> Walid Al-Moallem, the previous source, p. 257; Zafer Victor Kalos, *The Political Movement in Syria from the Ottoman and Arab-Syrian Eras*, Aleppo, Dar Al-Sharq Al-Arabi, n.d., p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Hashem Othman, previous source, p. 128

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Kayali, the previous source, Vol. 1, p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> Walid Al-Moallem, previous source, p. 571.

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *Labor Movements*, p. 226.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, translated by Samir Abdo and Mahmoud Falaha, 7th ed., Damascus, Dar Tlass, 1996, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar 1879-1940*, Damascus, Al-Ahali for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1989, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Agricultural Issue*, Part 2, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Jordan, H. Thori, *Syrian Politics and the Military 1945-1958*, translated by Mahmoud Falaha, 2nd ed., Damascus, Dar Al-Jamaheer, 1969, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> The same source, p. 63; Abdullah Hanna, *Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar*, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Salah Al-Akkad, *The Contemporary Arab East*, Cairo, Anglo-Egyptian Press, 1983, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Harb Farzat, the previous source, p. 129.

Ottoman era, relied on feudalism, employees and the wealthy in the interior regions of Syria, as the fixed income of these groups strengthened their political ambitions.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Cultural composition:** The leaders of the National Bloc received a great deal of education, most of them receiving secular education rather than religious education.<sup>2</sup> A number of them studied in French institutes or Syrian institutes that followed the Syrian approach, so the principles of the French Revolution greatly influenced them. Therefore, they were surprised by France's policy in Syria because of the brutality, oppression, and denial of the principles of the French Revolution of freedom, equality, and brotherhood that it led to.<sup>3</sup> The duality of French policy affected their perceptions and concepts, and this contradiction was reflected in the orientations of these politicians. A section of the leaders of the National Bloc studied in Ottoman schools, which were also influenced by French thinking, especially after the Unionists' coup. Therefore, the thinking of this group was close to the thinking of the first group.<sup>4</sup>

Another section of the National Bloc leaders received their education in Europe, at the American University of Beirut and the Protestant College in Beirut as well, where they studied medicine, law and administration.<sup>5</sup>

**3. Political structure:** The political background of most of the leaders of the National Bloc goes back to two main organizations that played an important role in the Syrian arena, namely the People's Party and the Independence Party.<sup>6</sup>

After the end of the Syrian revolution and the issuance of the death sentence against Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar, who left Syria after that, the People's Party fell apart and its members saw in the National Bloc the organization through which they could resume their party activity. The Independence Party did the same after Shukri Al-Quwatli merged the wing he led into it.<sup>7</sup> The third category that formed the National Bloc was made up of those independent in their political activity who had previously carried out activities during the time of King Faisal's government.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mahmoud Kamel, *The Great Arab State*, Cairo, Dar Al-Maaref, n.d., p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *Labor Movements*, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *The Agricultural Issue*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Hanna, *Abdul Rahman Al-Shahbandar*, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Amal Mikhail Bashour, *A Study in the Political History of Syria*, Tripoli, Gross Press, 2003, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Amal Mikhail Bashour, previous source, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Salma Al-Haffar Al-Kuzbari, previous source, p. 185.