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THOUGHTS FROM TUNIS

A Letter from Charles F. Gallagher

Tunis
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It's a long, long time from May to December, as the well-known refrain goes. And between them the days are not only growing shorter, but chances for the West are getting slowly slimmer in this part of the Arab world. Taking stock here in Tunis after a short stay on my first revisit this year, I am compelled to contrast the general feeling now abroad in North Africa with what was prevailing early last summer on my return to Morocco.

There is no doubt that the climate is beginning to deteriorate. It is changing almost imperceptibly, like a glacier or the movement of the hour hand on a watch which cannot be followed but which, each time you stop to look, has edged forward a bit and keeps on moving always in the same direction.

At first thought it might seem surprising that one is more conscious of the drift here in Tunisia than in Morocco. For if you had to give a brief definition of the new Tunisian Republic it might well be that it is, by comparison with most Arab states, a free country and a friendly country. This counts for much, and the good will that is manifest here, from President Bourguiba on down to the shoeshine boy at the corner cafe, is a precious asset. Unfortunately, Tunisia is also a small country and a poor country, and the imperatives of its economic position stand out daily like a running sore.

The poverty here is grinding; it shocks the observer who comes from a Morocco which seems in retrospect to be almost a highly-developed country. One example: when I first arrived the downtown air terminal was surrounded by unemployed, unofficial porters who begged to carry my bags to the hotel. "Only two steps," they said, knowing, as I did, that it was a good six or seven blocks. Not wanting to walk it myself in the rain, I finally

hailed a taxi. We were held up by possibly two red lights, but when we arrived without any real delay there on the curb was a half-blind man of forty-odd, one of the original would-be porters, waiting to open the door of the cab for me. This was no racket and he was no cynical beggar; he had run the distance through the city streets in the hope of getting perhaps a fifty-franc tip for carrying something from the taxi to the hotel door. What could you do but give him his tip?

This situation is repeated, with different nuances, on all sides; the boys who somehow get hold of municipal tram tickets and try to sell them to you cut-rate before you board (the profit is much less than a penny); the beggars in the streets who have come from even more hopeless conditions in the arid south; and the endless "position wanted" columns of the papers, in which applicants with good education and background are asking for any sort of menial work. The first reaction is: How can these people be friendly to the West when they see all around them occidentals steeped in what seems to them incredible luxury? How is it possible that there will not be a social revolution, a blind outburst of destruction and rage against not only the present inequality but against the apparent hopelessness of remedying this inequality? The answers are simple: they cannot remain friendly to the West much longer unless some sweeping changes are undertaken in Western policy; and there most certainly will be a social revolution if the economic picutre does not soon brighten sharply.

No one knows this better than the first-rate young Tunisian leaders who are doing their best to carry out social and economic reforms and still keep this a free country. Some reforms, such as abolishing polygamy, cost nothing, but others, such as building schools, take means which the government can hardly scrape together. If your income is cut from $200 a month to $100 a month, you may make do for a short time with great sacrifices. But if it is cut from $100 to $10 there is no hope, and the Tunisian state, which has been practicing since independence a very tight austerity policy, is just about coming to the end of items on which it can further economize. Deficit financing and unorthodox double-bookkeeping can no longer conceal the fact that the money is not there, and that the 12,000,000,000 francs in French promised aid is bogged down in political arguments which are unlikely to be settled soon. "The French are playing the game of asphyxiating us," said Abdelaziz

CHARLES F. GALLAGHER has since 1951 been a student of the affairs of Northwest Africa. He started his higher education at the University of California just after Pearl Harbor and soon was shifted to the Japanese language school at Boulder, Colo. He served out the war as an officer in the Navy and then became fine arts advisor on Japanese cultural property during the occupation of Japan. In 1949 he entered Harvard University to major in Far Eastern languages and history. He was graduated *summa cum laude* in 1951. Subsequently he was twice offered Harvard-Yenching fellowships to continue in the Far Eastern field, but decided instead to study Islamic society. Under Fulbright and Ford fellowships, he worked for two years in Paris and three years in North Africa. After completing his research in Rabat, he settled in Tangier to write a history of Morocco and a grammar of Maghrebian Arabic. He joined the AUFS in July 1956 as a staff member and participated in the 1956-57 program of visits to member institutions. In the summer of 1957 he returned to North Africa under AUFS auspices.

Mathari, the Director of the Société Tunisienne de Banque, Tunisia's first national bank which was set up this past week to break the strangle hold of French financial interests on the country. As things now stand, the Frency may well succeed.

Tied in with economic discontent is political dissatisfaction. President Bourguiba knows this well. In a statement the other day he said that his people wanted liberty, dignity, and bread. Of the three items they have only the first, and that is sharply conditioned by the inability to do anything much with it except starve. Dignity was certainly uplifted by the Anglo-American decision to supply token arms a few weeks ago, but it is not arms in the long run which will contribute to a permanent solution. The President admitted last week in an interview that his regime is weakening and that he does not know how much longer he can continue to follow a pro-Western policy: one month, three months, six months. Others have an idea. A young Tunisian newspaper editor spelled it out to me clearly: "If things do not improve here, there will be another Middle East in North Africa. And when it happens, Bourguiba will either have to take the path of Nuri /as-Said, the strong man and ex-premier of Iraq/ and rule as a dictator, or he will go along with popular sentiment and emulate Nasser."

The key to the political problem here, much more than in Morocco, lies in the Algerian question. Tunis is closer in many ways to Algiers than is Rabat, and Tunisia is moreover caught between the exigencies of Algeria on the west and Egypt on the east. Morocco has been able to take a more detached view, although vitally interested in a settlement, but when Mongi Slim, the Tunisian Ambassador, speaks for the Algerian cause and North African unity in the United Nations, it is a life-and-death issue for his country.

Tunisian leaders are afraid, and those who are closest to the West are the most afraid. Their fear shows through their conversations, particularly in their importuning Americans to take a firm stand on Algeria. They have been warning for several weeks that if the UN were non-committal in this debate it would be the last straw for FLN leaders who would have no recourse but to turn to the East for arms. This is an open secret here; the government and all responsible foreign political observers know it. And it is also common knowledge that parts of the FLN are slipping to the left to a degree which upsets Algeria's neighbors more than they care to admit.

The beginnings of the real crisis are here already. With the passage of a watered-down Loi Cadre by the French Assembly, and the statement by Premier Gaillard that "We will never accept, whatever the terms and the circumlocutions, the independence of Algeria," the chips are down. Les jeux sont faits. If the United Nations confirm the impasse within the next few days, the ultimate move of the FLN onto the Syro-Egyptian bandwagon will be inevitable, all the more so because Tunisia and Morocco will have shown themselves incapable, for all their friendliness with the West, of imposing a negotiated solution. With no other hope, the Algerians will retreat into an anti-Western intransigence which the Tunisians fear will drag first themselves, then the Moroccans, along with them. One Tunisian intellectual put it bluntly: "The unity of North Africa is the important thing. We are nothing alone. If Algeria goes over to the East we will have to go too, whether we like it or not."

Disappointment would very likely be all the more bitter because of

the false hopes raised in recent weeks by the British and American arms deliveries. The tempest in France over this teapot of popguns had the effect of persuading a number of North Africans who wanted to believe in the West that the two powers were finally getting ready to disavow French policy in North Africa. Unable to comprehend the difficulties of working behind the scenes to change French thought without sacrificing the Atlantic Alliance, the average man here is beginning to feel betrayed, even though no promises were ever made.

Many observers here, however, think that the arms deliveries had at least one good result. They postponed a crisis within Tunisia which surely would have erupted if the guns had been refused. Their reasoning goes this way: the arms promised by Egypt were a kind of poisoned gift. If Egyptian arms had been the only ones received, Bourguiba was to be invited to Cairo to thank Nasser for them; there he would have been confronted with his rival Salah ben Youssef (condemned to death for insurrection in Tunisia and now in exile in Egypt) and forced to take him back into a government of "reconciliation and true national independence" which would closely have followed the path taken by Syria and Egypt recently. When this plan failed, it is said, Salah ben Youssef was packed off to Damascus to be received by President al-Kuwatly in a most friendly fashion, as a reminder that the Syro-Egyptian bloc considered him and not Bourguiba the real leader of the country and was holding him in reserve for use when needed.

Looking back on Morocco, which I left ten days ago, the problem seems a little less acute, but the same symptoms are there in slightly different form: a basic desire for alignment with the West by many of the moderate leaders, including the King; an indifference among the population as a whole; and -- unlike Tunisia -- a growing overt hostility, sharpened by irritation at Western policy, among students and union members in the cities. Neither pan-Arab nor "positive neutrality" sentiment is as yet strong in Morocco, but there are signs that both, especially the latter, are spreading. The recent outbreak of fighting between Moroccan irregulars and Spanish troops at Ifni shows the hidden stresses in the country.

In the foreign policy debates held at the Consultative Assembly in Rabat last month, just before the royal visit to the United States, a new note dominated. It was finally translated, in the closing resolution, as "nondependence on any nation or group of nations" and, so far, it can be taken to mean just what it says, i.e., a position between the West, the East, and the Arab League. Unofficially, however, a brisk breeze of anti-Americanism was blowing, particularly over the question of foreign troops and bases. Morocco is much more "occupied" than Tunisia and it is the irritant of the presence of the armed forces of three countries (France, Spain and the United States) which shows indications of turning into a cancer.

As with almost everything else today, the issue of American bases is tied up with the political color of the post-Sputnik world. Moroccans are beginning to think twice about having the Strategic Air Force as their guest if it turns out that their country can be devastated by rockets. This fear is common to many countries, but in Morocco it is now being fed by the association, in the popular mind, of American forces with other "imperialist" troops -- and the Ifni troubles will certainly not improve relations -- and by Egyptian charges that the United States is following in the steps of Franco-British colonialism in the Middle East. If there, Moroccans reason, why not here?

As contacts with the Middle East increase, Moroccans are being constantly reminded by many of their Levantine visitors that they are not really independent and that they are being "played" for fools. And some are beginning to believe it. Teachers from Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, who have arrived this scholastic year for the first time, will have a powerful influence on the younger generation, especially at secondary school level, i.e., the young cadres of five years hence. And almost every one of these teachers is somewhere between mildly and extremely anti-Western. The other side of the coin finds Moroccan students who are going east, principally to Syria, for higher education, and a smaller number who went off on study trips to Communist China this summer, to the Moscow Youth Festival, etc. They have been impressed with what they saw and learned and their reactions in the press and in personal conversation are forthright. It is significant that the line of the younger generation recently has been far more antioccidental than the statements of government leaders a generation older. It should be added that Tunisia's refusal to accept Middle Eastern teachers -- which it does not need as desperately as Morocco -- and its insistence on sending all its students to Western European countries for higher education, has permitted it to avoid this problem for the present.

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The heart of the matter remains Algeria, though. Whatever slow disillusionment with the West is fermenting in the other lands of North Africa, it is being catalyzed there.

"The war will go on in Algeria," said Bourguiba resignedly after French rejection of the Tuniso-Moroccan good offices offer, "until France is ready for the idea of Algerian independence." The war is now something like a chess game which is being played between the Algerians and the French on one level, and between the Communists and the West on another. It is being played by the Communists with infinite patience and with a double goal. While the French Communist Party and the Algerian Communist Party openly support the revolution and demand peace in Algeria (knowing that the mere fact of their calling for peace will make it more difficult for the non-Communist parties to take the same position), Moscow says very little about it. It appears to have some doubts about the FLN itself, but it is willing to favor it in a general way. The main Russian fear is that Algeria will be another Indochina, with the substitution of American for French influence, as in South Vietnam. Communist propaganda to the Arab world these days is much harder on the United States than on France or Britain. A steady drumfire is kept up to convince the Arabs that America is the real enemy and to point out to the misled, duped Anglo-French that the United States is merely anxious to do them out of their empire.

But meanwhile positions are being slowly set up for the final kill. On the one hand it is improbable that, for a long time to come, any majority in favor of an Algerian settlement can be found in the French Assembly without the support of the Communists. The constant threat of a Popular Front government hangs over the issue and distorts it. This month a new leftist party is being formed in France, composed of dissident socialists unhappy over the official Mollet policy and other splinter left groupings. It will be called tentatively the "Union of the Socialist Left." It is not at all important yet, but it is a straw in the wind, for its platform calls for "Peace in North Africa based on a new majority not excluding the Communists."

On the other hand, the Communists will soon offer arms to Algeria or make them available through intermediaries in the Middle East, and they will finally be accepted. Thus the Communists will be in the position of the chess player who has interposed his knight between the enemy king and queen: one or the other piece will fall. Either France, progressively exhausted in a financial sense by the revolution and eroded spiritually by internal division, will make a settlement through a Popular Front government, or France will fight stubbornly on with a rightist government and the FLN and the whole Algerian Liberation Movement will be gradually swallowed by the Communists. One of these two alternatives is inevitable unless, by some miracle, reason returns to the national parties in the French Assembly (i.e., the non-Communists) and they agree to the Algerian thesis before this happens.

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There is little use in spelling out the gravity of these prospects if some attempt is not made to consider solutions. Is there anything the United States can do to reverse the general trend of the climate in North Africa? Most observers here, of whom I am one, and most sincere friends of the United States in Tunisia think it will be very difficult, if not impossible, unless several fundamental steps are taken in the next few months. Among these are:

1) A firm stand by the United States for Algerian independence, at least privately (and most Tunisians stress and understand the need for working away from the limelight rather than through sudden, blustering announcements) of the sort taken on the initiative of President Roosevelt by America in regard to India's freedom during World War II.

2) A program of "massive" economic aid to Tunisia (which bids fair to become the Jordan of North Africa) designed to show that it is worth while to be the friend of the United States, just as the Soviet Union is now proving to everyone that it pays Syria and Egypt to be associated with it. It is worth recalling the disappointed protest of Bourguiba last spring when the Richards Mission allotted his country a pittance: "America treats her enemies better than her friends," was his comment. American aid to Tunisia this year: $8,000,000. Soviet aid to Syria, a country of almost exactly the same population and income level: $200,000,000. Many Tunisians think that economic aid to the tune of about $100,000,000 a year for the next ten years would be enough to start the economy rolling in an irreversible direction and make Tunisia a kind of "show window for democracy" in the Arab world. Experts may disagree on the sum, but the cost will not be cheap. But if American leaders and public opinion decide not to pay it, let them not complain when they wake up some morning to find Soviet penetration of North Africa a <u>fait accompli</u> as it now is in the Middle East.

3) A somewhat similar liberal economic arrangement with Morocco, although the need is less pressing. One which, however, will involve the eventual removal of American bases there. Since these bases are destined to become relatively useless within a few years when an ICBM is produced, sage diplomacy should certainly make some promise as to eventual relinquishment now. The hard fact is that the longer the bases remain the more friction there will be with Moroccan opinion.

4) A large-scale general-education and technical-education program to be carried out both within the countries concerned and in Western countries. For the next few years language problems will impede any considerable number of North Africans from coming to the United States. But a program could be worked out whereby fellowships would be offered by American institutions for study in French-language countries, i.e., France, Belgium, and Switzerland -- the countries to which Tunisia is now sending as many of its bright young men as it can afford to. Conversely funds could be provided for teachers from French-language countries to come here to teach. This year, in the primary field, Tunisia asked for 500 French teachers and got 20. Many reasons mitigated against a full response, but the low salary-scale was among the most important. If the posts are made attractive enough, teachers will come, and eventually, when English is well-enough known as a secondary language in the middle schools, English-speaking teachers can take part in the program. Failing some arrangement of this kind Syrian and Egyptian influence in the intellectual domain in North Africa will become predominant within a decade with a distressing outlook for the governments concerned, not to speak of Western interests.

This is the minimum program of co-operation, anything less than which is likely to lose North Africa within a few years. There is nothing in it which is not known to American diplomats in the field. The ICA Mission in Tunisia, for example, is well aware of the insufficiency of the funds allotted it, and in the field of education it already has going projects and plans for the future which are highly commendable (although it is my personal view that any large-scale education program should be degovernmentalized and handled either by a foundation or by a group of universities). But the contacts of organizations like ICA are made mostly within a closed diplomatic circle, and this letter is an attempt to broaden the base of those who understand the necessity for remedial socio-economic action in North Africa as soon as possible.

Even all this may not suffice to re-establish a climate of warmth and confidence. In trying to judge the causes for the deterioration of Western stock here, weight must be given to the repercussion of outside events. Our present position of military strength, or the temporary lack of it, has put doubts into the minds of many would-be supporters of the West. Americans have always been considered rich, and while it is fine to be rich if you are also thought generous and powerful at the same time, for a long period many Arab states have had the idea that America is niggardly rather than generous, and they now begin to suspect that it may be weak, too. The temptation to disengage in these circumstances is obvious.

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In postscript there is one final source of concern which has bothered me from time to time recently, and that is what a liberal Frenchman, an ex-Governor of Algeria, in discussing Franco-Algerian relations, called the "realm of respect." Many North Africans have expressed to me their inquietude that their people are not really considered the 1:1 equal of the ordinary Westerner. While not accusing the average airman in Morocco, for example, of racism, and while making allowances for the many obstacles in the way of penetrating Muslim society (here I am speaking only of North Africa and not of the Middle East), there seems to be something in this. To many Americans the Germans are clean and prosperous, the English stalwart, the Italians artistic, the Japanese industrious, and so on, but there is little that is attributed to the average

"Arab." His way of life, his religion and thought, his family relations are either so slightly different that they jar for not being identical or so impossibly alien as to make understanding too difficult; and his political and economic demands are often considered to fit ill with the degree of his social and intellectual advancement. A flagrant example of what I mean is found in a statement reported to have been made by ex-Premier Georges Bidault in a public rally in Paris last week. As quoted in L'Action here in Tunis, he said to his audience:

"What I am saying is pitched to the level of the average listener; that is, a high-school graduate if he is French, and a minister if he is an Arab."

This kind of thinking is not only vulgar, it is politically disastrous -- for it is in this realm of respect more than any other that the French have lost Algeria.

In the same way, last year when I was visiting composers of AUFS member colleges, a student mentioned that he had spent the summer in an international study group. When I asked him how he had found it and what he thought of his fellow students, he answered that he had liked them all "except the Arabs," whom he thought vain, argumentative and not open to reason. We had a long talk about it and I think I understood his viewpoint, but I kept thinking that his bluff approach to a defensively sensitive group was bound to fail. A wider perspective of Arab problems and manners, a little smoothness of the tongue, and a certain formal politeness might have done the job. But it was a contact wasted because, I suspect, each expected too much of the other.

When considering the attraction that communist countries held for the Moroccan students who visited them this summer, it is well to keep this factor of pride and prejudice in mind. Many of the returnees made an absolute identification of communist society with a young, sound, constructive, comradely and disinterested attitude; and they contrasted this with their view of the Western businessman as a senile, greedy, lazy, profit-seeking exploiter who despised them while he robbed them. This set of values may seem grotesque to American readers but it testifies in part to the enormous need of the younger generation Arabs to belong, to be accepted in the outside world as first-class citizens, and it is an indication of the long, inner personal humiliation which so many feel to be their principal grief against the West.

This is a long-range problem and it will require a lot of contacts, plus a lot of tact and concession on both sides before any progress shows. There are many Americans in the countries of North Africa who maintain the friendliest personal contacts with Muslims, usually Westernized, but their sympathy often does not extend to the civilization as a whole; that is viewed as a theater piece, and the merchants, nomads, manual laborers, and servants who make it up as exotic players on a stage. Unless there is a marked psychological change in this viewpoint and until Westerners begin to consider the Arabs as human beings, in the same way that they think of Austrians, Danes, or Argentineans, there is not much hope for any really sound friendship between the West and the Arab world, at least that part of it with which I am familiar.

Charles F Gallagher