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TWO TUNISIAS: THE PLAN FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTER-SOUTH

A Letter from Charles F. Gallagher

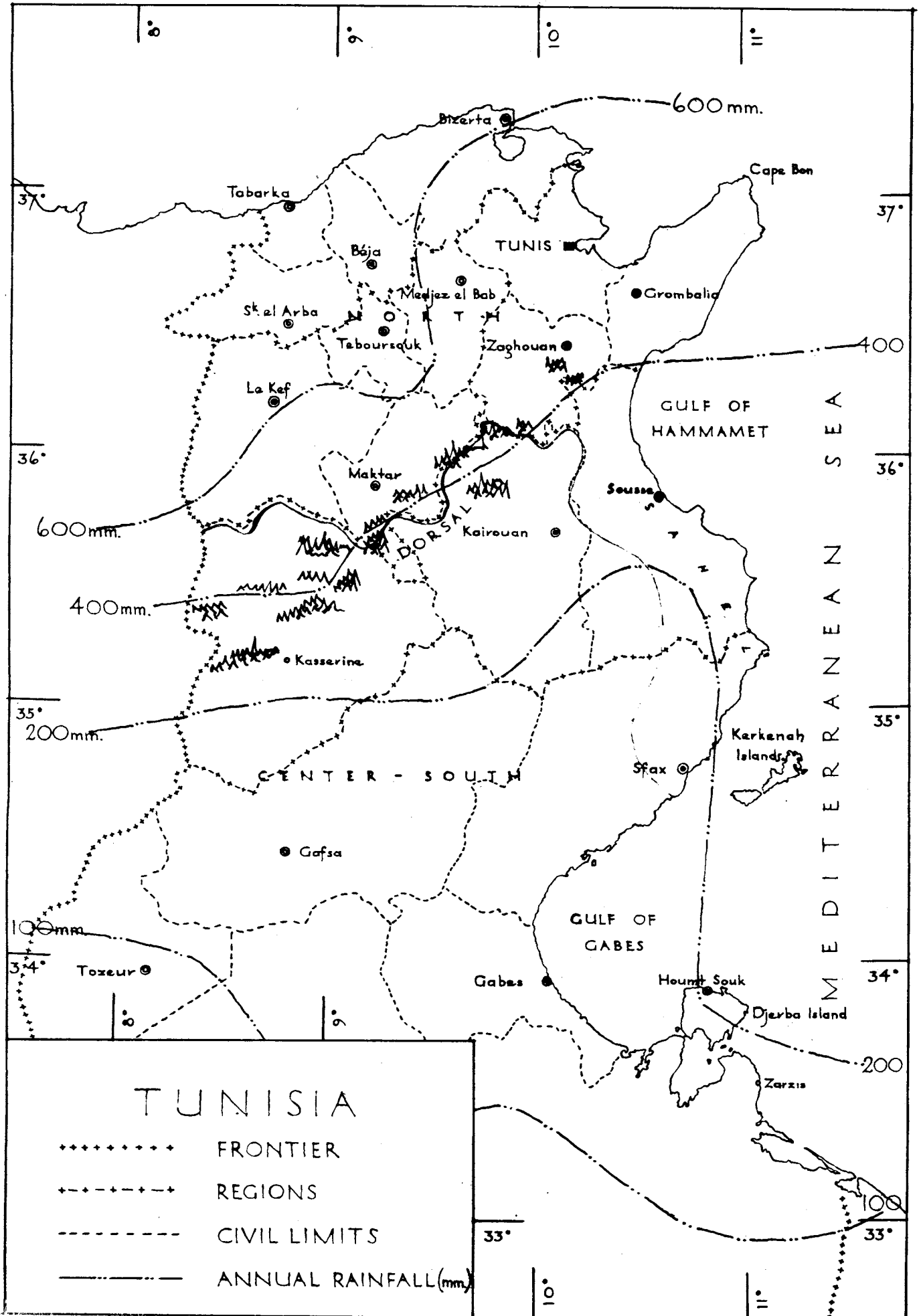
Tangier
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Shortly after one leaves Tunis aboard a vintage DC-3 of Tunis Air headed south for the Isle of Djerba, the plane flies over the so-called "Tunisian Dorsal," the mountain chain which runs roughly southwest-northeast from the Algerian border and drops into the Mediterranean at Cape Bon, dividing the country into two unequal parts. Unequal not only in area, but in all other respects as well, as the air-borne traveler is quick to notice. For after the relatively well-watered north, in which the forests of Tabarka and the fertile green patches of the Medjerda River valley stand out, the countryside south of the dorsal becomes suddenly brown and hard, with its arid surface highlighted by the cracks of dry river-beds, to which an impoverished foliage clings desperately, or by the scattered mud-walled farmhouses grouped around an occasional point of underground water. These signs of life are relative rarities, however, especially as one proceeds farther south. Then there is only an increasing desolation, emphasized by the prevalence of gleaming-white sebkhas, dry, salt lakes, some of considerable size, which are dotted over a lunar landscape.

A glance at the map on page two shows that the area south of the dorsal comprises more than two-thirds of the area of the whole country. Its population, however, is nowhere near proportionate: about one-quarter only of all Tunisians live in the center-south, and recent statistics have shown that alarming numbers of these have been steadily drifting north in recent years, as the result of the hopelessness of eking out a living in their sterile homeland. This migration and the constantly increasing impoverishment of the greater part of the country's surface with a resultant imbalance in all the aspects of economic and social life, are, in the opinion of all the Tunisian leaders in government and labor, the number one problem for Tunisia in the immediate future. And, hearteningly following up their words with action, officials are beginning this month to take the first practical steps in perhaps two thousand years to remedy the plight of what they call "the other Tunisia."

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Certainly the region generally thought of as the center-south, as marked on the map, does not offer a perfect homogeneity.



The regions closest to the coast are less disfavored by nature than the steppes of the center-west and the desert areas of the Nefzawa. The gaidship of Thala for example, in the northwestern part of the zone, receives 400 mm. (about 16 inches) of rainfall a year, and is infinitely better off than the regions around Gafsa. The rainfall lines on the map show the sharp decrease encountered as the desert is approached.

There is a basic unity to the area, however, in that however much the rainfall may vary within it, it is always insufficient and highly irregular. Also common to the whole area is excessive insolation, lack of nebulosity, and consequent aridity. The northern limit of the center-south coincides in general with the 400 mm. rainfall line, and in the extreme south it may rain once in a decade. For practical planning purposes, however, the 100 mm. rainfall line may be considered the southern limit, for below that it is doubtful whether at present anything can be done, even with the most advanced techniques and assuming that unlimited sums of money were available. On the northeast the area is bounded by the Sahel, a narrow, slightly-inclined coastal strip running down as far as Sfax, which, owing to the beneficent influence of the Mediterranean, receives enough precipitation in the form of fogs to supplement the deficient rainfall. The Sahel is the home of great olive plantations which extend mile upon mile, and its whole economy is such that it should be viewed as either a separate region or as an adjunct of the north.

Dominant winds in the central-southern steppes are from the south, i.e. the desert: dry and burning, they provoke a very high degree of evaporation. All the streams in the area are intermittent and most of them end their short, violent lives in inland sebkhas without ever reaching the sea. The vegetation is characteristic of the Mediterranean steppe, with an almost total absence of trees. The principal cover consists of great plains of esparto grass (alfa).

The inhabitants are in the majority the descendants of nomadic tribes who swept into southern Tunisia in successive waves during the Middle Ages. They are often described as passive, lazy, recalcitrant to progress, and too easily addicted to banditry and pillage. The area in which nomadism is prevalent today coincides almost completely with the area in question. Everywhere here the predominant social organization remains the tribe. The principal economic activities are, in order, stock-raising, picking (of esparto grass), and cereal culture.

As early as 1910, however, at least one Western scholar saw that the root of the problem did not lie alone in putting the blame on the hereditary deficiencies of the local inhabitants,¹ and in the following passage spoke with insight of the misery, the crime and the general insecurity of the area:

¹ Saurin, J. Le Peuplement Français en Tunisie, Paris, 1910, pp. 83ff.

"It is not gendarmes who will re-establish security, it is bread which must be given to the native; for misery is the general cause of all the evils. Crimes, pillage, and thefts increase in dry years; their incidence is also higher in dryer areas than in better-watered ones."

Saurin had previously noted that the insurrections of 1870 and 1881 in Algeria coincided with famine years which reduced the number of sheep by more than half.

A more recent denial of the theory that "the natives like to live that way" has been produced in the past twenty years. Since 1936 more than 200,000 persons have fled these impoverished areas and gone to swell the population of the north or the Sahel, where they generally live in urban conditions as deplorable in other respects as those of the tent or gurbi they abandoned. Incapable of integrating themselves to modern city life, they stagnate anew in the towns, to their own and to the metropolis' detriment.

In short, at the present time two-thirds of the area and one-fourth of the population of the country do not effectively participate in the national life, and while this condition is allowed to exist, any progress made in the richer and more fertile regions of the north will be annulled by the burden of supporting the disinherited regions, says Lamine Bellagha, the young economist who has been for three months Director of the Plan for the Development of the Tunisian Economy. It is further claimed that an enlargement of many sectors of commerce and small industry cannot be envisaged without an expansion of the internal markets brought about by an increase in the buying power of the forgotten people of the center-south.

CAUSES OF POVERTY

In the Mediterranean area the 400 mm. rain line marks the practical frontier between two agricultural regions. Above that line winter cultures, cereals in particular, arboriculture, the vine, and market-garden farms succeed without difficulty and give one harvest a year. Herds are likewise assured of sufficient pasturage. Below it, and especially below the 300 mm. line, the vine cannot be considered and cereal culture is a dangerous gamble. Arboriculture requires particular conditions of soil and atmospheric humidity, and irrigation is usually necessary. Animals must go long distances for summer pasturing for forests and scrub have given way to barren steppe formations. Below 200 mm. (about 8 inches) any growing is impossible without irrigation. And these norms do not reveal the whole truth, because of the often irregular nature of precipitation in arid regions. In central and southern Tunisia it has been said that rainfall should be measured by the hour rather than by the day or month. A goodly part of the annual rainfall is so violent, or so badly-timed and overconcentrated that it is harmful rather than beneficial.

Tunisia south of the dorsal may be looked on as a vast, gently-sloping amphitheatre facing the curve of the Mediterranean with its center near Gabes. From this inclined plain emerge several ranges of hills or low-altitude mountains, unable to protect the area from the hot, sand-laden siroccos which blow up from the Sahara in the summer to wither the vegetation. Some of these mountains, however, offer hope as areas of impluvium which would make possible the rehabilitation of certain perimetric areas. The southern flanks of the dorsal, primarily, and the heights around Gafsa, the Jbel Tebaga, and the Matmata massif in the south are among these. But the number-one stark fact is that there is no permanent water south of the dorsal, and the absence of vegetation on the hillsides makes the impetuous torrents of winter a source of further erosion. One bright factor in the picture is that the predominant soil type is the light, eolian kind which retains water better than clay soils, and is remarkable for extracting some of the humidity of coastal dews and fogs. This soil type is low in humus but its upper layers are rich in the fertilizing salts which allow vegetation to reappear at the slightest opportunity.

THE AREA IN THE PAST

The center-south has not been at all times throughout history the wasteland that it now is. It is common knowledge that all North Africa two thousand years ago was better watered and more fully forested than it is today and that the Sahara has been encroaching on cultivated lands during all this time. Experts are in disagreement, however, as to whether the climate has appreciably changed in two millennia and been the cause of the slow ruin of the Maghreb, or whether man's improvident deforestation and overuse of the soil has reduced the humidity and changed the climate. In either case, it is known historically from Roman experience in the early centuries of our era and from Aghlabid experience a thousand years ago that good results have been obtained from the soil of this area, when, significantly, political, economic, and social conditions were favorable. In the first century A.D. the Romans, after they had occupied Tunisia for over two hundred years, saw the necessity for the sake of their own security, of fixing the nomads of the area to the soil, and while they built a network of roads for strategic reasons and exploited the iron, lead, and copper mines of southwestern Tunisia, they installed, as they did everywhere, a formidable system of agricultural hydraulics for the reclamation of the land. Their attention was particularly directed to fruit and olive orchards, and according to some authors the olive groves extended from Sousse and Sfax to Tebessa and as far as Le Kef. These statements seem corroborated by the ruins of Roman oil refineries found around the latter site. We know, too, that Tunisia was able to serve as the principal granary and an important oil factory for Rome while nourishing on its own soil a population estimated at between five and six million, one and one-half times today's number. Roman works outlived Roman rule and survived the Vandal and first Arab invasions, although a steady process of deterioration was under way. To combat this the Aghlabids, in the

ninth century, made a great effort to rehabilitate the area. Arab authors of the period speak of the region of Kairouan, now a barren steppe-desert, as a "country with green trees, with enchanting gardens, where water flows on all sides."

More than anything else, it was the Hilali invasions of undisciplined Arab tribes driven out of Egypt and foisted upon Tunisia as a political measure in the 11th century, which brought ruin to the center-south. The agricultural maladjustment which Tunisia -- and indeed all North Africa -- suffered from this invasion has continued to our day. Like locusts, according to the 14th century historian Ibn Khaldun, these nomads descended on the country -- trees, farms, villages, waterworks were destroyed or left to rot unused, agricultural life gave way to nomadism and interior Tunisia became the domain of itinerant shepherds, quarrelsome tribes, and brigands, after having enjoyed one thousand years of sedentary fertility. The situation was an almost exact parallel of that in Southern Italy, and the interest of the Tunisian government in the recently-created Cassa del Mezzogiorno (Organization for the Development of the South) is not confined to a desire to copy their methods, but stems from a realization that the long-term laws of history have been operating in similar ways in both these Mediterranean countries.

Life withdrew to the coastal cities after the Hilali invasions, where it existed protected by solid ramparts, or to the north in the safety of the mountains. Much later a new impetus was brought to the north by the Moriscos, talented and highly-civilized immigrants from Andalusia, in the main farmers and small gardeners, who fled from religious persecution in Spain in the early 17th century and settled principally around Cape Bon.

This was basically the situation found by the French when they installed their protectorate in 1881. In the 75 years of their rule they did much that was creditable, even according to the strictest nationalists, but it has been claimed that their primary interest, as capitalist colonizers, lay in the return they could get from the colonized regions. They tended thus from the beginning to concentrate on the more productive parts of the country and this leaning became the more pronounced after a number of colons settled in the north and brought their voice to bear on investment and development projects. The Europeans (who included a good number of Italians) had chosen the north because the climate was better, the security greater, the Medjerda valley was connected with Algeria, from which many of the new arrivals came, and because an urban life was already in existence nearby in Tunis and offered a minimum of amenities. In the north, too, land was mainly in private hands and could be bought up more easily; in the center-south most of the land was collective tribal land, or habus property, i.e. land held either publicly or privately, often for religious purposes, which was in all cases inalienable. Consequently the rare parcels that were desirable in the center-south were usually unobtainable. The early European settlers were, in addition, dominated by the mirage of wine-growing and quick fortunes through it; this meant the Medjerda valley, the

Tunis region, and Cape Bon. Many large European holdings date from the early years of the protectorate when the Tunisian government put large blocks of good land on sale in order to pay off its debts; the extensive domains of the Societe Franco-africaine at Enfidaville is the outstanding example. From 1905-1910, as another example, 2,500 colon families were installed on 265,000 hectares (1 hectare equals 2-1/2 acres) in the north, while 70 families settled in the center-south. Naturally this disproportion influenced more and more the economic policies of the protectorate government in later years, and thereby the already great schism between the north and the rest of the country was enlarged under French rule.

Shortly before World War II the first notions of aiding the peasantry and developing the backward parts of the country appeared. In 1935-36 famine conditions brought appeals for aid and a Committee of Solidarity under the patronage of the then Resident Guillon collected 22 million francs for relief and temporary works projects. At the same time the Steeg Mission was dispatched to Tunisia to formulate longer-range plans. It recommended that small-scale hydraulic works be carried out "by the people themselves" and the French government put 8 million francs at the disposal of the Regency in order to undertake the work. It had hardly begun in 1939 when credits were suspended until the end of the war. When rebegun, in the stress and chaos of the immediate postwar period, these projects showed themselves to be insufficient, sporadic, and badly organized. They were, especially after the dislocation and devastation of 1943, merely a drop in the bucket.

It was only after the war smoke had dispersed that a real change in the situation began slowly to come about. The classic, private colonization methods of a generation before were given up for planned development. Recognition of the need for more serious attention to Tunisia's economic problems was praiseworthy, but the first steps were feeble and hesitant. The two four-year plans elaborated by the government for 1948-52 and for 1953-57 were designed to remedy unemployment and raise the living standards of the population, but they bypassed the economic and social development of the center-south. The primary reason for this was that the plans were made up mainly by French functionaries in Tunisia, who were either overtly influenced by the economically powerful interests, both French and Tunisian, already located in the north, or whose unconscious sympathies lay with a region and a class of people they were better acquainted with. The consultative commission, a sort of official pressure-group, had representatives only for Sousse and Sfax in the center-south, and we have seen that these regions are not properly in the underdeveloped area. Secondly, when the plans were submitted to Paris for final approval, the French government, itself ignorant of local details, was likewise under pressure from the colonial lobby, the directors of large companies, and the more vocal Tunisian interests of the Tell (northern mountains) and the eastern shore. The 1948-52 plan, furthermore, was primarily concerned with reconstructing what had been destroyed during the war -- which touched Tunisia much more severely than the other countries of the Maghreb -- and it laid

emphasis on rebuilding ports, railroads, roads, electric energy installations, hospitals and schools, more or less as they had existed prior to the war. This plan did, however, include such questionable programs as the development of the Lower Mejerda (something like developing Bucks County, Pennsylvania, while leaving the TVA undone), a project in which 25 billion francs (about \$70 million) was spent in a small area of 200,000 hectares, the proprietors of which were by anyone's standards quite well off. Previous to this four-year plan, one abortive effort had been made in 1945, with a "Projet sommaire d'un Plan general de Paysannat," evolved by two economic experts, Saumagne and Saadallah, which gave a considerable role to the center-south; it was never put into effect, owing to strenuous objections from northern interests. The second four-year plan (1953-57) laid more emphasis properly on the development of agricultural production, but again of the 95 billion francs projected for investment the part reserved to the center-south was estimated at from 13 to 28 billions (14 to 30 per cent of the total), and the actual amount spent is proving to be closer to the lower of these two figures as the plan draws to a close. Result: a widening of the gulf between the two Tunisias.

Meanwhile, from a social and human point of view, the economic situation was deteriorating all through the protectorate period, and in recent years this deterioration has rapidly landed. For nomad life in the center-south, which had preserved a rudimentary equilibrium within its stagnation previous to 1880, began to find its inner balance shattered, and since its diverse aspects formed a whole which could not long exist without the working of all the parts, it started to crumble apace. As with any primitive society, when one of the elements of nomadic life was disturbed or suppressed it was necessary to introduce a replacement factor as soon as possible in order to preserve the whole structure. This unfortunately was not done in Tunisia where the coming of the European brought permanent change to the way of life of the population. Much of this change could be absorbed in the more flexible north, already accustomed to some degree of external contact, but in the south the people were deprived of one support after another and no relief was offered.

To begin with, the security re-established by the French put an end to the razzias, or foraging raids, of the nomad, until then directed at the fertile farmlands of the north. Reprehensible as these were, they were nevertheless a part of local life and tradition and they brought in a certain proportion of the nomad's annual income. At the same time the sanitary improvements effected under the protectorate and the successful battle against epidemics diminished mortality, but the rhythm of births did not slow down and population pressure increased. Meanwhile the expansion of the olive groves westward from the Sahel, under improved European techniques, cut many of the transhumance paths for flocks and eliminated numerous pasturing places. The extension of farm areas in the north did the same for many summer pasturages, to which the nomads still come in recent years, like lost children, only to find no grass for their sheep and, with greater mechanization on the

farms, no need for their surplus seasonal labor. The development of communications broke the transport monopoly which had been in the nomads' hands and prevented them from collecting the traditional duty on goods passing through their lands. While the money thus earned may have been small, it was an essential part of their livelihood, and it was taken away without any exchange.

In so diminishing the pasture lands of the nomad, in pushing his frontier back, in reducing his opportunity for part-time agricultural labor, and in removing his supplementary income sources, one did not make him disappear; one turned him in desperation into a potential fellagha (outlaw) or a displaced neo-urban proletarian. This has been the evolution of the past several decades, and the events of 1955-56 show that the discontented nomad is the best tool of ambitious politicians -- as Salah ben Youssef proved when he bought the support of tribesmen in the south for his abortive revolutionary campaign against the Bourguiba government. The Tunisian government, warned by this experience, is now alive to the fact that to let this state of affairs continue is not only to condemn the country to economic stagnation but to make it the theater of grave social and potentially political troubles, which could rapidly bring back the anarchy of yesteryear in aggravated form. Labor leaders and neo-Destour party chiefs on the spot in the center-south feel that the tension in the area is near the point of rupture, particularly in view of the exceptionally poor harvest this year, and that the present explosive situation cannot go on longer without danger.

One government official reports having visited several work relief projects in the south in December 1954, after many of the fellagha who had been in revolt against the French had turned in their arms at the behest of Bourguiba and on the promise of a general amnesty. They were being hired on a public works program in consonance with the promise, and one hiring officer said that he had taken on that week several fathers of from seven to ten children. They had not been interested in politics or trouble, they explained, but they had just wanted to assure their families and children of subsistence. Many of them had come thirty kilometers to work for 250-300 francs (about 75 cents) a day for fifteen days. They slept on the site in caves and their usual meal was barley bread, roots, and water.

DEMOGRAPHY OF THE AREA

The area under discussion covers about 86,000 square kilometers (about 34,000 square miles, or the size of Maine); the north contains some 30,000 square kilometers and the Sahel about 11,000 square kilometers. The population of the center-south in 1956 was 1,080,000 (28.6 per cent of the total population of Tunisia), with an average density of 12.5 per square kilometer as opposed to 30.2 for all Tunisia, 70.8 in the north, and 67.2 in the Sahel. This mean reflects a great diversity within the area, for some parts are almost totally uninhabited.

The birth rate in the center-south is higher than in the rest of the country (490 per 10,000 against 410), but it is partially compensated for by a higher mortality (200 per 10,000 against 130). The excess of births over deaths is still 10 per cent superior to other areas, however, and the principal correction for this factor is emigration. It has been said already that 200,000 people have left the center-south in the last twenty years, and in the Kairouan region 153 of every 1,000 departed in one decade (1936-1946). A regional breakdown of emigration has not yet been made for the 1956 census, but it looks as if the number of departees will be even higher.

Only 7,400 Europeans live among the million inhabitants of the area, representing 4 per cent of the total European population of the country. One town (Kairouan) has more than 30,000 people, three (Gabes, Tozeur, and Nefta) have more than 10,000. The Europeans, except for about one hundred families, live in these cities. With the cities extracted, population density is reduced to about 10 per square kilometer in the center-south against 40 in the north.

SOCIAL STATUS AND HABITAT

It is perhaps in these fields that the sharp difference between the two Tunisias shows up most clearly.

Public health and sanitary equipment is glaringly insufficient. There is no hospital in the entire area; ten dispensaries exist and the number of beds is less than 20 per 100,000 persons (180 in the north and 58 in the Sahel). Thirty doctors, each attending to more than 30,000 patients, tend to the population's medical needs. There are two dentists and seven pharmacists. No comments are needed on that.

An entire gamut of dwellings is presented in the area, from the prehistoric caves of Matmata to the (rare) modern farmhouse for the European, with tents and gurbis, either in mud or brick, predominating, plus a scattering of wooden shacks. The tent is the favorite home of the nomad, but a few tribes which engage in some agriculture while pasturing nearby maintain semipermanent houses. In almost all cases, however, social conditions are lamentable, with chronic undernourishment and widespread disease -- mainly trachoma and tuberculosis. In the towns of the area the percentage of overpopulated houses is calculated at 67 for all dwellings, much higher than in the north (25 per cent), and even than the overcrowded capital of Tunis (56 per cent for the old town of Tunis).

Unemployment is a constant problem. And it must be understood that "unemployment" here means something quite different from its normal connotation in more advanced countries. It does not stand for a salaried employee who has lost his job, but for anyone without employment and without resources. It means, generally,

-11-

someone who has never had a job and who, if present conditions continue, will probably never have one. It is chronic, permanent unemployment with no possible relief in sight. And since the whole area lives on such a threadbare basis, the slightest fluctuation in the economy of the country, or a slightly inferior harvest, or a drought, has enormous repercussions, like the ripples of a pond, which drag down the shoemaker and the weaver of the town along with the shepherd and the farmer.

The most recent statistics of the Tunisian government show about 400,000 unemployed, although Ahmed ben Salah, head of the UGTT (Tunisia's labor union) says it is nearer 600,000. The full meaning of these figures can only be understood by realizing that less than 600,000 are currently unemployed in Western Germany which has a population of 50,000,000 compared to Tunisia's 3,800,000, or by remembering that an equivalent in the United States would be about 26,000,000 people out of work. In simple terms, one out of every three adults in the country lives on the charity of the other two or requires foreign help. In Ben Salah's own words, "There is no condition like this in any other country in the world."

Ahmed ben Salah,
Secretary-General
of the UGTT (Tuni-
sian National Labor
Union) and firm
partisan of the
plan for the center-
south. (Shown here
with Walter Reuther
on the occasion of
his visit to Tunisia
in 1955)



Of the 400,000-600,000 unemployed, 250,000-300,000 are in the center-south, i.e. more than half of the active population. For them much relief work has been undertaken recently -- road-building, stream-widening, rock-breaking projects and so on -- but it is all a poor palliative and does not touch the heart of the problem. The slender resources of northern Tunisia cannot continue charity indefinitely and France, which has greatly contributed in the past, will probably refuse to do so much longer except on an emergency, humanitarian basis.

For those that do have work the situation is a little, but not much, better. The average yearly revenue of families of fellahs (peasants) in several qaidships in the central steppes runs from 20,000 to 30,000 francs per year (about \$57 to \$85). The average per capita income for all Tunisia is about 45,000 francs per year (roughly \$125-\$130).

ECONOMY AT PRESENT

Stock-raising and sporadic agriculture represent the almost exclusive resources of the population of these parts. The mines provide for only about 50,000 persons directly or indirectly. Sheep and goats, with an occasional dromedary, are the principal animals. From them the nomad gets his nourishment: meat, milk, butter, and cheese; his house: tents are made of goat- and camel-skins; and his clothes, woven from the fleece of the sheep. The occasional sale of an animal brings him in a little money for the grain he needs and, more rarely, luxury products such as tobacco, tea, and sugar. Stock-raising in this area accounts for 63 per cent of the sheep, 61 per cent of the goats, and 83 per cent of the dromedaries of the whole country. The horse, now that the once-profitable raids on the north have been forbidden, is a fast-disappearing luxury.

But the nomad's principal capital is a highly unstable one. It is threatened by two things: his own lack of foresight in an unsystematic usage of pasture lands on the one hand, and periodic drought conditions on the other. The latter is a double-edged sword which kills off much of his stock and at the same time diminishes the crop he may have sown to add to his diet, or which can come in from the north (for a severe drought in the south generally means a limited one in the north) to tide him over.

The nomads carry on cereal culture regardless of the difficulties or the small chances for success. Every river-bed or gully whose soil has accumulated a little water is scratched, plowed, dug up and cropped, and often they will go as far as 100 kilometers to exploit a piece of land that promises even the meagerest reward. A decent harvest is hard to get. It is assured only if there are sufficient rains at three distinct periods: in autumn, winter, and spring. Of the three the last rain is the most important and indispensable one. If autumn rains are lacking the situation will be bad because the nomad will give up and sow nothing. But if there are good autumn rains and winter rains followed by a

-13-

dry spell the situation will be catastrophic because the planter, always willing to take a chance, will sow extensively, go into debt for more seed, and often improvidently use up whatever small resources he has on the side in the hope that there is going to be a good crop.

The difficulties of getting a good harvest is shown clearly by Vibert:

"From 1920 to 1955 the wheat harvest in the center and south was inferior to 500,000 quintals 25 times, of which it was superior to 250,000 quintals 19 times. In these 35 years 22 harvests yielded less than one quintal per hectare. Only on six occasions was the harvest superior to two quintals per hectare."

In short, wheat-growing in this area is a lottery where one wins only once in six attempts. A sign of the degeneration of the soil appears in the fact that harvests in the center-south represent only 13 per cent of the total national cereal production, on a 1950-54 average, as against 35 per cent for the period 1915-19.

Why then does the fellah go on sowing grain in the face of such discouraging prospects? He is forced to, in desperation, for one thing -- in violation of his own proverb that "He who gambles by necessity loses by obligation" -- and, if he is lucky, he can secure a year's food supply in a few months. Furthermore, the government has encouraged him recently with seed loans under certain circumstances and he cannot pass up this free turn at the wheel. It is agreed by all who have studied the problem that arboriculture should take the place of most of the grain culture, and history confirms this view. But it will require considerable organization on the technical and human level before the change can be made satisfactorily.

At present olive plantations are moving in steadily from the coastal regions, but there is a limit to their ability to flourish without added irrigation, and they must be spaced much farther apart as the region becomes dryer. Perhaps the most serious drawback to unlimited olive plantings lies in the danger of a monoculture, and Tunisia's export trade is already heavily laden with olive oil. Nevertheless, government planners feel that they, along with almond- and fruit-trees represent the best hope for the distant future.

In the true south, as opposed to the center, this kind of arboriculture is impossible, and only the date palm can be considered with complete confidence. The northern limit of the date palm runs along a line from Gabes to Tozeur, and everywhere south of there it appears as the miracle of the desert. In the shade of the date palm the most diverse cultures grow: cereals, vegetables, fruits; its own fruit nourishes men and beasts, and it is possible to live healthily for extended periods on dates and water alone. Its juice is a highly-appreciated drink and its leaves are used for weaving and construction material. Near the sea at Gabes the dates are of

ordinary quality and are eaten on the spot. In the western oases, however, the famous deglat en nur variety is produced and exported with success throughout the world. This type, however, accounts for only 15 per cent of the total Tunisian production.

Among the subsidiary occupations, the gathering of esparto-grass (alfa) brings in a small revenue to the 200,000-300,000 miserable souls who engage in this back-breaking and unrewarding task. Exploitation of the pickers -- usually whole families or tribes -- is current. The pickers were paid four francs (about a penny) a kilogram in 1955, when the average selling price was fifteen francs. Fishing (279 tons, mainly in fixed fisheries, for the center-south out of 11,477 tons for the whole country in 1955) is at present negligible in the area, but promising from the viewpoint of future development. The last resource of the population, sponge-fishing (representing 18 per cent of the total Tunisian production of 180 tons) is now threatened by the development of synthetic materials in other countries.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

The extractive industry is the only important industrial activity in the center-south. It employs at varying times from 7,000 to 10,000 workers. Many of these, however, especially in the phosphate mines, are Algerians or Tripolitarians who, being far from their homes, are considered more manageable by the mine employers. Since many of the employees are foreign to the region, the companies are non-Tunisian, and the derived industries (lead foundries, phosphate-treating plants, and fertilizer manufacturing installations) are located in Sfax or Tunis, there is really little that the area receives from them under present conditions. Many of the Tunisian mines, notably lead and zinc mines, are operated far from their shipping ports and, carried on with overage, costly equipment, they are profitable only when world markets are



Sponge-Fishing off the Southern Coast of Tunisia

-15-

high. Since the prices of these metals are closely tied to the international political situation, vast swings in their prices often cause temporary closings and fluctuating employment for the few local workers. And now phosphates, the most valuable single mining export of the country, are being surpassed by richer finds in the United States, Soviet Russia, and Morocco, and production is currently lower than in 1930.

The transportation system, which was designed originally to bring the products of the mines to the ports of Sfax and Sousse, is both deficient and ill-suited to the internal needs of the area. Only 1,100 kilometers of paved roads (as against 4,300 kilometers in the north) serve the center-south.

The total amount of industry and commerce in this area has not been accurately figured, but it is estimated at about 10 per cent of that of all Tunisia.

PRESENT PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Now for the first time the men in charge of the country's destiny seem to have a clear idea of the necessity for large-scale, well-coordinated efforts in this area. At the last neo-Destour conference in Sfax this spring, M. Filali, now Minister of Agriculture, spoke at length on the need for developing the center-south. Ahmed ben Salah in conversations with me said that something must and will be done for the people of the area. And Prime Minister Bourguiba said, speaking to the Constitutional Assembly in April:

"The program of this government is to make the unemployed the moving force in the economic restoration and development of this underprivileged area, on a basis of cooperation and justice."

Thus the new government committed itself to action as soon as it came to power, and it remained only to lay down a concrete plan and elaborate the details. The first step taken was to set up an autonomous office to outline the "Plan for the Development of the Tunisian Economy," a Tunisianized version of the two previous four-year plans of the French Protectorate. But the Director of the Plan, M. Bellagha, stressed that his new efforts will be quite unlike those of the past. The principal goals at which he is aiming, he said, are (1) the well-being of the masses, and (2) the shaping of a homogeneous nation in the interest of the country's own economic and political future.

Within the framework of the planning for the entire Tunisian economy, it has now been agreed that absolute priority will be given to the center-south (and in fact, the day I left Tunisia early in August the Council of Ministers took the first legal steps towards setting up an independent TVA-like authority to deal with the problem). While this priority is being given to the center-south a certain risk will be run in letting the north, as it were,

live on its past momentum and resources. It is claimed by some critics of the plan that funds invested in the center-south will increase the total national revenue more slowly than would the same amounts invested in the north, but the present government, if only for political reasons, cannot agree to this principle. It is considered also that the richer regions will be able to attract a certain amount of private capital, something that is out of the question for the center-south. Finally, the government feels that the development of the center-south will in the long run automatically increase the prosperity of the north, whereas the reverse is not true.²

But this was only the basic decision. After it followed the question: What will be developed in the center-south? agriculture, industry, or the general infrastructure? Will economic development precede social development? Here the planners have taken a bold step. While the area is an agricultural one, they are proceeding on the premise that the transformation industries for agricultural products are the natural complements of the former, and the development of these requires an infrastructure -- energy, roads, education, hygiene, etc. -- which makes the problem indivisible.

Within this total framework, however, if a relative priority is to be established, it will be given to (1) the development of hydraulic resources, (2) the spread of arboriculture, and (3) an increase in market-gardening. Agricultural self-sufficiency and reduction of constantly threatening (and this year actual) famine conditions are first, semi-emergency goals. Later on, says Bellagha, export possibilities can be looked into, although he emphasizes that careful market research must be carried out before successful exporting can be considered. Tunisian economists admit that the reputation of many of their products -- dates and olives especially -- often suffers from indifferent packaging, failure to grade fruit carefully, and a lack of interest or knowledge about the predilections of particular clients.

The land problem which has plagued the center-south for centuries has been largely solved by the government's firm and drastic (for a North African Muslim state) decree of May 31, 1956, nationalizing the habus. All the public habus land was taken over effective immediately, and private habus property will be liquidated gradually as the present owners die. The reintegration of these lands (which form as much as half of several qaidships in the area and which were for all purposes "dead" and useless to the economy) into the national life was the vital prerequisite to any social action in the center-south. Working from these blocks of land, the government plans to found model villages wherever water and agricultural prospects are inviting, and settle nomad groups in them.

² This has already been indicated in the case of Italy and its plan for the development of the southern regions. Cf. Revue Economique, No. 2, March 1956, "Contribution au probleme des aires deprimees: l'Exemple du Mezzogiorno."

-17-

Given the structure of tribal life and nomadic mentality, a co-operative or collective system will probably be introduced. Certainly it will be necessary at the beginning to conserve collective tribal property with regard to herds and pastures, for stock-raising will have to remain the bulwark of the population for some time to come, while the fruit trees (which need 6-8 years) and the olive trees (12-15) are allowed to grow.

Experience has shown in North Africa that nomadic populations have a strong resistance to being tied down to the soil as sedentary farmers, and it is noteworthy that the depopulation of the center-south (and of all arid areas in the Maghreb) has been effected in favor of a swelling of the cities, rather than being a shifting of rural populations from a less-favored to a more fertile area. Accordingly some opposition is expected, and it is not considered possible to change the living patterns of almost a million persons overnight; a generation, it is generally agreed, or even more, will be needed to produce significant transformations, especially since Tunisian leaders stress that in a democracy there can be no question of using force. The change must be accomplished by gentle but persistent persuasion. Pilot villages, grouping a fraction of a tribe around a newly-dug well, for example, will be organized with a radiating cultivation area of orchards and fields. The project will be focused on a community center, to be built by the government, which will provide elementary schooling -- for both children and adults -- a dispensary, a mosque, and co-operative storage and transportation facilities. It is thought that when a number of these are under way the example of their success will be catching enough to overcome the initial reservations of the more suspicious tribesmen.

Water remains a vital problem, although it has always been one of means and effort. All hydraulic resources will be tapped: deep and medium soundings, water retention works, the banking of streams, placing dams on the larger, semipermanent streams around Kairouan, cisterns, wells, and even the derivation of water from the northwest, are included in the plan. Previous studies have shown that there is water and that the area can be satisfactorily irrigated and provided for. What is needed is a concentrated effort by technicians with enough credits and with a well-defined program which looks upon the entire area as one unit.

A great boost for the fishing industry in the south, now centered around the small port of Zarzis, opposite the Isle of Djerba, is also projected. With over one-third of Tunisia's 2,600 kilometers of coastline in this underdeveloped area, it is plain that an extension of the presently minuscule fishing industry can be very useful to the regional economy. The actual state of the industry in these parts is lamentable: less than 3 per cent of the country's catch comes from the south. The UGTT lobbied hard to have 1,000,000,000 francs (about \$2,800,000) included in the plan for the development of the fishing industry, but the government has proposed only 250,000,000 francs in its preliminary allotment for 1956-57. A good part of this is to be devoted to a reorganization

of the canning industry which is at present in the hands of a private monopoly which sells containers at a price making Tunisian canned fish exports too expensive in foreign markets.

FINANCES

The last obstacle in the way of putting the plan into effect is its financing, and this is currently being held up for political reasons. Negotiations with France covering the whole range of Franco-Tunisian relations, and including the question of French economic help for the Economic and Social Development Budget (the so-called Title II Budget to which France has always in the past contributed), were broken off by the Tunisians in mid-July mainly because of French insistence on maintaining troops in Tunisia "to cover Algeria and protect French nationals in Tunisia." They have not been resumed yet, although under-the-counter contacts are going on to prepare their renewal and prospects seemed favorable in early August.

Although unofficial Tunisian sources have from time to time mentioned exorbitant sums in connection with the annual amount necessary for the Title II Budget (ranging as high as 100,000,000,000 francs a year), the government is basing its plans for fiscal 1956-57 on a budget of about 20,000,000,000 francs (about \$57,000,000); before a certain pique became noticeable in Paris as Tunisia showed itself independent in spirit as well as in name, the French were making offers of 13,500,000,000 francs (about \$38,600,000).

Much of whatever sum is finally agreed on -- and everyone thinks there will be an agreement after some hard horse-trading -- will go straight into the plan for the center-south. But before then, the emergency famine conditions which the area is now facing require a more immediate aid, principally in foodstuffs. It is estimated that about 100,000 tons of wheat will have to be imported immediately, and for this and other surplus products Prime Minister Bourguiba is turning to the United States, with whom preliminary contact was made last month through Ambassador Dillon in Paris.

The importance of this move in relation to the development plan is that the government wants to use the surplus foodstuffs, not as a dole, but as incentives to the people of the region, starting preliminary work on the plan at once and paying local labor primarily through work-coupons which could be exchanged for the wheat, dairy products, and other necessities, plus giving them a small allotment of a few francs a day cash for tobacco and so forth. The morale factor in the center-south has reached a crisis point, says M. Bellagha, and this system would have the advantage of showing the people there that, at long last, someone was really taking steps to solve their permanent problems, and that the situation was not completely without hope.

The next few months should tell exactly what amount from which sources can be devoted to the immediate execution of the plan.

-19-

Hope is high for the maximum possible, of course, but no matter how humble the beginning, government leaders are determined to go into action now.

CF Gallagher