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Tunisia: Education, "Cultural Unity"  
and the Future

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

One of my strongest impressions upon arriving in Tunis late last September was that of seemingly endless waves of school children. "Back to School" signs were featured in most shops along the Avenue de France and Avenue Habib Bourguiba (formerly Jules Ferry), and in all parts of the city--modern, old medina, and suburban--clusters of brown or blue smocked children (boys and girls) could be seen on the way to school. And when caught in traffic during the "school" rush hours, it seemed as if all Tunis was either going to school or taking their children.

Recollections of other countries in this part of the world came to mind--countries where the cry for more schools had been one of the strongest demands of the nationalists against their foreign rulers; where from schools or clubs associated with such schools had sprung the first nationalist movements, countries where the larger questions of modern v. traditional, religious v. secular, indigenous v. foreign were being - if not answered - at least tackled in the schools.

What then is the story behind this apparent flurry of educational activity in Tunisia?

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"It is a sacred principle of general pedagogy--the necessity of safeguarding the cultural unity of a country. This is a corollary of the idea which we have developed earlier: education is social integration. If the society is a living reality, one and indivisible, then the culture will be so as well, and the pedagogical system must be a harmonious whole given the task of not letting the unity of the whole be placed in peril. To ignore the principle of cultural unity is...to sow the seeds of discord and--another unavoidable consequence--to place it in peril of death."

These lines appeared in 1947 in an Arabic language review Al Mabaheth. The author, Mahmud Messadi, then a Tunisian professor at the newly created (November 1945) Institut des Hautes Etudes, went on to contrast this ideal with the "virtually tri-partite culture" existing in Tunisia with its three separate and unrelated systems of education:

1. The Sadiki\*-type or "assimilated" education (often termed Franco-Arab).
2. Orthodox Islamic teaching, or the "Zitouni" (Zaytuni) system. The University Mosque of Zitouna with its various regional annexes provided a form of education comparable to that of Al Azhar in Cairo.
3. The completely French teaching of the lycées and colleges.

Some 11 years later the author of that article received the chance and the challenge to put his ideas to the test, for in May 1958 Mahmud Messadi became Minister of Education.

M. Messadi's "sacred principle" of cultural unity was not to be resolved simply by reshuffling existing educational facilities. Equally important, and probably of greater political urgency, was the basic task of greatly increasing the total school attendance. At the time of independence in 1956, roughly 180,000 Muslim students between the ages of 6 and 14 attended primary schools. This represented only 22% of the total in this age group. The enrollment in secondary education was about 16,000 or 3% of the total number of Tunisians between the ages of 15 and 20. Even this low figure gives a somewhat distorted and overly-optimistic view of the true picture facing the new Tunisian state. For only by dint of a fairly impressive effort in the last 10 years of their Protectorate had the French attained this modest level of school attendance. In 1947 (at the time of Messadi's article cited above) only one-half of that proportion were in school--11% of the total Muslim Tunisians of primary school age and  $1\frac{1}{2}\%$  of those in the secondary school age group.

From this dual legacy--the lack of a uniform system of education and the abysmal numerical inadequacy of that which did exist--several important considerations arise. First, as with so many newly-independent countries, the new government and administration is led by an extremely small elite possessing the educational qualifications deemed necessary to govern a modern state.

Further, with the achievement of independence, this small ruling elite must move abruptly from agitation to implementation, from planning (and promising) to day-to-day operations. It suddenly finds itself free in two different senses--free for the first time of outside control, but also virtually free of past experience upon which to base important administrative decisions. Every action in such a situation is a precedent; even the decision to make no change

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\*For Sadiki (or more correctly Sadiqi) College, see below page 4. French spellings of Arabic names will be used throughout this report. Where there is possibility of confusion the accepted English transliteration will be given in parentheses.

in the old Protectorate system involves discussion and soul-searching unknown to routine, settled bureaucracy. And the impulse to change, to exert one's own personality, to prove that independence means more than a simple change of government--must necessarily be strong in such circumstances.

Finally, since so few Tunisians have had the chance to receive any education in the past, there exists a great gap in the cadres (a favorite word of the planners in the Ministry of Education) necessary to run a modern state and economy. As a result, graduates of the intensified educational program will quickly assume important positions, and in little over a decade the results of the present program will be felt in all sectors of the society. For example, the present plans would call for an increase in intermediate and secondary enrollment from approximately 21,000 in 1959 to 130,000 in 1969. This seems modest enough even for a small country with a population of about four million, but absolute figures are misleading in education-starved countries like Tunisia. It is perhaps more valid to note that for every one student now enrolled in secondary or intermediate education there will be seven in 1969. The small "ruling elite" will have increased itself in roughly the same proportion in that brief span.

In short, it is not too much to suggest that the large question of what will be the future political-cultural orientation of Tunisia will be determined less by reactions to Great Power maneuvers, by the relations with Abdal Nasir and the Eastern Arab world, or even by the resolution of the Algerian question, than by the results of the programs now being advanced by M. Messadi and a few hundred like-minded persons in the Tunisian educational system. It can not be stressed too much that this very small group now has the initiative. The government is popular. Groups that might be inclined to oppose are (for reason to be noted later) both discredited and lacking leadership and/or firm orientation. The chance for a "guided social revolution" comparable in its results if not its methods to that of Ataturk's Turkey is available to the government presided over so ably today by President Habib Bourguiba. However, it must be recognized that this government--this small ruling elite--"represents" Tunisia only in a sense acceptable to Edmund Burke. Having the confidence of the masses now, they have the intention of imposing by persuasion their own idea of what should make up the proper "cultural unity" of their country. A big order, and if they should falter after some three or five years, much of what now seems to typify the new Tunisia could quickly change. If, however, enough élan and efficiency can be generated and maintained for about a decade, then a better-prepared and more broadly based ruling group could, in fact, maintain and perpetuate the social revolution being worked out by today's leadership.

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Before describing the major points in the present educational program, a few remarks to show just what the Tunisians inherited in this field when independence came in 1956. Many Western writers are inclined to state boldly that modernism in Tunisia began with the French Protectorate in 1881. This is not quite accurate. Instead the pattern seems to be more in line with that of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire at that same period. Tunisia, as these other countries, had begun to feel the influence of a physically superior Western culture and had, while still maintaining some independence, begun its first tentative steps to synthesize Western thought and technology into its existing Islamic culture. However, the combination of internal inefficiency and outside aggression would not permit the realization of such changes from within. Still, the establishment of the French Protectorate in Tunisia, like the British occupation of Egypt in the following year, can be considered more justly the continuation and intensification of modernization, rather than its beginning.

The main features of the pre-Protectorate phase of modernization in Tunisia are linked with the reforming zeal of one Khayr al Din Pasha, a Mamluk of Circassian origin whose various services for the Beys of Tunis included that of Prime Minister from 1873 to 1877 (and later, after falling out of favor with the Bey of Tunis he served for just under a year as Grand Vizier in Constantinople). His plans for adapting Western technology to the Islamic heritage are best symbolized and realized in the Sadiki College (in the French sense, i.e., a secondary school) founded in 1875 and still in existence. (The school was financed by the revenues from the confiscated properties of the former Prime Minister, Mustafa Khaznadar, who was also Khayr al Din's father-in-law.)

This school represented a cautious marriage of old and new, indigenous and alien. Its some 150 students were guided by 21 teachers of Arabic and Qur'anic studies as opposed to only 13 teaching all other subjects. In fact, each student received a firm grounding in Arabic and Islamic studies before even beginning the modern subjects, for, as the beylical decree establishing the school made clear, this was to be an Islamic school designed "...to teach the Qur'an, writing and useful knowledge, i.e. juridical sciences, foreign languages and the rational sciences which might be of use to Muslims, being at the same time not contrary to the faith. The professors must inculcate in the students love of the faith by showing them its beauties and excellence, in telling them the deeds of the Prophet, the miracles accomplished by him, the virtues of holy men..."



### SADIKI COLLEGE -- THE CAUTIOUS BEGINNING OF A SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Aside from the Sadiki College and an earlier short-lived Polytechnic School for Army officers, Tunisian education for Muslims consisted solely of the traditional kuttab education, or small schools usually attached to mosques teaching the Qur'an by rote. From these kuttab schools, brighter students might make their way to the university mosque of Zitouna for higher Islamic studies. The Zitouna mosque with its regional annexes accounted for, at most, a few hundred students committing to memory a fossilized curriculum which prepared one (and at that poorly) only for a position as imam or qadi in the shari'a courts. Even here, the gusts of change had begun in the era of the Khayr al Din's reforms. In 1875, a beylical decree for the first time regulated studies in Zitouna and its annexes. For the first time, textbooks were prescribed and "modern" studies (optional) introduced--arithmetic, geometry, architecture, astronomy, and history and geography of the Arabs. However, this change was not quite so revolutionary as it might seem at first blush--we can see already the fateful pattern of Zitouni policy of change: too little and too late--for the most recent of the "modern" texts was over three centuries old.

This, then, was the extent of educational facilities available to native Tunisians in the seventh decade of the last century. It is not even necessary to mention in this context the activities of missionary and lay schools of European origin. Their efforts reached only the European and Tunisian Jewish communities. In 1853, for example, two schools run by the Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne numbered 287 students including 27 French, 81 Italians, 118 Maltese, 46 Jews, and only two Muslims. And in 1880 three such European schools had a total of 465 students of which four were "Arabs". In short, the idea of modernization had taken hold "at the top" and modest changes were in the offing, but the mass education (or lack of same) remained as it had been for centuries.

The immediate impact of the French Protectorate in the field of native education was negligible. The French authorities, concerned with the embarrassing number of Italians in Tunisia concentrated on schemes for French colonization. The idea of spreading French culture among the indigènes hardly existed. Nor was this inconsistent with the mentality of the times. This was, after all, the classic period of imperialism and the concept of "mission" or "stewardship" even where active did not automatically embrace the social services taken almost for granted 70 years later. Recall that the total number of Algerian Muslim children in primary school in 1892, after 60 years of French control, was only 11,409.

In fact, French educational policy in Tunisia maintained almost to the end this mentality of considering "Tunisia" in terms of its European colonizers (never exceeding 8% of the total) with the indigènes coming in a very poor, at times almost forgotten, second. A real change and a keen awareness of the glaring inadequacies of the native education came, as has been noted, only after the Second World War. By that time, however, the pattern had been set, and the whole chain of events leading to independence was not to be reversed.

This blanket qualification of French educational efforts in Tunisia is, of course, grossly unfair to several score enlightened and dedicated Frenchmen who devoted their lives to education in this country and whose work serves often as a basis of what is best to this day. Nevertheless, as a general statement of the whole complex making up the French Protectorate (and here must be added such ingredients as attendance statistics, budgetary information, land and colonization policies, statements of representative colonists regarding the indigènes, even personalities of residents), it is, I sincerely believe, an eminently fair appraisal.

In any case, a French educator in Tunisia with no apparent axe to grind could observe in 1949 that "two great tendencies seem to

to have presided over the erection of schools and the development of school enrollment: the concern of the authorities to assure the maximum instruction of French children, and the necessity to plan by priority the more important population centers for school building." \*

The French legacy in education can most readily be explained in terms of the three-way educational system deplored by Messadi (see above page 1). There was, first, French education integrated completely into the system of metropolitan France. In 1954, the next to last year of the Protectorate, the figures for primary education (which, for rather technical reasons, gives the most clear-cut example) in completely French education were:

	<u>Number of Students</u>
French:	29,010
Tunisian Muslim:	14,525
Tunisian Jew:	12,184
Italian:	2,987
Maltese:	285
Others:	290
Total	<u>59,281</u>

Or, roughly one student in four in the completely French system was a Tunisian Muslim, (the average for any ten-year period would be, of course, much lower).

Second was the "assimilated" system, called in the primary grades "Franco-Arab". (For secondary, it was usually termed "modern" or the "Sadiki type".) Here the figures for the same year, 1954, were:

French:	467
Tunisian Muslim:	125,030
Tunisian Jew:	223
Italian:	74
Maltese:	5
Others:	60
Total	<u>125,859</u>

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\* Jean Poncet, "La Scolarisation de la Tunisie et le Milieu Social," Semaine Pédagogique, (being the proceedings of a conference organized by the Direction de l'Instruction Publique in Tunisia), April 1949. It might be noted that this conference was itself symbolic of the "new look" in French educational policy during the last years of the Protectorate.

In the Franco-Arab schools the language of instruction was divided between French and Arabic on a roughly  $2/3 - 1/3$  basis. The schools were avowedly lower in standards than the French schools (where no Arabic was taught), but to compensate the Tunisian Muslim was able to get some training in his native language and culture.

The third major category, the Zitouna type of education, was left virtually untouched by the French authorities. Some Tunisians might want to see in this both a Machiavellian policy of divide (into divergent educational systems) and rule, and a desire to foster the obsolete segment of Tunisian education so the Tunisian will not "catch up" with the European. The truth seems to be much simpler. The French had their hands full with their own plans in other fields, and there seemed to be every justification for taking a stand in principle against interfering in religious matters. If this policy also gave some marginal short-run political benefits...tant mieux. As a result, the Zitouna complex was marked by two major trends during the Protectorate: (a) sporadic, but never quite successful, attempts at reform from within (usually the student body) such as in the 1920's and 1940's leading even to a student strike in 1947 based on demands for better physical facilities, foreign language instruction, and equal job opportunities for Zitouna graduates; and (b) a rather impressive growth in total enrollment. The number in attendance at Zitouna is estimated to have increased almost ten-fold from 1931 to 1951. This "empire-building", on the part of the ulema, in no way matched by a concomitant growth in quality, was always deplored by the nationalist elite, but they were to some extent hoisted on their own petard during the Protectorate period since one of the main points of their argument was the French neglect of Arabic and Islamic studies.

A hybrid type of primary school not mentioned in Messadi's three-way classification deserves mention. This was the "modern Qur'anic school" designed to modernize the traditional kuttab system by adopting many of the techniques of modern pedagogy while at the same time maintaining Arabic as the language of instruction and continuing full emphasis on Islamic studies. This type of school which resulted from native Tunisian efforts solely (as will be seen later) remained basically private in character to the end, being financed by private subscriptions and habus funds (charitable foundations--the wafq of the Eastern Arab world) to which in later years was added some governmental assistance and supervision. At the end of the Protectorate period these schools had a total enrollment of 35,000 or about 1 student for every four in the Governmental Franco-Arab primary school.

The social result of this complicated and diverse educational system was (1) a level of school attendance and a standard of performance among the European community comparing favorably with metropoli-



tan France, (2) an almost equally good record among the Tunisian Jewish community\* educated also almost exclusively in the French schools, (3) and finally a modern education available to only a handful of Tunisian Muslims who made up over 90% of the total population.

During the period the Tunisian Muslim who wanted a thoroughly modern education but who did not relish the thought of becoming one of Marshall Lyautey's "100 million Frenchmen", found his ideal in the Sadiki College -- which, in fact, set the pattern for modern Tunisian education (as opposed to French education in Tunisia).

Reserved for Tunisian Muslims, most of whom entered by competitive examination, this single school with a total student population never rising far above 700 served as the training ground for the indigenous Tunisian leadership from the turn of the century to the present day. Its alumni include President Bourguiba and 8 of the 11 members of the present cabinet. Two other cabinet members who were not students at Sadiki later taught there. One must continually make a few mental adjustments and recall the paucity of modern education available to Tunisians during all of this long period in order to appreciate fully how one small secondary school could exert that much influence and serve as the focus for so much intellectual and political activity. It is perhaps helpful in this respect to draw comparisons with the early, formative years of the American University of Beirut or with Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum, Sudan.

If the Sadiki College represented an attempt to bring some of Tunisian and Arabic culture into modern, Westernized education, then the Khalduniya represented a parallel attempt to blend some modern methods

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\* The Tunisian Jewish community is an interesting subject of study deserving more attention than can be given here. There is almost no Zionism among Tunisian Jews, and on the other hand Tunisian official governmental policy is one of thoroughgoing racial and religious toleration. Public sentiment is not far behind this official policy. There is no more anti-Jewish sentiment than exists in certain quarters in our own country. This happy state of affairs for an Arab country is, deservedly, fairly well known. It is even more extraordinary in the light of recent history, for the large majority of Tunisian Jews welcomed the French Protectorate and adopted French language and culture. Many can no longer speak Arabic, and as many as could took French citizenship. As noted, Tunisian Jews were educated almost exclusively in French schools: even the schools of the Alliance Israelite had a completely French curriculum with the sole difference of an additional program of Hebraic studies. These schools, under the Protectorate, were largely financed by the Tunisian government. They are now in the process of being "nationalized" (i.e. open to all students and the same curriculum as in other public schools), a source of muted discontent among Tunisian Jews.

and subjects into the Zitouni education. The Khalduniya, taking its name from the famous 14th Century Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, was established in 1895 by a few reform-minded Tunisian Muslims for the purpose of giving Zitouna students some background in modern studies. Finding little official response from the Zitouna leadership, the Khalduniya (which, interestingly, did get the warm support of the French Resident, Rene Millet) was obliged to give off-hour instruction in foreign languages and modern studies on a completely voluntary basis to interested Zitouna students.

"Khalduniya" (again in a manner similar to its counter-part, the Sadiki) soon became a cover term to describe the activities of a self-help movement among native Tunisians, activities of which the modest adjunct to the Zitouna mosque was merely the most striking example. (The meagerness of numbers involved in these "historic" institutions is again worthy of note -- the average number of students attending the Khalduniya in 1901 was 99; in 1905 only 156.) This movement included the establishment of small libraries and lecture rooms catering to the needs of the upper working class; an attempt to break the Jewish monopoly in local small industries; an interesting attempt at a kind of experimental and training farm for native farmers; and the beginnings of the so-called "modern Quranic-schools" mentioned above.

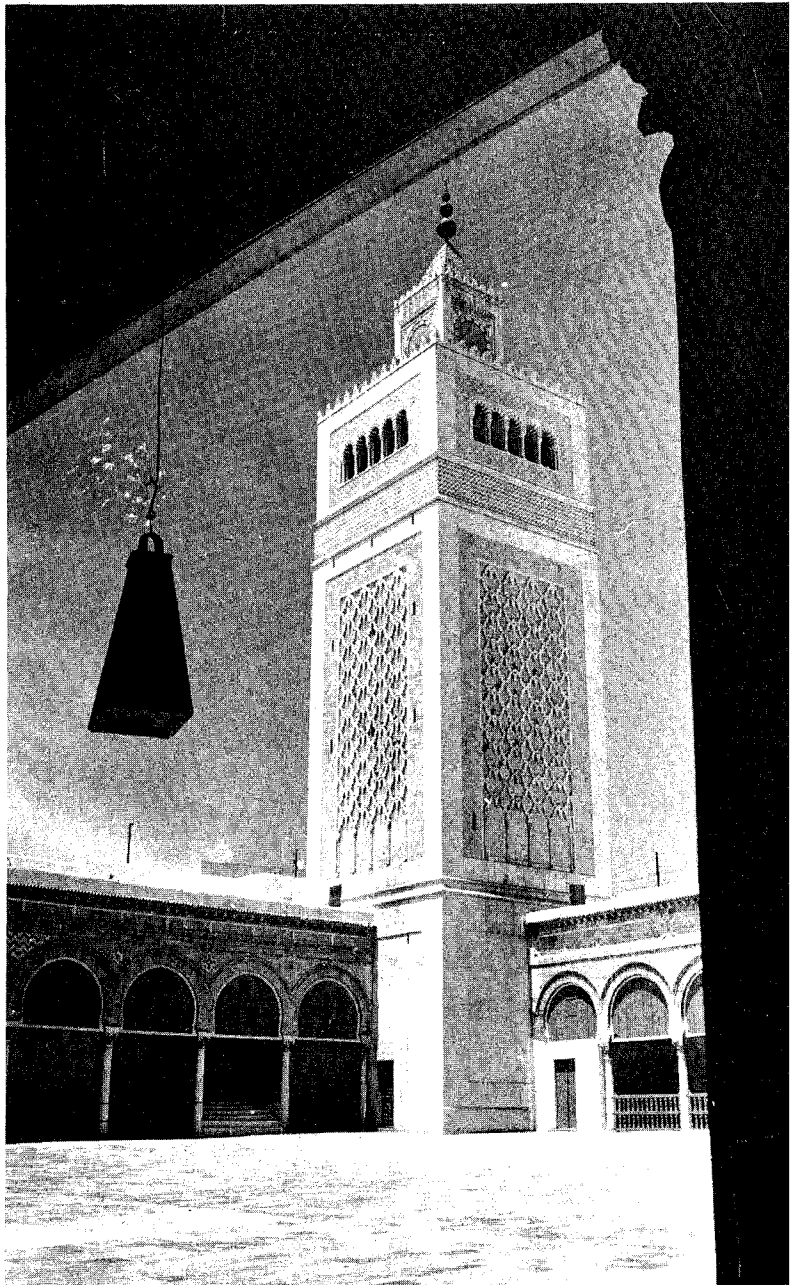
This movement served, in fact, as the chrysalis of the Tunisian nationalist movement, and the names of the early leaders -- Bashir Sfar, Ali Bash Hamba and Shaykh al Ta'albi -- all figure prominently. The Khalduniya can hardly be over-estimated, but at the same time it is important to stop short of the idealized version which sees arising from the Khalduniya a free alliance of two equal and former rival forces -- Islamic traditionalism and modern secularism -- who henceforth marched arm in arm toward the single goal of national self-determination. The Khalduniya (both the specific institution and the more general activities embraced by this name) did serve to pave the way for an acceptance by traditionalist bourgeoisie and urban workers of modern, secular ideas; and to this extent it was a necessary forerunner of the Neo-Destour of the 1930's. However, it must be remembered that from the beginning the Khalduniya received support from only a handful of the Zitouna ulema; it was never able to realize a permanent radical change in orientation of the old university mosque. Its leadership represented for the most part (Shaykh al Ta'albi is here an important exception) an enlightened group intent on achieving their aims by "going to the people" rather than a group arising from within the people to be reformed. In short, the Khalduniya had a short brilliant career which strongly marked Tunisia's future orientation; but by the time it came to an end in the 1940's it was a spent force, while on the other hand the orientation represented by Sadiki College continued to grow, embracing virtually all of the rising young Tunisian elite. This state of affairs can be followed and corroborated by a study of the break-away by Habib Bourguiba and his colleagues in 1934 from the old Destour to found the thorough-going modernist and secular Neo-Destour. In fact, a sociological study of the origins and cultural background of those

forming the New Destour and of the leadership remaining with the old Destour would bring out in bold relief the double theme of a clash of the settled old generation against the rising new one (common to all cultures) plus at the same time the sharp break in cultural orientation of the two generations. However, this can only be suggested at this time lest we stray too far from the restricted topic of Tunisian education.

These then were the main lines inherited by the new Tunisian government in 1956 after 75 years of the French Protectorate and a pre-Protectorate generation of cautious beginnings in modernization: not much education of any kind; and then, to compound the problem, the existence of a French school system peopled by Europeans and a handful of Tunisians; the Sadikiya type assimilated and "Franco-Arab" schools; and the archaic Zāytouna system whose prestige had declined, possibly beyond redemption.

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In its first two years of independence the Tunisian government moved energetically but cautiously. Impressive increases in school attendance was recorded, but education continued basically within the existing framework. This was a wise policy. The obvious reaction in the first flush of independence would have been to propose changes too sweeping for existing personnel and facilities; and at the same time, what might have seemed to outsiders as radical and somewhat irresponsible policies would have discouraged foreign



ZITOUNA MOSQUE -- "largement dépassé"

teachers who will be needed in increasing numbers for at least another decade.

Again, that great exception - Zitouna. To describe the first two years as cautious might seem a poor joke to a Muslim traditionalist, for radical changes were made in the Zitouna system in April 1956. All of the old annexes of the Zitouna Mosque were integrated into the secondary system of national education. The university mosque itself became a public institution with a "civil personality" under a shaykh rector who is nominated by decree and responsible to the Minister of Education. The university mosque teaches two major categories of studies: Arabic language and literature, and juridicial and religious sciences. In short, Zitouna is no longer a "system"; and the remaining university mosque is under considerable pressure to become a modern faculté within the new Tunisian University. However, the teaching staff of Zitouna and, in general, the religious leadership of similar background had fallen into such low esteem that changes which might have caused no end of conflict in other Arab or Islamic countries went into effect in Tunisian with hardly a murmur of protest.

This state of affairs deserves a few further explanatory remarks since it is essential background to an understanding of the cultural outlook of today's leadership in Tunisia. The decline in status of the orthodox religious group can be traced in Tunisia to three inter-related factors:

1. As is the case in large measure in most other Arabic and Islamic countries the religious leadership remains in the hands of a rigid orthodoxy who do not have the capacity and who by training would abhor the attempt to "rethink" and adjust their theology to the daily problems of the modern world. This group have, in short, forfeited that role vital to any "clergy" -- that of being the conscience of the community, often somewhat behind the times, possibly at times even a bit ahead, but at least in touch with and talking the same language of those in the community worried about and trying to adjust the actual to the ideal.

2. The religious leadership further had the bad luck to get itself identified with the old Destour and forces opposing the Neo-Destour, and even in some cases they were linked with the French (e.g., the Shaykh al Islam was on the committee under whose patronage the Eucharistic Congress at Carthage was held in 1931, and Islamic fatwas (advisory judgments) were never lacking to condone or pave the way for any change in French policy). Here the contrast with the eastern part of the Arab world is striking. The Muslim Brethren might well be accused of obscurantism, of a myopic view of the real world in addition to many other shortcomings, but their "nationalist" record of consistent opposition to the foreign occupying power was always beyond reproach. Even the "complaisant" ulema of the era of British and French dominion in that part of the world always managed to maintain some force, bargaining power and respect vis-a-vis the ruling infidels.

3. Finally (and this is both a result and extension of the above two factors) the vicious circle of declining job opportunities to Zitouna graduates in the modern age leading to declining prestige and thus

the impossibility of inducing the better qualified candidates to consider a Zitouna education virtually eliminated the chance that the university mosque could reform itself. As a perceptive observer noted of these students in 1951, they "are no longer those of a century ago. The sons of good families (not excepting those of the ulema), the children of the bourgeoisie and even of urban workers move en masse toward modern education...What remains to people the Grand Mosque and its annexes? Those who have not been able to find a place in the modern schools or who have not done well (about a thousand holders of the certificat d'études who have not gained places in the secondary schools and who do not want technical education), and the bedouin who still have faith in the value of Zitouni diplomas. In sum, the frustrated students, intellectually and materially."\*

Zitouna is rapidly withering on the vine. Since the forced retirement of its last rector--Tahar bin Ashur, who refused to condone Bourguiba's proposal that the  Jihad (holy war) against poverty justified breaking the Muslim fast in the month of Ramadan, no steps have been taken to appoint a new one; and the considerable inefficiency and disorganization always endemic with Zitouna is now compounded by that arising from despair and disillusion. The government line fixed on several occasions by Bourguiba is to praise Zitouna for the role it played in resistance to frenchification by preserving the Arabic and Islamic heritage, but to follow this praise with the observation that resistance is no longer needed as independence has been achieved. Zitouna is now dépassé. Among the aims of independence, according to the official "L'Enseignement en Tunisie" in Le Documentation Tunisien was to "aborder l'unification d'abord administrative, puis, de point de vue culturelle de l'enseignement zeitounien, largement dépassé (emphasis added) et de l'enseignement général." Now could anything approaching the old system be revived assuming some revolutionary change in policy in the next few years? Of the many Zitouna annexes which used to give the traditional equivalent of a secondary school preparation for later entry into the university mosque, there remains only the Ibn Khaldun school (even the name is significant) designed to let students who began their traditional studies before the changes finish their studies in something resembling the old way. The school with a population of 1800 last year is down to 1350 this year and expects to close its doors in another four. The remarks of this school's director, Alarbi al Nebi, might serve to epitomize the "line" or better, the last ditch stand, of the diminishing traditionalists. With considerable circumspection and after persistent prodding, he ventured to me the following summary: No one disputes the goal of unification in education although there are some who would like to see greater emphasis given religious studies in the new unified education. The "nationalization" of al Zitouna is acceptable since it

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\*Henry de Montety, Revolution Moderniste a l'Université es Zitouna, L'Afrique et L'Asie, #13, 1951

is--unlike Al Azhar--and has always been a national Tunisian institution (or at most a Maghribi institution) serving the needs of this area. He was a little more revealing of what were probably his real sentiments in urging me to see many people from all sides (and not just those in official positions) in order to get a proper perspective of the Tunisian views on this subject of education. He also expressed the desire to see more Tunisian students study in the eastern Arab world as well as more professors from those countries come to Tunisia to teach.\*

By 1958, the time was ripe for an ambitious long-range educational program. The Zitouna problem was virtually out of the way; two years of independent government had given the new leaders a chance to know intimately the problems and prospects; and enough time had lapsed since independence to avoid the stigma of having taken precipitate, unplanned action.

These first two years also showed that yeoman efforts along the previous lines would not be enough. As with so many newly independent countries (i.e. the almost overwhelming combination of an under-developed economy making for limited budgetary possibilities, a high rate of natural increase in population, and a woefully low level of literacy and education as a starting point) Tunisia found it had to run hard even to stand still and keep its present low proportion of educated to total population. With a birthrate of 41 per 1,000\*\* Tunisia could expect an average annual increase of about 15,000 primary school age children (6 to 14). Thus, an annual increase in school attendance of 15,000 would be essential merely to maintain the present low standard. Over and above this annual demand loomed the challenge of some 530,000 children of primary school age (or two out of every three in 1958) deprived of any chance to get an education. That is to say, with an annual increase of primary school attendance of 20,000 (which would be for 1958 an impressive 8% increase), it would require approximately 106 years to achieve universal primary education in Tunisia. This, it should be stressed, is to consider only primary education.

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\*The Director's doorkeeper, after showing surprise to find himself addressed in Arabic, immediately asked if I were Russian.

\*\*One of the largest in the world. Compare the following:

16 per 1,000	England
18 per 1,000	Italy
20 per 1,000	France
36 per 1,000	Brazil

The government's attempt to increase school enrollment without changing in substance the system inherited from the days of the Protectorate (excepting the Zitouna system already noted) had been impressive. In two years the total primary school population had risen from over 180,000 to 265,000. Unfortunately, there was no chance of maintaining this rate of increase or of even approaching it under the existing system. The needed annual increase in teachers would not be available for over a decade, and the point of saturation had been reached in the prospect of recruiting foreign (almost all French) teachers.

In addition, the government could not continue to ignore its idée fixe of a unified educational system, and to the extent that one postponed that goal while increasing school attendance one merely compounded the problem.

It was time for a breakthrough by mid-1958. After a committee of education experts guided by Mahmud Messadi had worked out the main line, President Bourguiba announced the ten-year educational reform at the commencement exercises of Sadiki College in June 1958. With his usual good sense of the proper gesture at the right time, the President had chosen as the site for announcing the government's plan the very school which he himself had entered just 50 years earlier.



LEFT TO RIGHT: MINISTER OF EDUCATION MAHMUD MESSADI  
AND HIS CHEF DE CABINET TAYIB TRIKI.

Messadi, as Minister of Education, gave more details a few weeks later. The question of a unified educational system was embraced wholeheartedly and without resort to any transitional phases. Henceforth the Tunisian education system was to be as uniform and centrally coordinated as that of France itself, perhaps the acme of standardized uniform education.

Universal primary education was to be achieved in 10 years, after which time it would become compulsory. This average annual increase in primary school enrollment of just over 50,000 would be achieved, *inter alia*, by two dramatic revisions which may well be long argued and possibly even deplored by many a pedagogue, but to this writer seem just the right balance of realism and idealism:

1. For the first two years of school, there will be two shifts of students, each attending for one-half day or a total 15 hours instruction per week.
2. The seventh year of primary education will be eliminated.

By these measures alone the potential primary school enrollment can be increased by almost 30%, but these innovations are accompanied with an intensive program of accelerated school building and teacher recruitment.

In a sense these two measures can be viewed as the sacrifice (in possible total over-all efficiency) deemed necessary to make the goal of universal primary education feasible. When one considers the dangerous possibilities inherent in any society having a small educated minority shoulder to shoulder with a vast majority completely unlettered, the choice seems obvious. It was essential that a large number of people who had lived until that time on the vague promise of better days when and if independent, now be given a stake in society by seeing their children obtain a modern education. From another viewpoint, to be blunt, Tunisia (as almost every newly independent country) is in greater need for two mediocre doctors than for one good one -- and the same holds true right down the line of professions and crafts.

As for the vexing question of language of instruction, the reform took a line which, while giving Arabic a slight primacy, seems at the same time to commit Tunisia to a practical bilingualism of Arabic and French. The first two years of instruction are given



solely in Arabic, but after that time French predominates as the following table shows:\*

<u>Primary School</u>	<u>Number of Hours per week</u>	
	<u>Arabic</u>	<u>French</u>
1st year	15	
2nd "	15	
3rd "	10	15
4th "	10	15
5th "	10	15
6th "	10	15
Total	<u>70</u>	<u>60</u>

In secondary education the language of instruction (barring one or two exceptions such as the Ibn Khaldun school mentioned above) is just as it was under the Protectorate -- French in everything except the teaching of Arabic language, "civic and religious studies" (one hour per week for the first three years), and the study of Islamic thought (not taken by most students). In short, a little under one third of the total secondary instruction is given in Arabic. Tunisian officials, understandably, soft-pedal this fact which the shortage of trained Arabic-speaking teachers makes inevitable, in the short run at least. Every possible detail concerning the language of instruction in primary school (where a great change has been made) is available, but one will look in vain for any such breakdown in official publications dealing with secondary education. It was also somewhat frustrating trying to get a true picture of this situation from Ministry officials, and only chef de cabinet Tayib Triki was finally willing to offer a blunt, direct answer. He insisted that the ultimate goal was 100% education in Arabic, but he would not even hazard a guess of what the ratio of the two languages of instruction might be at the end of the 10 year reform program in 1969.

So much for the language problem. Secondary education itself is now of two types: either an intermediate education lasting only three years or a preparatory education of six years duration. The former is designed to give a more practical and "trade-school" training to those who will not be going on to higher studies, while the latter follows the traditional preparatory school pattern -- with, however, considerably greater emphasis on the natural sciences. Competitive exams at the end of the primary education decide which type secondary education (if either) the student will enter. The separation of the secondary sheep

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\* Cf. M. Messadi in La Figard 3 Nov. 1959, "Nous avons engage notre pays dans un bilinguisme de fait. Nous desirons conserve toute son importance a votre culture francaise. Il depend de la France que ceci reussisse ou echoue." (i.e. in providing sufficient teachers.)

from the intermediate goats at the tender age of 13 or 14 seems a little harsh, but the principle is recognized that a student who later does especially well in intermediate education can be considered for transfer to the secondary. In any case the Tunisian problem is such at this juncture that it must be tackled by a sort of statistical morality without too much concern for occasional individual hardships. Also, the real personal hardship is felt by those students who barely fail to get in either type of secondary school; for even at the end of the 10 year reform program only one out of every three primary school graduates will be able to continue in either terminal intermediate or secondary education. The policy must be to "save the maximum number of potential intellectuals, recognizing that for a time many will go unschooled." \*



The six year secondary education offers three options to the students, to be chosen at the end of the first three years: (a) a general course of studies, (b) technical (mainly aiming toward engineering), and (c) commercial and economic studies. It is planned that the proportion of students taking each option should be respectively -- 50%, 30% and 20%. This sharp move away from classical and liberal arts studies, the early specialization, and the planned heavy increase in graduates with considerable technical knowledge is bold indeed for a country with Tunisia's present economic development. Whatever else can be said there should be no shortage of candidates to

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\* "L'Enseignement Tunisien a la veille de la reforme,"  
L'Action, 14 July 1958.

PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA INSPECTING  
A NEW TECHNICAL SCHOOL

carry out this new approach--of 200 students recently applying for government scholarships, 63% expressed a preference for higher studies in the natural sciences. Only 20% opted for law, and 17% for lettres.

Created also with the Reform program was an Office Pedagogique (Diwan al Tarbiya). In addition to all the tasks which the name might imply (assist in working out a uniform curriculum, publish a journal keeping instructors up to date on problems and new developments in education, etc.) this office has the assignment of supervising the writing and publication of appropriate textbooks. At the time of independence, Tunisian education relied mainly on foreign textbooks--all French for instruction given in French; Egyptian or Lebanese for instruction in Arabic. Obviously an educational declaration of independence from both sources is an important ultimate aim for the Tunisian leadership, but an excess of zeal in such a program could easily lead to a rapid decline in standards. This has been avoided to date. Most of the Office Pedagogique books published thus far are either selections of texts for use in teaching Arabic and French or history and geography books closely following previously used texts. The very fact that Tunisia needs to free itself from both French and Egyptian textbook domination probably facilitated the middle way. (It is interesting to speculate how much pressure would exist for more Arabic teachers and textbooks from Egypt if Abd al Nasir had taken a more subtle line in relations with Tunisia in the last four years.)

The publication of native textbooks reaps other benefits for a country straining every budgetary nerve to finance an intensive educational program. The Office Pedagogique books will be published and distributed directly by the Ministry to students without the intermediary of the bookdealers. As a result foreign books now costing three to six dollars will be replaced by books costing about 50¢. The government should be able to put to other uses the roughly 45,000 dinars (one dinar equals \$2.40) used last year to provide textbooks for poor students, and in human terms scores of family crises over how to pay for Ahmad's or Fatima's books will be solved. Having been in the various bookshops of Tunis at the time of the return to school, I lived with this problem while waiting my own turn in the queue. It was touching to see small children (boys and girls) handing over in return for bright, new French and Egyptian textbooks sums of money which might well represent more than a week's wages to their father, or even (not unlikely with chronic underemployment) the diminishing savings of a family having no one gainfully employed at the moment. One example will serve for all. An illiterate workman whose clothes indicated his peasant origins came into the Al Najah bookshop (located just a few yards from the Zitouna Mosque) clutching in his hand a grubby piece of lined paper on which was written (by someone else, of course) the name of a textbook. The bookdealer with the deftness of a bartender reached without looking to pick a book from the shelves behind him, flicked it on the counter, and barked out with the arrogance of a gendarme, "dinar wa nus" (\$3.60). The workman, astounded,

fell automatically into the only world of trade he knew -- the bargaining of the suq. "Surely the gentleman was joking . . . an impossible asking price . . . or perhaps you have something similar for less?" It was all over. The bookdealer had already given the universal Arabic sign of negative - the head tossed back quickly with an accompanying click of the tongue -- the book was back on the shelf, and several small school children were eagerly swarming into the workman's place to make their purchases. (The workman's son may eventually have been one of those to receive a free book after his teacher had ascertained by a rough, informal "means test" that the family could not afford the purchase, but it is just as likely that the father, after consulting with friends or with passers-by who would listen, spent every available franc to buy the book fearing that without this "amulet" his son might not be able to stay in school.)

The education reform, it has been stressed repeatedly, has as its keynote national and cultural unity, and this idea of unity extends to both the sexes. There is great concern to achieve eventual universal education for both boys and girls, and as late as his press conference in September of this year Messadi, while taking pride in the increases in school attendance, went on to deplore the fact that only 27% of the girls of primary school ages (as against 57% of the boys)



OUTSIDE A GIRLS SCHOOL IN TUNIS. THE AIM -- UNVEILED, UNSECLUDED,  
AND IN SCHOOL.

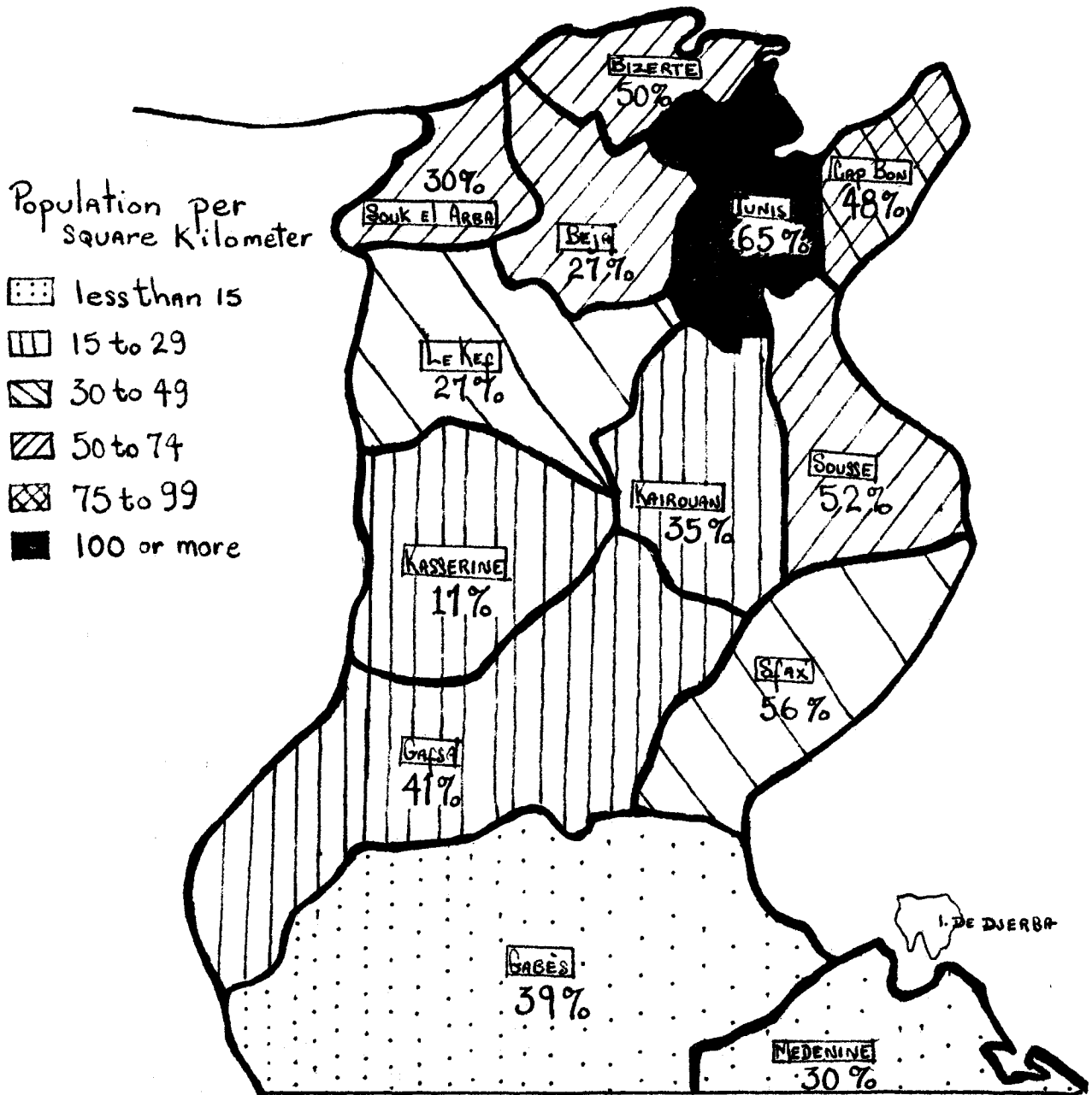
were attending school. He pledged increased efforts to close this gap. Nor is this window-dressing. The Bourguiba government is dedicated to the idea of bringing Tunisian Muslim women into full participation in society; and the President, himself, as a top leader of the Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes once said, "is the first feminist."

There remains, however, another form of disunity at present about which it is unlikely that as much can be done. This is the disparity of educational opportunity among the various sections of Tunisia. With a national average of 43% of primary school age children actually in school, the local averages vary all the way from 65% in the gouvernorat of Tunis to 17% in Kasserine. The breakdown by gouvernorat follows, as might be expected, the indices of urbanization and economic development; and the central and southern part of the country being more sparsely populated and less endowed with natural resources makes an especially poor showing.

What then is to be done? When the problem is reduced to the hard choice of spending a certain sum of money in urban area X and educating two children or the same amount in rural area Y and educating only one, it is not so easy to insist on equal opportunity to all regardless of section. One can also take refuge in the population increase projection which would foresee in 1966 a 50% increase in the urban or semi-urban population as against an expected 30% increase for the remainder. The government policy after two years remains firm. Each gouvernorat is to have the same proportion of primary schools per total number of school age children, and each gouvernorat is to have at least two large lycees (one for each sex) in addition to other colleges by the end of the 10 year period. The following table should clarify both the present disparity of educational opportunity and some of the steps already taken:

<u>Gouvernorat</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Number of Primary School Age children</u>	<u>Percentage of Primary School Age Children Actually in School</u>	<u>Lycees under Construction</u>
1. Tunis	747,967	128,800	65%	
2. Sfax	338,268	76,700	56%	
3. Sousse	447,093	102,200	52%	*
4. Bizerte	258,544	52,400	50%	
5. Cap Bon	240,353	55,800	48%	
National Average			43%	

## TUNISIA



The figures shown in each gouvernorat represent the percentage of primary school children actually in school.

The areas of greatest economic development are found in the gouvernorats of Bizerte, Tunis and along the Sahel (coastal plain) of Cape Bon, Sousse and Sfax.

<u>Gouvernorat</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Number of Primary School Age Children</u>	<u>Percentage of Primary School Age Children Actually in School</u>	<u>Lycees under Con- struction</u>
6. Gafsa	255,767	56,800	41%	*
7. Gabes	176,002	40,800	39%	*
8. Kairouan	204,039	47,800	35%	*
9. Medenine	235,446	55,100	30%	
10. Souk el Arba	196,113	43,700	30%	
11. Beja	248,525	55,000	27%	*
12. Kef	265,502	58,400	27%	
13. Kasserine	164,395	37,600	17%	

I have been unable to uncover accurate figures for total school construction by gouvernorat (although projections for the entire 1959-69 period are available), and therefore have resorted to the index of grand lycees under construction. This is, of course, merely a rough indicator of progress in primary education, but in any case the existence of a lycee will tend to force the creation of primary schools. It is significant to note that four lycees are under construction in gouvernorats with school attendance below the national average to only one in a gouvernorat above that average (at Monastir, the home town of Habib Bourguiba). Even with this progress to date it remains certain that the educational reform program is most likely to break down in later years in these sparsely populated and underdeveloped gouvernorats. (The French 20 year reform program planned for 1949-69, for example, aimed for universal primary education only in the urban and semi-urban areas and for attendance of roughly two-thirds of the total primary school age children in the other parts of the country.) One might even predict that when the critical point is reached the responsible officials will opt for letting natural migration from poorer to richer regions, or the results of economic development in a certain region determine the location of school development rather than a strict adherence to the original plan.

At the peak of the educational pyramid will be the University of Tunis (officially in existence since March 1960). Up to the present time this university is little more than a regrouping of various existing institutions under one administration, e.g. Institut des Hautes Etudes, Zitouna Mosque/University (embracing only the "higher" studies and not the secondary studies now "nationalized" as already noted), the Ecole Normale Supérieure, etc. In fact, most of these institutions remain at their old locations, and many of the other aspects of unification have yet to be completed. In one sense it is recognized in principle that the real growth of the university can and should only be realized as the products of the present primary and secondary reform reach college age (only after 1964). Still there has been an impressive advance in university attendance since independence. The Institut des Hautes Etudes (the nucleus of the new

university -- all other branches such as the Ecole Normale, the Agricultural school, etc. being specialized departments) numbered in 1956 only 362 Tunisian Muslims (24 of whom were women). By the school year 1959-60 the number of Muslim Tunisians had jumped to 955 men and 146 women. Even more impressive was the change in emphasis to natural sciences as seen by the following table:

Tunisian Muslims Attending the Institut des Hautes Etudes\*

	<u>Literature and Humanities</u>	<u>Natural Sciences</u>	<u>Law</u>	<u>Total</u>
1952	99	47	66	212
1956	94	111	111	316
1959	252	569	263	1084

Even with this impressive increase Tunisians getting their higher education abroad exceed the locally educated by about 3 to 2. There were in 1959 an estimated 1500 Tunisians pursuing higher studies in France and about 100 in Iraq and Lebanon. This should be compared with the situation in 1956 when there were some 500 in France and about 200 in the Near East. Again, it is interesting to speculate . . . . If Egyptian-Tunisian relations had been marked by cooperation rather than rivalry, how many students would now be getting an education in the Arab East with just what effect on future cultural orientation?

In any case the University of Tunis will grow -- according to present plans -- in stages consistent with the remainder of the reform program, and the inspiration will not come from the East. The

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\* All of the above number concerning the Tunisian Muslim enrollment at the Institut des Hautes Etudes are an exaggeration of possibility as high as 35% of the actual total. This inaccuracy arises from the fact that the figures give a total number of degree candidates, (but there are three types of degrees available in this transitional period -- Tunisian, French, and joint Tunisian/French). Many students take the examinations for more than one type of degree in their field. This is probably especially the case with Tunisian Muslims, for presumably French citizen would be satisfied with the French degree. Accurate figures for the total numbers of Tunisian Muslims enrolled at the Institut are apparently not available. Official Ministry of Education figures (as should indeed be the case) give no information on nationality or religion of the students.



following statement taken from an official Ministry of Education report entitled "Study of the Creation of the Tunisian University" seems almost to go out of its way to make that point clear:

"The example of certain young universities created in the last forty years in various countries formerly dependent or underdeveloped, notably in the countries of the Arab Near East, demonstrates that a University which is not sufficiently concerned with research rapidly becomes a teaching institution, the level of which approaches some sort of complementary secondary education."

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Two years have now passed since the beginning of the 10 year educational reform. How does performance compare with the plan? Statistically things look good although not quite up to the mark set. The proposed primary enrollment for 1959-60 and 1960-61 were respectively 373,000 and 428,000. In 1959-60 the actual enrollment was only 362,000 and the expected 1960-61 enrollment (statistics are not yet available) will be in the neighborhood of 412,000. At this rate the aim of universal primary education would probably not be reached for at least 12 instead of 10 years. However, this is hardly a severe criticism if the upward spiral can be maintained if only at a slightly reduced rate. The terminal intermediate and secondary education enrollment, on the other hand, are both slightly ahead of plan.

As for the budgetary possibilities of such a program, one is loose in a field of variables. Some points are clear. By Gladstonian principles of financing the plan is unfeasible. Involved is an estimated increase in the annual budget from \$21,360,000 in 1959-60 to \$58,320,000 in 1968-69 -- not to mention a building program of over \$122 million over the ten year period. Education already absorbs 17% of the total budget. Implementation will in any case require a considerable amount of foreign aid -- more perhaps than the Tunisians would like to think, or admit. But essentially the educational reform is linked intimately with hopeful plans for rapid economic development. "A policy of reduced or slow school attendance implies a choice of underdevelopment or at least a resigned attitude towards a permanent protraction of economic and social underdevelopment. . . (But the opposite policy can) help carry out successfully any plan of transformation of the economic and social structure of the nation.\* Educational reform and economic development -- each depends

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\* From the Ministry's announcement of the Reform Plan entitled Perspective Decennale de Scolarisation.

on the other. If the latter fails, no politically conceivable amount of foreign aid could make up the budgetary deficit; and in any case the increasing number of trained "cadres" could not be absorbed in the lagging economy. If educational reform falls short of the mark the economic plans fail for lack of necessary trained personnel.

This is a not unfamiliar situation. It is the typical "operation bootstrap" of underdeveloped countries, and under such circumstances one must be a visionary, for to be completely practical and "realistic" means to accept the present unsatisfactory standards.

A word more about foreign aid. United States economic aid to Tunisia in the field of education is now in its third year, and the average expenditure has been about two or three million dollars per year or a total to date of approximately \$7,000,000 (including expenditure to be made the remainder of this fiscal year). This aid has gone almost exclusively for assistance in the construction and equipment of schools, especially technical secondary schools. U.S. officials have (wisely, I think) shunned heavy commitments in other fields of education both in order to avoid the introduction of yet another educational system (and language, in many cases) when the national theme here is "cultural unity" and also to keep on good terms with the French who are hypersensitive about others efforts in their former Protectorate.

Assuming U.S. aid in the same ratio for the full ten year period, the total value of our aid in implementing the 10 year program would be in the neighborhood of \$23,000,000. Since the estimated credits for new construction and equipment in the Tunisian 10 year reform program amount to \$122,500,000 or:

- \$31,000,000 for primary education
- 16,800,000 for terminal intermediate education
- 74,700,000 for secondary education

roughly one dollar out of every five for the total construction program would come -- if the present situation were projected -- from U.S. aid. This is to leave out of account completely the planned \$2,500,000 U.S. aid for construction and equipment of part of Tunisian University. Comparison here is not possible for the Tunisians have not prepared budget estimates.

American aid, involving mainly credits, is potentially expendable. It is, in other words, politically possible that some other state, or group of states might be willing to offer the same amount of aid; but the French aid, in the short run at least, is absolutely vital not only to realization of future goals but even to the maintenance of present levels. This aid takes the form of just under 1,300 teachers. By terms of a cultural and technical cooperation agreement signed between Tunisia and France in April 1959 (superseding an earlier agreement, and giving somewhat better terms to Tunisia) the French government not only aids the

Tunisian Ministry of Education in recruiting needed personnel in France, but also pays approximately 40% of the total salary and allowances granted teachers so recruited. Since the total average payment (salary and allowances) to French teachers in Tunisia amounts to about 38% above the total average payment to teachers in metropolitan France, it works out that the government of Tunisia is able to recruit French teachers at prevailing French salary scales, while the French government makes up the difference entailed by transportation, additional allowances, or in effect in the bonus payment which makes the arrangement sufficiently attractive to bring in the required numbers.

In short, for the school year 1959-60 there were (in addition to 44 French teachers in higher education):

212 in secondary schools or about one for every five native  
Tunisians

94 in technical schools or about one for every eight native  
Tunisians

928 in primary schools or about one for every seven native  
Tunisians.

Admittedly, 184 of the almost 1300 French teachers in Tunisian national schools are not covered by the Franco-Tunisian agreement, having been recruited directly by the Tunisian government (almost all of them in primary education, and representing French citizens who already happened to be in Tunisia). However, if the political climate changed to such an extent that the French government felt disinclined to renew the agreement (subject to annual renewal or renegotiation), then almost certainly most of the non-agreement French teachers would also begin to leave Tunisia.

In addition to the 1300 French teachers in the Tunisian national school system there are over 1400 teaching in the remaining French schools in Tunisia. However, these teachers also make a real contribution to Tunisia's education needs -- giving primary and secondary education to some 8,000 Tunisian Muslims and 6,500 Tunisian Jews as well as to 19,600 children with French citizenship. Thus, 42% of the pupils attending these totally French-staffed and French--financed schools are Tunisian citizens.\*

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\*According to M. Teyssier, Director of the Mission Universitaire et Culturelle Francaise en Tunisie there are over 3,000 French teachers in Tunisia (the difference being the increase for 1960-61 for which statistics are not yet available), 6,000 in Morocco and only 3,000 in the rest of the world including all of the former French colonies in Africa. This gives an interesting indication of the importance France attaches to North Africa.

Even this number of French teachers must be increased if enrollment goals are to be met, and for this school year the Tunisian government was seeking an additional 750. Only in the latter years of the reform program can Tunisia begin to think of a gradual replacement of French by trained native Tunisian teachers. This state of affairs is one of the many which must be considered in understanding the Bourguiba policy vis-a-vis France in spite of the many sources of friction -- Algeria, the 1958 bombing of Sakiet Sidi Yusif, the Bizerte naval base, etc.

So much for the question of statistics, budget, and foreign aid in appraising the progress to date. Of more importance really is the question -- what sort of new Tunisian is being produced by this education? What are the ingredients making up this greatly prized "cultural unity" that independence has presumably made possible?

Certain trends can be picked up from the lists of studies themselves. We have seen an almost equal division of instruction between Arabic and French in the primary grades, and virtually no change from the Protectorate days as regards the language of instruction in the secondary schools. This is, of course, in large part dictated by necessity. One must rely on French-speaking teachers for several years to come. However, what conclusions are to be drawn from the fact that "Quranic and moral studies" in primary education average one hour per week as against a weekly average of 3 hours for arithmetic,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hours for Arabic language and 5 hours for French?

In secondary education the teaching of French language and literature will take only slightly less time of the total schedule than Arabic language and literature. Again, is it harsh reality or conscious choice? The necessity of continuing to teach many subjects in French is not disputed, but doesn't this continued emphasis on the teaching of French language and literature (an average of 5 hours out of 30 per week for the first four years as against an average of six for Arabic) involve a more deliberate choice?

Official publications have often noted the need to re-integrate Islamic philosophy into independent Tunisia's educational system. The official program for secondary education lists in a single fascicule the subject "Philosophy and the Study of Islamic Thought." This sounds intriguing - a synthesis of Western philosophy and traditional Islamic studies? No, the title is confusing. They are two completely different subjects taught in the last year of general secondary education according to the following schedule:

Hours per week (total of 30)

<u>Degree Program:</u>	<u>Modern Letters</u>	<u>Classical Letters</u>	<u>Science</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Normale</u>
Philosophy	7	7	4	4	5
Study of Islamic Thought	2	3	1	1	2

Further, lest one have the idea that perhaps some Zitouna thinking has been able to carve out for itself a small niche in the new, unified secondary education, note should be taken of the following remark explaining the general aims of the program (translated from the Arabic -- the program for Islamic thought covers 10 pages in Arabic; that for Philosophy 22 pages in French):

"In a word, the methods to be relied upon in teaching Islamic thought should be those employed in what is today called the study of religious thought from the sociological point of view (sociologie religieuse). This is the method which attempts to go beyond the investigation of any given weltanschauung ('aqliya) to discover the substantive factors which determined its various viewpoints just as they determined the solutions and the problems arising from that very weltanschauung in any given age. This (method) in short, calls not for simply receiving and believing but for thought, investigation and criticism."

We have also noted the genuine effort being made to give equal educational opportunities to both sexes, and this new mentality seems to be striking roots. In a recent lecture on modern Tunisian literature there was only one poem cited by the speaker which drew guffaws and catcalls from the audience (about three-fourths students) -- that written in the early 1930's by a conservative exhorting women to remain true to their religion by keeping their veils and habits of seclusion.

What then will be the final result of this cultural unity? This much seems certain. The present leadership is genuinely devoted to a modern, secular, Western cultural outlook in a manner exceeding in boldness the various modernist movements found in any other part of the Arab world. This does not mean any necessary political francophilia or pro-Westernism. It is rather the modernism of Sartre and Sputnik - of the rights of man and of successful five year plans. The rejection of the Arab East also goes deeper than the existing troubles with the U.A.R. Basically, the Arab East has not made a very impressive showing and no amount of appealing to a common heritage can obscure this to the Tunisians.

Much of what seems to be developing wins the support of us Westerners (naturally enough, since the aims overlap so many of our own cultural values) -- the goal of universal primary education with all it implies of social responsibility, female emancipation, the moderation and good sense of bilingualism and apparent bi-culturalism, the increased emphasis on natural sciences and the attempt to build a better material world . . . However, small ruling groups trying to change too quickly the most basic tents of their society have often come to grief at what seemed to be the height of their influence. If the present government, now so firmly established, should for any reason begin to lose some of that popularity, is it not especially vulnerable to the charge of being too Western -- too much opposed to the "good old values" of Islam and

Arabic culture? One can imagine what a demagogue from the religious right might make of the following fact: The student magazine Jeunesse asked students of the Ecole Normale Superieure if they had a personal problem concerning the existence of God. Of those answering the questionnaire 47% admitted to a problem. Of the remaining 53% to whom this question caused no doubts:

8% believed God exists

45% believed He does not exist.

Perhaps this is just a flash in the pan -- a sort of freak-like the celebrated Oxford Union decision not to fight for King and country, but it is serious enough to cause concern. One can only hope fervently that the many noble aims of this Tunisian guided social revolution are achieved and that while striking out against the false god of immobilisms and religious obscurantism, the Tunisian rulers will nevertheless strive to build on the foundation of what is best in their own cultural heritage.

Sincerely,



Leon Carl Brown

Received New York December 20, 1960.