

# The legacy of the Algerian war

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NO political group or party in France has gained prestige from the Algerian war. President de Gaulle, who with whatever delays has after all brought the war to an end, seems the least in danger of being thanked by the politically organised. He is the last man to be surprised and has indeed for long past concentrated on leading and manoeuvring the unorganised. It is essentially to them that he addresses himself when he asks the nation to renew his mandate by a referendum.

His critics on the Right can plead as alibi that their policies were rejected without any frank admission of the fact, and can argue with a wealth of quotations from the President's earlier speeches that they were deliberately misled. The Socialists have to bear the main responsibility for what was done in Algeria from February, 1956, to June, 1958, when M. Guy Mollet was Prime Minister and M. Robert Lacoste, Minister for Algeria. The Radicals at that time controlled the Army. The MRP, sitting in the middle, gave momentary indications that their responsibilities in Indo-China had taught them something, but this certainly did not include how to take action. The bitter truths about the situation were told with relentless courage by the Opposition weeklies. These now give the impression of having lost with their theme their inspiration.

France has not rid herself of the Algerian problem by recognising Algerian independence. There are first of all the Algerians in France—the Moslem immigrants, who have long constituted an important element in her labour force, and the European refugees, who now number perhaps 300,000, who may grow fewer but are more likely to grow more numerous. But she has also to deal with the habits acquired by both Army and police in dealing with Algerians, and with those of a resolute and active section of French society which has imitated the Algerian nationalists in the use of violence and the least reliable section of the Army in its habits of thought.

The spectacle of rival groups manoeuvring for power in Algeria itself should remind us that throughout the Algerian war two groups have been shooting it out among the Moslems in France. The Moslem discipline is much to be admired. It should not be forgotten how it was enforced. Secret tribunals have not yet ceased to meet in cellars, and to condemn fellow Moslems to death. Only last week, 17 Moslems were arrested in a Paris suburb on just

this charge. While one of their victims has escaped, another has disappeared.

The European refugees are inevitably bringing with them initiates of the OAS, who will strengthen the reduced but still active forces of that organisation on this side of the Mediterranean. These have already shown their determination to keep up the fight, but are fortunately suffering for the moment from severe dislocation and from lack of funds. It is no longer possible for the OAS to pillage the banks of Algeria. On the other hand, the bed of sympathy which every conspiracy needs if it is to flourish will gain from the influx of refugees as soon as these have begun to find jobs, or even to settle down on the relief funds that the Government itself makes available. Their absorption will be slow and difficult, their sense of injustice unreasoning and enduring.

The problem of dealing with these two forms of residual terrorism is connected with a still more serious one—the habits formed in the course of repression during the last seven years. "Realistic" methods that cannot be justified legally or admitted in Parliament, but which were applied under the responsibility of certain senior officers, were the first school for a "psychological warfare" that soon became an autonomous policy, then a conspiracy and finally open mutiny. Those who winked at such goings-on, whether in the administration or the Government, Parliament, or the press, had a very heavy responsibility for what came afterwards. Inevitably, the amnesty for Moslem rebels has been accompanied by an amnesty for police or military torturers. It is little comfort that these in their turn are belatedly followed by an amnesty for the French friends of the rebels like Father Robert Davezies, who has just been released six months after his condemnation to a three-year sentence (of which he had already served one year before his trial).

Little is known, or probably will be known for a long time to come, about the disciplinary measures taken within the Paris police after the scandals of excessive violence used against demonstrators or prisoners during the months which immediately preceded the Evian agreement. The following points may be usefully recalled. The police of the Paris area were under great strain because of the problem of dealing with the very large Moslem population, itself under the terrorist control of the FLN. The Paris police had suffered heavy casualties. An unarmed but mas-

sive demonstration of Moslem Algerians in Paris was dispersed on October 17 with great brutality; over eleven thousand men were arrested and detained under shocking conditions for several days, while the leaders were combed out. It came to light about the same time that some dozens of dead Moslems had been picked out of the Seine, mainly in September, some of them perhaps the victims of the FLN, others of private quarrels, but the remainder probably thrown in by groups of policemen, on or off duty, who thought that the officially admitted methods were too mild. On the rare occasions when the fact of a corpse reached the court of law no evidence was ever available, even when the corpse came from a police station. Later in the winter, the Paris police distinguished themselves by the brutality of their action against anti-OAS demonstrations, until finally, on February 8, a totally unnecessary police charge against demonstrators who were already dispersing caused eight deaths.

Nobody has been publicly punished or reprimanded for these things, but the following may be hazarded. The more or less private punitive expeditions that ended with bodies in the Seine were certainly disapproved from above and probably by the majority of the police. The guilty may at least have got the impression that they should walk warily. The violence against the anti-OAS demonstrators provoked such a monster demonstration of sympathy and protest that the police authorities certainly decided to be more careful. But the methods used against the Moslem demonstrators of October 17 are probably on the record as a well-conceived operation, even if some of the details went wrong. After all, there was no more serious trouble with the Paris Algerians after that; no more police were murdered. That is part of the legacy of the Algerian war. Since then the hatred of many Paris policemen may well have been turned against the OAS as more recent troublemakers, but essentially it is the methods tried out and confirmed that are the legacy of the Algerian war and may well lay up trouble for the future.

As for the Army, the President is still hoping that the attraction of really modern equipment and training up to and including the use of nuclear deterrent will induce it to forget its Algerian hopes. The parachutists are reported to be practice-jumping as never before, as a cure, it would seem, for no longer being allowed to throw their

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weight about on part of the earth's surface. Part of the trouble with the officers at least has certainly in the past been a justifiable thirst for a doctrine related to their function. There is little news of developments in this connect. But it is not only the officers and parachutists, still in uniform, who matter. The wars of Indo-China and Algeria did a lot of damage to the minds of a great many young men who often remain organised in some form of association. Their state of mind will not heal up all at once.

On the other hand, these wars also awakened up in the minds of other young men, mainly among the students, and ended by stirring many of their teachers to a sense of enhanced responsibility. As

against the grim tale of moral and human damage, these two positive factors must be remembered. The students of 1962 are certainly far more politically aware and more politically serious than those, say, of 1950. As the stimulus was drawn from the prospect of military service to be spent largely in Algeria, their positive contribution may perhaps also be reduced. But at least their immediate seniors have gone out into life with some degree of political purpose, and will therefore balance the outlook of the parachutists. Perhaps, who knows, preoccupation with Algeria may be replaced by preoccupation with atomic armament, now present in the French mind only as the question of whether it should be European or French.