

The Algerian Republic

THE independence granted to Algeria in July 1962 meant the end of 2,000 years of foreign occupation and domination. The first occupants of the Algerian littoral, the Phoenicians, had soon fallen under the power of the Carthaginian and Roman Empires. In the seventh century, the world of Islam was brought to Algeria by the Arab conquerors. In the fifteenth, the country was the scene of the Turkish invasions and, in the eighteenth, it sank into anarchy while the coast was the refuge of the pirates of Barbary. On the pretext of destroying piracy, France embarked on the conquest of Algeria in 1830. As early as 1848, the territory was divided into three departments, considered as an integral part of the national territory and administered from Paris.

French domination lasted for nearly a century and a half. The advent of France brought the development of the Algerian land and raised the living standards of the native population far above those of almost any other country in Africa and the Middle East. The development and modernization of agriculture, the setting up of an irrigation system, the dredging and building of harbours, the construction of roads, the development of modern means of communication (including air transport), and the creation of a nucleus of industries are so many achievements to the credit of France. With regard to public health, it need only be mentioned that the Moslem population has increased fourfold since the conquest. Above all, France brought to Algeria a culture and a way of life that left a deep impress on the Moslem élite and middle class. The reverse side of the picture is that the participation of Moslem elements in the country's political life left much to be desired; universal franchise and the eligibility to public office of all Moslems and Europeans without distinction were granted only after the Second World War. The process was speeded up, though too late, by the coming to power of General de Gaulle, and soon there were talks on integration or fraternization in complete equality, at least in theory, between Moslem and European Algerians.

Nationalism Resurgent

In spite of this long and apparently fruitful association of the two communities, the call of nationalism was being heard with increasing urgency. Was the reason to be found in the absence of the Moslems from political life and public office, an absence which had been forced on them for so long? Partly, no doubt. Or was it not rather owing to the wave of nationalism and anti-colonialism which was sweeping post-war Africa? Be that as it may, on November 1, 1954, a group of confirmed nationalists founded the "Front de Libération Nationale" (National Liberation Front), which rapidly became by far the largest Algerian rebel movement. On November 1 of that year, the FLN began hostilities. Slow to get started, its war machine, whose fortune varied greatly in the course of the rebellion,