

Franco-Tunisian Relations

ON July 3, 1955, a series of Conventions were signed by the Prime Ministers of France and Tunisia setting forth a new relationship between the two countries. The Conventions were later ratified by the French and Tunisian Governments and the instruments of ratification were exchanged in Paris on September 1, 1955. The conventions envisage an enduring and close communion between the two countries. Within this framework a large measure of local autonomy is transferred immediately to Tunisia and authority in other spheres is to be assumed by the Tunisians in specified stages extending over a period of 20 years. However, throughout this period France will remain responsible for the defence of Tunisia and for the external relations of the territory. This important event opened a new era in Franco-Tunisian relations. It was the climax of a process of constitutional evolution which commenced when Tunisia became a protectorate of France.

The French protectorate of Tunisia was established by the Treaties of Kassar Said (or LeBardo) and La Marsa of 1881 and 1883 respectively. The subsequent development of the country was governed by the clause in the Treaty of La Marsa under which the nominal head of state, the Bey of Tunis, undertook "to make such administrative, judicial and financial reforms as the French Government considers advisable". In the years that followed, a French administration was grafted to the traditional Tunisian institutions: modern communications were introduced; agricultural and mineral resources were developed; and modern health practices were introduced. Many thousands of European colonists settled in the protectorate.

The rise of nationalism in Tunisia may be said to date from 1920 when the Destour or Constitution Party was formed. The programme of the Destour called for a number of political reforms including the establishment of a deliberative assembly elected by universal suffrage and of government responsible to this assembly, elective municipal institutions and the appointment of Tunisians to posts in the civil service. A number of administrative reforms were adopted by the administration but these did not satisfy the nationalists. Following a series of incidents in the early thirties the Destour was dissolved by the authorities. Its place was soon taken, however, by the Néo-Destour (New Constitution), a movement with modernistic tendencies and organizational methods, which sought not only political objectives but also the raising of the standard of living of the Tunisian people. Labour troubles and political unrest led to the proclamation of martial law in April 1938, the dissolution of the Néo-Destour and the arrest of many of its leaders.

Postwar Developments

By the end of the Second World War the Néo-Destour had become a popular symbol of the growing Tunisian desire for self-government. Progress was made towards this goal in successive reforms which were granted by France with a view to the development of representative institutions. In 1949 a Tunisian cabinet was set up under Prime Minister Mohammed Chenik. In April 1950, the French Government responded favourably to a seven-point