

Algeria:

The World University Service of Canada holds an annual summer seminar overseas, to study the people, and culture of the chosen country. Last summer Beverley Gietz, arts 4, joined 42 other Canadian students in Algeria; she participated in the study group of politics of the north African nation. Miss Gietz reports here on her five weeks in Algeria.

The Kierouan edged gently into Algiers harbor. From the foredeck we made out the streets above and the arcades still higher, filled with cheering, white-robed Algerians.

The crowd waved welcome—but not to the Canadian university students arriving for the month long World University seminar to be held in Algeria. The hero was an Algerian war leader, returning on the Kierouan from imprisonment in France.

It was an impressive introduction to Algeria. Cheers, flags and banners strung over the fronts of white-washed buildings proclaimed socialism, brotherhood, and peace. "So this is independence", we thought as our bus carried us to the university residences outside of the city.



Bev
Gietz

So too, no doubt, did the returning war hero. Perhaps successive days revealed to him, as they did to us, another meaning of "independence".

Indeed the modern university residences, surrounded by well-tended gardens, made it difficult to believe that we were in an "underdeveloped" country. Nor did the lot of the students we met give cause for anything but envy; the government's socialism and desire to increase the ranks of trained youth meant all tuition was paid and each student given an adequate living allowance.

But not all Algerians were so fortunate, we were to learn in our ten days at Algiers. Nowhere did we see people starving. Nor did there seem many more beggars than in France's Marseilles. High apartment buildings lent an air of modernity. But like the university campus, they were the remainder of the French years—not the product of independence. The new independent Algeria found little use for them; most we learned have remained empty since the former French occupants' departure after independence. Very few Algerians can afford the rent, it was explained to us. Replacing the departed French is a small class of educated Moslems who can afford to live in the European manner.

But the vast majority of the people still live in the ancient clay and cement houses of the densely-populated Kasbah, in the dilapidated workers' districts on the city's eastern skirts, or in

bidonvilles—cardboard and tin huts which the government is rapidly replacing with barrack-like tenements.

STILL DIVIDED

The difference is that the majority of those "on top", now count those below as their "brothers", that now anyone—Moslem or European—can sit in the downtown cafes, that now talk is of erasing the economic as well as social disparity between the two classes of Algiers.

While in the Kasbah, families gain a living selling everything from chickens to carpets in the narrow, teeming streets. The workers' districts manifest the effects of the unemployment rate which sometimes climbs to an appalling 60%. We saw for the first time a sight that was to become familiar during our travels in Algeria—cafes filled all day with men who should have been working. Only government pensions, and foreign aid keep starvation at bay.

Who is to blame? The men content to sit in the sun? But it is not their fault there is no work. The government? But the government is desperately aware of the problem—of the pensions that drain its budget, of the unrest that boredom and hunger can produce to threaten the stability of government.

The government is trying to re-establish dislocated industry on a socialist, co-operative basis, but is hampered by lack both of capital and skilled managers and technicians. The workers cannot be blamed; the government is doing its best. All that remains to accuse is the revolution itself and the calamitous reaction of Algeria's European population, whose departure deprived the country of its managing and directing technical class as well as millions of dollars of capital.

A few of the Algerians I met were so bold as to say confidentially, "There should never have been a war". A revolution, yes. But a gradual revolution. More, however, point to the pre-rebellion years and the brutal way the French fought the war to support their thesis that French intransigence made any

sort of gradual solution to Algeria's need for independence impossible. Regarding independence as a noble "fait accompli", they bury present difficulties on optimism. "All it takes is time", we were told over and over. "Ca va marcher . . ."

THE MEANING

What does independence mean to the average Algerian? Has it changed his life? The answer varies from region to region in direct relation to the amount of government control. The coastal plain, particularly in the region of the capital, Algiers, has left the greatest change, while life in remoter regions areas seems hardly to have been affected.

More subtle, but equally real as the economic changes, are changes in attitude. A nationalism that seems almost excessive (to Canadians at least) exalts everything Moslem, everything Arab, to the neglect of the European characteristics which 150 years of French rule have bred into the Algerian national character. The Moslem religion has been adopted as the state religion. Where textbooks and instructors allow, classes are being taught in Arabic, despite the obvious advantages of using French in the educational system. Ben Bella prefers to deliver his speeches in Arabic, despite the fact that he and his advisors are reputed to find French easier in private conversation.

PROPAGANDA HIGH

Independence, resulting as it has in a one-party system of government, has meant a campaign of publicity and propaganda, aimed at keeping revolutionary elan and FLN support at high tide. Banners bearing slogans enthusiastically endorsing socialism hang from buildings. Helicopters drop pamphlets on pedestrians. Billboards that in Europe would advertise cigarettes, urge Algerians to greater efforts. The press, run and written since the FLN takeover by party members, spreads front pages with propaganda, relegating world news to the bottom half of the inside back page.

The same themes—nationalism, hard work, and feminine emancipation—barrage the urban Algerian relentlessly. Nationalism exalts everything Arab and Moslem, as well as the glories of independence and the cost of the war—the war casualties, or "chouhadas", are the subject of cult-like adulation. But at the same time, an emphasis on the need for hard work, urges that the war is over. Former soldiers—and Algeria has many young men who grew up knowing nothing but fighting—are

urged to lay down guns for books and plow shears and become "militants" in a new army devoted to building an economically-sound Algeria.

Another of the favorite themes is feminine emancipation. For centuries Algerian women, following Moslem tradition, have lived in the seclusion of closed doors and veils. Algeria cannot afford to let half her human potential go to waste, newspapers warn; women are urged to give up the veil and train as teachers and technicians. But it is difficult to break centuries of tradition, particularly when it is buttressed by religion. Most women continue to wear the veil; only the young—and not all of them—want the emancipated life.

NO PLACE FOR FRIVOLITIES

Art in the city centre is often reduced to a tool for the propagation of revolutionary themes. Young Algerians perform self-written dramatizations of the government-approved virtues in grand French-built theatres, that until independence had thrived on the "frivolities" of Moliere; there is no room for mere diversion in the new Algeria. An Algiers' paper's sole critique of a visiting French production of Shakespeare's Coriolanus, analyzed the play in terms of whether the portrayal of Coriolanus was as "selfishly bourgeois" as it ought to have been.

But the art of the isolated Mozabite cities far south in the Sahara remains to show that what Algeria might have been like without the French, the war, or revolution. Not propaganda-inculcated nationalism, but a gentler affirmation of the people's indigenous culture prevails here. Compared to the traditional oriental music and Arab dances Algerians still love, the idea-laden western drama we had seen in Algiers seemed crude perversion. Yet perhaps for all that, the latter was a significant comment on the dilemma of the French-formed Algerians that produced it. The educated Algerian remains half European. Repudiate Europe he must. Yet he cannot affirm himself without affirming Europe, for its language and culture are part of him. In seeking to express something new, he can do no better than produce a caricature of the European culture that produced him.

SOCIALISM'S ANSWER

What does independence mean to Algerians in the economic sphere? On first glance, the picture seems hardly pleasant. Nine years of war destroyed much property and stymied industrial growth. The OAS activities which followed the signing of the Evian accords, bringing Algeria independence, des-



Algiers and Harbour—view from the sea

BC