

Canada and the United Nations

Question of Algeria⁽¹⁾

On July 16, 1957 twenty-two African and Asian states requested that an item entitled "the question of Algeria" be placed on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly for consideration at its Twelfth Session. The explanatory memorandum covering this request contended that the situation in Algeria had deteriorated rather than improved since the Assembly had discussed the subject at its Eleventh Session and the Assembly should therefore take up the matter once again.

French Position

Debate on the Algerian item commenced in the First Committee on November 27 with a statement by the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Pineau, who outlined the French position. He said that while not opposing this debate, France considered the Assembly incompetent to deal with a problem which falls entirely within the framework of French sovereignty. Denying that France had ever refused to undertake negotiations with the Algerian rebels, Mr. Pineau said the only offers had come from the French side and that the three-stage offer of a cease-fire, elections (with a single electoral college) and negotiations, which had been made by Mr. Mollet in January, 1957, was still valid. Because it was evident that the rebels still insisted on a prior recognition of the right to independence, it was not possible for the French to accept the offer of good offices which the President of Tunisia and the King of Morocco had made at their meeting in Rabat only a few days before. Mr. Pineau referred to the lessening of incidents towards the end of the year in Algeria and outlined the social and political reforms which had taken place there. He said that the loi-cadre for Algeria (which the French National Assembly approved on November 29) was proof of the French desire to find a political solution to the problem. (The loi-cadre is a new basic statute for Algeria which provides for the setting up of a single electoral college, the division of Algeria into a number of regions with a larger measure of local autonomy and increased Algerian representation in the French National Assembly). Mr. Pineau criticized those who talk irresponsibly of self-determination in connection with Algeria and foresaw that if one turned blindly to this principle for guidance, the inevitable result would be partition of the country between the European coastal cities on the one hand and the Moslem hinterland on the other.

Tunisian Statement

The Tunisian representative, Mr. Mongi Slim, joined in the debate to stress his country's desire to work towards a goal of peaceful negotiations. While admitting that France had a legitimate interest in North Africa, he attacked the "fiction" that Algeria was an integral part of France. He criticized the French three-phase formula in which cease-fire and elections are necessary conditions for negotiations and to prove his point referred to Indonesia, Morocco and Tunisia, where negotiations had preceded a cease-fire. To disprove the French argument that a recognition of the principle of self-

(1) For the background to this question, see "External Affairs" for May 1957.