

Return of the Distant Ones

Monday, Nov. 28, 1955

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,861661-1,00.html>

North African political figures sent into exile or to prison are called *éloignés* (distant ones). Last week in French Morocco and Tunisia two such distant ones were close at hand. Both were nationalists whom the French had once deported; both were also moderates on whom both Frenchman and Arab must now depend if calm is to be restored in North Africa.

But between the two there were significant differences.

Home to Morocco after two years of exile came Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, also known as Sultan Mohammed V, descendant of The Prophet.* With him came two wives, four emancipated daughters and 22 veiled concubines.

At Rabat airport, Mohammed V stepped from a life of luxurious discontent into a chaos caused by the abdication of the French and a vying among the Moroccans themselves, some to retain their feudal fiefs, others to spread violence born of ignorance, a few to seek a difficult adjustment between ancient ways, present misery and future progress. Glowed one Moroccan: "The Sultan's exile was a great thing. We've achieved a political and national consciousness we weren't able to build in 40 years." But Morocco, unlike Tunisia, has few modern institutions of government, and Mohammed V, whose skill and devotion as a political engineer remain in doubt, faces the job of laying a solid roadbed atop the shifting sands of Arab ambitions.

Disappearing Zoo

Facing a crowd of 50,000 in front of his palace, Mohammed V spoke: "Dear people, here we are as you have known us, at the service of our dear country. Praise Allah who in his mercy has put an end to our tribulations."

Inside the palace he found a sultanic shambles. The palace furnishings, once a vast treasure, had been smashed or looted by French police and local vandals. Of his collection of 60 clocks, four remained; of hundreds of porcelain and crystal vases, one. Gone were the royal family photo albums, as well as the Sultan's 56 cars, trucks and buses, which the French government had sold off. Where once was a private zoo, only three gazelles and an ostrich remained. Muttered Mohammed V:

"This is evil for evil's sake."

Long before daylight next morning, the Sultan drove to the holy city of Fez to kneel toward the rising sun, and to pray on a rug beside the grave of his mother, who had died of grief for her son ten days after his removal from the throne.

The day was Throne Day, the 28th anniversary of Mohammed V's accession. He capped it with a speech in which he proclaimed "the beginning of an era of liberty and independence," but remembered to say a kind word for the French: "The independence to which our people aspire does not mean breaking our bonds with France."

Morocco's nationalists had been happy to use him in exile as a symbol; the question now was whether they were prepared to accept him in person, or would find him too pliant and suspect him of being manipulated by the French. That unanswered question moderated their welcome.

At week's end, with this question unanswered, the celebrating went on in the palace courtyard, where crowds gathered and milled. Suddenly someone spotted Tayeb Baghdadi, Caliph (deputy) to the Pasha of Fez, who had come to Rabat to make amends to the Sultan for having supported his banishment. The mob closed in,

kicked and beat him, ripped off his white silken robes. "The Sultan may forget, but we will not forgive you!" cried one. The Caliph fought for his life, but a rock on the head finished him.

Leaving two other stripped bodies on the pavement, the mob then surged through the gate, trampled two men to death and danced around their corpses. Another victim was doused with gasoline and set afire. Trembling with disgust and worry, Mohammed V emerged from the palace and pleaded: "Be calm, be calm!"

"Our Given Word." In Tunisia, the returned hero was Habib Bourguiba, no Sultan but a French-educated lawyer and the father of Tunisian nationalism.

An éloigné off and on since 1934, when he was first clapped into a Sahara prison, he returned last June from exile in France, bringing with him a pact with France which took Tunisia a long stride toward democratic self-government. He found himself locked in a struggle for leadership of the Neo-Destour (New Constitution) Party, which he had founded.

His rival was Salah ben Youssef (no kin to Morocco's Sultan), who in exile in Cairo had increased his hatred of the French and had come home preaching guerrilla warfare. Bourguiba ousted him as secretary-general of the Neo-Destour, and last week defended his action at a big party conclave in Sfax. If Tunisians start killing, cried Bourguiba, "world opinion will call us children. We must keep our given word, which is the source of our success. By discussion with France, everything can be settled."

His two hours of pulsating oratory ended with a fiery question: "Are you prepared to resume fighting under Salah ben Youssef?" The party's reply was a thundering no. Of course, Bourguiba has warned, if France welsches on her promises, "we will all become extremists and I will be the leader."

* A lineage also claimed by the rulers of Jordan, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.