

# Habib Bourguiba, the Moses of Tunisia

## THROUGH PRISON TO FREEDOM

**HABIB BOURGUIBA**, President and benevolent dictator of the Tunisian Republic, is a connoisseur of nationalist politics—and French prisons.

He has known 25 years of private hell—arrest, release, exile and re-arrest, mostly on the orders of swiftly changing French governments.

To-day his face is prematurely aged by imprisonment and illness.

And yet he is undaunted. Last year he said: "I could not have fought France so long had I not loved France so much."

Bourguiba is a squat, ebullient man with piercing blue eyes. Like Israel's Ben Gurion, he has the air of a minor prophet. He also has a remarkable talent for inflaming mobs.

Paradoxically, he has a reputation for quiet reasonableness in overseas negotiations—no small measure of his mercurial temperament.

For Bourguiba is at once a clown, although with grim under-meaning, and a fanatical idealist. He can convulse the Tunisian Constituent Assembly with his imitations of well-known French personalities. He can have them roaring fierce acclaim at his forceful oratory.

voluble Frenchman. But then it is said of him that he is half demagogue and half French intellectual. Certainly he knows more about France than most Frenchmen.

Politics are his passion. He is a master of ruse and manoeuvre, and is inclined to brush aside incidental technicalities. A senior French official in Tunis once said that, with all his experience as a diplomat, he was no match for the craftiness of the little Tunisian President.

Bourguiba is today the living hope of an independent but West-biased union of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.

He is also fighting hard to shake off the last vestige of Tunisia's former French protectorate status—that is, the remaining 15,000 French soldiers—and his way of doing this is to make the outward signs of independence plainly visible.

### Nasser's wiles

In all this, he has been an outspoken enemy of communism ("an evil, alien doctrine"), equally outspoken in his defence of the Algerian nationalists ("their country is the Palestine of North Africa"), and increasingly exasperated with France's attitude.

His fear is that, with the continuance of the Algerian war, his neighbours will fall victim to the wiles of Egypt's Nasser and consequently the embrace of the Kremlin.

Bourguiba's nationalist fervour has landed him in loads of trouble.

He was gaoled in 1934 by a Conservative Government for alleged complicity in Tunisian nationalist agitations, gaoled again in 1936 during reaction against the *Front Populaire*, with whom he was aligned.

In 1939, accused of plotting against the State and inciting to civil war, he was again gaoled and transferred to Marseilles. He was still awaiting trial when, in 1942, the occupying Germans released him with the hope that he would get Tunisia's support for the Axis powers.

### Suspicious Allies

Suspicious Allies re-arrested him in 1943. He was freed by France's General Juin, only to be shut up again by Juin's successor, General Mast, and exiled.

After four years in exile, he came back into politics with a "watching brief" in the Franco-

## A CONTACT NEWSNAME

Tunisian negotiations with French Premier Schuman in 1950. But when these talks broke down he was sent back to prison by the new French Premier, Pinay.

In 1955, he was released by Premier Faure and sent home with an agreement giving the Tunisians limited but real self-government. A year later, the agreement was formally signed and, after 75 years of direct French rule, Tunisia was on her own.

Habib Bourguiba was born into the poorest section of the Tunisian middle class, at Monastir (a small, coastal town southeast of Tunis), the youngest of eight children. He began making trouble early. When only 15, he was expelled from his secondary school for "strikes and bad behaviour", but, after two years of lung trouble, went on to a Paris university, graduated in law and political science, and flung himself enthusiastically into Tunisia's nationalist struggle.

Bourguiba first joined the fanatical Muslim Destour Party which was dedicated to complete independence for Tunisia. But the party's religious basis conflicted with the values he had learned in France, and in 1934 he formed his own, more westernised, Neo-Destour (new constitution) Party, moderate and secular, and aimed at securing self-government. The Neo-Destour is to-day the only party of any consequence in Tunisia.

Now came the opportunity for his sense of drama. Secret cells were organised in every locality, rigid discipline was imposed, youth and women's movements were formed. Soon came an almost mystic devotion to Tunisia's national cause, and personifying that cause was Bourguiba.

Bourguiba is to-day a benevolent dictator—and a skilful one. He knows to what lengths he can go,

He has an enormous financial problem, for, under French rule, naturally-poor Tunisia relied largely on subsidies from France and expenditure by the French people and troops.

Since independence, however, over 100,000 French people have left Tunisia (leaving about 30,000), and because of violent disputes with Paris over frontier incidents and other aspects of Tunisian support for the Algerian nationalist cause, the French Government has blocked most of its credits.

### Faces West

Bourguiba still faces West, but there is little sign of the West facing Bourguiba. France has turned her back, and America is averting her eyes so as not to incur French anger.

Bourguiba has fought a long, hard battle. He is undaunted by nearly half a life-time of imprisonment and exile.

Sentiment flew out the gaol windows long ago.

SIMON KAVANAUGH



BOURGUIBA

Bourguiba is probably of Berber, as distinct from Arab, descent. He has a ruggedly handsome face, slightly hawked nose, a square chin and a high tenor voice. His pale eyes can shoot sparks.

Met informally at his comfortable villa perched on the Mediterranean shores, he will probably be dressed in a dazzling grey and white silk smoking jacket with a belt. In public, he invariably wears a dark suit with a tarboosh jammed squarely on his head.

Bourguiba is a direct and earnest speaker. He has great personal charm, can be very modest, yet feels he has a high mission as a statesman.

When sitting talking, he will tap his listener's knee incessantly, using gestures and grimaces to illustrate his points, rather like a

## TALKING BUSINESS with RALPH HORWITZ

### Minister of Everybody's Affairs

**MR. ERIC LOUW** is no imperialist, but his urge to self-expression must have its outlet. Consequently although Mr. Louw is Minister of External Affairs, his empire building is directed to his own country and his own countrymen.

To Mr. Louw, therefore, the fact that he resigned as Minister of Economic Affairs quite a few years ago does not mean that, as Minister of External Affairs, his "I warn you's" are restricted to nasty foreigners who talk about South Africa or nasty South Africans who talk about Mr. Louw's conduct of our foreign affairs. Clearly the scope of his "warnings" still embraces his former portfolios.

### Quite plain

Thus Mr. Louw, when recently invited to address the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, made quite plain that he, unlike Dr. van Rhijn, would never, when invited for a drive, be taken for a ride.

"I hope," said the Minister of External Affairs "our hosts (the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce) will not take it amiss if I say that, in a very large measure, the drop in our foreign exchange reserves has been the result of assurances given to my successor, the Minister of Economic Affairs, Dr. A. J. R. van Rhijn was assured by importers—particularly in the motor trade—that the relaxation of import control

measures would not entail a large sacrifice of foreign exchange. He tells me he has profited by this experience."

The implication is, of course, that Mr. Louw when he was Minister of Economic Affairs, was never so naive as to believe the "assurances" of businessmen. Mr. Louw believes in himself. But unfortunately for the country's foreign exchange reserves, said Mr. Louw in effect, business found no difficulty in misleading the inexperienced Dr. Van Rhijn.

When the Association of Motor Assemblers understandably answered Mr. Louw's allegations of bad faith, the Minister, while stating "I have neither the time nor the desire to enter into a controversy with the Association", promptly gave a detailed analysis of the industry's activities before and after the relaxation of import control.

One wonders whether Mr. Louw was provided with his figures by the Secretary for External Affairs or the Secretary for Economic Affairs. Does he perhaps feel it necessary to find "the time and desire" to act as a sort of reserve Minister of Economic Affairs just in case the actual incumbent should be unable to do the job as well as Mr. Louw did it?

In the course of the years that Mr. Louw was Minister of Economic Affairs and of Finance, he deservedly built up a considerable reputation among businessmen for admin-

istrative energy and approachableness. But Mr. Louw's handling of foreign exchange control was not invariably informed and sophisticated. Let Dr. Van Rhijn emerge from the shadows—Mr. Louw also made his mistakes.

### Korean War

Thus in September, 1950, Mr. Louw (and Mr. Havenga) totally miscalculated the effects of the Korean War and its effects on supplies and prices. By failing to anticipate the tremendous price rises which followed, Mr. Havenga and Mr. Louw in effect reduced their then foreign exchange reserves by tens of millions of pounds.

Also Mr. Louw is completely silent on his own responsibility when as Minister of Finance he decided that South Africa's interest rate would not follow the Bank of England, and introduced the first barriers to the free flow of sums between South Africa and Britain. Our current difficulties in financing our imports and in maintaining a rate of industrial expansion are much more attributable to that policy decision of Mr. Louw's than to Dr. Van Rhijn's amiable alleged naivety.

Whether as Minister of Economic Affairs or as Minister of Finance or as Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Louw's ability and hard work have won him deserved good will among businessmen but that good will is easily exhausted when he decides to become Minister of Everybody's Affairs.