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*World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Apr., 1962), 461-482.

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*World Politics* is currently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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# THE NEO-DESTOUR PARTY OF TUNISIA

## A Structure for Democracy?

By CLEMENT HENRY MOORE\*

TUNISIA, of all the countries in the Arab world today, seems to offer the most promising prospects for constitutional democracy. A Tunisian nation already exists, both as a historic political entity and as a people mobilized by a coherent political movement during twenty years of opposition to French domination. President Habib Bourguiba, the creator of the Neo-Destour Party, is not only the Leader needed to incarnate a new nation and decide its direction; he is also the great Educator of the public. The ideas that he communicates in his frequent and readily understood speeches are the Western political concepts and methods that the Neo-Destour assimilated more profoundly during its long struggle than any other successful Arab liberation movement. "Bourguibism" is the vision of a modern open society that respects both individual liberties and social justice. During six years of independence, despite the Algerian problem on its western frontier, Tunisia has displayed remarkable political stability. Its new Constitution, patterned on the American presidential system, has created a strong executive balanced by a National Assembly, both simultaneously elected by universal suffrage. The society seems relatively homogeneous, for the nationalist movement displaced not only a colonial oligarchy but a traditional land-owning, governing, and religious aristocracy. All self-conscious sectors of the society have demonstrated their awareness of the need to maintain national cohesion for the sake of economic development.

The most significant factor for the future of democracy, however, may be the internal functioning of the dominant party. The Neo-Destour is the only mass party of its kind in the Arab world. Unlike Nasser's National Union, it was not manufactured by a government but was the genuine emanation of a new nation responding to a colonial situation. It was originally designed in 1934 to oppose French domination more effectively than the Destour Party<sup>1</sup> it replaced, by appealing to

\* The author is doing research in Tunisia for a doctoral dissertation on the Neo-Destour Party, with the aid of a grant from the Ford Foundation; the views expressed in this article are, of course, his own and not the Foundation's. They are the product mainly of extensive interviews with party officials, especially at regional and local levels.

<sup>1</sup> The Destour, or Liberal Constitutional, Party was founded in 1920. Its main goal, a Tunisian Constitution, is the meaning of "Destour" in Arabic. The best histories of

the masses as well as to the educated Tunisian elite. Though willing at times to operate within the system of a reformed French Protectorate, the Neo-Destour was never given the opportunity until 1954 to contest general elections or to exercise effective government responsibilities. For intervals adding up to almost ten years out of these two decades of opposition, most of its leaders were in prison, and only clandestine action was possible. During the rest of the time, however, public party activities were more or less tolerated, and the Neo-Destour was able to acquire an articulated structure.

Having succeeded since 1954 in capturing the state apparatus, the party has placed its leaders and cadres in all key positions. It tolerates the existence of two opposition parties, but one, the Communist Party, with limited activities, has little influence, while the other, the original Destour Party from which Bourguiba broke in 1933, has no activities. In the course of the independence struggle the Neo-Destour created or infiltrated a number of organizations that today group workers (UGTT), artisans and shopkeepers (UTIC), farmers (UNAT), students (UGET), youth (Neo-Destour Youth), and scouts.<sup>2</sup> These, together with a women's organization (UNFT) created after independence, have organizational autonomy but do not constitute independent centers of political power. Potentially the most effective sources of political opposition, UGTT and UGET are curbed both by a genuinely felt need for national unity and by the existence within them of numbers of Destour cadres more likely in crisis to obey party discipline. Outside the party there are no representative structures whose deliberations might either

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the Tunisian nationalist movement are F. Garas, *Bourguiba et la naissance d'une nation*, Paris, 1956, and Ch.-A. Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, Paris, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> The Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) was created in January 1945 with Neo-Destour support, to provide a purely Tunisian alternative to the French Communist-dominated CGT. What is now called the Union Tunisienne des Industriels et Commerçants (UTIC) was created by the Neo-Destour in early 1946 to support the nationalist cause and to counter a similar Communist front organization. The Union Nationale des Agriculteurs Tunisiens (UNAT) was created only in 1956, but virtually all of its cadres came from the Union Générale des Agriculteurs Tunisiens, established at the same time as UTIC for similar reasons. The older organization was dissolved after some of its top leaders followed Salah Ben Youssef in 1955-1956 (see text below). The Union Générale des Etudiants de Tunisie (UGET) was founded clandestinely in 1953 by Neo-Destour students in France. The Neo-Destour Youth dates back to 1936. Some of the many Tunisian scout movements were heavily infiltrated by the Neo-Destour for many years; all have since independence been combined into one organization controlled by the party. The Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes (UNFT) was founded with Bourguiba's personal blessing and support in 1957. These organizations may all be treated to a varying extent as ancillary organizations of the Neo-Destour. Their structures, which complement that of the party, help to maintain national cohesion, while providing democratically elected organs for political education and leadership training. Unfortunately, for lack of space they cannot be treated in this article.

overrule or give rise to important policy decisions. The National Assembly, which consists only of deputies nominated by the Neo-Destour, cannot play such a role as yet, for its deliberations are limited and take place largely within closed commissions. Tunisia's many new municipal councils, while offering a training ground for civic responsibility, have been allowed to function properly only when their elected members were local Neo-Destour candidates. Of course Tunisia has periodic elections under its new Constitution, but it has become increasingly difficult for non-Communist Independents, who might stand some chance of election, to be candidates. Hence in Tunisia today the Neo-Destour has a monopoly of political power. Bourguiba shows no intention of allowing the party gradually to induce external competition and to relinquish its political monopoly within the foreseeable future. Rather "its mission, intimately bound up with the life of the people, is permanent."<sup>3</sup>

Though a well-organized political party with a mass following, the Neo-Destour is neither a constitutional mass party nor a totalitarian party. The categories of Western political scientists, devised for the study of political parties in more mature political systems, cannot adequately explain Tunisia's dominant party. The Neo-Destour resembles the Congress Party of India, the CPP of Ghana, and various territorial offshoots of the RDA in French-speaking Black Africa more than it resembles European political parties. Political scientists have not yet devised a generally accepted model to characterize these newer but highly structured parties.<sup>4</sup> However, they may be called "national" parties, and they have a number of traits in common. They all originated as elite and then as mass parties in reaction to a colonial situation. Their leaders assimilated the political culture of the colonial power, which to a greater or lesser extent constituted the ground rules of the conflict between the two. Since mass parties and universal suffrage conditioned politics in the metropolitan country, the nationalist elite had to organize similar parties, which in the West had required centuries of political evolution. During the colonial period, these parties were patterned upon metropolitan parties, usually ambiguously those of the constitutional and totalitarian Left. Indeed, the situation confronting the Left in the mother country had something in common with the colonial situation confronting the nationalists. Both found it possible to work within the capitalist

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Bourguiba delivered on October 2, 1958, at an assembly of Neo-Destour cadres. See Secretariat of State for Information, *Les Congrès du Néo-Destour*, Tunis, 1959, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> For a documented discussion of the problem, see my article, "The National Party: A Tentative Model," *Public Policy* (Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration), x (1960), pp. 239-67.

or colonial system at times, but not always. But even when the nationalists were divided into two groups, they usually managed to stay within the same party for the sake of national unity. Doctrinal conflicts rarely exacerbated tactical disagreements.

Attaining independence before it had effectively mobilized and educated the most backward sectors of the society, the national party became preponderant. Its problems no longer resembled those of Socialist or Communist parties in the metropolitan country, because it no longer faced the opposition of a colonial oligarchy. Despite the absence of a generally accepted model, however, it is crucial for an evaluation of the prospects of democracy in Tunisia and a number of other new nations that the nature of the national party be clearly apprehended. These parties are not like constitutional mass parties simply because—except for the Congress Party in India—they have no effective constitutional opposition.

But it would be an even more serious mistake to confuse a party like the Neo-Destour with totalitarian parties.<sup>5</sup> Bourguibism is the antithesis of a totalitarian ideology, for Bourguiba recognizes that no neat doctrine or intellectual system can do full justice to the complex realities of Tunisian society. Bourguiba has confidence in Tunisia's historic destiny, but his belief in history is a youthful liberal faith unhampered by any dogma determining its outcome. He believes in reason, but only for arriving at pragmatic open solutions of his society's problems. He is a determined modernizer both of the Tunisian society and of the Tunisian economy, but his reformist zeal is curbed by a respect for the individual and his democratic liberties. He realizes that his ultimate goal of maximizing individual liberties and dignity can be achieved only through structural reforms that may in the short run curtail these liberties, but he is trying to use common sense and flexible formulas to cushion inevitable tensions as much as possible. Reason, he believes, should persuade rather than force recalcitrant sectors of the society to co-operate in the building of a new nation. The new nation for Bourguiba is a group of living individuals, not an intellectual abstraction. Bourguiba has faith in reason, but it is not a totalitarian faith because it is governed by common sense and liberal values.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It will be seen that structurally the Neo-Destour somewhat resembles Communist parties. But relative emphasis upon party structure and neglect of ideologies, as exemplified by Maurice Duverger's *Political Parties* (London, 1955) and Robert R  zette's *Partis politiques marocains* (Paris, 1955), can be misleading, especially with regard to national parties, whose structures remain fluid.

<sup>6</sup> No detailed theoretical study of Bourguibism exists. But, for a discussion of some of Bourguiba's key ideas, see Roger Stephane, *La Tunisie de Bourguiba* (Paris, 1958), where the term "Bourguibism" was popularized, and Gabriel Ardant, *La Tunisie*

The mission of the Neo-Destour, according to its 1959 Covenant,<sup>7</sup> is the apparent paradox of maintaining its political monopoly, in order to preserve Tunisian independence and to modernize the economy and the society, while "working for the consolidation of a truly democratic life in which responsibilities are limited and which guarantees for individuals the enjoyment of their rights and public liberties." But the paradox, which is that of other preponderant national parties, is perhaps more apparent than real. Unlike totalitarian parties, which rule by force, the Neo-Destour is genuinely representative, for it embodies the new nation through an elite, formed by French education and united by years of resistance to French domination, that seems committed to the radical modernization of Tunisian society. National consensus has been illustrated in a number of daring innovations, such as the abolition of polygamy; the guarantee of personal and civil liberties for women; educational reform that promises eventual bilingual schooling for all children by modern French rather than traditional methods; and a massive campaign against economic backwardness and poverty, now to be spearheaded by a new super-ministry for economic planning.

Meanwhile the party is still trying to consolidate a national community in which some sectors lag behind others in political maturity. The fulfillment of this task is the essential precondition of any viable constitutional democracy in the future. It must be remembered that successful Western democracies have functioned only in the context of pre-existing national communities sharing broad purposes and agreed procedures for discovering the means of achieving these purposes. When with the rise of extremist parties these purposes and procedures were sometimes forgotten, the democracies were imperiled. By maintaining its political monopoly within the foreseeable future, the Neo-Destour may be able firmly to implant common national purposes and procedures in the minds of all Tunisian citizens, so that they acquire a coherent political culture. But this task of political education, especially when coupled with the other prime task of economic development,

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*d'aujourd'hui et de demain* (Paris, 1961). The best source is the collection of Bourguiba's weekly speeches since 1956, available at the Tunisian Secretariat of State for Information. For his speeches and writings before independence, see Habib Bourguiba, *La Tunisie et la France*, Paris, 1954.

<sup>7</sup> Political Bureau of the Neo-Destour Party, *The Covenant and Internal Statutes of the Neo-Destour*, passed by the Sixth Congress, Tunis, 1959 (published only in Arabic). I have rendered a free translation from the Arabic. In this article, political terms, whenever ambiguous, have been translated in light of the French terms that inspired their use. The internal statutes of the party passed at the Congress of 1955, along with the more rudimentary statutes of 1934 and 1937, are contained in the appendix of *Les Congrès du Néo-Destour*, *op.cit.*

requires a political mechanism that can also maintain the cohesion of a growing elite. The national party appears capable of fulfilling these functions more effectively and more democratically than either a totalitarian party or an authoritarian clique composed, for instance, of army officers or of a land-owning oligarchy masked by a parliamentary system.

It must be admitted from the outset, however, that national parties like the Neo-Destour do not in their internal functioning live up to all the norms of liberal democracy. Since 1955, when the Neo-Destour took responsibility for a compromise agreement with France that did not meet all nationalist aspirations, the party has become even less democratic than it used to be in the heat of anti-colonialist combat. The former Secretary-General of the party, Salah Ben Youssef, launched a campaign against the agreement with France that by early 1956 almost developed into civil war. Though Bourguiba, with the aid of faithful political lieutenants and the UGTT, finally eliminated the Youssefist threat, the experience conclusively demonstrated that Tunisia was not ready for democratic competition even within the party. In late 1956 Bourguiba thought that Ahmed Ben Salah, then leader of the UGTT, wanted to use his trade union as the organizational base for a labor party that might challenge Neo-Destour political control. He accordingly encouraged a split within the union that eliminated Ben Salah and seriously weakened the UGTT. Though Ben Salah was subsequently appointed minister and today is in charge of Tunisia's economic planning and finance ministries, the UGTT remains firmly under Neo-Destour control. The Ben Youssef and Ben Salah stories have set the tone for prudent uniformity in Tunisian political life.

Echoing this tone, the Neo-Destour was internally overhauled in late 1958. Previously modeled on mass parties of the French Left, the Neo-Destour had consisted of cells freely elected at the local level, supervised by federations annually elected by the cells, and headed by a national congress, an interim national council, and an executive, the Political Bureau, elected by the congress. In late 1958 the federations were replaced by a smaller number of provincial offices headed by officials appointed by the Political Bureau. These party officials, called Commissioners, are not subject to criticism from the cells as the federal executives used to be at the annual federal congresses. Instead of representing the cells, the Commissioners govern them. In a sense the Neo-Destour, previously closer in structure to the French Socialist Party (SFIO), was made to resemble a Communist party, in which officials in charge of intermediate executive bodies, though in appearance elected

(unanimously) at regional congresses, are in fact appointed by the central secretariat.

Bourguiba gave a number of reasons in defense of this basic change in party structure. He explained that decentralization had been necessary during the many years of clandestine activity, when national leaders were in prison. Though originally founded primarily to execute the directives of the Political Bureau, the federations had become independent centers of power when the Political Bureau could not effectively operate. During the period following independence, however, he came to feel that "We need a strong power which does not dissipate in multiple ramifications. We need cohesion and discipline to increase efficiency."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, "It is indispensable that the party adapt its organization to the administrative armature of the country, so that the two structures can re-enforce one another and evolve harmoniously." The federations, rather than paralleling the new administrative structure staffed by Governors and Delegates, had been based upon the personal influence of "certain militants." "Especially those who claimed a glorious past of struggle and sacrifice have paralyzed the activity of the administration by their constant interventions." Even before the reorganization of the party, the Political Bureau had been obliged in some provinces—and notably in Tunis—to dissolve the federations.

In reality the political maturity of the party's cadres had declined disastrously after independence, for two reasons. With victory in sight by late 1954, the party was swamped with new recruits. From a membership estimated at 106,000 before July 1954,<sup>9</sup> the Neo-Destour had acquired roughly 325,000 members by the time of its Fifth Congress in November 1955,<sup>10</sup> and supposedly numbered 600,000 by 1957.<sup>11</sup> During these years the best cadres of the party were being drained off into government jobs, where they could no longer devote the same amount of time to party activities. Cells multiplied, but lacked competent leadership. The Neo-Destour take-over of the government created problems of patronage that the federations could not always handle properly but

<sup>8</sup> This and the following quotations are from Bourguiba's speech of October 2, 1958, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> La Documentation Tunisienne, *Tunisie* 58, p. 22, quoted in Keith Callard's highly informative article, "The Republic of Bourguiba," *International Journal*, xvi (Winter 1960-61), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Neo-Destour Party, *The National Congress of Sfax*, Arabic edn. [Tunis, n.d.], p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> The unlikely figure of 600,000 was given in *Tunisie* 58. Today the party claims between 250,000 and 300,000 adherents, out of an adult male population of less than a million (women in the party are still rare, except in some cities). But these figures, swollen by new recruits in some of the politically underdeveloped areas of Tunisia, may mask increasing apathy in some old party strongholds.



that explained why provincial administration was sometimes "paralyzed." Arguments were sometimes bitter between members of federations and Neo-Destour government officials, nor was it always clear who governed, for was it not the party that had brought independence? Conflicts were often exacerbated by family, village, and sometimes tribal rivalries. The cumulative impact of all these factors motivated the reorganization of the party in late 1958.

Authoritarian trends in Tunisia since independence, moreover, are not surprising in light of the fundamental domestic problems, compounded by a delicate international situation, that the political system has had to handle. It would be naïve to expect the Neo-Destour, or any other ruling national party, to be internally democratic to the extent that two or more clearly defined groups would compete for power in periodic elections at successive levels within the party. The Tunisian elite is homogeneous, and for the time being is neither in need of such competition nor sufficiently large to provide a responsible alternative leadership. But the Neo-Destour may be paving the way for fuller Tunisian democracy in the future to the extent that (1) it encourages rational discussion of national and local problems; (2) it communicates to the public its democratic values and national problems; (3) it maintains its representative character by balancing the interests of the elite and continuing to stimulate the enthusiasm of the masses; (4) it encourages wide practical participation in local politics; (5) it maintains a democratic style of elections and free criticism of authority. Negatively, too, the Neo-Destour will not have precluded a democratic future to the extent that it avoids taking a totalitarian shape. The functioning of the various organs of the Neo-Destour will be examined with these criteria in mind.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE CELLS

Neo-Destour cells are quite unlike Communist cells. They assemble less often and contain a larger number of members. General assemblies or information meetings usually occur at no more than three-month intervals. They lack the secrecy of Communist cell meetings, and are sometimes even open to the general public. Any Tunisian can be a cell member if he is not a member of another party, if he is committed to respect the principles of the party, if he executes its decisions and pays his dues.<sup>13</sup> The most important prerequisite for membership—respect

<sup>12</sup> Apart from meager newspaper reports, the only solid documentary description of the party's present structure lies in its published internal statutes. These will not be individually cited in what follows.

<sup>13</sup> The 1959 statutes omit the previous requirement that new members take an oath.

for the principles of the party—does not imply the sort of conversion required by totalitarian parties, for the Neo-Destour's principles are flexible and undogmatic. Some of the party's 1,000 cells have had as many as 3,000 members, while most cells outside Tunis average between 100 and 400 members. The cell committee, a collectively responsible executive of from 8 to 12 cell officers elected at the annual cell assembly,<sup>14</sup> may meet as often as once a week and carry on many activities, especially in the cities. But, unlike dedicated Communists, they cannot claim a local monopoly of ideological purity and devotion. Furthermore, the Neo-Destour cell is permitted free formal and informal contacts with other cells, whereas horizontal contacts of Communist cells are kept to a fully controlled minimum. Clearly "cell" is a somewhat misleading term for the Neo-Destour to apply to what are in fact more akin to the "sections" or branches of constitutional mass parties like the SFIO.

As a result of the reorganization of the party in 1958, the Political Bureau through its Commissioners exerts significant power over the cells. Candidates for cell elections must be approved by the Political Bureau, while previously anybody could be a candidate as long as he had been a party member for at least two years.<sup>15</sup> The Political Bureau may suspend or dissolve any cell committee guilty of an infraction of the party's Covenant or internal statutes. The Political Bureau then delegates responsibility to an appointed commission of cell members until the convening of a general assembly of the cell, within a period in theory not to exceed six months. Before 1958, the federations could dissolve cell committees with the approval or tacit silence of the Political Bureau, but new cell elections had to be prepared within two weeks, not six months. Today even the six-month deadline is not always respected. Nor is the principle of collective responsibility always followed by the Political Bureau, which has sometimes, under the rather flexible rules of party discipline,<sup>16</sup> simply removed individual trouble-makers who

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In practice the prospective member today, at least in Tunis, needs two sponsors who are members of the party to present his name to the cell committee. The \$3 annual dues are not always paid in full.

<sup>14</sup> The elected officers choose among themselves a President, a Secretary-General, an Assistant Secretary-General, a Treasurer, an Assistant Treasurer, an Orientation officer, a Youth officer, and a Social Revival officer. The Orientation officer is responsible for party propaganda within the cell's district. The Youth officer carries out the program of the Neo-Destour Youth. The Social Revival officer watches over the interests of the general public in everything from garbage collection to the building of a new mosque.

<sup>15</sup> But the Political Bureau does not exercise its new privilege indiscriminately. The representative of the Political Bureau who presides over the cell's general assembly may be asked to explain why a candidate was not approved.

<sup>16</sup> A party member or official may be punished by a warning, suspension, or expulsion from the party, if proved guilty of any of the following broad charges: (1) prejudicing

were misusing their cell positions. Cell committees are generally suspended or dissolved for one of two reasons: either they have been paralyzed by internal dissension, usually a function of local family rivalries, or they have been too inactive and apathetic in the execution of normal party duties. Suspended or dissolved cell committees are not an uncommon phenomenon in Tunisia today. They reflect less an overly authoritarian Political Bureau, however, than a simple lack of responsible party cadres. Within limits defined by the party's internal statutes, cell elections are genuinely democratic and follow fixed procedures understood by most members.<sup>17</sup>

The Political Bureau may also determine the number of cells and delimit their territorial competence. Since 1958 efforts to make the party structure parallel the country's new administrative structure have necessitated the reduction of the number of cells from 1,500 to 1,000. In theory, the party now has one cell for each *cheikhhat*, the government's lowest administrative division. Since these divisions are purely geographic in all parts of the country, newly regrouped cells have sometimes embraced disparate tribal fractions. Currently, however, the Political Bureau is trying to increase the number of cells in some provinces, where the necessary cadres are to be found, in order to stimulate more local initiative. There has been only one case of what appears to be outright political gerrymandering.<sup>18</sup>

Though the Political Bureau supervises all cell activities, local initia-

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interests of the party and departing from its political principles; (2) action susceptible of endangering the party or supporting one of its enemies; (3) breaking the party Covenant or internal statutes, or affecting the dignity of the party; (4) public expression of hostility toward the party or toward one of its organs. In practice the Political Bureau has a potentially formidable disciplinary arsenal, but it is a deterrent rarely employed.

<sup>17</sup> A few weeks before the general assembly, candidates submit their applications through the cell committee to the Political Bureau. Though the list of candidates is divulged only at the assembly, the cell members know in advance who is running for election, because prospective candidates are usually approved. At the assembly all members who have been in the party for at least nine months are electors, if they have paid a reasonable portion of their annual dues. They vote for as many candidates from the list as there are offices to fill. There are almost always substantially more candidates than offices. Voting patterns are irregular; cell elections are never blind plebiscites.

<sup>18</sup> In Kairouan, after serious incidents on January 17, 1961, when a large crowd chanting religious slogans marched upon the Governor's office and residence to protest the transfer of a religious instructor. A re-enforced National Guard was needed to combat the mob, and a small number of people were actually killed. The incident revealed growing tension between the traditional aristocracy of the Kairouan *medina* and the governing authorities who are spearheading social revolution in the area. On February 13 and 14 the Commissioner held meetings of cell officers to explain his decision to increase the number of cells in the *medina* to 13, a surprisingly large number. On February 23 he held a meeting of party cadres to designate the new cell officers. See *Al 'Amal* (the official Neo-Destour daily newspaper), March 5, 1961, p. 3.

tive is encouraged. The most recent national congress, in March 1959, passed a resolution calling for each cell to organize a local project to re-enforce Tunisia's economic and social development. The application of this resolution has of course necessitated close co-operation between the cells and higher party officials, especially when government support was needed. But most ideas came from the cells. Cells also enjoy direct contacts with local government officials. Since 1957 many elected municipal councils have been set up in villages and towns, and they are composed largely of cell officers. Often, too, the *cheikh*, though appointed by the government, will have been the former cell president. Furthermore, the Governor's Delegate, who is the *cheikh*'s superior in the administrative hierarchy, usually tries to keep on friendly terms with the cell committee, for the popular support which it represents is essential to the success of many government projects.<sup>19</sup> Patronage is managed through higher party levels, but cell demands and advice receive serious consideration. Local grievances voiced by the cell committee are aired either in meetings with higher party officials or in meetings grouping both party and government representatives. Consultation is constant, though the cell has few fixed prerogatives. Hierarchies lack rigidity, for virtually all provincial officials, whether in the party or in the government, are either Neo-Destour militants or former militants, brothers in the same cause.

Cell meetings, however, rarely discuss national policies. The frequent cell committee meetings, which are not public, seem to be concerned exclusively with the administration of the cell or the discussion of local problems. General meetings, held in theory once every three months, are rarely forums for the airing of national issues, though attempts to treat them thus are made from time to time by patient party officials. The annual cell assembly is almost invariably confined to a discussion, sometimes sparked by lively but orderly criticism, of the committee's activities during the year.<sup>20</sup> The Orientation officer, in charge of propaganda, receives the party line on national and international issues from the Political Bureau. He transmits it, sometimes through an effective

<sup>19</sup> In theory, the provincial governmental and party structures are distinct hierarchies, with horizontal contacts only between the Governor and the Party Commissioner. In principle, the Governor's Delegates have no contact with the party apparatus. But as one delegate told me in the presence of cell officers whom I was interviewing, "We always work together in our different domains. I consult the cell about my problems, and the cell may consult me about its problems." In practice, too, Delegates are often in contact with higher party officials.

<sup>20</sup> But an exception to this rule that occurred in the assembly of the venerable cell grouping the artisans and businessmen of the *souks* of Tunis was related to me with pride by a higher party official.

network of trusted militants, but it is never criticized formally in cell meetings. Party communications from above bring to mind the Neo-Destour's independence struggle; they are *mots d'ordre*, to be obeyed like the commands that launched demonstrations against colonialism. The only role permitted to cell members as such in the elaboration of national policy is their ritual agreement at assemblies to send a telegram to President Bourguiba expressing full support for all his policies at home and abroad.

The Neo-Destour cell, in short, unlike the SFIO section, is more a vehicle for the mobilization and education of the masses than a forum for discussing national issues or for proposing national policies. It is not quite democratically elected because the Political Bureau must endorse candidates, and elected officers can be easily removed by their superiors. But in reality, as in all voluntary organizations, there seems to be relatively little turnover of officers. The alternative to the Political Bureau's tutelage would not necessarily be more democratic. Intensified personality and family clashes might threaten the unity of the party, but they would not produce coherent policy alternatives emanating from the cells. Furthermore, the Political Bureau, by the diplomacy of its Commissioners, is in a position to teach diverse cell factions to tolerate one another. While the party structure allows for little cell initiative, party leaders, armed with their unambiguous powers, can afford to encourage the coherent practical initiatives that cells do take. Cell officers acquire the practical arts of democratic leadership, while their activities may in the long run be educating the public in their responsibilities as citizens.

#### THE PROVINCIAL OFFICES

The substitution of appointed Commissioners for elected federation officers may not be as serious a blow as it seemed to internal democratic growth. Though elected, the old federations were essentially executive arms of the Political Bureau. Furthermore, democratic elections, far from stimulating mobility and the rise of new militants, had acted as a brake. By returning the same old militants to power over the political machines that they had created, the federations encouraged the perpetuation of a parochial leadership more apt to rest on the laurels of independence than to confront the new economic and social problems that independence had brought.

The Commissioners, on the other hand, are able to stimulate new blood by co-opting younger militants for their co-ordinating committees and subcommittees that assist them in working with the cells.

Young school teachers and former students of French universities have thus been brought into the party apparatus, more often as unpaid militants than as paid officials. The school teachers are especially important, if the party is to take on new life by mobilizing the country for economic development. Yet, working in villages and towns where they were not born, these teachers often cannot be elected to cell committees, for most indigenous members consider them "strangers" even if they are natives of a neighboring village.

Armed with the confidence that the Political Bureau displays in him, the Commissioner is often able to obtain more for the cells under his supervision than might a democratically elected official.<sup>21</sup> In political power the Commissioner of a province ranks second only to the Governor. In constant contact with both cell leaders and the Governor, the Commissioner is able to communicate to the latter the popular demands of the former. Schools, dispensaries, public works, and patronage are accorded priority, when technically feasible, in areas where cells have built up the most political pressure. The Commissioner in large part determines these priorities, in consultation with the Governor. The parallel structure of government and party has at times resulted in serious friction between Governor and Commissioner. But knowledge of the smooth working relationship between the Secretary of the Interior (who is Assistant Secretary-General of the party) and the Political Bureau has generally induced close co-operation. In the two cases since 1959 when friction became unbearable, both Governor and Commissioner were shifted. On the other hand, weak Commissioners whose choice was influenced by the Governor concerned have not lasted.

Though party statutes make no mention of any substitute for the annual federal congresses, provincial offices have developed the practice of holding regular assemblies of party cadres, roughly once every two months. These meetings are typically chaired by a member of the Political Bureau, and include the members of the co-ordinating committee, the cell officers, and some militants especially invited by the Commissioner. While there is no voting, the assembly may discuss substantive political issues. Procedure is flexible. After an opening speech by the member of the Political Bureau, scores of questions on all topics are

<sup>21</sup> Though appointed, the Commissioner and his co-ordinating committee must effectively collaborate with the cells. In a sense they must be more representative than the Governor and his Delegates. During Ramadan in Sousse, for instance, the party officials never dared to smoke or eat in public during the daytime, because public opinion, attached to Ramadan and reflected in the cells, would not have approved. On the other hand, Tunisian government policy since 1960 has been to discourage observance of the month-long fast, and most high government officials in Sousse had no hesitation about smoking in public.

addressed to him from the floor. There is no attempt to draw any line between a point of information and a substantive grievance. Especially in Tunis, where the cadres are politically sophisticated, such meetings can provide lucid debate on national problems. Constructive criticisms and suggestions to the Political Bureau are encouraged, and discussion can be rational, because party leaders claim no ideological monopoly. When criticized by young intellectuals of the party for lacking a "doctrine," Bourguiba is reported to have told them to go think one out and tell him about it.

While the provincial offices are formally not as "democratic" as the federations used to be, it is not certain that they cannot more effectively educate party cadres in the pursuit of democracy. By being an effective link not only between cells and the Political Bureau but between cells and the governing authorities, the Commissioner is in a position to give the cells lessons in practical responsibility. While pushing for the satisfaction of justified demands, he also explains to cells why some demands cannot be met. He assures a measure of mobility within the party and stimulates the discussion of basic government policies. Though no structures for debate exist formally at the provincial level, the informal meetings of cadres can be equally educational. Fortunately for prospects of democracy in Tunisia, the Commissioners seem to view their task as one of education toward this goal as well as simple administration of a growing party bureaucracy.

#### THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

Those who defended the reorganization of the party at the 1959 Congress pointed to the National Council as compensating for the loss of the federations. It was argued that the cells, which would henceforth directly elect a large majority of the National Council's membership, were substantially strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

Before independence the National Council, like its SFIO counterpart, was in fact able at times to exert important influence. Bourguiba used it as a lever upon some of his more moderate colleagues on the Political Bureau in 1938, when he was not the unquestioned Supreme

<sup>22</sup> The Director of the Political Bureau even pointed out at the 1959 Congress that cells could and should, in light of the party reorganization, give delegates specific mandates for National Council and Congress sessions. See *Le Petit Matin* (Tunis), March 5, 1959. The National Council is now theoretically composed of the members of the Political Bureau, the Commissioners, and one cell delegate for every 5,000 members. Previously the National Council had consisted of the members of the Political Bureau, one delegate from each federal executive, and an equal number of members elected by the Congress. These elections were hotly contested in 1955, where 172 candidates ran for 32 seats! See *La Presse* (Tunis), November 20, 1955.

Combatant which he later became. Between 1949 and 1951 the Council met frequently, and served in 1954 and early 1955 as a substitute for the Congress, which could not be convened after 1952 when the party was forced underground. Especially in 1938 and 1951, the National Council decided important tactical shifts in Neo-Destour relations with France.<sup>23</sup> Even after 1955, when the Council no longer met every three months as the internal statutes of the party dictated, the Political Bureau needed its agreement to a number of decisions.

After the 1959 Congress the National Council did not meet at all,<sup>24</sup> nor was any attempt made in the succeeding two years even to organize the election of its members by the cells. The Political Bureau's procrastination and violation of the party statutes that it itself designed had no readily observable cause. Privately party officials indicated simply that no important problems had arisen that the Political Bureau might usefully put before this body. Clearly they interpreted it as being more a public forum through which party energies might be mobilized than a deliberative body that must meet regularly to check the activities of the Political Bureau. But its failure to meet regularly seems paradoxical in light of the serious efforts undertaken by the Political Bureau and its Commissioners to stimulate discussion in cadres' conferences. The fifty-odd militants whom the cells would elect would not seriously embarrass the Political Bureau in regular Council meetings, while discussions would inject a more democratic atmosphere into the party, and perhaps help to counter some signs of apathy and bureaucratization. A National Council composed of politically sophisticated Destourians might yet give the party a much-needed forum for structured debate on substantive national issues.

#### THE POLITICAL BUREAU

The Political Bureau, elected by the Party Congress, has always been the party's supreme executive organ. Statutory membership was increased in 1959 from eleven to fifteen, thus ratifying a change that the National Council had already accepted in 1957. The executive powers that the federations once held are now, somewhat increased, in the hands of the Political Bureau and the Commissioners whom it appoints. But since independence the Political Bureau superficially appears to have

<sup>23</sup> See Hedi Nouira, "Le Néo-Destour," *Politique Etrangère*, xix (July 1954), pp. 317-34.

<sup>24</sup> On November 17, 1961, the Director of the Neo-Destour announced that the National Council would meet sometime in February 1962 to discuss Tunisia's Three-Year Plan, which is designed to be an almost revolutionary innovation in Tunisia's social and economic life.



concentrated deliberative as well as executive powers. When Party Congresses are not in session, the Political Bureau is the party's only deliberative authority, since the National Council has lost its former importance.

Yet the Political Bureau is clearly not a form of collective leadership, despite the fiction of its collective responsibility. Elected by acclamation at Party Congresses, Bourguiba is more than a first among equals on the Bureau. The inspirational Leader, Bourguiba is also a sufficiently astute politician as not to allow any single lieutenant to become either a potential rival or an obvious successor. The Political Bureau is in practice little more than one of Bourguiba's innumerable vehicles of consultation. However, it meets regularly, once a week when Bourguiba is in town, and contains many of his principal collaborators.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from Bourguiba, the Political Bureau consists of five ministers, including the three most powerful (the Secretary-General of the party, who is Secretary of the Presidency; the Assistant Secretary-General, who is Secretary of the Interior; and Ahmed Ben Salah), the Governor of the Central Bank (another virtual minister), three Ambassadors, the President of the National Assembly, two trade union leaders of the UGTT, a business leader from UTIC, and the Director of the Political Bureau, who as a student was one of the founders of UGET. The last four members are especially significant for assuring that the diverse interests of the Tunisian elite be taken into consideration in all important policy decisions, thus maintaining the party's broadly representative character. Though hardly a cabinet in the British sense, in time of crisis the Political Bureau meets before Bourguiba presides over his infrequently assembled Cabinet of Ministers. The Political Bureau discusses all political problems, ranging from foreign affairs to internal economic or religious issues. Its deliberations are secret and informal, usually taking place over Bourguiba's dinner table. However, the Political Bureau is collectively less important than it might be, because of Bourguiba's presidential style of leadership and because its three ambassadorial members, based overseas, are rarely available, while at least two others are symbols at best. The Neo-Destour Party, as an organization, does not make important decisions for a government servile to its will. Rather, as at the provincial level, party and government co-

<sup>25</sup> In a somewhat unorthodox manner, the Political Bureau decided on November 17, 1961, after expelling one of its members from the party (Masmoudi), to co-opt Ahmed Ben Salah in his place. This decision had the salutary effect of making the Bureau's composition accord with political realities, for since January 1961 Ben Salah had become a virtual super-minister, second in some respects only to Bourguiba. Especially in the all-important economic field, the Political Bureau's discussions may therefore acquire more significance, and Ben Salah, too, may more effectively mobilize the party apparatus for his economic planning by being unequivocally a part of it.

exist; neither is a dominating center of power. In practice, this means that the technicians in the administration can sometimes overrule the politicians.

But many internal party decisions emanate from four or five key members in the name of the Political Bureau. These decisions do not always affect merely the routine administration of the party. The reorganization of the party, for instance, occurred several months before the Congress had passed corresponding internal statutes. The Political Bureau may sometimes even ignore the statutes, as in its failure to convene a National Council. A speech by Bourguiba calling for a new tactical shift may provide almost the same measure of legitimacy to a decision of the Political Bureau as a Congress could provide. However, far-reaching changes in party policy usually require at least the retroactive political support, if not initiative, that only some larger body can give.

The party bureaucracy, managed for the Political Bureau by its Director, has grown since independence, though not in alarming proportions. Not including the staff of the party newspaper, the work gang "animators,"<sup>26</sup> janitors, and chauffeurs, the bureaucracy has less than one hundred full-time officials and secretaries, spread out over Tunisia's thirteen provinces. Of course, the number would be much larger if it included the many militants holding patronage jobs in public or semi-public organizations who devote much of their time to the party. But bureaucracy is kept to a minimum, and party posts, often demanding a 70-hour week, are hardly sinecures. Aside from the Director and his Commissioners, who constitute the core of the system, the heads of the three central services for youth, orientation, and social revival keep in regular contact through the Commissioners' offices with the cell officers concerned. Unlike similar organizations affiliated with political parties in the West, the Neo-Destour Youth has no autonomy and passes no resolutions. It used to be extremely important as a device for political education and anti-colonialist agitation, and created a legion of loyal militants who after independence were able to constitute the body of the new Tunisian police force and National Guard. Today it theoretically has 80,000 members but has lost considerable dynamism,<sup>27</sup> because

<sup>26</sup> The party decided in early 1960 to create a corps of "animators" to stimulate the 150,000 unemployed unskilled workers whom the government hires at subsistence wages (including supplies of American wheat given to Tunisia) on public works projects. Unlike government foremen, the animators listen to workers' grievances, try to clear up administrative bottlenecks, and try to inculcate on the workers the idealistic notion that they are working for the good of the nation in the struggle against underdevelopment.

<sup>27</sup> The Tunisian government's *Monthly Statistics Bulletin* reported in November 1960 that only 2,383 youths had been directly involved in specific Neo-Destour programs

it can provide neither the excitement of a continuous independence struggle nor jobs for all the boys. The service for social revival has as its main tasks the general supervision of cell projects, the work of the party animators, and the mobilization of the masses when their cooperation is needed for the success of government projects. The party's orientation service explains national policies and the frequent speeches that Bourguiba gives. It also ensures that every public appearance of the President and other leading figures of the regime takes on the character of a mass plebiscite. In the late summer of 1961 literally thousands of meetings were organized at all levels of the party apparatus in all areas of the country to discuss the sensitive problems raised by the July Bizerte crisis and the new policy of state planning and "Neo-Destour socialism." Possibly the highly efficient apparatus of mass propaganda saved the regime after the shock of the Bizerte massacre, when Bourguiba's infallibility was disproved for many Tunisians. Certainly the apparatus strongly contributed to the widespread—if not total—acceptance of Neo-Destour socialism.

The line between administration and policy is necessarily vague. But the structure of the Neo-Destour in practice accentuates this vagueness, by allowing the more powerful members of the Political Bureau great latitude. What is perhaps more disturbing for prospects of democracy in Tunisia is the apparent absence within the ranks of the Neo-Destour of articulate doubts about its procedures at higher levels, for everyone agrees without trying to define their terms that a strong central power is needed in Tunisia today. The strongly concentrated power is moderately exercised to conciliate the various economic interests of the otherwise homogeneous elite, but anyone in the party who publicly asks basic questions about this strong central power and its possible dangers apparently runs the risk of being purged from the party.<sup>28</sup>

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during 1959. It was perhaps these statistics that impelled Bourguiba on March 30, 1961, to devote a whole speech to the problems of youth organizations, in which he found the level of participation to be abysmal. In the summer of 1961, however, roughly 10,000 Neo-Destour youths participated as "volunteers" in the party's catastrophic campaign to force the evacuation of the French bases at Bizerte. It was said that some 3,000 were killed or wounded in the one-sided four-day battle.

<sup>28</sup> The October 7, 1961, issue of *Afrique-Action*, a weekly paper run by Neo-Destour sympathizers, carried an editorial about personal power. It was universally attributed to Mohamed Masmoudi, the newspaper's political patron, who though a member of the Political Bureau had just been dismissed by Bourguiba from his government job as Secretary of Information. Though speaking in general terms of the type of regime headed by leaders like Bourguiba, de Gaulle, Nasser, Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Fidel Castro, and Houphouët Boigny, the article was interpreted by the Neo-Destour as a personal attack against Bourguiba and the Tunisian system rather than an exercise in political science. On November 17, after being attacked in the Neo-Destour press and

## THE CONGRESS

The National Congress, composed of cell committee delegates, is in theory the supreme authority of the party. Since 1959 it is supposed to meet every three rather than every two years, but in fact the Neo-Destour has held only four real congresses in twenty-seven years: in 1934, 1937, 1955, and 1959. The two other ostensible congresses of 1948 and 1952 met clandestinely. Before each National Congress the cells are given at least a month in which to study the reports that the Political Bureau plans to deliver to the Congress, so that in theory basic policy issues can be intelligently discussed by Congress delegates.

In practice, the Congress is a demonstration of national solidarity rather than a forum for the articulation and structuring of differences that may divide the party. Voting is usually unanimous on resolutions. The procedure for electing the Political Bureau not only emphasizes the prestige of the Leader, who is elected separately, but mitigates divisions within the party by obliging candidates to present themselves individually on the same list rather than on separate lists. Only the popularity of diverse shifting cliques within the party can be calculated, on the basis of the number of votes received by each candidate. However, Congresses are democratic in two senses. The number of candidates for the Political Bureau exceeds the number of seats, so that elections are not entirely predictable. Secondly, both in Congress Commissions and in plenary, debate is apt to be extremely lively. The Congress stresses a solidarity of equals; the lowliest delegate may grill a minister with embarrassing questions and criticisms, for all are equal in their role as militants; only Bourguiba is the untouchable Father at these grand family reunions.

Decision-making in the party is not democratic, but Congresses have an undeniably democratic atmosphere. In 1959 the Congress Commissions played a less important role than in 1955. On the other hand, the six-hour report delivered by the Secretary-General to the Congress in 1959 was greeted with discussion and criticism that lasted into the night and continued during the following morning and afternoon sessions, before the report was unanimously accepted by the Congress. During the full day of debate, six ministerial members of the Political Bureau

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in cadres' conferences, Masmoudi was expelled from the Political Bureau and from the party. Bourguiba explained the action of the Political Bureau to the Tunisian public on the following day. He argued that Masmoudi should have expressed his opinions frankly within party organs rather than in public. Interpreting Masmoudi's article personally, Bourguiba, the other members of the Political Bureau, and many party cadres believed that Masmoudi was guilty of breaking party discipline.

answered batteries of questions from the delegates. Debate covered all important government policies and many specific problems. The Congress afterward more rapidly acquiesced to the Director's report, which explained the reasons for the reorganization of the party that the Political Bureau had already executed. But on the following day the new internal statutes reflecting these changes were passed only after "laborious" discussion.<sup>29</sup>

Like the congresses of most mass parties with ostensibly democratic structures, the congresses of the Neo-Destour are in theory its supreme authority but in practice exert little effective power. Within limits that only the future can reveal, Neo-Destour delegates seem willing to pass any resolution that is actively supported by leaders known to have Bourguiba's blessing. But the Neo-Destour's emphasis on national solidarity, and even the automatic cheers of any assembly of party members in response to the mere mention of Bourguiba's name, should not blind the observer to the democratic traditions engrained in the party. Unlike those of Communist congresses, debates and votes are not artificial displays; surprises occur,<sup>30</sup> though Bourguiba himself is criticized only indirectly through attacks on his ministers or close collaborators. The Neo-Destour Congress, though it may meet only four or five days every three or four years, gives party directives their legitimacy in the eyes of many militants. The give and take of plenary debate sets the tone of political behavior when the Congress is not in session. Despite its brevity, the National Congress is the Neo-Destour's most important focal point of Tunisia's new political traditions of spontaneous debate and criticism of authority.

Some conclusions emerge about the changing structure of the Neo-Destour that are significant for evaluating prospects for democracy in Tunisia. They may also help to elucidate the nature of the ruling national party, though it is dangerous to generalize from one example.

After six years of independence, the structure of the Neo-Destour has evolved clearly, and not in a liberal democratic direction. Though the cells remain relatively democratic, a handful of party leaders have effectively consolidated their control over the whole party apparatus. The mechanism increasingly has become an instrument for executing orders from above rather than a hierarchy of deliberative bodies for the articulation of representative opinion from below. An authoritarian trend has been reflected also in the increasing political monopoly that the

<sup>29</sup> See *Le Petit Matin*, March 4-5, 1959.

<sup>30</sup> One of Bourguiba's closest younger collaborators, for instance, was not re-elected to the Political Bureau in 1959.

Neo-Destour acquired after independence, when all political centers independent of party and government were eliminated. But it would be misleading to conclude that the Neo-Destour, which resembled the SFIO on the eve of independence, is being transformed into a totalitarian party.

The Neo-Destour, even if it once formally resembled the SFIO, is clearly not and never was a constitutional mass party. In one important respect it is closer to the SFIO now than before independence. Its cells are no longer semi-clandestine centers of anti-colonial agitation; rather they are openly elected public centers of political education. But internal party democracy is even more of a myth in the Neo-Destour than in the SFIO, despite the fact that internal democracy would more readily correspond to democratic constitutional values in a preponderant party than in a party that from time to time shares governmental power and public responsibility with other parties. Apart from the triennial Congress, the Neo-Destour has no deliberative body that can effectively debate national issues and criticize the Political Bureau. It has no formal or informal structures that can channel the sporadic criticisms heard at cadres' conferences and congresses into competing policy alternatives. All important decisions are instead made by a self-perpetuating oligarchy, checked only by an amenable Congress that rarely meets.

But the Neo-Destour deviates almost equally from the Communist model. Before independence, the goal of liberation served as a substitute for ideology in capturing the minds and entire lives of the many cadres devoted to the liberation struggle. With independence, total personal engagement has withered away. Those who have remained or become devoted to the party have acquired a Bourguibist outlook, which is the negation of indiscriminating total engagement in any doctrine or organization and an acceptance of complexity and diversity, brought out by constant discussion at all party levels. Membership seems more genuinely voluntary than in totalitarian parties. The masses are not forced to join the party, and as dropping membership claims since 1958 suggest, membership is no longer as essential to the common man as in 1956 for the satisfaction of personal needs, such as a job or education for one's children, because the state apparatus, strengthened in 1958 at the expense of the party, tends toward greater impartiality. For the educated elite, too, party membership is no longer as essential even for a successful government career, and, conversely, opportunists in the party are discouraged by the perceptive Commissioners.

Cell activities emphasize personal initiative, not blind obedience. Horizontal contacts between cells are encouraged, not prohibited. The

Neo-Destour remains a genuinely popular party, and its ideology, unlike a totalitarian one, could not justify systematic repression or vast purges. The party's leadership is open to new ideas and even to new leaders on intermediate levels, for it knows that it does not have the absolute answer to all of Tunisia's problems. If orders and most initiative come from above, the Political Bureau and its Commissioners are constantly attempting to stimulate more initiative from below and to train new cadres. Party meetings are constant experiments and retain their spontaneity, unlike Communist congresses. The Director of the Political Bureau, in charge of party administration, exerts significant power, but it belongs mainly to the older men on the Political Bureau. Intellectually rather embarrassed by its monopoly, the Neo-Destour has not made a cult of single-party dictatorship.

It is perhaps easier to conclude what the Neo-Destour is not than what it is. But some traits of this national party emerge. Maintaining a structure distinct from that of the government, the Neo-Destour is constantly trying to educate the population in the principles of Bourguibism, and to transform people into citizens. It maintains the cohesion of the new nation's elite. It mobilizes the energies of the population in practical projects that party and government decide upon. It acts as the link between the population and the government. It collaborates with the government in decision-making. It encourages cadres in the exercise of their local responsibilities. Despite a paternalistic structure, the Neo-Destour in fact remains representative of the nation, because its leadership strives to maintain the popularity of the party as if a powerful opposition existed.

Though not ideally democratic in structure, the Neo-Destour both in theory and in practice gives its hundreds of thousands of members and militants an effective political education. It is much more than a disseminator of government propaganda because it has a life of its own. Almost any Tunisian citizen can be a Destour militant, and one man out of every four joins the party. Congresses emphasize the equality of all militants and the right of each to criticize and to convince others of his point of view. The habitual conferences of cadres are rehearsals of congresses and teach the same lessons. The cells, tutored by generally dedicated Commissioners, encourage not only local political initiative but the general acceptance of certain democratic procedures for arriving at concrete decisions. A powerful machine that, by persuasion rather than force, is stimulating the general sharing of national purposes, the Neo-Destour also seems a training ground for possible democracy in the future, the outlines of which cannot yet be perceived.