

And the Dangers that Beset It

The Question by Henri Alleg.
George Braziller. 123 pp. \$2.95.

by James Greene

A democracy, Lord Acton wrote nearly a century ago, will stand or fall depending upon whether it chooses "to give the supremacy to the law or to the will of the people; whether to constitute a moral association maintained by duty, or a physical one kept together by force."

One could imagine Acton's approving the course the Western democracies have chosen in uniting themselves against the threat of Soviet power. For it is basically an extension of the democratic idea that they seek in their defense—"a moral association" maintained by a "duty" to the West's tradition of respect for the individual conscience. No occupation troops insure that the chancelleries of Western Europe conform to a single policy of defense; yet the belief in the democratic tradition is what makes the Western alliance purposeful. And while the threat to that tradition has called forth the anxieties of our age, the very defense of it has made and kept us keenly aware of its supreme importance to our civilization and our moral life.

It was because they understood this "duty" that many Frenchmen took alarm at early reports from the Algerian war that French paratroops were using torture there in a routine way to extract confessions. Even those who believed in their deepest hearts that "Algeria must remain French" were disquieted by rumors that, if true, meant the West had already abandoned that greatness it was so greatly prepared to defend.

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The worst fears of these Frenchmen have now been established; with the publication of *La Question* in Paris in February this year, the details of Algerian torture perpetrated by members of the French Army are free to haunt the conscience of the West. After a sale of sixty thousand copies in two weeks, *La Question* was placed under a ban by the French Government, the first such action in two centuries. The Government then proceeded to seize editions of newspapers that accorded space or favorable comment to Alleg's work.

Already translated into half a dozen languages, it now appears in English. This international interest is clear indication that we are not here confronted with simply one more case of war-time atrocity.

Henri Alleg, a French Communist and author of *The Question*, was editor of an Algerian newspaper for five years when that publication was suppressed in 1955. Alleg remained in Algeria but went into hiding in 1956. In June of 1957 he was arrested by paratroops and detained at El-Biar in the suburbs of Algeria for a full month. He is now in a civil prison in Algiers where he wrote and smuggled out this account of his stay at El-Biar.

Alleg gives the account of his interrogation in clinical details that will prove difficult for the strongest stomach. For the details are shockingly similar to ones that have come to us from within the Soviet Union, from Hungary and Poland. As Jean-Paul Sartre points out in his introduction, the methods used by the French paratroops repeat those used by France's worst oppressor, the Gestapo. It seems George Orwell was right: we become what we fight. Although the fact of torture is known alike to the National As-

sembly and to the Resident Ministers in Algeria, no attempt has been made to stop it. No steps have been taken to bring the brawny fist of France in Algeria under the control of civilian intellect; that fist now swings menacingly and blindly at France itself.

Once the expediency of torture is accepted we are well on the road to disaster. As Alleg warns, and as many have warned before him, it is a device that corrupts the nation's youth now being sent to serve France in Algeria. Finally, the whole concept of a just war evaporates in the hot air of fanaticism.

In taking this unchallenged step, the army has threatened the Actonian choice made by the French democratic state; it would have that state become rather a "physical association kept together by force." For how else, they argue, can Algeria be kept a part of France? The consequences of that alteration in France could prove disastrous. For the logical pursuit of it would spread the North African war to Tunisia and Morocco, leaving the Western alliance a mockery of its own ideals. Our leaders would no longer be civilized leaders of civilized men; each of them would have to become, like Euripides' Thoas, "a barbaric king of barbarians."

By providing us with the details of how the paratroops in Algeria have stamped upon the individual conscience as the "pernicious creature" of Parisian "intellectuals," Alleg has sounded a major alarm. That alarm will not stop ringing until France answers its desperate call. Unless it answers with dispatch and purpose—as many illustrious Frenchmen are now demanding—the house we all live in may be reduced to the common ash of history.

Foreign Policy: The Next Phase

by Thomas K. Finletter. Harper. 208 pp. \$3.50.
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