

TUNIS TROUBLE:

Prime Minister Harold Macmillan hurries to France to smooth down the worst Anglo-French disagreement for many years. The young French premier Felix Gaillard greets him with a smile - but millions of his fellow-countrymen are very angry - and here's the reason. Britain and America have been supplying arms to the Tunisian forces, which they regard as an important link in Western defense. But there's a lot of sympathy in Tunisia for the Algerian rebels, and France fears many of these weapons may find their way across the frontier into rebel hands.

This fear hits the French on their sorest spot; for with the growing importance of their North African oilfields, they regard the crushing of the Algerian rebels as vital to their security - and the campaign is bleeding France white, both economically and politically. Now, they declare, Britain and America are stabbing them in the back. One attempt to solve the Algerian deadlock comes from the Arab side; President Bourguiba of Tunisia flies to Morocco to discuss a peace plan with the King of Morocco, Mohammed the Fifth. Mohammed gives the President a royal welcome at the airport.

After the official ceremonies are over, the two North African leaders get down to business. From the Royal Palace they appeal to France and the Algerian nationalists to negotiate for "a just solution" - and offer to mediate. But France refuses; Arab mediation, she says, cannot be impartial. Meanwhile, in Paris, Britain and France thrash out their differences. For the British side, Mr. Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd cannot promise there will be no more arms for Tunisia, but only that any new request for arms will be discussed first with the French. With that, Monsieur Gaillard has to be content.

But French public opinion is still far from content. On the Place de la Concorde, hundreds of demonstrators chant "Macmillan to the gallows - Algeria is French!" In a pitched battle with the police, they try to force their way to the British and American embassies - the British in particular, for as a closer friend, Britain comes in for the fiercest resentment.

A hundred people are arrested and many injured before the fighting dies down - but unless France can be reassured, or the Algerian problem solved, her anger will not die down so quickly.