

The Ben Barka Affair

Poses A Case for Experts

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CPYRGHT The Herald Tribune Staff
PARIS.

¶The Ben Barka affair, now almost six months old, has become a case that might be more readily unraveled by Inspector Malgret or Hercule Poirot than by the French government or police.

The fictional detectives, presumably, would be more at home with the bizarre details of the case than the puzzled and ponderous operatives of French justice seem to be.

For example:

¶Mehdi Ben Barka, exiled leader of the leftist opposition to Moroccan King Hassan II, was kidnaped at noon outside of a famous Left Bank cafe on Oct. 20, and presumably murdered in the suburbs of Paris.

¶President De Gaulle has accused Moroccan Interior Minister Mohammed Ould El Fassi of first-hand participation in the kidnapping. The French government issued an international arrest warrant for Gen Oufkir, but Hassan indignantly refused to act on it.

¶Only six arrests have been made. Two French counterespionage agents, two Paris plainclothes policemen, a French journalist and a Moroccan student were arrested and admitted having participated in the kidnaping directly or indirectly. All denied any knowledge of what finally happened to Mr. Ben Barka.

¶The French police, ministry of Justice, Advocate General and investigating magistrate still have given no indication that they know where Mr. Ben Barka is or whether he is dead or alive.

There have been no trials, and there may never be any. The Paris Court of Appeals will announce a week from this Wednesday whether the investigation of the case



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The late Ben Barka

should be prolonged to find out how deeply the French police are involved with the French underworld.

This aspect of the affair came up last week when the Paris Police Department produced a waitress who said she saw one of the policemen arrested in the Ben Barka case at a dinner party given three years ago at the home of a criminal who is sought for questioning in the case. She said there were other French police there, too, but she couldn't identify them.

The affair is scheduled for

or after it happened, but did nothing about it.

But what is probably the most important aspect of the case, and its ultimate resolution, is the effect it might have on Franco-Moroccan relations.

ENVOYS RECALLED

France and Morocco recalled their ambassadors as a result of the controversy, but there has been no indication that either government is considering a formal break in diplomatic relations.

Such a break would cause serious trouble for both countries. Morocco depends on France, its former colonial protector to keep it operating. Frenchmen still control most of the nation's industry and farm much of its land. French professional and technical staffs staff most every department of the government, which receives about \$50 million a year in aid from Paris.

To end all this would leave Morocco with a disastrously weakened economy. It would also leave President de Gaulle, possibly, with the image of a bully towards a small struggling country.

Thus, there are many observers, not all of them cynics, who believe the Ben Barka case will die of old age, unsolved, and unlamented by most of those involved.

debate in the National Assembly early next month, and it will probably be a repeat performance of charges made in the French press against the de Gaulle government's role in the matter.

During the height of the furor over the case two months ago, various publications charged that the President's Interior Minister, Roger Frey, and the secretary general of his personal staff, Jacques Foccart, both knew of the kidnaping either just before