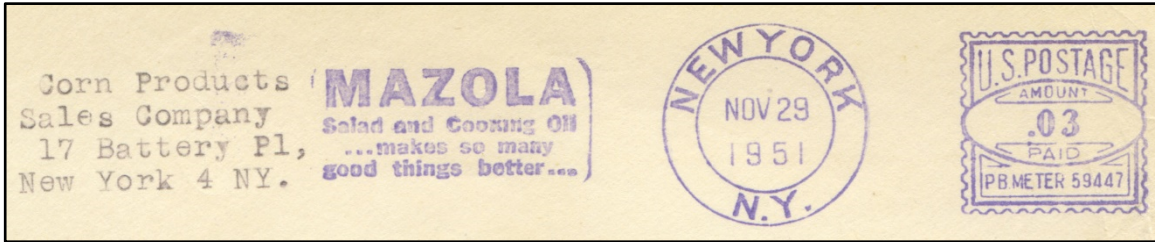


# WHEN CULINARY BLISS TURNED

## BITTER: MEKNES 1959

by Tony Curiale

In August 1959, hundreds of people began complaining they were unable to walk, and others felt that their arms and legs were suddenly paralyzed. Thought at first to be poliovirus, the rapidly growing number of victims and tests made indicated that it was not polio. This happened in Meknes, a city in Central Morocco and more than 300 cases were reported there and other parts of the country, namely Nador and the Rif Mountains, began reporting similar cases.



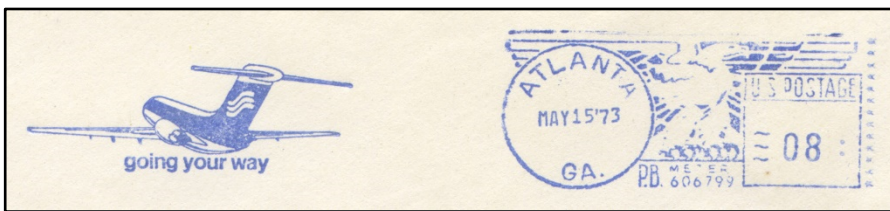
*Pitney Bowes model CA series meter stamp, first class rate – Cooking oil*



The World Health Organization and Red Cross were called to help establish the cause of the illness and treating the victims and what appeared to be a viral epidemic was in reality massive poisoning from oil.



*Morocco in 1955*



*Pitney Bowes RF, RT Series meter stamp, first class rate – Jet engines*

It was found that the culprit was a dark-colored cooking oil that was still being sold in the city's marketplaces. Having tested the oil, the chemical *tricresylphosphate*, or TCP was found to be contaminating the oil. It seems that when the US was about to leave its air force bases in Morocco, it sold off many surplus supplies, including TCP-bearing oil it used for lubricating jet engines. The oil eventually made it to local, unscrupulous dealers who mixed it with peanut oil and sold it across the country.



*Chemicals*



In order to aid the families whose members consumed the adulterated cooking oil, in 1960 Morocco overprinted a series of stamps issued in 1957 to honor Sultan Mohammed. The resultant semi-postal stamps were overprinted and surcharged with the Arabic inscription, "Aid for poisoned oils victims - October 1959".

The surcharges were applied to the 5-, 10- and 15-franc values with an extra 10 francs each and the 25- and 30-franc values with an extra 15 and 20 francs respectively.