

IGOR BELYAEV

## Progressive Trends In the Arab World

### "Before" and "After" the 5th of June

**I**T HAS become customary for the Arabs to divide the events of the last few years into those occurring "before" and those occurring "after" the fifth of June, 1967. The Six-Day War and the important changes that ensued in the Arab world were like a suddenly-formed watershed. The concepts "leading up to it" and "following from it" became a touchstone for both politicians and historians in dealing with recent events.

The long-drawn-out Middle East crisis gave rise not only to new revolutions in the Sudan, Libya, the South Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf area. It is now an indisputable fact that radical left-wing national-liberation movements are developing throughout the Arab world. It must also be borne in mind that, however they may differ, these movements are all aimed at profound social changes.

Outwardly, for example, the revolutions in the Sudan and Libya are alike. In both countries the heads of government and state are young army officers whose determination and fervor remind one very much of the young Egyptian officers who overthrew King Farouk in 1952. But purely external similarity is deceptive. The Sudan differs from Libya. In the Sudan, before the army took power in May 1969, bourgeois and national political parties had existed for almost fifteen years. The Communists played a very important role in the May revolution. Their influence made itself felt in every sector of society, including the sector that took over the reins of government.

Enormous importance attaches to a series of events that greatly

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weakened the forces of counterrevolution. The Mahdi family, bound up with imperialist circles and its supporters from the Ansari sect (a religious sect to which the Mahdi supporters had traditionally belonged), tried to overthrow the revolutionary government and, by exploiting religious passions, sweep away everything progressive that had emerged in the country. They failed, however, and were crushed. After this, the revolutionary Sudan faced a not less important and acute problem, that of defending the Sudanese South from the designs of the enemies of the Sudanese people.

There is ample evidence that foreign agents, including agents linked with the United States and Israel, deliberately fanned up discontent among certain South Sudanese African tribes. The western bourgeois press constantly maintains that a real civil war is on in Southern Sudan. Actually, imperialist agents and their henchmen in South Sudanese provinces are trying to split the country. Whom does separatism in that vast African country benefit? Naturally only those who want to divert the revolutionary leaders of the Sudan from the solution of the country's vital tasks, including stepping up the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East and Africa.

The nationalization of foreign banks, firms, companies and enterprises in the Sudan indicates that foundations for a stable national economy are being laid in the country.

The Sudanese revolution has become part and parcel of the national-liberation revolution in the Arab world. Its anti-imperialist and anti-feudal direction is obvious. And the determination of the new leaders to take the Sudan along a path leading to socialism only proves that the number of progressive regimes in the Middle East "after the fifth of June" has increased.

### Social Change in Libya

**I**T WAS quite different in Libya. I visited that country several times prior to September 1969. In Tripoli, Benghazi and other cities and villages, time seemed to have stopped. The Parliament buildings in the two capitals of Libya—Tripoli and Benghazi—stood empty. The rare elections to Parliament would remind the people of the existence of formal democracy, but power was fully in the hands of King Idris who was also the spiritual head of the state, as head of the Sanusi Order of Sunnis.

Now the country seems to be making up for lost time. There is no longer a king. All legislative and executive power is in the hands of the army. The young Libyan army officers, to judge from the speeches of M. Qathafi and other leaders, are full of revolutionary

and patriotic enthusiasm. They are unselfishly and honestly striving to transform Libya in a short time into a flourishing nation of socialist orientation. In many respects, they lack experience. Emotion often eclipses foresight in the young leaders' great wish to get everything done immediately without waiting for the results of what has been started. But the gains revolutionary Libya has already made justify optimism about its future.

M. Qathafi and his comrades began by abolishing the monarchy, a move hailed by every Libyan, excluding of course those who had served the dethroned king loyally. They, however, are too few to offer any hope of success to the imperialist forces. This does not mean that there is no opposition altogether. The trials that have taken place indicate its presence. But the opposition forces are not strong enough to have a decisive influence on the masses, who fully support the revolution.

The revolutionary Libyan leaders have also solved another problem: they have liquidated every type of foreign military presence. There are no British or American military bases there now. London and Washington were compelled to withdraw their troops from Libya, despite the temptation to intervene. This had been dreamt of even after the rebellious army officers had become established in Tripoli and Benghazi. When the flags at the British and US bases were lowered, this signified much more than a mere change of masters. Libya ceased to be a base of NATO as it had been for nearly two decades.

The Libyan leaders understand very well that only when the country gains economic independence will its full freedom be guaranteed. No hothead will claim this is an easy task, especially in Libya, a country with a backward economy neglected for years by its previous rulers. These rulers raked in oil royalties and complacently considered King Idris's meager "handouts" enough for the nearly two million Libyans.

Libya's oil is not just fabulous wealth; exploited in the country's interest, it would be a sure foundation for her all-round economic development. Some may argue that nationalization is necessary. But in taking this step, Libya would encounter insurmountable difficulties at this stage. She has no secure markets, nor has she any tanker fleet. Certainly it is this consideration that prompted the country's revolutionary leaders to begin with a flat ultimatum to the foreign companies operating in the country that they should raise Libya's share in profit. The negotiations were difficult but in the end Libya won a victory. The West, including the West German and American com-

panies operating in Libya, needs Libyan oil so badly that it yielded, and now the country possessing such vast stocks of "black gold" will have greater income.

Speaking of the new trends in the development of the Arab countries, it is important to note the ending or substantial limitation of foreign economic domination by the new leaders. The liquidation of the foreign military presence in Libya, linked with the nationalization of everything that earlier belonged to the Italians who appeared there back in Mussolini's day, clearly indicates the line of development of that country toward rapidly growing independence.

Iraq and South Yemen should also be mentioned in speaking of the growth of anti-imperialist struggle in the Arab world. In those two countries socialist slogans have also been put forward as the basis for their people's striving for a better life. However complicated the situation in Iraq and the South Yemeni People's Republic may be, the trend in their development is clear: the imperialists are losing ground, and progressive elements gaining.

And finally, a feature of the new that today determines the life of the Arabs is the growing relations of the Arab world with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, as a result of the national-liberation revolution there. In fact these relations have long become a vital need. Therefore all talk of "removing" the Russians from the Middle East that has occurred during briefings at the White House seems ludicrous. Over the last three and a half years the Soviet positions in the Arab countries and in the Middle East in general have undoubtedly become much stronger, while those of the United States and other Western powers have become weaker—mainly because the policy of these powers runs counter to the vital interests of the Arab countries.

#### *"Before" and "After" Nasser*

NASSER'S death has introduced a new phrase in the political life of the Arabs. Now all events occurring in the Middle East are also divided into "before" and "after" the death of the Egyptian leader.

The Arabs lost the generally recognized leader which Nasser had been for the last fifteen years. The Egyptians lost an outstanding leader of their revolution. One of the UAR's most authoritative journalists, Mr. Ahmed Baha el-Din, once remarked that Nasser's strength above all lay in his deep perception into the heart of the fellah. For a peasant country such as Egypt was until recently, this was of tremendous importance. Nasser made an agrarian revolution and nationalized the main means of production.

Nasser was not a working-class leader, but there is every reason to say that the working class received more from the revolution than any other class during the last few years. And not only the workers in the cities, but the farmhands as well. Of course, the socioeconomic gains of the Egyptian workers are relatively limited. One of the causes of this is the country's limited industrial and material resources. Indeed, it is not easy at all to build up 1,000 industrial plants and at the same time sharply raise the standard of living for all. When in the early sixties Nasser said that the Egyptian fellah, as well as the worker, had begun to eat more, this seemingly simple truth contained a great meaning. For the first time on the banks of the Nile the authorities were taking care of the working man.

Progressive changes in the UAR are doubtless due to the fact that the Egyptian leader, who died in September 1970, had consistently followed the general direction of the Egyptian revolution. Nasser was the first in the Arab world to utter plainly the word "socialism" in relation to his country. At first the Egyptians talked of "Arab" socialism. But Nasser quickly discarded this definition, stressing in his famous speech at the Congress of Popular Forces in Cairo in May 1962 that the ideological basis of the Egyptian revolution must be scientific socialism. Nasser never considered himself a Marxist. But this did not prevent him from openly saying at the Arab Socialist Union organizing meeting in Giza that he and Marxism were apart only on the question of religion and the dictatorship of the proletariat and that he subscribed to all the other principles of Marxism without reservation.

Nasser was the first in the Arab world to feel the vital need for Egypt's rapprochement with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Those Arabs who still fail to grasp the meaning of what has happened in this respect are not likely to be understood by their peoples. The Aswan High Dam has turned into a symbol of this friendship before our eyes.

Some people in the West are alleging that the Soviet Union has "penetrated" into the Middle East only through its arms and combat equipment supplies to the Egyptians. This strange allegation seems to derive from a failure to see the main reason—the turning of socialism for the Arabs into such an attractive force that it sweeps away imperialist influences as an anachronism. Herein lies the actual cause of the Arabs' love for the Soviet Union.

Now that Nasser is dead, the West expects that a reverse process will start—the retreat of the Arabs from socialism. This will never happen. For the striving of the Egyptians and other Arab peoples for

changes along socialist lines is much stronger than anything else that may be interwoven with the national-liberation movement in the Middle East. The anti-imperialism of the Arabs is clearly stronger than anti-communism and anti-Sovietism.

Nasser is no longer alive, but his anti-imperialist policy continues to live. It will continue to have tremendous influence on the course of events not only in Asia and Africa, but also in Latin America.

The UAR has been and continues to be the leader of the Arab world. The setting up of the federation of the UAR, Libya and the Sudan and the subsequent joining by Syria is an important step in confirming anti-imperialism in the policy and practice of these Arab states. The decision is also important in another way: the development of economic, cultural and other forms of cooperation among countries. But the main motivation of these states was to unite their revolutionary efforts. Herein lies the great importance of the move. I by no means want to suggest that all the problems of Arab unity have already been solved and now it is simply up to the other Arab states to join the federation. The development of cooperation, and even more so of economic and other types of integration, is a long and complicated process. But this process has already started. Special prominence in the federation's policy has been given to the struggle against imperialism, which is now above all directed against the dangerous consequences of Israeli aggression and new designs of the West in the Middle East. The creation of the federation also indicates that no political "vacuum" has formed in the Arab world after Nasser's death.

### *War and Peace*

**I**SRAEL'S attack on the UAR, Syria and Jordan on June 5, 1967 was a surprise action for these countries.

I want to remind the reader that Nasser did much to avoid a war. In particular, he closed the Aqaba Gulf to Israeli ships only *for a short and strictly defined period*. Nasser appointed a representative delegation for talks in the USA on shipping in the gulf. It was to have flown to New York on June 7, 1967, for talks that Nasser hoped would help avoid a conflict.

But the events of the past years are not so important now. The main thing in the Middle East is the need to resolve the protracted crisis. It is noteworthy that even most western authors, while paying tribute to the late UAR President as a great personality, recalled that over the last few years Nasser had devoted himself to the achievement of a Middle East settlement by political, that is peaceful, means.

It was Nasser who by supporting the November resolution of the UN Security Council made the first step that was so necessary. After this the idea of Arab-Israeli contacts through Dr. Jarring began winning supporters.

The UAR and Jordan declared their readiness to fulfill the November resolution in all respects. This means that the slogan of the destruction of the Israeli state which had always been put forward by Arab extremists, and which had always been exploited by imperialist and Zionist circles, was discarded. When President Nasser declared that after the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the Arab territories they had occupied he would recognize Israel and establish diplomatic relations with it, this spelled a policy of peace, and not of war. The United States for some reason failed to "notice" this.

The Arabs understood very well that to develop their national-liberation revolutions they need peace, not war. The efforts of the UAR and Jordan (and also of Syria, which has made it clear that she will not hinder a political settlement) reflect this factor above all. The Arab peoples are against war, a war that suits imperialist designs in the Middle East.