

MOHAMMED WAHBY

ARAB SOCIALISM

FERMENT AND COMMITMENT

AFRO ASIAN PUBLICATIONS

Among all the developing countries the UAR, perhaps provides the most fascinating example of quick progress achieved in face of tremendous difficulties, including the second highest rate of population growth in the world and a discouraging scarcity of indigenous natural resources. Like all other developing countries, it has also been constantly faced with external pressures aimed at abridging its political sovereignty and economic independence. Yet its achievements are so great that the UAR is already looked upon as a model by Afro-Asian countries.

A socialism free from dogmas and evolved essentially in the light of concrete realities has been the chief instrument of the inspiring socio-economic changes in the UAR. The author while putting the U A.R. experiment in its proper perspective delves deep into its complexities, exploring its varied aspects and discussing frankly the many problems inherent in the development process.

Price : Rs. 6.00

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Foreword by

K. KAMARAJ

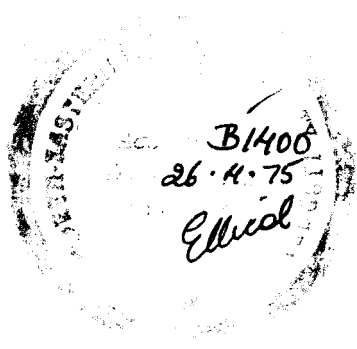
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“TO ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES CAN BEST HELP EACH OTHER THROUGH A FRANK EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS.”

—*The Author*

PREFACE

The United Arab Republic and India have a great deal in common. Their deep friendship is based on many factors, the chief of them being a shared desire to enlarge the area of peace in the world and to reduce tensions and conflicts, so that newly-independent nations may get a fair chance to develop their economies and become strong. Jawaharlal Nehru and President Nasser, along with President Tito of Yugoslavia, for years strove towards this end, with a large measure of success.

Our two countries also face many similar problems, in regard to both internal growth and external relations. The UAR, like India, is a predominantly agricultural country seeking to modernise itself in every way and usher in a socialist order. As such, the developments in the two countries are of considerable mutual interest, and there is constant and growing need for exchange of information and experience. Such exchange will undoubtedly help cement the bonds of friendship further.

Mr. Mohammed Wahby, Assistant Chief Representative of the League of Arab States in India, has certainly rendered good service by attempting a thoughtful analysis of the socialist experiment initiated in the UAR. He has tried to put the achievements in perspective without at the same time glossing over defects and shortcomings. I understand that this is the first time a book of this scope is being brought out, and on this count also the effort is welcome.

I am particularly happy that Mr. Wahby is publishing this book on the eve of the visit to India of President Nasser, for at this time there will be widespread desire to understand how the UAR is tackling its problems and what kind of future is envisaged for the people of that country.

11-10-1966

K. Kamaraj,
President,
Indian National Congress

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The Ferment

Institutions, whether political, social or economic, are not born out of a vacuum. Nor do they function in a void. They are the product of a continuous interplay of social and economic factors and are, therefore, organically related to the specific society they are intended to serve. This fact, simple and widely acknowledged as it is, is either entirely ignored or, at best, accorded a second place, by many a political writer, while judging the socio-political development of the newly developing region of the world.

A certain system successfully working in a particular social environment, is often held up by its advocates as the only model which could bring about the desired transformation in all under-developed areas. Moreover, the twentieth century has witnessed a series of attempts to superimpose one or another political model on a number of countries where conditions were not conducive to its successful functioning. Hence, the not altogether satisfactory performance of transplanted parliamentary democracy in many an under-developed country. On the other hand, it is by now fairly well-established that Marxist application has proved its efficacy in Eastern Europe, in the measure it moved away from Lenin's Russian model.

This emphasis on the realities of a particular situation, is all the more necessary while dealing with the subject of this book. For one thing, the interaction of social, political and economic conditions on the one hand, and

Agrarian Breakthrough

It will be helpful before we start to trace the socialist course in the UAR to deal with some questions often asked by the foreign observer. For instance, was the revolutionary regime installed in 1952 socialist in its ideological orientation right from the beginning? If so, how can we explain its hesitant and uncertain first steps? Or, is Nasser, the most dynamic and organising force behind the new leadership, only "a recent convert to socialism, who after a period of hesitation, came at last to embrace his new ideal, and then began to apply himself to the task of transforming society in accordance with his adopted faith with all the dynamism of his personality and the proverbial zeal of a convert?"¹

The question betrays a somewhat dogmatic attitude that tends to gloss over the complexity of the situation. For though Nasser himself has admitted that the leadership lacked in its initial stages a blue-print to guide the revolutionary action, there was always a sense of direction as well as a basic commitment which charted the path of social change according to the nature of each stage of the struggle. In the period 1952 to 1956 the drive was concentrated mainly on giving immediate economic relief to

1. Fayez Sayegh : "Middle Eastern Affairs," Number, 4.

III

Process Of Crystallization

With the turn of the 19th century Egypt began to shed its feudal character and take gradually to a capitalistic structure of economy. The change was not due to the introduction of industry but to the change in the relations or production in agriculture brought about by the adoption of cotton as the main crop. The process started with the expropriation of the land by Mohamed Aly which consummated by the end of 1815. Most of Egypt was converted into a huge farm under his direct administration. Later several categories of landholders came into existence: members of the ruling family, the Turkish officers, high government officials and a certain number of foreigners. The vast majority of small landowners was reduced to the status of agricultural labourers.

In 1821, the cultivation of long-fibre cotton began, and with it the second important step towards a capitalist structure of economy was taken. Unlike the short-staple cotton which was grown in Egypt for local consumption, prior to the reign of Mohamed Aly, the long-staple variety was introduced to cater exclusively to the foreign market. Therefore, Mohamed Ali's efforts were relentlessly directed towards the introduction of most upto-date methods of cotton cultivation to ensure maximum profits. On the other hand, he ruthlessly suppressed any move by the

Organising The Masses

A unique feature of the Egyptian revolution is that it brought into existence a progressive state before the creation of a revolutionary mass organisation. All other similar movements depended on revolutionary parties or organisations which had struggled long and sacrificed much before they were able to come to power. The revolutionary movement in Egypt, however, depended on a secret organisation within the army, the only possible instrument of change at that time, to bring down the feudalist-capitalist alliance and then installed into power a progressive government dedicated to the interests of the masses. Thus, on July 23, 1952 Egypt had a revolutionary government, but no popular organisation to support it, a progressive leadership on top, but no roots among the masses. It is this situation which impelled the Charter to declare, "The revolution itself did not break out on the eve of July 23. But on that glorious night the gate was flung open for it".

The genuineness of the new revolutionary leadership impelled them to break out of their secret army organisation and to go out exploring all possible means to identify themselves with the masses—to try and understand them in order to be able to unify and lead them. The new leaders could have cloistered themselves into their

Theoretical Framework

There are three distinct, yet complementary, factors which have helped to crystallize and bring into shape the socialist transformation in UAR. The first was the profound awareness of the leadership of the deepening misery of the working classes coupled with a dedicated zeal and determination to explore all avenues for bringing about a just and efficient socio-economic order. Without a theory of change however, the revolution would have remained without a vision of the new society it was seeking to build.

The second factor came into the forefront when the limited clash between the nationalist forces and Britain over the evacuation of the latter's troops from the Suez Canal Base, escalated into a clash with world imperialism. The more the imperialists tightened their economic and political stranglehold to force Egypt to submit and give way to their policies in the area, the more adamant the Egyptian leadership became on safeguarding the integrity and independence of the country. This continual process, of which no end seems to be in sight so far, was the source of the determination to expedite the development of the country by mobilising all the resources and by galvanising the long-oppressed masses into action so that the people may be able to safeguard national dignity. This long and arduous struggle also revealed the organic relationship

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