



Dear Friends:
The successful army coup to regain the independence of Syria from Egypt put an end to the United Arab Republic. Nasser says the revolt was an "imperialistic plot" against his "socialism." There has been little enough "socialism" in Egypt, let alone Syria. It is true there had been some land reform in Egypt while the feudal potentates in Syria went very nearly untouched. But it was these same landowners plus the small capitalist class plus the military bureaucracy which, less than four years ago, had asked for union with Egypt, though the latter had neither a common border nor a common history with Syria. About the only reason anyone could adduce then for this sudden merger was that the Communist Party of Syria was getting too powerful and Nasser had shown his expertness in dealing with political opposition. Nasser obliged again by putting the leaders of the CP in jail and driving the party underground.

On the other hand, the reactionary government in Syria was not exactly a novice in such matters either. The Communist Party, which had, four years back, looked so threatening had itself come out of illegality only in 1954. Between 1954 and 1958 it had become the best organized and most active party in the whole Middle East. However, throughout this period, its leaders had functioned, not as revolutionaries, but as Arab nationalists. Although it controlled all three trades unions and varied "National Front" organizations, it had given up its agrarian demands. For the class struggle it substituted Russian foreign policy, tailored to suit the Arab Middle East.

As its leader, Khaled Bakdash, had put it, "Syria is Arab nationalist, not Communist, and will remain so." Its Manifesto appealed to "all four classes." "The National Front," said the 1955 Syrian CP Manifesto, "ought to unite all those who oppose the Pact of Baghdad." To make themselves fully acceptable to the ruling cliques, it spiced its program with a good deal of anti-Semitism. The cornerstone of all Arab Communist policy being that Israel is an "outpost of Western imperialism in the Middle East." With the Czech arms deal, the CP persisted with its central aim: to lead Syria, like Egypt unto the Russian foreign policy path.

When the United Arab Republic, under Nasser, drove the Communist Party underground, not a word of open criticism came from Russia. This doesn't, of course, mean that Russia had no interests other than those of Nasser, but he is too important an ally in the fight against "the West" for Russia to encourage its CPs

in the Middle East to carry on any independent policy except when Nasser turns against Russia. Thus, when the Iraqi Revolution occurred, and Kassim and Nasser competed for leadership of the Middle East, Russia hurried massive aid to the High Aswan Dam, although, or precisely because the CP played an independent role and Iraq competed with Egypt for leadership. In a word, when Nasser began to suspect Russia's role, Russia was quick to appease him. Let's not forget that it took two full years after the Suez war and Dulles's scuttling of the promised aid to Egypt before Khrushchev consented to step in.

It is true that in the past few months exposes of Nasser's dictatorial rule, with accusations that he had murdered a leader of the Syrian CP, began to appear in the Russian press. The present military coup, however, seems to be without the benefit of Russian complicity. It is concentrated in the same clique which, four years back, had handed Syria to Egypt most enthusiastically. In the tangled Middle Eastern situation, this doesn't mean that the Syrian CP wouldn't help the same clique break away from the United Arab Republic! It becomes all the more important therefore to review the whole Middle Eastern situation from the vantage point of the cold war.

The entry of Russia in the Middle East in 1955 with the Czech arms deal came on the initiative of Cairo and Damascus as much as from Russian ambitions. Therein lies the key to the differences in Russian policy between 1945 and 1955. At the end of World War II, Russia tried direct military intervention in Iran. Its "Western Allies" soon made it clear to Stalin that they would not tolerate it, and Stalin's army withdrew.

With the victory of Mao in China, the Russian attitude to the Orient changed. It is widely believed that this was due to the fact that Stalin finally realized the value of the peasantry, that he came over to Mao's position of the peasantry as the "vanguard." **Nothing could be further from the truth. What finally united Stalin and Mao was that both now had the same enemy: the United States. Ever since the Marshall Plan and the beginning of the cold war in Western Europe, Stalin was looking precisely for such an ally in the East. The war in Korea was meant to show in no uncertain terms that now Russia could fight the United States on two fronts.**

The world was now divided into two, and only two, main blocs, both West and East. The old revolutionary line of distrust of the bourgeoisie continued, however,

and the leadership of the national revolutions, whether in India or the Middle East, (and later Africa) was treated as "imperialist agents." The slander persisted, no matter how revolutionary these leaders were in throwing out the imperialists.

Here some flexibility did appear with the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's coming to power. But on the whole, the initiative did not come from Russia. Russia refused to participate in any UN aid to the underdeveloped countries until the actual military rulers there began to sound out Russia as to direct help against "the West."

ALONG WITH THE FEELERS FROM ABOVE, THE COMMUNIST PARTIES BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE A GROWTH FROM THE POST-WAR INTELLIGENTSIA THAT WERE SEEING IN POST-WAR COMMUNISM THE ROAD TO BECOMING THE RULING POWER IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES.

This rhymed with their own ambitions and the objective pull of the new stage of capitalism—state capitalism—which meant they neither needed "capital" nor a proletarian mass base, which, in the underdeveloped economies, was very tiny in any case. An administrative mentality would suffice. "Anti-Westernism" would get aid from Russia. In the case of the Middle East, though Russia originally voted for the establishment of Israel, it soon, in and out of Russia, began its own anti-Israel campaign. "Rootless cosmopolitans," was the byword in Stalin's Russia and became popular in the Middle East.

All politics in post-war Middle East revolves around Israel's establishment. Most regimes had been toppled because of their defeat in the Palestine War. Egypt alone tried to make its revolution not only against Israel but for the Egyptian masses. It embarked on a Land Reform Act. It is impossible, however, to carry through a social revolution "from above." Nasser's method of stopping midway in the revolution, continued with his class-collaborationist way, both with the capitalists and the feudal potentates he had just displaced as ruler, and adding to the opposition to Israel, the question of industrialization as "above classes." This is the reason why Sputnik No. 1 is a much greater magnet in the Middle East for Russia than the brutal crushing of the Hungarian Revolution ever became a symbol against Russia.

The checkered role of so-called "revolutionaries" can be seen also among the Middle Eastern Socialists. Thus the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, BA'ATH, came about as a union of two separate factions in 1953. The history of both these groups goes back to the early '40s; they were pro-fascist and two of its present leaders—Aqram Hourani and Colonel Afif al-Bisra—took part in the abortive pro-Axis Rashid Ali revolt in Baghdad in 1941. One of these groups was originally headed by Michel Aflaq, a leading member of the Syrian CP. When

the Axis failed they shifted sides. I don't mean to say there is no kind of "socialism." One must remember that the workingman's total disillusionment with private capitalism was so complete that even Fascism called itself national socialism. This bastard socialism is what characterized Peron's Argentina, and the Middle East. In their national attempts to gain independence, they have stood for agrarian reform. Their socialism never was international. They do not permit the Israeli Socialist Party to sit in any congress in which they participate.

The anti-Semitism of Russian Communism in the post-war period became an open phenomenon in Stalin's last days not only because of the birth of Israel and the greater room for maneuver that Russia achieved by being for the more numerous Arab countries. Above all, it became an open phenomenon because, in fighting the true internationalism of Russia's returning soldiers and intellectuals, Stalin had to contend with the irreversible fact of post-war history, that state-capitalism was a world phenomenon. If "the West," as well as Russia could now plan and, according to Varga, would thus be able to avoid the type of depressions that doomed private capitalism, then Stalin, in his aim to dominate the world, faced a mightier competitor than he was willing to contemplate. He thereupon turned to a sort of new type of "social fascism" "third period" adventurism. It is this the Stalinist bureaucracy could no longer stand, and welcomed Stalin's demise.

What Khrushchev achieved with his "deStalinization" and "war is not inevitable" doctrine at the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party was the recognition that there were "other paths to socialism." That is to say, the neutral zone, the underdeveloped countries, the national revolutions, the "progressive bourgeoisie"—all these would unite with a single objective—anti Western imperialism.

In the case of the present coup in Syria, Khrushchev may be confronted with a divided Middle East. As he was shown during the Iraqi revolution this is coming faster than his policy for all national subversion would prefer. The CPs there are too weak to rule without the "co-leadership" of the ruling classes as presently constituted. But then even a Khrushchev cannot have everything he wants. The jockeying for position in the UN will pale before that in the Middle East over the next period.

—Raya
The most perceptive books on the Middle East are those written by Walter Z. Laqueur. *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* is the best of these. *The Middle East in Transition*, edited by Laqueur has a good contribution, "The National Front," by A. Bennigsen. John H. Kautsky's *Moscow and the Communist Party of India* throws valuable light on the relationship of Mao and Stalin. Also Nasser's *Philosophy of The Revolution* should be read.