

Arab Socialism and Its Parties:

I—The Socialists Of the Arab World

By CLOVIS MAKSOU

Progressive and socialist groups in Arab countries have many times been dismissed by some of our Western comrades as negligible or "groups of fanatics masquerading under socialist slogans." The reason for such dismissal of Arab regenerating forces is due primarily to the fact that many powerful groups had a vested interest in identifying Arabs as backward, illiterate, serene and emotionally immature people. Western military strategists classify us as "unreliable."

Let me say at the outset that our backwardness, poverty, illiteracy and all other aspects of the tragedy we live and experience in our everyday life cannot and should not be causes of disillusionment. They are not for us causes for despair. The social and economic conditions are a challenge to all thinking Arabs. To deny the fact that there is definite and scientific response is to deny the Arab people from having their case objectively presented.

The Arab human situation with all its pathetic symptoms and all its frustrations is in fact—what may appear to many conservatives a paradox—the dynamism of the Arab situation. Arabs are not lethargic, as many think they are. The will to change the rotten conditions under which they live is evident. This will for radical changes is what constitutes the dynamics of the revolutionary situation in the Arab world.

But dynamics cannot have an operational value, and therefore no effect, unless they are dialectically integrated with a directive. And it is in the battle for the direction of the Arab social revolution that the socialists play a very prominent, if not a dominant role.

I shall not, however, deny that the competition is keen and follows the same pattern with different emphasis that it does in all countries. The Communists on the one hand, trying to subvert the revolutionary will to Soviet designs, and neo-fascists and military dictatorship attempting to pervert the revolution with popular slogans and apparent reforms which conceal the truth of the situation, are constantly hammering on democratic socialists hoping that they will crumble before totalitarian logic.

But this repudiation of nostalgic and sensational nationalism which, in the given Arab circumstances, constitutes an attractive force for the politically immature, and the general repudiation of communist doctrine, which also is a theoretical magnet for the politically impatient and the intellectual frustrates desperately seeking recognition and the acquisition of a sophisticated air—the repudiation of these two forms of totalitarianism does not mean at all that socialism is easily acceptable. It is preferable to state that the intellectual climate as well as the socio-economic conditions are more readily disposed to accept socialism than any of the other movements. Socialism in the Arab world has the status of the "most favored ideology."

Growth of the Movement

Why did socialism attract such a great number of adherents that today every Arab socialist party in the Fertile Crescent area—namely, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan—constitutes the largest and most effective opposition to the present regimes? and though still in the embryonic stages, socialist organizers have infiltrated in the oil fields of the closed society of the Arab peninsula? . . .

By probing into the causes of the rejection of totalitarianism, a group of dedicated democrats and liberals came to certain concrete results. The probe went further into the causes of the failure of European socialism. The answer they found was not only a vision of a new Arab society based on equality and justice for all, but a messianic zeal to be fulfilled in the Arab contribution toward restoring hope in a world socialist movement. This contribution, brought to its maximum effectiveness, was the mood and the hope which instilled Asiatic socialism with the vitality and genuineness it now has.

It is by this new spirit of Asia—and the Arab world is an integral part of Asia—unfolding itself through a synthesis of serene contemplation and revolutionary action, that the restoration of the liberal spirit of Europe—and America is part of Europe—free from the fetters of irrational involvement that Europe finds itself in—is possible. There will be no advanced, economically rehabilitated Asia without Europe, and there will be no true Europe without the spirit of Asia.

This universality of purpose is the real challenge to socialism today. This universal outlook would have to transcend political opportunism and realization of short-term objectives at the cost of long term ideals.

Amidst such psychological and political atmosphere, men like Kamel Jadurji, Kasen Hasan in Iraq, Michael Aflak, Akram Hourani, Saleb el-Bitaur in Syria, Kamal Jumblatt, Fouad Rizk in Lebanon, Abdulla Rumiour, Abdulla Maivas, Husno Khoffash, Ameen Shoucair in Jordan and hundreds of other young men and women started the organization of socialist parties in their respective countries. The parties are relatively new. Ever since they were organized they have undergone and experienced all kinds of persecution, imprisonment, banishment.

In Lebanon one year after the formation of the socialist party, three of its members had to die by the bullets of the police in the now well-known Barook where the party was holding an election rally. Our deputies were harangued out of Parliament; simple members were deprived of their jobs in factories or mills if they did not abandon the party. Money was spent without account to defeat socialist candidates and

On these two facing pages, we introduce our readers to what is perhaps the least known socialist movement in the world, at least as far as American socialists are concerned: the socialist parties of the Arab world.

Among the leading people of the Arab socialists, there are undoubtedly few who are as qualified as Clovis Maksoud to act as spokesman for his comrades in the pages of an English-language socialist organ.

Comrade Maksoud is a member of the Executive of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon, led by Kamal Jumblatt. And as far as we know, it is the Lebanese party which is the best developed of the Arab socialist movements, both ideologically and organizationally.

Among Lebanese socialists, Comrade Maksoud is especially well-placed to do this job for LABOR ACTION readers. He is at present residing in Britain, where he is engaged in social and theoretical studies and in improving acquaintance with the Western labor and socialist movements. As a reader of LABOR ACTION, Comrade Maksoud is also no stranger to our point of view and interests.

Of the three articles by Clovis Maksoud published here, the second and third are contributions to LABOR ACTION. The first is the main portion of a speech delivered by Comrade Maksoud at a recent conference of the British-Asian Socialist Fellowship in London.

We present this material by Comrade Maksoud for the information and interest of our readers, without any evaluation of our own on its content or its point of view on most of the problems of Arab socialism which it treats. However, on one point particularly we are interested in carrying discussion with Comrade Maksoud further; it is one which we have many times analyzed in our own press. This is the problem of relations between Israel and the Arab world and their respective policies. A brief note on this question is appended on the next page. We hope to hear further from Comrade Maksoud on this and other questions.—Ed.

all kinds of pressure were put on the party to disrupt it.

Despite all this, the membership has increased since 1949 threefold, the circulation of the Lebanese socialist paper has more than doubled since 1951. We have elected three members of parliament and helped elect five others in a parliament of 44. We have organized the Electrical Union, the Transport Workers and the Carpenters Union and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. In six of our village branches, consumers' cooperatives are functioning very well. One marketing cooperative in another village branch has proven a successful experiment. A health insurance for party members and their families has been operating successfully for more than a year.

There is a great deal to be done yet. Mistakes have been committed, and the financing of the party is inadequate. An educational program is necessary if the branches in the villages are to be brought up to standards set by the Doctrinal Commission of the party.

In Syria, where today the military dictatorship of Shishakly, has imprisoned the socialist leaders, the party is very active underground. The party thanks to the popularity of Michel Aflak, has an almost 90 per cent majority of the students and professors of Syrian colleges, and university members. The major contribution of the party in Syria to Arab socialism has been

II—The Rise of Lebanon's Socialist Party

The date May 4 marks one of the great events in the political and intellectual developments of Lebanon. On that date in 1949, the Progressive Socialist Party was formed. The significance of the party can be judged only by the impact it has made on the political scene in Lebanon and in the Arab world.

The date, however, does not mean that socialist thought had no strong adherents among various sections of the population before 1949. There were socialist elements (wings) in many of the various Lebanese parties. It was a natural result of the confined structure of the traditional parties that these various socialist tendencies should have difficulty in achieving unity.

Lebanon, being half Christian and half Moslem, was bound to have political parties along religious lines. The French Mandate, operating on the conventional policy of "divide and rule," encouraged such parties, and the political life in Lebanon revolved along confessional patterns.

In this framework, nationalist parties were emerging. Their professed aim was to diminish religious confessionalism and integrate the population to a sense of national belonging. This was undoubtedly a progressive step. But then the issue arose as to what was the nationality of the Lebanese? Some nationalist parties maintained that Lebanon is an integral part of an Arab nation. Others maintained that it was a part of a Syrian nation and still others insisted that Lebanon is a nation with a specific "mission" and with certain characteristics that distinguishes the Lebanese from an Arab or a "Syrian."

A debate along these lines followed and the nationality issue dominated the intellectual scene for a long period of time.

In the meantime, the economic issues and the need for

the wealth of publications it has put out. The illegal years since its formation in 1944 outnumber those when it functioned legally. But despite this, it has elected 7 members of parliament in the last legislative body Syria had and Michel Aflak and Akram Hourani became twice ministers in coalition cabinets. The peasants in Homs, Hama and Jebel Druze regions constitute, besides the students of Aleppo and Damascus, the bulk of the party. Many young army officers are secret members, and this is what keeps the Shishakly regime worried and uneasy.

In Jordan, where the party is not recognized, it has elected two members of parliament despite the efforts of Glubb Pasha and the Jordanian government. The leaders are very popular so that it is difficult to restrain any of their activities. The party controls the trade unions, and has effectively blocked Communist infiltration into refugee camps. As in Syria the student body and the government clerks are amongst its most fervent members.

In Iraq, the party concentrates mostly on political education and trade-union organization. The organs of the party, Sout el-Ahali, etc., are banned. Recently the prime minister of Iraq wrote to "Mr. Kamel Jadurji, president of the dissolved Social Democratic Party" to inform him that the paper is suspended. In the last election the party had 16 members of parliament.

For a "Third Force"

This is a brief sketch of the various Arab socialist parties. What are the policies of these parties and what is the driving force that makes them capable of a successful mission to regenerate their people?

Arab and Asiatic socialists do not conceive of their doctrine as a compromise between two opposing systems, namely capitalism and Communism. They do not parenthetically think on Communism as an "extreme form of socialism," a notion that saps many socialists of their sense of integrity and which imbues them with a feeling of inferiority complex. Arab socialists reject the dissectionist school that characterizes some social democratic parties. In other words idealism and realism are not two separate identities. Theory and practice are not different things. Domestic affairs and foreign policy are not two distinct departments. Politics and principles are not anathema to one another.

We have conceived of socialism as an integral ideology, an all embracing philosophy of life. This integral totality is no substitute for a religion. One of the basic tenets of socialism, one of the constituent elements of this philosophy of life, is the concept of freedom—freedom not in the abstract or limited sense, but freedom as the climate that would allow the creative potentialities of man to be channelled in a progressive and co-operative path. This is in contradistinction to the present trend of dehumanization that we witness today as a result of the total dominance of the machine as a regulating force in human relationships. . . .

In this world that is divided into two antagonistic blocs, passionately involved in the pursuance of war policies that will endanger our very existence, it is hoped that this Fellowship, broadened in the future to bring about more organizations and wider geographical representation would prove to be the vehicle of detachment and objectivity much needed for a sane approach to world problems. I see nothing more fitting to inspire a Third Force Movement than British socialism and Asiatic dynamism. Our only hope is that we can contribute our share to such a worthy cause.

It is the paradox of our time that a Third Force, a further disintegration of the world, is the only way to world unity. Let us hope that socialists would not fail this generation and the future one. Socialists will succeed. They must succeed.

social and political readjustment became pressing in the war and post-war years. They were making the thinking elements in these various groups realize that such preoccupation with the issue of nationality was keeping the intellectuals of Lebanon from assuming effective leadership. In the complex world such issues had no relevance to the masses' desires and aspirations.

The dissidents from these various traditional parties met for months in order to discuss a program that would not only be a rallying point for them, but which would have sufficient revolutionary zeal to broaden the political consciousness of large segments of the population who were still apathetic and whose apathy was instrumental in perpetuating religious bigotry and reactionary dominance.

In its embryonic stages, the party had undergone several doctrinal difficulties. Though it was agreed that the issue of nationalism can no longer occupy all our political energies, it was still no easy task to determine the framework of socialist action. Was the scope of our party to be confined to Lebanon? or (as many maintained) was the effectiveness of socialism in Lebanon contingent on its realization throughout a politically integrated Arab world?

Another issue that was bound to come up was whether the Progressive Socialist Party would conceive of socialism simply as a political and economic solution to political and economic problems, or whether our socialism was to be a philosophy of life and an all-embracing doctrine? Disputes on these issues were very bitter. Many who worked for a socialist party left the party before it was launched formally. The others realized the importance of these doctrinal questions and the need for their clarification.

The presence of a corrupt government and nepotism

A Spokesman Explains Its Ideas

and persecution against elementary rights, however, made the postponement of the discussion of such doctrinal matters imperative. The immediate danger to elementary economic and political rights necessitated the direct mobilization of the masses behind a socialist vanguard. Time and experience were the guarantees that doctrinal and theoretical issues would be resolved on a more mature level.

On May 4, 1949, the Progressive Socialist Party was formed. Its activities were centered on agitation and building up an organized machinery in the cities and the villages. In the elections of 1951, the party had reached such a degree of influence that three of its members were elected to Parliament.

Then the party led the mobilization of public opinion against the Bechara el-Khoury regime. Despite the fact that later on many leaders and political parties were instrumental in bringing the September 1952 revolt to a successful end, no objective observer can deny that was if not for the initiative of the PSP the revolt would not have materialized so soon.

The *Anba*, organ of the PSP, was the mouthpiece of popular discontent. Credit for ridding the people of Lebanon from the fear-complex they suffered must be given to the article "The Foreigners Brought Them [the Government] In, Let the People Kick Them Out," by Kamal Jumblatt, chairman of the PSP, who comes from a noble family and is also a Druze leader; to the articles of Elie Moukarzel, editor of *Anba*; and to many leading editorials written by the *Anba* staff.

In the meantime, articles on the Third Force and articles by Fouad Rizk, PSP vice-chairman, on "The State We Want" were setting the pattern for future theoretical formulation. A doctrinal commission was conducting several discussion groups.

Teams of young organizers and propagandists were touring the villages explaining to the peasants the principles of the cooperative system. In Btiknay and Aytat, producers cooperatives were formed. The Ashrafieh branch of the party is in the process of establishing a marketing cooperative.

The party attracted a large segment of the intellectuals, doctors and lawyers. Young socialists like Jibrán Majdalany, Antoine Khallouf, Kassem Emad and Iskandar Gibril and Antoine Batlouin have initiated several constructive projects for the party. Libraries in the branches were installed and lectures were conducted. A health insurance program was started by Dr. Robert Karam and the Women's Branch of the party.

Activity among trade unions increased. Much credit is due to the energy of Fared Jibrán and other socialists with a trade-union background. In the various districts many socialists achieved prominence on the municipal and other administrative levels. Khalil Kairalla, Anwar Rasoul, Said Abou el Hosn are among the many.

Thus it can be seen that although our major efforts

went into the struggle against the corruption and nepotism of the el-Khoury regime and into the political struggle that remained under the Chamoun regime, the party kept its pace along all fields of socialist endeavors.

After the victory over Bechara el-Khoury and the installation of Camille Chamoun as president, the prestige of the party rose with traditionalists in Lebanon. In the meantime, the leadership of the party refused to join the Cabinet unless certain reforms were to be initiated. *The Anba* stated that "the purpose of the revolt was not to substitute one president for another, but was to remove all obstacles to economic and political reforms that will insure full employment, fundamental rights, progressive system of taxation and the punishment of those who have used their influence for personal enrichment."

Experience with Opportunism

The prestige with the traditionalists led to an overflow of opportunists to the ranks of the PSP. They succeeded in inculcating the party with certain ideas of "practicalism" foreign to the basic premises of socialism and foreign to the traditions of the PSP. But it was evident that there would be no retreat from the dynamism of our program, and opportunist elements began to drop as fast as they joined in.

This posed before us several organizational problems and new criteria for membership were enforced. Our political allies were leaving the national front they formed with us. Their support of the reforms they agreed upon was becoming lukewarm in preparation for final withdrawal. Questions of the political alliances of the PSP were coming to the forefront. Mistakes of the past were giving us good and severe lessons. It was a mistake on our part to accept lip-service support to our program as indicative of political reliability on the part of an ally or of a member.

In the last five years many situations have radically changed. Many debatable issues ceased to be debatable. Socialism in Lebanon cannot succeed unless it is integrated with socialist development on the Arab scale. Our experience, our sufferings, our successes as well as our failures have given us a depth of understanding of the various issues that make the socialists of Lebanon, along with other Arab socialists, the regenerating force that will enable us to contribute to world peace and give hope to the Arabs in a better future.

Toward this end the PSP has attended all Asian and other international socialist conferences. Many of its leaders have visited European and other socialist parties. They did so in order to pool their own experience and learn from others. They have done this with the firm conviction that socialism is the unifying force of the East and West. That unity as such is truth and happiness.

III—Arab Nationalism & the Israeli Problem

What is known as the "Arab World" is in reality one Arab nation. Geographic unity, economic and political interests, the community of language, culture, history and aspirations are factors which make the Arabs one nation. The awakening of the Arabs has constantly been geared toward the unity and independence of their nation. For this reason they fought on the side of the Allies during World War I [see MacMahon-Hussain correspondence].

The secret treaty of 1916 known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which led to the division of the Arab nation into several states, constituted a betrayal of Arab national aspirations. The function of the Arab socialists is therefore not confined to social and economic regeneration of the Arab masses, but is to include the achievement of Arab unity.

Imperialists and reactionaries have acquired a vested interest in the continuation of the present state of affairs. In fighting for national unity the Arab socialists are somewhat unique. No socialist movement anywhere was faced with a torn-up notion, the unity of which fell almost exclusively upon their shoulders.

In view of this situation we find that the socialists in the Arab World are also nationalists, although not in the classical sense. In our view nationalism is contrary to socialism when it is aggressive, exclusive, acquisitive and self-contained. Nationalism is un-socialist when national exaltation becomes a creed or a conception of the Absolute. Nationalism is progressive, necessary and an integral part of socialist theory when it is anti-imperialist and gives a rallying force of unity to a national entity disrupted by the schemes of closed diplomacy and power politics.

Socialist adherence to the nationalist movement facilitates the path of cooperative rebuilding of society in the aftermath of unity and freedom. It also instills the nationalist movement with immunity from becoming narrow and dogmatic, a situation that has led to the growth of fascist and neo-fascist regimes in recent history.

It is our firm conviction that if we act as the vanguard of the nationalist movement we will shorten the nationalist phase of our country's development. We will prevent the movement from falling to the leadership of vocal anti-democratic groups. And by our example we will enlist the non-socialist elements to help in achieving our final objectives.

Another unique problem which faces the Arab Socialist is Zionism. I shall not deal with all the aspects of the problem. The basic difficulty lies not so much in its complexity as in the solid jungle of legend which has grown up around it.

Due to the immense barrage of propaganda the Zionists have put forth, the world has been looking at Palestine mainly through Zionist spectacles and has unconsciously acquired the habit of reasoning on Zionist premises. To expound the Arab case would entail not only the assertion of historical truths but also exposing the fallacies and pseudo-facts that have been advanced. This alone would require a whole series of articles. Here I shall point out a few of the major objections we hold as socialists to Zionism:

(1) **The existence of Israel lessens the chances for a successful elimination of prejudice and anti-Semitism from the rest of the world. In fact it is a retreat from facing the problem at its roots. As such it becomes a *modus vivendi* between the forces of anti-Semitism and the victimized Jews. It is an escapist compromise with bigotry and reaction. Arab Socialists think of the Jews as a religious group, and they will fight any discrimination or persecution against them in Arab countries or abroad. But the very existence of Israel frustrates our efforts instead of contributing to them.**

(2) Zionism is a movement that seeks to make religion the rallying factor of a nation. As such it is self-contained, mystical and intolerant of other religions or races (cf. the treatment of Arab minorities in Israel). It becomes aggressive and violent (cf. the organized massacres at Dair Yasseen, Qibia and Nahalleen). It is in addition an expansionist movement (cf. Israel's defiance of the proposal to internationalize Jerusalem). Dr. Nahum Goldmann stated at the World Jewish Congress in Geneva that "Israel is unique among nations, there is no other state where 90 per cent of its people live outside it." This, I submit, is the driving ideology of Zionism. The implications can be drawn by the reader and perhaps will make our attitude toward Zionism more understandable.

(3) The legal basis for Israel (the Balfour Declaration) is, from a socialist point of view, amoral. In accepting such a legal basis, one is condoning a movement to establish a 'national home' in the home of another people against their will and without their consent.

(4) The presence of Israel as a state constitutes such a threat to the Arabs that all their attention is diverted away from foreign policy. The true interest of the Arabs in international affairs lies in pursuing a vigorous and positive neutralism, but the local area tensions prevent the effective expression of this interest and block the materialization of a unified Third Force movement in Asia. This movement is the only possible path toward peace. By obstructing it, Israel acts as a center of war and imperialism.

Toward a Discussion: Anti-Zionist or Anti-Israel?

Naturally, Comrade Maksoud's relatively brief statement of an Arab socialist point of view on Israel does not answer all the questions we would like to put on the subject, but perhaps discussion can be fostered by making a few comments which suggest themselves immediately—not through misunderstanding, we hope.

Comrade Maksoud is undoubtedly largely justified in remarking that one of the difficulties in discussing Israel and Zionism is the mass of encrusted "legend" around it and the strong influence of Zionist propaganda in shaping the views and opinions even of socialists who do not think of themselves as Zionists. We have pointed that out with regard to this country too. In fact, we can say quite confidently that LABOR ACTION is the only socialist organ in America (and probably Britain can be thrown in too) which has devoted a fairly large amount of attention to a Marxist socialist attack on Zionism, both in its ideological aspects and in its concrete policies as acted out in Israel. That is worth pointing out to define our common ground with Maksoud.

That common ground further includes agreement with respect to the expansionist nature of the Zionist ideology which dominates the rulers of Israel, which represents one side of the threat to peace in the Near East, and which is part of the drive behind the "organized massacres" of which the Israelis have been guilty, as well as of the scandalous policy which Israel follows with respect to its Arab minority.

We therefore are among the few socialist groups which can discuss this question with Arab socialists as thorough anti-Zionists.

But we also think it is important to make the simple distinction between being anti-Zionist and anti-Israel, just as we insist on the fundamental importance of the distinction between being anti-Stalinist and anti-Russian.

It is around this part of the question that there may be a substantial difference of view which we would be highly interested in discussing further.

A DIFFERENT POLICY ON ISRAEL

At any rate that is what is suggested to us by Comrade Maksoud's repeated references to "the very existence of Israel." Although he writes in terms of opposition to Zionism, the sharp nub of some of his arguments seems also to point to the conclusion that the aim of legitimate Arab nationalism must be to wipe Israel out as a state. We do not know whether Comrade Maksoud would actually go that far, but surely it is a point to be clarified since the present operating policy of the Arab regimes is indeed directed to this end.

Our own point of attack is centered on the Zionist-chauvinist policies of the Israeli government and leaders—to be sure, a policy which, we also know, is shared to one degree or another by a large majority of its people. Our hope is the growth of those small tendencies now existing in Israel which reject these policies, policies which are not merely the outcome of mistakes or malevolence but which flow from the Zionist ideology itself. We look to the disintegration of the reactionary Zionist illusions among the people under the battering of experience, just as we look in the case of other countries to a change in the politics of the people in the direction of socialism under the same battering. But on no account can we advocate the destruction of a state by foreign regimes (which, moreover, themselves represent a reactionary class) because we condemn the policies of that state.

We advocate that Israel cease to look upon itself as a Jewish ghetto in the Near East and move toward being in truth the home of two peoples living in harmony, integrated into what is after all a predominantly Arab Near East. We find missing in Comrade Maksoud's brief statement, moreover, any criticism of the reactionary role which (we believe) has been played by the Arab ruling classes—and not only the Zionists—in exacerbating Israeli-Arab relations.

We would like to say the same thing to Arab workers that we have often enough directed to the Israeli socialists: only insofar as you fight against the reactionary foreign policies of your own governments can you hope to appeal successfully to the workers on the other side of the border to oppose their leaders' policies. Unfortunately, on both sides the workers are stuffed with the idea that the other side contains no one but hopeless chauvinists. A beginning must be made in breaking this vicious circle, and genuine socialists have done such jobs before.

Such, at any rate, is the point of view which we would like to discuss with Arab socialist comrades.—Ed.

A Classic Marxist Study

**Karl Kautsky's
FOUNDATIONS OF
CHRISTIANITY**

\$3.50

LABOR ACTION BOOK SERVICE
114 West 14 Street, New York City