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NON-RULING CPS: Sudan

23 July 1971

SUDANESE COMMUNIST COMPLEXITIES

Summary: The July 22 counter-coup which reinstated General Numeiry as President of the Sudan has erased the short-lived prospects of the Sudanese Communist Party for influence in the national government. The following report reviews developments within the Sudanese Communist Party during the Numeiry government's first two years in office, focusing on the inter-party split which occurred over the issue of cooperation with Numeiry's pro-Arab-unity government, and on relations between the party and that government.

The Marxist-oriented coup which catapulted leading proponents of the Sudanese Communist Party into the national and international limelight at the beginning of this week was reversed on July 22, and with it the communists hope of preserving their party identity in power in the Sudan. One of President Numeiry's first statements after being returned to power was to the effect that "these communists are traitors"; he hoped "every member of the armed forces and every member of the people will be with us against every renegade who belongs to the communist party." (1)

The definition of "a communist" is, however, a difficult matter in the Sudan. As the Italian communist daily l'Unita pointed out in a candidly confused article on July 21,

... not all its [the CP's] militants and leaders are known as such. This is why one often speaks of personalities being "close to the communists" or "friends of the communists" without any further details It is therefore not always easy (or permissible) to distinguish between socialists and communists."

A major reason for this muddled situation is provided by the course of inter-party developments in the SCP during the last two years. In addition, the ambivalent attitude of the Numeiry government toward the country's communists has not contributed to clarifying things for the outside observer.

Prohibition Brings Problems

During the last two years, the Sudanese communist party has been on a slow boat to impuissance. At the time of the May 1969 coup which first brought Numeiry's Revolutionary Command Council to power, the Sudanese CP--the largest and best organized on the African continent and long a stronghold of Sudanese intellectuals -- wielded considerable influence in national affairs, in spite of the (largely theoretical) prohibition which the junta had slapped on it. Several of its members held top cabinet posts, and SCP Secretary General Abd al-Khaliq Mahjub, in an interview with the Soviet magazine Za Rubezhom claimed that "the present government is a coalition of anti-imperialist elements -- Democrats and Communists." (2) However, almost before the ink was dry on this statement, Numeiry began to take steps indicating that the Communists were in fact participating in his government solely as individuals and not as members of the pro-Moscow SCP. In the fall of 1969, a sharp anti-Communist campaign was launched in the national press and later that year Prime Minister Babakr Awadallah was replaced, after having said, during a visit to East Germany, that the Sudanese Revolution could not progress without the cooperation of the Communists. (3) The Sudanese government's deportation to Egypt of Secretary General Mahjub in April 1970 was a further indication of the growing tendency to enforce repressive measures against the SCP. The Party's Central Committee reacted strongly to Mahjub's deportation, issuing a statement (4) calling the arrest of the Secretary General "a hostile action against the Communist Party" and saying that it "destroyed the basis of alliance, coordination, and cooperation among the revolutionary groups."

The high-ranking Communists in the Numeiry government did not, however, resign their positions in protest. This odd situation -- Communists participating in a government which had arrested and exiled their leader -- was, in fact, a reflection of the dissension which had long been brewing in the CP over the issue of cooperation with the left-nationalist junta. In August 1970, it was to come to a final split within the Central Committee.

The Matter of Dissolution

One of the objectives of the Numeiry government was participation in the proposed four-nation Arab federation, and one of the prerequisites for participation would have been the establishment of a Socialist Union within the Sudan, patterned after the Egyptian political body of the same name. The Revolutionary Command Council approached the SCP on this matter, pointing out that the regime's Charter called for "the setting up [of] the political organization within whose ambit should be incorporated all of the forces of the Revolution. . ." (5) The Mahjub leadership was strongly opposed to the idea of abandoning the Party's identification in favor of a Socialist Union, and convened a special Party Conference in August 1970 to review the matter. (6)

By a four-to-one majority the Conference opted against dissolution, and resolved to pursue the formation of a National Democratic Front, presumably to be led by the Communists. In the political resolution passed at the Conference, "The Present Political Situation and the Tactics of the Communist Party of the Sudan," (7) the majority position noted that "a necessary prerequisite. . . for the very existence of the regime itself, is the complete abandonment of all anti-Communist policies." Twelve of the Conference representatives apparently felt differently, however. Undaunted by the possibility of a "Leninist" condemnation of "splitting activities" from the Soviet Union (which was, after all, supporting the Numeiry government and, by Egyptian example, its quest for the dissolution of the SCP in favor of a Socialist Union), they bolted the Conference and formed their own party. The Italian CP organ, Rinascita tells the story thus:

Twelve members of the CP broke away to form a second Communist Party under the leadership of Ahmed Suleiman, former Sudanese ambassador in Moscow and now Minister of Industry, and of Muavia Ibrahim, present Minister of Labor. It is this second party which is particularly represented within the Numeiry cabinet, although the Minister of Southern Affairs, Joseph Garang, continued to belong to the original Communist Party. (8)

From Split to Coup

In the ensuing months, the government continued its anti-SCP campaign, arresting Secretary General Mahjub (who had since been repatriated from Egypt) in December and, on February 12, 1971, issuing a promise, delivered by Numeiry personally, to crush the Communist Party. Accusing the Communists of such crimes as sabotage, opposition to Arab unity and opposition to "the revolution" in general, Numeiry said they had no place in his government and called on the population to "destroy the communist movement." Later, a member of the government softened the blow somewhat by distinguishing between good and bad Communists; "enlightened Communists" were indeed welcome in the revolution, an apparent reference to the members of the "second Communist Party" still in government, who must obviously have felt deeply offended by Numeiry's sweeping reference to "all Communists." There were also various reports of the presence in the Sudan of a Soviet delegation, apparently attempting to mediate among the two communist factions and the Numeiry government. (9)

Then, on 30 June 1971, the director general of the Sudanese Ministry of the Interior made a statement that SCP Secretary General Mahjub "managed to escape from his detention camp last night." (9) By July 20, the British Communist Party organ Morning Star was able to report that Mahjub "is now working with the Party underground," presumably against the government's planned "dissolution of all trade unions, peasant leagues, professional bodies, cultural associations, friendship movements, including the Peace Council," and its stepped-up plans for the formation of a Socialist Union, as reported in the same article. It is generally assumed that this week's coup was

related more or less directly to this "underground work." Thursday's counter-coup and the concomitant crackdown on Sudan's communists indicate, however, that Mahjub's days at liberty may well be numbered. The Sudanese Communist Party--or at least the Mahjub majority portion of it--began the week with high hopes for its national future. At week's end, its fate appears to have taken a perilously different course.

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- (1) UPI, 22 July 1971.
- (2) Reported by Radio Moscow in Arabic, 11 August 1969.
- (3) RFE/Mishlawi Special, Beirut, 26 April 1971.
- (4) Published on 16 April 1970 in An-Nida, Beirut.
- (5) Cited by Joan Shaw, "Crisis in the Sudan," in Marxism Today, April 1971.
- (6) Reported in Morning Star, 30 April 1971.
- (7) See footnote 5.
- (8) Ruth First, "Radiografia sociale del regime sudanese," in Rinascita, 25 June 1971.
- (9) RFE/Mishlawi Special, Beirut, 15 April 1971.
- (10) Omdurman Radio Domestic, 30 June 1971.