

RUSS - MOSCOW SACRIFICES THE SUDANESE COMMUNISTS

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The strong criticism of Sudanese Communists, by a leading member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, for attempting to overthrow the régime of President Ja'far an-Nimeri, constitutes a reversal of the previous East European and Soviet line towards the events of July, 1971. The comments were made by Vasil Bilak, a Presidium Member and Central Committee Secretary of the CPCz with special responsibility for relations with fraternal parties, at a closed session of the party Central Committee on October 21, 1971, and have only recently come to light. They were carried by the Sudanese newspaper As-Sahafa (reported by Cmdurman Radio on February 15, 1972) and by the French newspaper Le Monde on February 12.

Bilak claimed that the then Secretary-General of the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), Abd al-Khaliq Mahgoub, had "begun to prepare a military coup d'état of which neither we nor the other fraternal parties knew anything". The coup had been badly planned and had lacked the support of the masses. It had been directed against "the progressive officers of Nimeri" who had overthrown a government representing feudalism and big bourgeois interests. Le Monde further quoted Bilak as saying that "It would not have been wise willingly to abandon positions acquired with difficulty in Sudan or elsewhere. We would only have been playing into the hands of imperialism..."

According to the reports, Bilak accused Mahgoub of a negative attitude towards the Federation of Arab Republics, comprising Syria, Libya and Egypt and which Sudan intends to join. The Communist countries - particularly the Soviet Union - have extensive interests in Egypt and substantial investments in Syria and Sudan, and these are no doubt among the "positions acquired with difficulty". But the Federation has proved basically anti-Communist. In May, 1971, President Sadat of Egypt purged the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the country's only legal political organisation, of left-wing elements led by Ali Sabri, the former Vice-President, and by other political figures who were thought to be sympathetic to Moscow. Libya's President Qadhafi recently denounced the Soviet Union as an "imperialist State" because of its rôle in the Indo-Pakistani war.

In Sudan, meanwhile, the question of Federation membership forced relations with the SCP to crisis point. Originally, the party had helped Nimeri to power, but the President's wish to join the Federation presented

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the SCP (and all other political parties) with the prospect of dissolution, so that members could join Nimeri's new Sudanese Socialist Union, modelled on Egypt's ASU. In 1965, the Egyptian Communist Party had been encouraged by Moscow to go into voluntary dissolution to enable members to join the ASU; but while the Egyptian party had always been small and ineffective, the SCP was the largest and best organised Communist Party in Africa and the Arab World. It resisted attempts to force its dissolution.

How far the official leadership of the SCP was involved in the coup of July 19, 1971, will probably never be known. The insurgent régime lasted only three days, and after the counter-coup which returned Nimeri to power, all the leading left-wing figures of the Sudan - including Mahgoub - were executed. The Soviet Union and the other East European Communist countries, which had previously condoned Nimeri's treatment of the Sudanese Communists in the interests of maintaining good relations with the government in power for strategic reasons, reacted strongly. The Soviet news agency Tass, on July 27, expressed fears for the fate of Mahgoub and condemned the "hysterical anti-Communist campaign" in the Sudanese Press and radio. When the executions began, Nimeri was attacked by the Soviet Union, East Germany, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia.

On July 29, the day after Mahgoub's death, the Czechoslovak party newspaper Rude Pravo published an obituary and an extensive extract from Mahgoub's speech at the International Conference of Communist Parties held in Moscow in 1969. The obituary said:

"Our resolute condemnation of the repressions which can only bring joy to world reactionary forces, our condemnation of injustice and of the campaign against the democratic forces in Sudan is nothing else than an expression of our sincere interest in the internal and external strength of the anti-imperialist front in Sudan and in the rest of the Arab world, which the Communists of the whole world have always supported".

Protest messages were sent to the Sudanese Embassy in Prague after meetings organised throughout the country. At the subsequent gathering of the Warsaw Pact Powers in the Crimea, the Communist States formed a united front in condemning the "ruthless terror" in Sudan. Bilak's statement in October therefore marks the turning of the wheel full circle in three months.

Under the Dubcek régime, Bilak was a member of the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and was also First Secretary of the Slovak CP, but he lost the latter position when suspected of collaboration with the Russian-led forces which invaded Czechoslovakia in August, 1968. He never lost his position on the Presidium, however; in November, 1968, he was made a Czechoslovak party Secretary, with special responsibility for inter-party relations. He is now one of the two or three most powerful men in Czechoslovakia and naturally very much Moscow's man in a country still occupied by Soviet forces. There seems little doubt that he was chosen to make Moscow's change of heart known to the world and to administer the stab in the back to the Sudanese Communists.

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