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EGYPT'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIET BLOC

CRU

28 March 1958

Foreign trade data published the other day in Cairo reveals the rapidly rising degree of Egypt's economic dependence on the Communist Bloc. The Bloc accounted last year for LE 121 million, which is more than a third of the country's over-all foreign trade turn-over (LE354 million). The proportion is still larger in exports; more than two fifths of Egyptian exports go to the Bloc. The table below reflects the Communist Bloc's spectacular ascent to the present position, where it has become the principal outlet for Egypt's exports. It will be seen that over the period of five years, the proportion of exports sold to the Communist countries increased nearly fourfold.

	<u>EXPORTS</u>	<u>IMPORTS</u>
1953	12.2	7.1
1954	14.2	5.9
1955	26.7	6.8
1956	34.1	14.4
1957	44.1	18.7

USSR tops the list

The year 1957 will go down in Egypt's economic history as the first in which the Soviet Union took the principal place as a trading partner. Between 1956 and 1957 the Soviet-Egyptian turnover increased four times, reaching about LE 50 million. She thus displaced the United States, whose trade with Egypt amounted in 1957 to only half that volume.

The dramatic change in the Soviet Bloc's position as Egypt's customer is well reflected in the developments in Egyptian cotton trade, that is, in the trade in Egypt's staple commodity. Here again the Soviet Union, for the first time, is reported to be occupying, in the current export year—that is in the export year—starting September 1957—the principal place in the table of buyers. Still as late as 1954, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Western Europe took between them almost three-fifths of exported Egyptian cotton. In the current export season nearly three-fifths of the cotton is taken by the Sino-Soviet Bloc, thus no more one quarter is left for the rest of the world.

Another significant feature of the 1957 development is the decline of Egypt's foreign trade deficit. With LE 11 million it stood at the lowest point ever recorded since the early 'forties. It is a significant indicator showing how the geographical reorientation of trade towards the Communist world restricted Egypt's margin of freedom as an international buyer.

Egyptian export surplus with the Bloc.

The Sino-Soviet Bloc buys consistently more than it delivers. In other words there is a consistent export surplus in Egypt's relations with the Communist

world. In 1957 only less than three fifths of exports to the Soviet Bloc were covered with Egyptian imports (about LE 78 million worth of goods were sold to the Sino-Soviet Bloc against LE 45 million worth of imports). On the other side, the surplus of imports from the non-Communist world amounted to about LE 45 million.

While no precise data is available on the non-commodity items of the balance of payments, it is safe to surmise that a substantial part of the currency earned by Egypt, (i.e. of her export surplus) is earmarked for payment for Soviet and Czechoslovak armament deliveries.

Facing the U.A.R.

In spite of President Nasser's harsh measures taken against the Syrian Communist Party, since the creation of the United Arab Republic, the Soviet Union gives, at least for the time being, the appearance of willingness to implement the aid agreement, which pledges Soviet help to Egypt in the sphere of geological and mineral prospecting, as well as that of mineral engineering, electrical, chemical, textile, food, medicine and light industries, and promises a loan to the tune of LE 61 million, i.e. the equivalent of \$ 175 million, repayable in twelve years, with interest at the rate of 2½ per cent. The agreement has now been ratified and the first group of Soviet experts to be employed in Egypt under this agreement arrived in Cairo last week. Similarly, the USSR is trying to convey the impression that the political changes would not affect her pledge to assist Syria in her economic development with a loan of the same order as that arranged for Egypt (the East German Government too has announced its willingness to go on with its assistance to Syria).

It is clear that the Soviet Union does not want—at least not yet—to explode the story of aid without political strings. At any rate, an early collapse of what is intended to be the display of Soviet altruistic generosity would affect the Soviet political position in the Middle East too gravely to be advisable from the Soviet point of view.

On the other hand, while giving, on the face of it, a warm welcome to the Arab Republic, the Soviet Union shows significant coolness in assisting its unity. It is known that proposals submitted by Colonel Nasser's Government for revision and coordination of the two aid agreements (that is, the agreements stipulating aid for Egypt and Syria) so as to prop up programmes for a speedy integration of the new Republic's economy, have been rejected by the Soviet Union. In other words, in practical terms, the USSR clings to a status quo. Egyptians feel that for lack of Soviet sympathy, the integrating process will have to be put forward until the '60's and this cannot fail to cause concern in Cairo.

Grievances and Disillusions

The Cairo Government has taken some steps to lessen the new, overwhelming supremacy of the Soviet bloc in the Egyptian economy. For some time now, the Egyptian Government has been operating a system of currency discounts and bonuses which secures special benefits to those buyers of Egyptian goods who pay in hard, or generally speaking, transferable currency. But purchases under payments-agreements which stipulate settlement in Egyptian pounds are not covered by this special arrangement. As a result, Western countries are able to buy Egyptian goods more cheaply than Communist countries. It is clear that these arrangements are intended to encourage Western purchases of Egyptian goods and particularly of the principal export commodity, i.e., cotton.

The Egyptian concern is no doubt motivated partly by political considerations, but also partly by risks and disappointments resulting from the Communist grip on Egyptian economy. One of the principal worries on this count is that while gaining gradually a near-monopolistic position in Egypt's trade the Soviet Bloc spoils her markets. As early as 1957, the National Bank of Egypt noted in its Economic Bulletin that "strong rumours were circulating that Egyptian cotton was being re-exported to some countries with a discount of some 20/30 per cent" (vol. X, No. 1, p. 29, English text). These rumours have since been confirmed from various sources. It is clear that in order to secure their stranglehold over Egypt's economy, the Communist countries buy more of Egyptian cotton than they need for their own consumption. Thus, the Egyptians have come to realise that what appeared to them as new, additional markets, are in actual fact a substitute for the old traditional markets and partly a new middleman between the latter and Egypt. Moreover the forceful campaign of expansion in Soviet cotton growing launched by Mr. Khrushchev foreshadows a decline of Communist buying, which makes dependence on it hazardous in the long run.

A recent study based on field research in the Middle East lists different Egyptian complaints on various counts. (R. L. Allen, Middle Eastern Economic Relations with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Mainland China, University of Virginia, 1958.) Egyptians are worried about the loss of Western markets. They are no less concerned about the slowness and uncertainties in Communist delivery of goods. It will be remembered that great prominence was given to the Soviet "rescue operation" in selling wheat to Egypt. However, the Soviet Union was late in the delivery of the wheat and it proved not to be up to specifications. Similarly, crude oil supplied by the Soviet Bloc was found to contain too much sulphur and damaged Egyptian refineries. Some refined oil products bought from the Soviet countries had to be re-refined. Some equipment was offered by the Communist countries below the world market prices; but after delivery had been made, the prices have been raised in some cases by as much as 40 per cent. Generally the relative cheapness of Communist equipment proves only illusory, when its quality is taken into account. As a result there are no standard facilities for repair of Communist-delivered equipment. All this seems to damp down the original enthusiasm for expanded trade with the Soviet Bloc. The fact that Soviet aid by-passed all the dreamt for projects, such as the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, and that when materialized, the size of Soviet assistance proved to be much smaller than was initially hinted at, only adds to the disillusionment.

THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

On February 1, 1958, President Kuwatly of Syria and President Nasser of Egypt announced in Cairo the formation of a new United Arab Republic (Al Gumbhuria al Arabia al Muttahida) linking their two countries politically. This was the culmination of many weeks of rumour and agitation, mainly from Syria, for the conclusion of the union which had been agreed in principle some time ago.

It is not surprising that the pressure for the achievement of a measure of Arab unity through the marriage of Syria and Egypt should have come mainly from Syria. The Ba'ath movement, the most popular party in the country, has always regarded pan-Arab unity as one of its most important objectives.

The Ba'ath-el-Arabi, as it was originally called, was founded in 1940 by Michael Aflak, with the assistance of Salah Bitar, now Syrian Foreign Minister. Aflak himself has taken little active part in politics for some years, but he is still widely admired and respected in Arab nationalist circles. In recent months he has emerged from seclusion to represent Syria at meetings in Yugoslavia, Greece and in Cairo, where he attended the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference in the last week of 1957.

Beliefs and Aims of the Ba'ath

The original motto of the Ba'ath-el-Arabi was "One Arab Nation Only Bearing an Immortal Message." Its three principal beliefs were:

- (i) The Arab States must be united;
- (ii) A new social order must be introduced;
- (iii) These changes can be achieved only by revolution.

At the time of the foundation, and for some years afterwards, the Ba'ath maintained that none of the Arab governments then existing was truly representative of the Arab people, and its main aim was to rid the Arab world of the feudal and undemocratic institutions which served only the limited interests of a small ruling class. It also opposed the Arab League and aimed to replace it by a league of Arab peoples. In foreign policy it always opposed French rule in North Africa and favoured unity of an independent Maghreb. In the struggle between Russia and the Western Powers it stands for neutrality for all the Arab States. Its domestic policy is Socialist, demanding equal opportunities for all.

By 1948 the Ba'ath movement had gained some influence in Arab Palestine and was spreading to Iraq, Transjordan and to a lesser degree to the Lebanon. In Jordan it exercised considerable influence, to the detriment of Western interests, until the discovery of the projected Left-wing coup against King Hussein in the spring of 1957 forced its leaders into exile in Syria, where the Party had been growing steadily in strength and popularity since the fall of the last of a series of Syrian dictators in 1954.

Opposition to Communism

Ba'ath co-operation with the Syrian Communists is of long standing. During the Shishakly dictatorship, when the Ba'ath Party and Ahran Hourani's Arab Socialist Party (which joined up with it in 1952) were banned, the parties were known to be co-operating in a so-called "People's Front" aimed at getting rid of the Syrian military dictatorship. Nonetheless the Ba'ath has always been theoretically opposed to Communist government in Arab countries, maintaining that it is incompatible with Islam; and there are some grounds for believing that the acceleration of the first step towards Arab

unity, at last taken on February 1, was mainly the result of the Ba'ath-Socialists' growing alarm at the pro-Soviet alignment into which co-operation with the Communists had led them.

The Nasser-Naguib coup which deposed the Egyptian king and the fall of Shishakly in Syria led to the establishment in the two countries of governments which, though totally different in character, had many common aims. Both were intensely xenophobic and vociferous in the cause of "Arab independence" and "unity of the Arab nation." Their complete refusal to accept the existence of the State of Israel, which they regarded as a "Western creation," and their intense resentment of the privileged position long held in the Arab countries by Britain and France have led them into closer alignment with Soviet views on international issues. For several years the USSR has been well able to exploit popular anti-Western feeling by expressions of support for Arab aims and, most successfully, by the provision of the arms with which Egypt and Syria declare they hope to deal with Israel in due course. Now the two countries have both signed long-term economic agreements with the USSR, hoping to carry out the industrial projects which would increase their prosperity, but in fact providing for a dangerous degree of involvement with the Communist bloc.

Political life in Syria was lively and free at the end of the succession of dictatorships. Advocates of a "Fertile Crescent" policy (union with Iraq) and partisans of federation with Egypt, Right-wing Fascists of extreme Islamic rigidity, and able, Moscow-trained Communists have all been able to make their voices heard. But the military autocracies left a legacy of Syrian Army involvement with internal political affairs; a large and influential group in the army belongs to the Ba'ath Party, and when their leader, Colonel Malki, was assassinated in 1955 the alleged responsibility of the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS) for the murder was taken as the pretext for a succession of repressive measures which have in effect brought about a complete suppression of Right-wing and pro-Western (including pro-Iraqi) opinion in Syrian politics. For nearly two years, Syria has been controlled by a Left-wing coalition, with the army playing a leading part in political life.

Normal political life in Egypt has not been permitted under Nasser's control. No true political parties have been allowed to function since the military junta came to power in 1952, and the first tentative steps towards a parliamentary life were taken only in the summer of 1957. Candidates previously approved by the authorities were allowed to stand for election to the first Parliamentary Assembly of the Nasser regime, and a "National Union" -- the only political party so far permitted -- has been formed. The main factions of the Egyptian Communist Party have expressed their support for Nasser's foreign policy, but Communism is illegal and Communists are still imprisoned. Nonetheless some prominent Communist sympathisers have succeeded in obtaining positions for which Government approval is necessary, notably in the Press and trade unions.

Shishakly was replaced as President by Shukri Kuwatly in 1954, and since then relations between Egypt and Syria have been increasingly close. In the autumn of 1955, the Syrian-Egyptian Military Pact was signed; under its provisions, the Egyptian Commander-in-Chief, General Amer, became Chief of the Joint Syrian-Egyptian Military Command. The command was later joined by Saudi-Arabia, the Yemen and, for a short time, Jordan, but the link between the Egyptian and Syrian Armies has been the only truly close one.

In the summer of 1956, the Syrian Chamber overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for the speedy implementation of Syrian-Egyptian unity. In July the Syrian Prime Minister went to Cairo to discuss the proposal, and it was agreed that committees should be formed to study various aspects,

including the drafting of a Constitution. By August, 1956, the Syrian Government had prepared a draft proposal for federation between Syria and Egypt. It provided for one president, to be alternately Syrian and Egyptian with two-year terms of office, and for joint diplomatic representation; but it stated that "within the union, the two countries would maintain their domestic political status and their own systems of government."

Drafting a Constitution

The drafting of a Constitution for the Arab union was entrusted to a committee appointed by the Arab Graduates Association. A copy of it appeared in the British pacifist weekly Peace News in October, 1956, together with an article by Brijen Gupta on Egyptian-Syrian union. The writer said that in two months of conversations with Arab politicians, he had been told by many of them -- mentioning Bikhdash, the Communist leader, Hourani and Bitar, of the Syrian Ba'ath, Chaderchi and Samarraï, who are Nuri al Said's opponents in Iraq, and others -- that the union of Egypt with Syria was a matter of only a few months. Gupta quoted a particularly interesting remark which he claimed Michael Aflak had made to him: "We shall ask Israel to join us, and agree to lose as much sovereignty as any Arab State would lose. And in addition we would promise to world Jewry a spiritual symbol in Jerusalem, such as the Vatican promises to Catholics the world over." One of the chief opponents of the Ba'ath desire to lay the foundations of Arab unity as rapidly as possible was said to be Kamal Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze and Socialist leader; Jumblatt had allegedly said that Arab unity at this stage would only lead to an "aggressive nationalism" which would be directed against the West and Israel instead of towards some creative ends. "Egypt," he is quoted as saying, "would become the Prussia of the Middle East, and might cause war."

By the beginning of 1957 the largely pro-Ba'ath and increasingly anti-Western Jordanian Government was expressing a desire to join the proposed Syrian-Egyptian Federal Union; in August, 1956, Jordan and Syria had concluded an "economic unity" agreement which, it was pointed out, would facilitate Jordan's inclusion in the projected union.

Abortive Coup d'Etat

In March, 1957, the Education Ministers of Egypt, Syria and Jordan signed an agreement for the cultural unity of their three countries; and the Syrian Government, in a statement made in Parliament, pledged itself to adopt urgent measures for the realization of a federal union with Egypt and Jordan. The following month, however, the Jordanian advocates of this policy had fled to Damascus after the abortive coup d'etat against King Hussein, and subsequent relations between Jordan on the one hand and Egypt and Syria on the other have deteriorated.

In July, 1957, Nasser was due to make an important speech to the Egyptian National Assembly, and it was expected that he would deal with the Syrian desire for union. However, in a very long address he made only one short reference to it:

"Less than a year ago, Syria announced through its Government and Parliament the desire to unite with Egypt as a first step towards full Arab unity. Egypt, which has registered in the first Article of its Constitution that it is part of the Arab nation, cannot but respond to this move, and welcomes any attempt which brings nearer this desired national aim."

A Lebanese paper, Le Soir, commented on July 24 on the probable consequences of Syrian-Egyptian union:

"For Egypt it would be the realization of a secular dream, the domination of the Near East, territorial expansion and a way to provide jobs for unemployed administrators and officers. Instead of having freedom of thought, which is typical of the Syrian people, the Egyptian police system would be installed... The liberal parliamentary system, of which Syria has always been proud, would be crushed and an autocratic system of government, similar to the Egyptian system, would take its place... Syria will be incorporated in the Soviet commercial and economic exchange system, a system followed by Egypt, which will pull down the economic stability of the Near East, much desired by the Soviet Union. Syria will become, as Egypt already is, easy prey for Communism, which thrives on misery and the exploitation of the masses. Syrian-Egyptian union will be some sort of new federal republic revolving in the Soviet orbit. We trust that these suppositions will never come true and that Syria will regain a prosperous life in the economic, political and military fields, and that she will have a better future which she will put at the service of her sister countries, not as a satellite in the service of Egypt."

At the beginning of September a further step towards unity was taken with the signature in Damascus of an economic union agreement between the two countries. This defined objectives and means of implementation, and provided for the formation of a joint committee to study and propose practical steps. The following month, Egyptian troops moved into Syria to defend her against the imagined threat from Turkey. Their arrival was described by Damascus Radio as "the first practical step towards the unity of the Arabs," and the Syrian Moslem Brotherhood paper Al Manar commented that the event showed "without the slightest doubt that both President Kuwatly and President Nasser are fully determined to move towards unity."

Early in November the Egyptian National Assembly decided to accept the invitation extended by Akram Hourani, Ba'ath-Socialist leader and strongest advocate of unity, for a delegation to visit Syria to discuss steps for the unification of the two "sister States." Forty members of the Egyptian Parliament, led by Anwar al Sadat, visited Damascus, sat with their Syrian colleagues in the Syrian Parliament, and joined in a unanimous vote approving a proposal to expedite the federal union of their two countries. Anwar al Sadat declared that unity was "now an accomplished fact," and Sabri al Assali, the Syrian Prime Minister, said that Syrian-Egyptian union was "but the first step towards the comprehensive Arab union." On November 24 Akram Hourani claimed that the practical steps for the realization of union would probably be accomplished "within one month, because the union between Syria and Egypt has actually existed for months."

Rumours of Disagreement

In December, rumours began to circulate in Beirut about disagreements between the Ba'ath-Socialists and the Communist Party in Syria on the question of union with Egypt. Khalid Bikdash, the Communist Secretary-General, was away in Moscow, and there were some grounds for believing that in his absence a split was developing within the Party. On December 15 the Beirut pro-Communist paper Al Hadara published on the same page a statement by Michael Aflak that the Ba'ath-Socialist leaders were engaged in drafting the federal union plan, and a two-column article headed "Islam forbids federal union between Moslem countries." The article advocated complete unification of Moslem countries.

Bikdash returned from Moscow on December 23 to find that the final conclusion of union with Egypt had become the burning question of the hour in

Syria. Of all the political parties in Syria, the Communist Party was the most likely to be affected by it in view of the official Egyptian attitude to Communist activities. On January 13, the Communists issued a pamphlet, the result of their Central Committee meeting held a few days earlier, defining the Party's position. While ostensibly advocating the principle of unity, it called for a joint commission to study the form which union could take in view of "the peculiar conditions in each of the two countries." The next day the Ba'ath paper Al Rai al Aam attacked the Communists' proposals as not being sufficiently advanced, pointing out that their cautious attitude was no doubt dictated by the fear of suffering the same fate as their imprisoned Egyptian comrades. Moscow's attitude has been enigmatic: Tass failed to report the Communist Party resolution on unity, and the USSR is unlikely to oppose a popular Arab idea, of which she may well be able to make good use, for the sake of the personal safety of individual Arab communists.

The mounting pressure to unite the two countries became too great for Egypt to ignore. However, it was made clear that before union could be brought about, changes must take place in Syria to bring the two countries into line. While these were being discussed, Syrian politicians and soldiers flew to and from Cairo and contradictory predictions and rumors filled the Syrian and Lebanese Press. Many Syrian politicians stated that they were ready to dissolve their parties and join in a "National Union" on the Egyptian pattern if this would further the cause of Arab unity. But simultaneously it was reported that Khalid al Azm, one of the most ambitious men in Syria and the chief architect of Syria's prospective economic dependence on the Communist bloc, was engaged in consultations with a view to forming a new Syrian political party. On January 23, Akram Hourani, of the Syrian Ba'ath, stated that he was prepared to withdraw entirely from political activity if union with Egypt required such a step.

The "Final Project"

On January 25 Salah Bitar, Syrian Foreign Minister and, as a founder of the Ba'ath, one of the most passionate advocates of union, arrived in Cairo with a copy of the "final project" as approved by the Syrian Cabinet. This provided for a unified Arab Republic -- for some time past the Ba'ath had ceased to speak of federation -- with one President, one Executive and one Legislature. The Egyptian Press, which hitherto had been markedly less vocal on the subject than Damascus newspapers, began to show greatly increased enthusiasm for the imminent prospect of union, while Cairo Radio pointed out that Syrian political parties would be dissolved.

In Damascus, the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party issued a statement denying an earlier Press report that a split in the ranks of the Party in Aleppo over the question of union had led to the resignation of 80 members. The statement stressed that the Communist Party gave its backing to the union and that there was no dissension. On the question of the dissolution of their Party, however, the Communists were not apparently prepared to follow the lead of the Ba'ath. Bikdash is reported to have said:

"It has never happened in the past that any Communist Party in the world has dissolved itself. On a number of occasions, however, this was done by dictatorial authorities. We believe that, as long as the status to be set up in the Syrian-Egyptian Union is constitutional and democratic, there will be no need for the dissolution of parties."

From the time when it was reported that the new State was to have "one President," it was clear that this President would be Egyptian; on January 29,

President Kuwatly of Syria made a statement that after "fifty years of continuous struggle for the Arab cause" he was glad to hand over to Nasser, "this enthusiastic, sincere young man."

It has always been stressed, particularly by the Ba'ath Party, that all Arab countries are free to unite, and there is no question of confining the United Arab Republic to Egypt and Syria. In an interview given to the Middle East News Agency on January 31, Akram Hourani declared that the adherence of other Arab States to the Syrian-Egyptian Union would not conflict with their special characteristics; on the other hand, this union was opposed to and in conflict with "foreign influences, blocs and military alliances." The sole condition necessary for joining the United Arab Republic would be "liberation from these chains."

On January 31 President Kuwatly arrived in Cairo, accompanied by almost the whole of the Syrian Cabinet and by General Bizri, Syrian Chief of the General Staff. On the following day, the two Presidents went in procession from the Republican Palace to the Presidential Office, where the United Arab Republic was proclaimed and the documents signed. Nasser, in a short speech, said: "This is an immortal day in our history, and decisive, for Arab nationalism has realized itself." The declaration of unity provided for a presidential democratic system of government, with a single legislative assembly; Cairo was to be the capital, and a referendum was to be held within 30 days to decide who should be President. "Today is indeed a day of glory," said President Kuwatly. After rebroadcasting the Cairo proclamation ceremony, the announcer from Damascus Radio said: "I am resuming the news from the United Arab Republic Broadcasting Station in Damascus." Cairo Radio took a little time to follow suit, but on February 4 it too was describing itself as "The United Arab Republic Broadcasting Station in Cairo."

Temporary Constitution

President Nasser and President Kuwatly declared the outlines of the temporary Constitution for the new republic to the Egyptian and Syrian Parliaments on February 5. According to Cairo newspapers, the temporary Constitution will be in force for the transition period, during which the full amalgamation of the countries into one governmental system will be accomplished. The Constitution provides that access to this union is open to all Arab countries, whether on the basis of complete or federal union. According to Nasser, all Syrian political parties were to be dissolved on February 5 and a "National Union" formed; one quarter of the temporary National Assembly of the United Arab Republic were to be Syrians, and the remainder Egyptians. There would be a Council of Ministers in Cairo, whose members would be selected by the President; he would also appoint two Executive Councils, each with its own President, in Cairo and Damascus. These Councils would handle all matters except defence and foreign policy.

As soon as the United Arab Republic was proclaimed, Cairo newspaper reports claimed that the Yemen had expressed a wish to join it on a federal basis. Crown Prince Badr, the Imam's son, arrived in Cairo on February 5 to start discussions on reaching unity in foreign policy, defence, economy and education. Akram Hourani, addressing "the Arab people" on February 3, said that he was certain that other Arab countries would join. "I believe that Jordan and Iraq will be the first to join; however, I cannot tell which will join first, Iraq or Jordan." The present Iraqi Government, however, does not appear eager to unite with the United Arab Republic. Nuri al Said commented on February 1 that the union of Syria and Egypt

"is not bad -- when you consider that the federation removes one of them." And a former Prime Minister of Iraq, Fadil al Jamali, has made a fierce attack on the "unnatural union" designed to separate Syria still further from her natural ties with Iraq, and to use her as a base for Communist action. Al Jamali added: "The union which we want is a union based on the genuine and permanent interests of the Arabs, and not on propaganda aims and provocative policy."

Communist Comment

Communist comment during the period of agitation which preceded the announcement of February 1 was slight and unenlightening. Soviet propaganda at the time was concentrating on attacking the Bagdad Pact, whose Council Meeting took place at the end of January. Isvestiya stated cautiously on January 22: "It is at present rather difficult to speak of the details of the proposed federal union between two friendly Arab States," and pointed out that a political alliance between Egypt and Syria was facilitated by the fact that both countries pursued a policy of peaceful coexistence and both refused to join military blocs. The Cairo correspondent of the Czechoslovak newspaper Rude Pravo was more enthusiastic, describing the proposed federation as "a very reliable defence measure against any danger emanating from the Bagdad Pact." On February 2, the Soviet Press reported the signing of the agreement between Syria and Egypt briefly and without comment, and officials of the Soviet Foreign Office also refrained from expressing any opinion on it. Chou En-lai included the following significant passage in his report on the international situation to the plenary session of the Chinese National People's Congress on February 10:

"We warmly greet the founding of this new State and sincerely hope that the United Arab Republic will rely on the patriotic and democratic forces in Egypt and Syria to greatly encourage the Arab countries to strengthen their solidarity, smash all schemes designed to split the Arab peoples, and win greater victories in their common struggle to safeguard national independence and oppose colonialism."

Finally on February 15 Pravda states:

"The Soviet Union...welcomes the creation of the United Arab Republic, and sincerely wishes to develop friendly and cordial relations with it. The USSR will continue to be a friend of the Arabs. The Soviet people warmly welcome the consolidation of unity among the Arab peoples on the basis of the struggle against colonialism, for it cannot but serve the interests of reducing international tension and safeguarding peace in the Arab East, particularly in North Africa."

On the same day, Sovetskaya Rossiya commented on similar, but more specific, lines:

"...The United Arab Republic is a blow at the aggressive Bagdad Pact created by the imperialists to increase tension in the Middle East, sow discord and mistrust among the Arabs.

"The establishment of the United Arab Republic is regarded by the Soviet Union as a home affair of Egypt and Syria. The Soviet Union's relations with both countries are based on friendship and a common desire to strengthen peace in the Middle East. These relations are recorded in bilateral, mutually advantageous and equitable treaties which remain in force..."

Tito sent cordial telegrams to Nasser and Kuwatly on February 7; Voroshilov's congratulations were not conveyed until February 22.

Whatever the Soviet Union's attitude may be, there is no reason to think that the United Arab Republic will be more loosely linked to the Communist bloc economically than were Syria and Egypt before the union. President Kuwatly said on January 29, when taking delivery of a Russian aircraft presented to him by the Soviet Government, that the United Arab Republic would continue its co-operation with the Soviet Union on the basis of mutual interest, equality and national sovereignty, in the interests of the Arabs in general and of world peace. Certainly the United Arab Republic, if its foreign policy is to be an extension of Syria's, is unlikely to obtain any foreign aid from any other source. So far, the Soviet Union has had more success in Syria than in Egypt, and the formation of the United Arab Republic, even under nominal Egyptian leadership and at the cost of a measure of discomfort for the Syrian Communist Party, will not necessarily result in an appreciable increase in Nasser's ability to follow a "neutralist," third-force policy.

Influence of the Ba'ath Movement

The Ba'ath Party leaders, however, who, as those responsible for the achievement of union, are bound to play an important part in its implementation, have always rejected Communist government for the Arab world. Michael Aflak, interviewed in Yugoslavia in November, 1957, said:

"There are no ideological points of contact between the Socialists and the Communists, but in certain cases they co-operate. Communists are opposed to imperialism and the Bagdad Pact, but they are no neutralists, and in this way, pursuing a bloc policy, they help imperialism..."

Though Nasser's attitude towards domestic Communism is considerably more forthright and firm, he and the Ba'ath are likely to have more in common than either would have with Bikdash, whose eventual aim as Moscow's agent, whatever his intermediate maneuvers, is inevitably the establishment of Communist-controlled government somewhere in the Middle East. Bikdash's behaviour for the present is cautious in the extreme. He did not attend the session of the Syrian Parliament held on February 5 to welcome back Kuwatly from Cairo and to hail the achievement of union with Egypt. Instead, he left for Moscow with his wife, Wissal Farha (also a prominent Communist) and eight members of the Communist Party Central Committee. His two children have been in the Soviet Union since last November. In an interview published in the Prague newspaper, Rude Pravo, on February 27, he stated that the Syrian Communist Party would continue its activities in support of the United Arab Republic.

An Egyptian bystander, watching Nasser and Kuwatly on the rostrum on February 1, whispered to his neighbour, "But which is the bride?" On the answer to that question may well depend the eventual alignment in world politics of the United Arab Republic.