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THE SINGLE-PARTY SYSTEM IN EGYPT : THE  
QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

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THE SINGLE-PARTY SYSTEM IN EGYPT : THE QUEST  
FOR LEGITIMACY

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PREFACE

## PREFACE

A lot has been written on Egyptian politics, on Nasser and the Nasser era. A lot has also been written on the theory and practice of single-party systems. But very little has appeared on the single-party system in Egypt. The present work is an attempt to fill the void. Beginning with the birth of the first political party in the last quarter of the last century, the study traces the history of the party system in Egypt - the rise and fall of the multi-party set up, the single-party system under Nasser and the multi-party system of sorts of Sadat. This is not entirely a chronological, descriptive account; I have tried to present an insight into the working of the single-party system and bring out the factors responsible for its failure. The main focus, however, is the single-party system not only as a legitimacy device but also as a means to forestall opposition and perpetuate personal rule. I have sought to show that this is the case as much with the party system under Sadat as it was under Nasser.

I take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor M.S. Agwani (Chairman, Centre for West Asian and African Studies) for the valuable guidance and encouragement that enabled me to complete the work. Any shortcomings that may still remain in spite of my best efforts are entirely mine. I acknowledge with thanks the assistance provided me by the staff of the Jawaharlal Nehru University

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Till recently, Egypt was officially a single-party state. The only political party that existed was the government-party; all others were outlawed. This dissertation is a study of the single-party system in Egypt — its emergence, growth, shortcomings and replacement by "a multi-party system". In what socio-political setting did the military coup d'etat take place, how the new leadership dealt with the crises of legitimacy and consolidation of power, and how in the process the single-party system emerged. The experiment with the single party itself forms a chapter — why the Liberation Rally, then the National Union and finally the Arab Socialist Union? How did the legitimacy derived from the Party compare with that derived from other sources — charisma and ideology? How did the change in leadership affect the working and strength of the party system? And finally, what necessitated the switch over to a multi-party system and whether it is really a deviation from the one-party system that existed.

The Emergence of Parties and Party-systems.

In 1850, few countries in the world (except perhaps the USA) knew political parties in the modern sense of the word. There were trends of opinions, popular clubs, philosophical societies and parliamentary groups but no real parties. Today, whether one thinks of Anglo-American democracies or totalitarian systems such as the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany of the recent past, emergent African states in their



earliest years of independent evolution or Latin American republics that have hobbled along for over a century, a mammoth ex-colonial area such as India experiencing the vicissitudes of democratic experiment or an equally mammoth communist power such as China seeking to mobilize a population through totalitarian methods, the political party, in one form or another, is omnipresent. The important, and at the same time interesting, fact is not that parties can be seen in every kind of political system but that, as the world entered the 1970s, out of its 138 countries, slightly over a third (34%) had single party systems, half of which were states of the post-War creation.<sup>1</sup>

In this introductory chapter an attempt shall be made to see, first, how we passed from a system of no-party of the 1850s to that of the all pervasive political party of the 1950s; second, how far is it proper to call a single-party system a party system and how does it differ from a dominant party system with which it is often confused; and third, what accounts for the single-party systems prevalent today. Taking the case of five different established single party systems<sup>2</sup>, an attempt shall be made to pin-point any common determinants which can account for the emergence of single-party systems in developing countries.

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1 Jean Blondel, An Introduction to Comparative Government (London, 1969) p. 140.

2 Countries discussed are: Mexico, Tanzania, Tunisia, Algeria and Singapore.

Political institutions develop out of the need born of the growing complexities of political activity. Parliaments evolved out of the king's Councils created to help the monarch deal with the intricacies of decision making and making them more acceptable; cabinets grew out of the complexities of Parliamentary activity. The similarities of functions — to organize public opinion, to communicate demands to the centers of government and decision-making and of political recruitment — suggests that the political party, too, emerges whenever the activities of a political system reach a certain degree of complexity, or whenever the notion of political power comes to include the idea that mass public must participate.<sup>3</sup>

On the whole the development of parties seems bound up with that of democracy, that is, with the extension of popular suffrage and parliamentary prerogatives. "The more the right to vote is extended and multiplied, the more necessary it becomes to organize the electors by means of committees capable of making the candidates known and of canalizing the votes in their direction."<sup>4</sup> The growth-mechanism of parties in such situations has generally begun with the creation of parliamentary groups, the appearance of electoral committees and finally the

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3 Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, "The Origin and Development of Political Parties", in La Palombara and Weiner, eds., Political Parties and Political Development (New Jersey, 1966) p. 3.

4 Maurice Duverger, Political Parties-Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State, Barbara and Robert North, trans. (London, 1954) p. xxiv.

establishment of a permanent connection between these elements.<sup>5</sup>

However, these attempts at relating the evolution of national parliaments and the growth in the size of the electorate may explain the emergence of parties in established democracies of UK and the USA but not in most of the developing countries.

In the case of developing countries it is the historical situation of the movement from tradition to modernity and the problems that go with it which generally provide the context for the emergence of political parties. The historical crises at the same time tend to be a critical factor in determining what pattern of evolution parties take later. The crises themselves originate from the need to achieve in the shortest possible time what other societies took centuries to achieve and can be listed as: the crises of legitimacy, integration and participation. The first political grouping within the English Parliament which later evolved into parties were born at a time when the issues of legitimacy were much debated. A party is created when the existing structures of authority fail to cope with the crises. Nationalist parties in Asia and Africa are typically integrationist

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5 Duverger speaks of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary origin of political parties. Within the Parliament local (regional) factors, ideological and personality factors generally account for the emergence of political parties. Trade Unions, agricultural co-operatives and peasant associations, philosophical societies, student associations, secret societies and clandestine groups, and industrial-commercial groups often form the basis for the emergence of extra-parliamentary parties, *ibid.*, pp. xxiv-xxxx.

parties. The crisis of participation is often mixed with that of legitimacy. A change in the attitudes<sup>6</sup> towards authority may infuse in the subjects the belief that they have a right to influence the exercise of power - a non-participant population may thus be aroused into politics. The dominant political elite on its part may seek to win public support so as to win or maintain power.

The political party is thus a 20th century mechanism designed to solve the problem of how to bring 'the people', the new mass voters, into the political community. It is an "agency for the organization of political power characterized by exclusively political functions, by a stable structure and inclusive membership and by the ability to dominate the contesting of elections".<sup>7</sup> The "contesting of elections" distinguishes it from other organization, organizers and intermediaries in the political process as also from the informal elites of the community, the personal clique, the fluid and restless faction and the basically non-political group -- a corporation or a church -- engaged in some political activity.

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6 Socio-economic changes, a certain level of communication, the secularizing effects of an educational system and the homogenizing effects of urbanization may be taken-as factors that have affected these changes.

7 Frank J. Sorauf, "The Political Party" in Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley, eds., Politics of Social Change (New York, 1971) p. 39.

### Is a Single-Party System a Party-System?

Before moving on to a discussion on single-party systems per se it is necessary to ask: In what sense is a single-party system a party system? Is it correct to call it a party system? A 'party system' is concerned with "the interaction patterns among significant and genuine electoral organizations---".<sup>8</sup> But if there is just one party how can it along produce a system? A system of what? Surely it cannot be one of parties, for the party in such systems may "constitute a form of organization of political power but in no sense a party as the term is generally employed."<sup>9</sup>

The arguments against the use of the term are based on the "part-whole" relationship and the concept of "system". According to the former, if a party is not a part, it is a pseudo-party; and if the whole is identified with just one party, it is a pseudo-whole.<sup>10</sup> The single party identifies with the whole but it is obvious enough that it is smaller than the whole. It displays the characteristics of wholism in that it flatly rejects the idea of a whole resulting from a competitive interplay of parts. According to the latter argument, the

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8 Harry Eckstein, The International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences vol. 11, 1968, p. 438.

9 Charles E. Merriam and Harold F. Gosnell, The American Party System (New York, 1949) p. 8.

10 Giovanni Sartori, Parties and Party Systems — A Framework for Analysis, vol. 1 (London, 1976) p. 39.

term 'system' is important. A 'system' has no meaning unless (i) the system displays properties that do not belong to a separate consideration of its component elements and (ii) the system results from, and consists of, the patterned interaction of its component parts providing the boundaries of the system.<sup>11</sup> The 'single-party system' fulfils neither.

The concept of the single-party system is a "contradiction in terms" and "the precise anti-thesis of the party system" - the logical force of such an argument is difficult to challenge. But since there is no alternative labelling<sup>12</sup> one has to bow, under such circumstances, to the linguistic conventions that have received universal acceptance. Hence the use of the term 'single-party system' in this dissertation.

It is pertinent also to clarify the terminological muddle and distinguish the single-party system from a 'dominant-party' one. Generally speaking, the single party system is a political regime in which a single party monopolises power and opposition parties are outlawed while in a dominant party system minority parties continue to operate legally and compete for electorate support. However, for the sake of convenience it is felt proper here to define a single-party system as one

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11 Ibid., p. 43.

12 Sartori suggests the use of the term, 'party-state system' and adds: "while parties that are parts cannot identify themselves with the state, the party as a whole can only identify itself ideally with the state. Two wholes cannot exist unless they tend to coincide", *ibid.*, p. 45.

where other parties may exist - as they do in Mexico and Singapore but have little effect on the course of events and act like the minor parties in a two-party system.<sup>13</sup> In a dominant party system the one major party is capable of governing alone but several smaller parties which act as "parties of pressure"<sup>14</sup> cannot be ignored in its political calculations.

#### Some Case Studies of Established One-Party Systems

The single party system is a common phenomena today. But in only a few cases has it achieved some level of stability; generally it is short-lived, preceded or succeeded by military dictatorships. The case studies discussed here -- Mexico, Tanzania, Tunisia, Algeria and Singapore -- are from the category of such stable "established" one-party system where

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13 The advantage of such a broad definition is that it includes political systems where though the law permits other parties to be formed but at the same time it places conditions the fulfilment of which is extremely difficult. (For instance, in Mexico, a new group has to have inter alia, 'at least 2500' members in each of no less than two-thirds of the country's states and in any case a minimum of 75,000 members. It has also to hold in at least two-thirds of the federal entities a meeting to select delegates to a national constituting convention; a notary must attend to attest that decisions were taken by vote of the majority). Such a definition also includes political systems where minority parties are extremely insignificant. In Singapore, for instance, the People's Action Party won all the seats to the legislature in 1968 and 1972.

14 Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India", Asian Survey, vol. 4, December 1964, pp. 1161-73.

the single party has stayed in power for, say, a period of about ten years. Besides, only those countries have been chosen for discussion where the single-party has evolved without any prior ideology to support a one-party system, thus excluding ideological one party systems like that of the Soviet Union and China.

Mexico's "one-party political system was an invention forced by circumstances".<sup>15</sup> A coalition of forces represented by Adolfo de la Huerta, Alvaro Obregon and Plutarco Elias Calles managed by 1920 to impose order on the chaos created by the breakdown of organized political life in the early years of this century. Of the triumvirate, de la Huerta was eliminated when he tried to revolt against President Obregon who himself was assassinated before he could be officially inaugurated for a second term in 1928. Calles, as he could not himself become President because of the 'no-successive re-election' clause in the 1917 Constitution, got elected a not-so-significant person, Emilio Portes, as President, and in 1929 formed the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). The years that followed saw the decreasing influence of localized personalitic militarism and a corresponding increase in the role of the Party.<sup>16</sup> Soon the

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15 Howard F. Cline, Mexico-Revolution to Evolution, 1940-60 (London, 1962) p. 151.

16 This was made possible by the immense powers that the President enjoyed. In acting as the court of last resort in settling the inevitable clashes of conflicting interests with the help of the party machinery, he added immensely to the strength of the Party.



opposition parties<sup>17</sup> were left with little or no chance of defeating the official party's political machine by either ballots or bullets. In renaming the Party as the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) in 1937 and giving it a functional character<sup>18</sup> President Cardenas further strengthened the Party. The military sector was dropped by President Camacho (1945) who renamed the Party as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) the name that it still has.

The Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) was the only political party in Tanganyika, de jure and de facto. It faced no organized interest groups, functional organizations were linked in it (for example, the National Union of Tanganyika Workers, NUTA); led by a charismatic leader, the position of the high-level leaders within the party is not much challenged.

The Tanganyika African Association (TAA), formed in 1927 as a social organization, soon picked up political trappings, spread its influence to the rural areas, and by the 1950s, developed into a national movement. Julius Nyerere, in July 1954,

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17 The past few decades have seen many parties but most of them have been "short-lived, one election, personal-leader oriented parties". The National Action Party (PAN), for instance, was formed in 1939 but did not launch a Presidential candidate till 1952. The other parties worth mentioning are: the Popular Party (1948), the Communist Party, the Sinarchests and the Federation of Parties of the Mexican People (1951).

18 The military, labour, agrarian and 'popular' unorganized proletariat - each of those formed a national sector of the party.

called a Conference, adopted a new constitution and transformed the TAA into the TANU. Within four years TANU had become overwhelmingly the dominant non-governmental political organization in the country.<sup>19</sup>

In 1960 when Tanganyika gained independence, TANU formed a responsible government with Nyerere as Chief Minister. Under the new Constitution of 1962, Nyerere became President. Thus in eight years the President of TANU had become President of Tanganyika and a little later in January 1963 Nyerere announced that Tanzania would become a one-party state by statute.<sup>20</sup>

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19 The United Tanganyika Party, formed in 1956, under colonial sponsorship to counter the TANU, failed to win a single seat in the September 1958 elections. By the end of 1958, the UTP had ceased to function as an effective political organization. Besides, "the UTP did not even have the complete support of the Europeans".

Similarly, the two splinter parties and the African National Congress disappeared after the 1958 elections. In the 1960 elections the ANC was the only opposition but could get only 0.3% of the votes cast against 82.3% cast for the TANU. The People's Democratic Party and the People's Convention Party (1962) and the African Independence Movement (1963) met the same fate. The latter rejoined the TANU in 1964.

Henry Bienen, Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development (New Jersey, 1967) pp. 52, 56.

20 This transition to a one-party state was much helped by —

- (i) tribalism - with 120 tribes, any or a few of them could not be much of a nuisance;
- (ii) indirect rule which weakened the institutions as they had to enforce laws made by the colonial administration;
- (iii) the exploitation of the 'Savahili' culture - the language and Islam;
- (iv) by avoiding controversial issues; and,
- (v) the British support in the last years.

ibid., pp. 32-49.

By the time Tunisia achieved independence in 1956, the nationalist movement had acquired three distinct advantages: unchallenged leadership, a well organized party and a long established background of "constructive" conflict with the colonial power, France. These three having buttressed each other during the long drawn out struggle for independence it was not surprising that they should, after independence, bring forth a one-party system to build a new nation out of the old.

Founded in 1934 as a splinter group, the Neo-Destour captured much of the old Destour's organized following because of its dynamism and flexible tactics. Outlawed for the next twenty years, it openly became active in 1954. Led by a shrewd and extremely tactful leader, Bourguiba's Neo-Destour (renamed Destour Socialist Party, PSD, after the adoption of a socialist program) remains the only party in Tunisia. Its inclusive framework<sup>21</sup> leaves little scope for opposition. Bourguibaism - a set of tactics as it is - is also responsible for the continuance of one-party system in Tunisia. Bourguiba has always very diplomatically first eliminated his potential rivals and then, with equal tact, rehabilitated them in positions of power, thus ensuring their loyalty to him and to the party.<sup>22</sup>

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21 The UGTT, the labour organization, the UTAC, business and handicrafts organization; the UNET, the students organization; and UNFT, the women's organization - all have organizational autonomy but do not constitute independent centers of power.

22 The cases of Masmoudi and Ahmed Ben Salah are the better known ones.

Unlike Tunisia where the single-party system was the result of the consensus among the political elite of the country, in Algeria, the single-party system was the outcome of intense rivalry — both personalistic and issue-based - among political groups which mattered.<sup>23</sup>

However, by 1954, the Democratic Union of Algerian Manifesto (UDMA) had gone into steady eclipse while the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic liberties (MTLD) had foundered as a result of internal divisions and French repression. The CRUA (Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action) established in early 1954 by the initiative of MTLD militants, rejected the

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23 There were two main rival groups - one led by Messali Ahmed Ben Hadj and the other by Ferhat Abbas. Messali Hadj formed the North African Star [Etoile Nord Africaine (ENA)] in 1925-26. Having been banned, the ENA was reformed as the National Union of North African Muslims in 1934 and later as the People's Party of the African People (PPA) in 1937. These introduced the idea of independence.

In 1944, Ferhat Abbas and Bendjelloul (of the Federation of Elected Muslims established 1930) did succeed in achieving on the organizational level the accord among important nationalist groups that the Algerian Manifesto had produced. They formed the Friends of the Manifesto and of Liberty (AML). But here, too, Abbas and Messali Hadj fell out. While the Abbas group wanted independence with federation with France, Messali Hadj and his followers favoured a purely Algerian Parliament and Government. In 1946 Abbas formed the UDMA (the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto) and Messali Hadj formed the MTLD (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) which replaced the PPA but was still internally divided on doctrine, organisation, personality and generation conflict. No wonder then that the UDMA was electorally much more successful than the MTLD.

contention of both Messali and his opposition and decided to launch the revolt. The FLN (Front for National Liberation) and the ALN (National Liberation Army) were formed on 1 November 1954. In 1956 they were joined by other groups. However, the FLN remained a front of independent groups till independence in 1962 when the backlog of distrust and conflict surfaced. The three most influential men held divergent views on government, party and the role of the army.<sup>24</sup>

When Ben Bella became Secretary General of the FLN, he, having already banned other political parties, took the party under his control. Ben Bella and Boumedienne struggled to have control over the party. When Boumedienne overthrew Ben Bella in June 1965, the FLN though called a 'party' had no party structure or common ideology to speak of and those in power were still wrestling with the fundamental problem of converting the FLN into a proper political institution. Boumedienne who first seemed to favour a limited role for the party later built the FLN as the party in a one-party system.

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24 Ben Bella as President of the Council of Ministers wanted a powerful state with an avant garde party restricted to militants. Mohammed Khider, the Secretary General of the FLN, wanted a mass party to control the activities of the state. He was not opposed to the idea of a multi-party system. Hourri Boumedienne wanted the army to play a political role. Khider was eliminated soon as a dominant force on the political scene.

Strictly speaking, Singapore cannot be regarded as a one-party state for apart from the People's Action Party (PAP) there are sixteen other parties in the country. Many of these are, however, simply defunct or paper political organizations except for the Barisan Socialist which has opted for extra-parliamentary struggle. The remaining parties are small, ineffective groups which pose no threat to the PAP. The PAP "is victorious in virtually all elections"<sup>25</sup> but other parties are legal and do exist."<sup>26</sup>

The PAP began in 1954 as just another addition to a multi-party system. Leading the agitation for the end of colonial rule on the one hand and expressing commitment to socialism on the other, the PAP soon became the dominant voice on the political scene partly because of the alliance with the communists who provided the organization and mobilization abilities and partly because of the gradual fading away of other political groupings.<sup>27</sup> It became a homogenous organization after

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25 The PAP won all the seats in 1968 and 1972.

26 John H. Kautsky, Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism (New York, 1966) p. 145.

27 The Malayan Communist Party did not have much appeal as an independent organization. The Singapore Progressive Party, a multi-racial professional organization was disastrously defeated in 1955. Its chief rival, the Singapore Labour Party split asunder because of internal rivalries and never recovered.

the moderates took over the organization in 1961 and the Communists established the Barisan Socialist. While a member of the Federation which Singapore joined in 1963, PAP's conflict with the Malayan Chinese Association led to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia; Singapore then found itself under a "dominant one-party system".<sup>28</sup>

In the five countries discussed above, single-party systems emerged in spite of the differences in the socio-political cultural settings. What do they have in common then? First they had been colonies of the European powers and this experience brought them in contact with western political concepts, ideas and institutions. Secondly, after they became independent, all of these countries faced either a close struggle for power among leaders who had proved their worth during the colonial struggle or a total absence of it where only one leader emerged as one who had led the people to freedom. In either case, a single-party system was the result.

#### Why Single-Party Systems Emerge?

This brief examination of single-party systems would suggest that the one-party system, a pre-eminently 20th century political phenomenon, is a product of social, economic and political changes in the century. In such situations of rapid change, for one reason or the other, political elites have found

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28 Chan Heng Chee, The Dynamics of One-Party Dominance The PAP at the Grass-roots (Singapore, 1976) p. 10. This is the most appropriate term to be used for systems like Singapore and Mexico.

single-party systems as efficient means of political organization. The question to be asked now is: Why the single-party system and not any other form of political organization? In what ways is the single-party system more useful than a pluralistic system of parties? The answers to these hold the key to an explanation of the general causes resulting in single-party systems.

The most common hypothesis is that one-party dominance comes into being where party systems are formed in the course of struggle for national independence requiring channelling of political activity towards a single, widely shared, intensely held objective and avoidance of internal conflict.<sup>29</sup> Their continuance is the result of the effects of the pre-independence conditions. In the absence of the restraining influence of long-established participation in a competitive parliamentary framework, the drive for power in such a situation is raw and untempered. Besides, the nationalist groups subjected to such repressive measures and compelled to operate underground are not adequately socialized into the art of political compromise and responsible leadership. When in power, therefore, they are more likely to manifest an overly strong identification with the state, view opposition as illegitimate, and be dogmatic,

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29 Thomas Hodgkin, African Political Parties: An Introductory Guide (Harmendsworth, U.K., 1962), pp. 22-23.



uncompromising and monolithic in their orientation.<sup>30</sup> This has been the case with Algeria, Tunisia and Tanzania.

This, however, does not explain much. The question still remains : Why one-party system instead of no-party system? For to the extent that the purpose of the one-party system is to eliminate many parties, the difference would not be appreciable: the simple prohibition of any part at all will do as well.

A no-party state is the natural state for a traditional society. As a society modernizes the no-party state becomes increasingly the anti-party state — the conservative elements see the party as a challenge to established hierarchy and the administration sees it as a threat to rationalized rule. With further modernization, anti-partism yields to unipartism. It is gradually realized that the people can no longer be side-stepped, rather it is useful to involve them in government. Modernization means the extension of suffrage i.e., the emergence of a politicized society which raises the problem of channelment — the need for a stabilized system of political canalization. The single-party system acts as a channelling agency.

But modernization is not just the extension of suffrage. It also entails responsibilities and aspirations. Leaders have to cope with a piling up of the historical crises of legitimacy, integration and participation.<sup>31</sup> In this situation of

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30     Joeseeph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, n. 3, p. 31.

31     Ibid., p. 32.

"accelerated history", political leaders are tempted to attempt a quantum jump to economic modernity leaping over stages which required many decades in the West. In addition to all this, leaders of new states face the difficult tasks of modernization; hopes and aspirations are high, and there would soon be frustration if results were not quickly forthcoming. The single-party system, in these circumstances, is viewed as a means most capable of performing a variety of functions and of achieving more, better and faster than the pluralistic systems.

The ruling elites believe that they cannot afford the luxury of a pluralistic democracy, and of course, they cannot return to a traditional system where power is concentrated in the hands of a few and the masses remain unpolitized. Under the modernizing effect of their history of the recent past requiring some kind of a democratic institution and the need of involving the masses in political processes, the rulers of these states have found the single-party system a very convenient instrument for wriggling out of the dilemma of modernization as well as political stability, democracy as well as centralization of power.

Why not a two-party or multi-party system? An answer to this question must take into account the nature of the society in each case. In most cases, the society is one characterized

by a 'gap'.<sup>32</sup> While the unity forged by colonial struggle has to be jealously preserved in the service of other national "battles" after independence, the existence of such gaps which break up the homogeneity of the societies renders impossible the achievement of that basic consensus which most theorists of liberal democracy see as essential to its flourishing or even to its survival. These gaps are likely to mean that any opposition party or movement of consequence bases itself on a tribal or other racial, linguistic, religious or regional grouping which at least implicitly threaten the national unity which is the goal of the leaders to consolidate or bring into being. Put in other words, it is reasonable to expect that two or more parties will not promote unity to the same extent as a single party. The risks of disintegration are definitely enhanced in a multi-party system. In fact, the argument against the multi-party system is similar to what Abbe Sieyes had said about bicameral legislatures<sup>33</sup> that if they agree on fundamentals, they reduce politics to an argument about trivialities or into a state of potential civil war (if the differences are fundamental).

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32 It is a gap between the educated and uneducated, between rural and urban, the modern and the traditional. It is a gap between a small group of active, aspiring, relatively well-off, educated and influential persons and the relatively powerless peasantry, Edward Shils, Political Development in the New States ('s - Gravenhage, Monton & Co., 1962) p. 30.

33 Abbe Sieyes' famous comment is : if the second chamber dissents from the first, it is mischievous; if it agrees with the first, it is superflous.

Thus, the arguments generally given for the establishment and continuance of one-party system are all related in the ultimate sense to the question of unity and integration. Whether one justifies the one-party system in terms of the Marxist premise of direct correspondence between social class and political organization<sup>34</sup> or takes the down-to-earth position that having achieved a nationalist consolidation of political forces against the colonial authorities, must one now deliberately break up the unity which has been gained in order to satisfy the doctrinaire requirement of western-style democrats for a plurality of parties, the underlying idea is that of unity and its preservation.

The basic problem is, however, one of legitimacy. Though in all the cases discussed above, the ruling elite had already gained some legitimacy from a combination of past activities in leading the struggle for independence or getting rid of an inefficient and unpopular regime (as in Mexico) or leading the country in the face of some internal or external crisis (as was the case in Turkey after the First World War when Kemal Ataturk established the People's Republican Party), the very establishment of a new kind of system drives the leaders in search of

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34 Since party systems reflect the class structure of societies, where there are no pronounced difference among social and economic classes, there is no need for more than one party.

further legitimacy. This search for legitimacy is more crucial when the background is one of a two-party or multi-party system. Claiming exclusiveness and always perceived as exceptional, the single-party regimes have to establish their legitimacy.

Generally, two major means are adopted for gaining legitimacy: (i) through participation and the involvement of the masses in the political processes of the state — if not in reality, at least in creating a semblance of it and (ii) through the adherence, at least in words, to some ideology whereby promises of future development are made.<sup>35</sup>

As part of the need to build an effective state machinery and to create an aura of legitimacy for it, it is essential both to expand and control the popular participation which the granting of universal suffrage makes inevitable. However, mobilization has to be a controlled one for two reasons: first, because of the rulers' desire to remain in power and prevent the formation of any opposition; and second, because of the belief that in order to construct a modern society, it is absurd to rely on the "unmodern" masses to undertake and guide their own transformation. In establishing direct and permanent contact between the government and the people the single-party system breaks the isolation by its thousands of cells and units scattered throughout the country and at the same time takes the

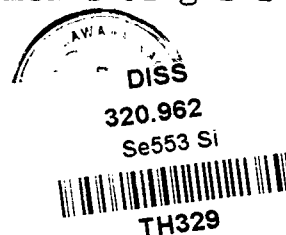
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35 The adoption of socialist programmes in practically all new states is nothing but a means of gaining legitimacy.

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responsibility of guiding, directing and mobilizing the energies of the masses. In so organizing political activity the elites argue that the system becomes much more democratic. Through the instrumentality of the party, they want to contain organized opposition opinions within the framework of the single-party system. Political competition might still find a place in the various organs of the government and party.

One salient feature of the single-party system as it has functioned in practice is that in most cases the capstone of the structure has been the single charismatic leader. Charisma helps to maintain the leader in power. The system, however, lacks inherent stability and tends to wither away as the country slowly trudges along on the path of modernization. The single-party system is, therefore, called in to act as the instrument which not only just keeps the leader in power but helps him cope with the task in hand and, in the process, consolidate his hold on the political system. Bourguiba's "what system, I am the system" and Nyerere's initial desire to welcome a genuine and responsible opposition soon turning into suspicion of a multi-party system because "a handful of individuals can still put our nation in jeopardy"<sup>36</sup> speaks amply of the immense use the single-party system is put to in order to keep personalities in power.

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<sup>36</sup> Julius Nyerere, Freedom and Unity (Dar-es Salaam: 1966) p. 312.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF THE SINGLE-PARTY  
SYSTEM IN EGYPT

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS OF THE SINGLE-PARTY SYSTEM IN EGYPT

The emergence of modern party organizations in the new states of Asia and Africa has been closely linked to the growth of nationalist ideas. Peoples striving for independence began to appreciate the value of political party organization and used it as the chief instrument of their national struggle against European domination. Egypt was no exception.<sup>1</sup>

National awakening in Egypt was the result of certain factors which, at the same time, acted as catalysts in the process - Mohammed Ali's (1805-48) and his successors' Egyptianization policy of sorts, growing foreign interference as a result of Anglo-French rivalry in the region, the development of an Egyptian Press,<sup>2</sup> the formation of secret societies both of a religious nature and in the army, Egyptian modernism with reformism, constitutionalism and Egyptianism as the factors of "quasi-national movement"<sup>3</sup>, and finally the First World War which changed the basic collaborationist views of the Egyptian upper class.

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- 1 In Egypt, the knowledge that a better state of affairs was possible in addition to the suspicion towards foreigners even aroused the uneducated classes. While they ceased to consider the personal rule of the khedive as an ideal one, they held the European influence responsible for the religious laxity of the rich and their own poor economic condition.
  - 2 There was only one Arabic newspaper in 1866. The number increased to fifty by 1898 in Cairo alone.- Jacob M. Landau, Parliaments and Parties in Egypt (New York, 1954), p. 74.
  - 3 Ibid., pp. 176-7.



The Emergence of Political Parties and Party System in Egypt

Secret societies were the fore-runners of political parties in Egypt. With their organization, however loose, and common ideals they provided the basis for the growth of political parties. Thus, the first political party grew out of a secret society founded by some military officers in 1876. It got transformed into the National Party in November 1879 but more or less continued with its secret character. With a bold programme for achieving Egyptian autonomy through parliamentary institutions and ministers responsible to them, it did attract the educated classes, journalists, peasants and a good many religious leaders. Another secret society claiming to be a political party in 1879 was the Young Egypt (Misr al-Fatat). It had a programme not much different from that of the National Party but in more specific terms. It even had as its organ a periodical, Misr al-Fatat, perhaps the first of its kind. However, both the National Party and the Young Egypt faded away after the Urabi Revolt of 1882, its suppression and the establishment of the British protectorate.

After a decade of lull, the nationalists once again started organizing themselves. This time an ambitious Khedive, Abbas II (who succeeded to the title in 1892) also joined. In 1893, one Latif Salim organized his own group into a secret society called the Nationalist Party with the purpose of working for the country's independence and present its cause to the

European public opinion. Among its members was Mustafa Kamel, who soon took over its leadership, and many of his would be followers. The Khedive formed the National Party (Hizb al-Watani) in 1897 with the help of Mustafa Kamel and Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid to resist British occupation. Even this had its origins in the secret society called 'The Society for the Revival of the Nation' (al-Jamiyyat-Ihya al-Watan) created to direct popular opposition to British occupation into nationalist channels and started operating freely only after October 1907. The significance of Mustafa Kamel's party lies in the fact that it was the first real organization of a political party in modern Egypt to outlive its founder.<sup>4</sup> Even after Kamel's death in 1908 when its popularity was on the wane, it still remained a factor in the political life of the country. The evidence of its congresses and journalistic activity shows that the National Party was still the best organized although its closest rival, the People's Party (Hizb al-Umma), enjoyed the support of the British and the next closest, the Constitutional Reformers (Hizb al-Islah 'ala'l -Mabadi al-Dasturiyya), patronized by the Khedive.

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4 Mohammed Farid succeeded to the leadership of the National Party and launched his movement for the grant of a constitution. He not only wrote articles but also started a signature campaign which gave it a greater popular base and created political consciousness among the people. He realized the value of support from the workers and peasants. He helped in the promotion of a trade union of handicraftsmen and suggested the formation of an agricultural trade union. Z.M. Quraishi, Liberal Nationalism in Egypt - Rise and Fall of the Wafd Party (Allahabad, 1967) pp. 26-7.

Mustafa's success stimulated the efforts of other would be leaders. There appeared on the political scene a group of moderate nationalists who were not in full agreement with Kamel's militant programme. Encouraged by Cromer they started a newspaper, al-Jarida, and in September 1907 established the 'Party of the Nation' or 'The People's Party'. Its activities revolved around the al-Jarida. It stood for co-operation with the British in the gradual implementation of reform. It is to this group that one should look for the origins of the Liberal Constitutionalists.<sup>5</sup> Soon after came a third party - the Constitutional Reform Party. It was a Palace body formed around the newspaper al-Mu'ayyad. It had no ideology nor a mass following.

During the following five years four other parties came up - the National Free Party, the Party of Independent Egyptians, the Young Egyptian Party and the Party of the Nobles. All these were minor parties and hardly influenced the course of events.

Political parties in Egypt before the end of the First World War had some common features. They were all rather loosely organized and all ties were personal. Except for the National Party, the other parties were groups loosely connected with a certain personality- whose abilities decided their fate\$- than to an ideal. They relied more on popular sentiment than

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5 Mahmud Zayid, "The Origins of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party in Egypt" in P.M. Holt, Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt (London, 1968), p. 338.

on efficient party discipline. In fact, except for Urabi's National Party and Kamel's National Party, all political parties were more so in name than in fact and were really instruments for the furtherance of private ambitions or group interests. They all had a common growth pattern — groups crystallized around already existing newspapers or started new ones and after a certain time grew into political parties the main interests and activities of which continued to be centered around their organs. "Papers (were)not only the voices but also the brains of the parties".<sup>6</sup> For Mustafa Kamel's party it was the al-Mu'ayyed to begin with, then the al-Liwa and later the 'Egyptian Standard' and the 'L' Etendard Egyptien'; the al-Jarida was for the People's Party and the al-Mu'ayyad for the Constitutional Reformers.

#### Parliament and Political Parties - the Inter-War Period

It was these not so well organized political parties which formed the bases and set the tone for the parties of the post-World War I period. It was remarkable how similar was the political orientation of these parties to that which preceded World War I. The National Party, most important before the War, was reduced to a mere cypher, its place having been taken by the Wafd which adopted most of its watch words, especially the anti-British slogans. Instead of the Constitutional Reformers,

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6 Landau, n. 2, p. 176.

openly favourable to the occupant of the throne and to Islam and covertly quite friendly with the British, there were the Constitutional Liberals who preached and propagated very much the same ideas. In 1908, the Khedive, dissatisfied with the attitude of the Constitutional Reformers, had inspired the formation of a Party of Nobles, small in number but loyal to him. In 1925, much the same happened — the King, displeased at the Constitutional Liberals' lukewarm attitude towards him, inspired the formation of the Union Party, counting only few adherents, but subservient to him. Little had changed during the first quarter of the 20th century.

The Wafd originating as a delegation to the British resident, Sir Reginald Wingate, claiming to represent the people of Egypt, and demanding "complete independence" soon assumed the character of a national union of personalities leading a popular movement for independence. It not, nor at least in its early stages, a political party for it was but a heterogeneous group of individuals, a coalition of those vital forces in the nation that demanded the evacuation of Egypt and worked to limit the power of the throne.<sup>7</sup> The Wafd, too, regarded itself only as the agent of popular will and not a

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7 Besides, it has been pointed out that the constitution of the Egyptian Delegation was in sharp contrast to the constitution of a political party in the modern sense of the term. The members of the Delegation had the attainment of sovereignty as their objective; they led a nationalist movement and had no programme of a political party. As a delegation it was an organization of leaders and had no organized ties with the people - Quraishi, n. 4, p. 46.

political party.<sup>8</sup> When it was ultimately obliged to enter the lists as a party it was because of the responsibility it felt for the enormous confidence reposed in it by the Egyptian people. Moreover, the growth of representation made the parliamentary sphere the logical arena for its activities.

The peculiarity of its origin accounted for the Wafd's all-encompassing, pluralistic nature. There was a place for everyone in the Wafd. In it were fellahin and pashas, Anglophiles and Anglophobes, conservatives and revolutionaries, intellectuals and rabble-rousers. "To define it (is) to define Egypt itself ---".<sup>9</sup> Even the four major splits that took place in its chequered history of about thirty-five years could not turn it into a really homogenous organization.<sup>10</sup>

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8 In a policy speech on 20 September 1923, Sa'd Zaghloul, the leader of the Delegation, concluded that the Wafd was not a political party. Emphasizing the basis of unity, the desire for independence, he said, "Those who say that we are a party aiming at independence imply that there is another party among the people which does not aim at independence" al-Ahram, 22 September, 1923. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

Even as late as March 1925, Zaghloul maintained that the Wafd was "not a political organization or a party or a group but an agent of the nation". Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 99.

9 Jean Lacouture, Nasser : A Biography (London, 1973) p. 15.

10 The very first split was quite expected. The differences between Zaghloul and Adli Yekken who tended to be more on the side of the British than that of the nationalists soon became evident and the two parted company when Zaghloul expressed no confidence in the latter's Cabinet formed in March 1921.

The second split took place in 1930 on the issue of the proposal of a National Government following the dismissal of the Wafdist Government and its boycott of the elections that followed. A younger group led by Nahas which was opposed to the idea of a non-Wafdist Prime Minister,

It is interesting to note that every split resulted in a new party being formed. Thus in 1922 Adli Pasha formed the constitutional Liberal Party with the object of weakening the organized agitation launched by the Wafd Party and to collaborate with the Constitution (Drafting) Committee. The Palace after dismissing the Wafd Government in 1930 made Ismail Sidqi the Prime Minister who formed the People's Party (Hizb al-Sha'b) to win a parliamentary majority and to abrogate the Constitution and repeal all democratic legislation. The third split resulted in the formation of the Sa'adist Life (al-Hayat al-Sa'adiyya) in 1937. The Wafdist Bloc ('al-Kutlat al-Wafdiyya) was inspired and encouraged by the Palace after the fourth split in the Wafd Party in 1943.

Two other political parties came up after World War I — the Young Egypt Society which later transformed itself into a political party, and the Communist Party.

The Young Egypt Society was formed in 1934 as "a fascist organization of anti-foreign and extreme nationalist complexion---

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... though in a minority, had its own. With this started the decline of the old stalwarts within the party. The third split on a minor issue of a project for electricity generation led to a Cabinet reshuffle in 1937 and the exclusion of two prominent members, Mahmud al-Nuqrashi and Mohmud Ghalib. They were then expelled from the Party. Similarly, the fourth split in 1943 excluded from the Cabinet the then Finance Minister, Makraw 'Abayd on the issue involving the unusual promotion of three officials of the government.

(with) a strong appeal particularly to the student class."<sup>11</sup> It claimed to express both the spirit and aspirations of the entire Egyptian nation. It transformed itself into a political party when legislation in April 1938 prohibited the activities of the shirt organizations (the society had its own Green Shirts Organization) and became the National Islamic Party in 1940 and had a new name — the Egyptian Socialist Party — in 1949-50.

Till the 1940s the Communist Party, even though founded in the early 1920s, remained inactive, suppressed and therefore, numerically and organizationally weak till the 1940s. Developments during the World War proved disastrous for the prestige of the Wafd, the Monarch and the British<sup>12</sup> but provided opportunities for the extremist groups. Marxists study groups sprang up but soon split into a number of disjointed fragments.<sup>13</sup> Out of these

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- 11 Arthur Yenchen, Acting High Commissioner, in a despatch to Sir John Simon, dated 30 January 1934 regarding the formation of the Young Egypt Society. Quoted by P.J. Vatikiotis, Nasser and His Generation (London, 1978), p.30.
  - 12 The Wafd lost patriotic appeal because it had seized power with British support; the King had succumbed to British threats and installed a government of the latter's choice; and, the British actions proved that the independence given to the Egyptians by the Treaty of 1931 was mere sham.
  - 13 The Egyptian Movement for National Liberation (EMNL) founded in 1942 by Henri — Curiel was for action at any price; Hillel Schwartz's Iskra (the Spark), also founded in 1942, was too theoretical and gave in to intellectualism; Marcel Israel's People's Liberation (Tahrir ash-Sha'b) founded in 1943 stressed the need for Egyptianizing the movement. The Vanguard (Al-Tali'a) was a splinter from the EMNL. Three more groups that came up were the Marxist League, the Citadelle and the New Dawn (al-Fajr al-Jadid).
- Jean and Simonne Lacouture, Egypt in Transition (New York, 1958) p. 258.



the Egyptian Movement for National Liberation (EMNL) outstripped its rivals and emerged as "the most dynamic branch of the Left".<sup>14</sup> After the War it absorbed the Iskra and became the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (DMNL), the largest communist group in Egypt and eclipsed the other smaller groups. Despite police repression and inner dissension the communist influence continued to increase so much so that after "Black Saturday"<sup>16</sup> "the Communists appeared to be the natural heir to political power in Egypt".<sup>17</sup>

The other group which gained prominence and popularity during the War and after was the Muslim Brotherhood. Established in 1929 by Hasan el-Banna, as the "Association of Muslim Brothers" (el-Ikhwan al-Muslimin), under the fiery leadership of the Supreme Guide and the striking appropriateness of its propaganda and organization to the state of Egyptian urban society from the

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14 Ibid., p. 259.

15 Communists were able to penetrate into government offices, newspaper bureaux, the Wafd, trade unions and even the Free Officers' Organization which was to topple the monarchy in July 1952.

16 On 26 January 1952, the pent-up nationalist feelings of the Egyptian masses burst into an orgy of violence and arson directed at the vast foreign property in Cairo.

17 M.S. Agwani, Communism in the Arab East (New Delhi, 1969), p. 48.

1940s onward, became a force to reckon with. The preoccupation of the Wafd and lesser political groups with the power struggle left large areas of political thought and action unattended. Not only were the intellectuals unable to reach a consensus but there was no political leadership capable of effectively presiding over this crucial process of ideology formation and forging a new synthesis of thought. The Wafd too, did not fulfil this role in the Egyptian political system. On the other hand, to the poverty stricken masses, demoralized and irritated by the foreign soldiery during the War, the Brotherhood brought a message of revenge and hope. Its popularity spread to all sections of the people - the faithful in the cities and villages, the business people, artisans and the disinherited, and the student community. With a para-military wing, it tried to use violence to topple the government and is said to have a key role as the instigator of the January 1952 riots in Cairo. It emerged from the January-July 1952 chaos as the strongest political organization in Egypt.

#### The Decaying Multi-party System: Road to Revolution

The years which saw the increasing popularity of the extremist parties also saw the decline of the Wafd. Disillusionment with quarrelling politicians and a power-hungry monarch was easily transformed into an antagonism to constitutional government in general and to its European origins in particular. This made it possible for the Muslim Brotherhood

and the Communists to attract hundreds of thousands of followers in the late 1930s, during World War II and after, from the dispossessed urban masses, and the permanently miserable rural population.

The party system that existed in Egypt during the first half of this century was thus a multi-party system. It could be explained in terms of the increasing socio-political differentiation. In a political environment so differentiated ideologically and structurally, one could find a diversity of doctrines and political organizations : Islamic fundamentalists, liberal constitutionalists, varieties of Marxists, labour and student organizations and secret organizations in the army.

The multi-party system formed part of the parliamentary system that was set up after World War I. The system collapsed because of the unreal hold which liberal European political ideas had over Egyptian leaders - a condition which inevitably caused the degeneration of political parties. The Wafd declined, broadly speaking, because of two reasons - its very nature and its inability to meet the new challenges that it confronted. Because of its being an umbrella organization and collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists, it comprised elements of different shades of opinion which undermined the cohesiveness that a political party needs to succeed. The numerable internal fissions which resulted further weakened the Party. The leadership, made up mostly of big land-owners, was

power-hungry and was therefore, ready to compromise. The support given to the Tawfiq Nasim government in 1934 and the provisions of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty were nothing but exercises in compromise and accommodation. The rank and file began to feel alienated and disharmony between the Wafd and the Egyptian masses began to appear. The compromising attitude towards its rivals continued till the end. In 1950 when the Wafd formed the Cabinet, it was expected that it would take advantage of its victory to start a battle against the King's arbitrary power. The King himself was apprehensive. But the government of the Wafd preferred to enjoy the benefits of rule and thus when Nahas Pasha met the King for the first time after his appointment as Prime Minister he expressed the desire "to be allowed to kiss the King's hand".<sup>18</sup> It was because of the nature of the party and of those who led it that it failed to meet the challenges of history. Though it led the nationalist movement, it was unaware of the limitations of its doctrine and could not face the challenge of pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and socialism — ideas which were increasingly becoming important.<sup>19</sup> The Wafd failed to

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18 George M Hadded, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States, Part II - Egypt, the Sudan, Yemen and Libya (New York, 1973) p. 10.

19 The Wafd started as a revolutionary organization in view of the spontaneous revolutionary upsurge that followed Zaghloul's deportation in early 1919. It soon realized the value of negotiation and propaganda and with the acceptance of the 1922 Declaration terminating the protectorate, the Wafd started on the path of becoming a parliamentary, moderate and nationalist party. The end of the first Wafd Government (1923-4) completed the swing of the Wafd from a revolutionary to a nationalist parliamentary party".

acquire a truly national outlook because of the preponderant influence of the landed aristocracy and big business in the higher echelons of its leadership.

The minor parties were also willing — either because of hatred for the Wafd or the personal ambitions of their leaders, or both — to support the King's arbitrary rule, following repeated prorogation of parliament. And through the King they often indirectly helped the British cause whose interests often coincided with those of the Palace.

Generally, parties in developing countries have programmes which, implicitly or explicitly, express the aims of a vested interest group, or of a traditional class, or else the perpetuation and opportunistic exploitation of existing popular preconceptions. None of these can save a party, or a country, for long.<sup>20</sup> Egypt, for most of the years between 1907 and 1952, was alternatively controlled by parties offering one of these three kinds of programmes and so failed to deal with social change— they did not emphasize the mobilization and organizations of an ever

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... Quraishi, n. 4, p. 97.

The first Wafd Congress in 1935 represented a swing to the left when the objectives of the Party were clarified and it became a champion of democratic rights and leftist causes. The 1943 Congress gave a more radical content to its policies which showed the growing influence of the young Wafdists.

20 Manfred Halpern, The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa (Princeton, 1963) p. 291.

with manipulating the government for the benefit of sectional interests. Internal political chaos, accompanied naturally by frequent breakdowns of public order, especially after the Palestine War in 1948, reflected the disarray of the ruling classes. A combination of these elements gave the military — the only organized institution<sup>21</sup> remaining in the state with access to the use of force, and therefore, to the exercise of power — their first political victory: the overthrow of the dynasty which had reigned in Egypt since 1805 in a well-planned coup d'etat on 23 July 1952.

#### The Coup d'etat and the Political Parties

It took some time for the people of Egypt to realize the significance of what had happened. For the first time in a long history of foreign domination Egypt was to be ruled by Egyptians. The masses came out on the streets in a frenzy of joy and jubilation to express their support to the new regime.

As it happens in cases where a group seizes power in ways

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21 The only institution that had not been directly involved in the conflict before 1948 was the military establishment. But here, too, discontent seeped in. Dissatisfaction among these young officers mostly native Egyptians of non-aristocratic or non-Turkish origins - against Britain and the Government developed early during World War II and drove them to conspiratorial activity. The humiliation of the Palestine War in 1948, the defective arms scandal and the arbitrary fashion in which the army had been committed to battle focussed their wrath on the King and the Palace - appointed leadership.

other than constitutional, the Free Officers<sup>22</sup> were anxious about legitimacy; they wanted to be accepted by the people. Thus, the last minute desperate efforts to recruit General Neguib to lead the revolt as frontman did not flow from Gamal Abdel Nasser's wish to "yield the place of honour to an older man" as Sadat asserts<sup>23</sup> but was designed to surround the Free Officers group, with a halo of legitimacy and recognition which they sorely lacked.<sup>24</sup>

But this was not sufficient. To establish popular bases of legitimacy and support for the revolution the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), set up immediately after the coup d'etat to run the government, proclaimed agricultural reforms, abolition of monarchy, and the reorganization of political groups. The Agrarian Reform Law, put into effect in September 1952, enabled the regime to establish a link with the peasant

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22 The Association of Free Officers established secretly in 1949 was one of the several conspirational groups within the army. The coup d'etat of July 1952 which the Free Officers engineered was an affair exclusively organized by eleven junior officers relatively unknown outside the military establishment and lacking widespread support. They could not present themselves as originating from a known political party (like the Bolsheviks in Russia) or legitimate themselves in a Charismatic leader who had achieved fame and popularity in the past by important services to the nation.

23 Anwar el-Sadat, Revolt on the Nile (London, 1957) p. 109.

24 R. Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt under Nasir - A Study in Political Dynamics (London, 1972) p. 24.

masses and at the same time reduce the economic power of the landed aristocracy. The abolition of monarchy, which had reached the height of its unpopularity under King Faruq, was generally welcome. But the reform of political parties was a problematic proposition.

The expectations of the political parties were the product of the peculiar relationship of these organizations with the Free Officers' Association. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists, having realized the potentialities of the Officers' group, had tried to establish links with it. "During his entire pre-revolutionary career, Nasser was under constant pressure from the Communists as well as the Muslim Brotherhood — each wanted him as a member".<sup>25</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood believed that the Revolution was their revolution and hoped to have a theocratic state established through Nasser. They took credit for the complete lack of opposition to the Revolution at the start and probably deserved it. Its Supreme Guide even proposed the amalgamation of the Free Officers and the Brotherhood. The Communists, through Khaled Moheiddin, tried to convince Nasser that what his group needed was an ideology which they alone could provide. They sent him books on communism hoping they could persuade him to adopt their ideology. The Muslim Brotherhood appealed to his belief in the Quran at the same time reminding

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25 Robert St. John, The Boss: The Story of Gamal Abdel Nasser (London, 1960) p. 71.



him that they had a well-knit organization ready to be used if Nasser should ever decide to make common cause with them.

Immediately after the coup d'etat, the Muslim Brothers made no secret of their opinion that the military movement was an instrument to instal the Brotherhood in power and set themselves the task of ushering in an Islamic state guided by those who understood the essence of it; i.e., by the Brotherhood leaders themselves. As to the reaction of the communists, the DMNL remained alone in its support of the Officers' movement, while the other groups struggled futilely with one another to decide whether it was a military-dictatorship or plain fascism.

The Wafd, too, like the Muslim Brotherhood, expected the coup d'etat to strengthen its own position. Its expectations were heightened by the expressed commitment of the new leaders "to restore constitutional life" implying thereby that the army which had acted to set things right would return to the barracks. On the morning of 23 July 1952, Nasser, on the advice of his Wafdist friend Ahmed Abul Fath, editor of El Misri, had no other thought than to recall the 1950 parliament, entirely devoted to the old party.<sup>26</sup> According to Major Salah Salem, later the Junta's public spokesman, the Officers had themselves planned a return to the barracks in six months. Nasser himself favoured parliamentary elections in six months, i.e., by February 1953, while other Officers with Marxist or Muslim

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26 Lacouture and Lacouture, n. 13, p. 241.

Brotherhood leanings wanted more drastic revolutionary action.<sup>27</sup> The Wafd was confident that, though weakened, it still had the largest following among the masses. The first cabinet led by Ali Maher, was a civilian one and did give the impression that the military was prepared for the reinstatement of a healthier constitutional order.

But gradually it became clear that Nasser, who headed the RCC, the chief decision-making body whose approval even General Neguib was required to take, had a mind of his own. He never wanted to commit his organization to any political party or ideology. Even Anwar el-Sadat, a prominent member of the Organization who is generally said to have had strong leanings towards the Muslim Brotherhood and was the liason man between the two groups, objected to a proposal for merger of the two organizations. Rather, the Free Officers hoped to use their association with the Brotherhood "as a lever to achieve their own ends".<sup>28</sup> Nasser's own hunch was that they should infiltrate the Brotherhood with their own young officers and keep a close eye on it for some day they might be useful. If such was the attitude of the leaders of the Junta, little wonder then that Nasser permitted only one Muslim Brotherhood member to join the first civilian cabinet (out of the three names that Neguib had asked for) and

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27 Robert Stephens, Nasser : A Political Biography (New York, 1971) p. 114.

28 Sadat, n. 23, p. 28.

that he bluntly rejected the proposal of having a Brotherhood committee to scrutinize all draft laws prepared by the Government saying that he could not accept supervision.

Similar was the relationship with the Communists. Though links were maintained through Khaled Mohieddin, Nasser, the staunch nationalist that he was, always treated them as Russian agents.

I knew their (Communists) inside secrets even before the Revolution. I knew the most intimate particulars about them... I had acquaintances from among the Communists, who endeavoured to exploit this acquaintance in order to bring me into the fold of communism  
--- But I staunchly believed in Arab nationalism.<sup>29</sup>

Little wonder then that Nasser came down with a heavy hand to suppress the Kafr al-Dawwar labour revolt of August 1952 which was inspired by the Left. Later, in early 1953, all the para-Communist organizations and publications were outlawed, hunted down or kept under firm control and a few score of militants arrested.

As to a return to constitutional government and the wafdist hopes of a return to power, the Military Junta made such a return difficult. To begin with, it did ask the parties to get ready to assume power but only after they had published their programmes and purged themselves of corrupt elements.

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29 Speech at Evacuation Square, Damascus, 15 March 1959.  
- Gamal Abdel Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews  
1959 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 146.

The publication of programmes was not much of a problem but the purging was. For what would the Wafd be left with if it were to dismiss Nahas Pasha, as it was asked to. The Junta then went about challenging the popularity of Nahas in the delta region - Neguib toured the Wafd strongholds and was welcomed and even acquired the messianic quality that Nahas claimed. To make secure their main base of strength, i.e., the Army Officers Corps, the Junta retired 450 Wafdist officers in September 1952.<sup>30</sup>

#### Nasser and the Political Parties

The old political parties appeared to be on their way out making way for the Military Junta to consolidate its power. That this spelt the end of the multi-party set up and paved the way for the one-party system which ultimately did come about was the result partly of Nasser's aversion towards political parties of the pre-Revolution type, the latter's reluctance to reform and adapt themselves to the new situation, and his own relentless drive for personal power.

Nasser's aversion towards political parties was rooted in his personal experiences dating back to his school days when he is said to have joined the Young Egypt party. Just one meeting with its Chairman was enough to sow in his impressionable mind the seeds of distrust for all political parties. To a minority party leader, he is reported to have said:

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30 Tom Little, Egypt (London, 1958) p. 203.

I believed in the party, until I saw the Chairman sitting there counting his profits.... When I heard the way he talked about money, rather than ideals and principles and aspirations, I was no longer interested.<sup>31</sup>

"It was the first disillusionment of a young idealist. It was the start of his cynicism about party politicians, which would increase from year to year and would some day lead him to order the elimination of all political parties, good and bad alike."<sup>32</sup> His "probing contacts" with the powerful Wafd, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, the Liberal Constitutional Party, and the Sa'adists also did not help — he found them all wanting. Even an organization like the Muslim Brotherhood whose combative exaltation he had admired thought only of using the conflict as a means to seize power.<sup>33</sup> The Communists as a whole had dissociated themselves from the common cause, quarrelling among themselves about the nature of the new regime.<sup>34</sup>

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31 Quoted in Robert St. John, n. 25, p. 26.

32 Ibid.

33 Nasser distrusted the Brethren because of their earlier co-operation in 1946 with the Ismail Sidqi Government in purging communists as well as for their own, vast connections with pro-Palace and other party politicians. - Vatikiotis, n. 11, p. 115.

34 The trend of distrust, not without reason, was to continue long after Nasser had firmly established himself in power. Nasser's direct contact in 1958 at the time of the Union with Syria with the Communists and the Ba'th (officially in a state of auto-dissolution but implicitly recognized to be still existing in a twilight zone between legality and illegality) only served to strengthen his suspicions and add a new dimension to his hostility towards political parties. He realized that even parties which considered themselves ideological and progressive were not immune to petty factionalism and narrow partisanship.

he Struggle for Power

After the coup, the young officers' suspicions were confirmed. All the major political parties saw in the change, a chance to seize power. Though it is true that the promises of a return to constitutional government after elections were empty promises meant only to gain legitimacy which the Junta so badly needed, it is also true that the political parties by their stubborn, uncompromising attitude towards the Officers' directives themselves offered grounds for their own destruction, still rooted in the society of the past, they failed to respond to the calls for radical change.

We felt the need for a radical change, but we did not know the road, or the method leading to its realization. We thought that they (the politicians) with their experience would know the road and the method --- (but) they did not feel the need for a radical change.<sup>35</sup>

Instead, they sought actively in the months after the coup d'etat to embarrass the Junta — the Brethren by using the strength of their organization to demand a share in power, the waft by clamouring for a new constitution and thus an early return to parliamentary government, and the Communist by fomenting industrial strife among the labour class. Through their actions, they proved that they were "as short of vision, patriotism and

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5 Interview granted to Mohammed Hasanayn Haykal, editor-in-chief of 'al-Ahram', 2 July 1959.

Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews 1959 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 570.

constructive idealism as they were long on selfishness and opportunism."<sup>36</sup>

More important was the struggle between two major groups within the Junta led by General Neguib and Colonel Nasser respectively. Their differences went deeper than a conflict of personalities and ambitions. The conflict between Neguib and Nasser arose from the fact that the former was an elder conservative looking to the past, while the latter was a revolutionary looking to the future. Neguib thought it was enough to abolish the monarchy without abolishing the political institutions in which it was set. Nasser and his supporters believed that a total revolution was necessary in the political life of the country. Essentially, the competing policies centered on the role of the military in Egyptian politics and the question of a return to constitutional government was only a related issue. Having achieved substantial popularity among the masses, Neguib could not have remained content as a mere figurehead without a decisive voice in the RCC. Neguib felt he was being used by the RCC. He knew that theoretically he was head of the Cabinet, the RCC and of the Joint Committee composed of the Cabinet, and the RCC meeting together but actually he was no more than a figurehead. The Commander-in-Chief,<sup>37</sup> Abdel Hakim Amer, ignored him when issuing

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36 Fayez Sayeg, "The Theoretical Structure of Nasser's Arab Socialism" in Albert Hourani, ed., Middle Eastern Studies No. 4, St. Antony's Paper no. 17 (London, 1965) p. 49.

37 Neguib himself wanted to be Commander-in-Chief but Nasser, always fearful of letting real power slip out of his hands, did not permit this and appointed his close friend and confidant, Abdel Hakim Amer, as Commander-in-Chief.

orders, the Cabinet took decisions without bothering to get his approval. The RCC failed even to inform him when it was going to meet. For the ambitious young officers, unless the Army remained in power and the old parties out of it, they could not feel secure. Apparently they were as obsessed by the frightening thought of what would happen to them if democracy, and with it, the old politicians, returned, as by the no less disturbing idea that the revolution would not continue its march, or would not be able to stand on its feet without them. As for Nasser, he had, from the very beginning, made it quite clear that the Revolution was his work and that all decisions were to have his approval. He realized that he had to nurse his constituency — the Army — if he wanted to continue to exercise power. As if to reconcile this with his expressed desire for constitutional government, Nasser identified the Army with the people. "The Army represents the whole people", he said.<sup>38</sup> Then,

Indeed the Army which carried out the Revolution, which played the role of the Vanguard, was nothing but a representation of your own nature, your potentialities, a representation of our own existence, our own history, our own origin, and an interpretation of the inmost soul of everyone of us.<sup>39</sup>

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- 38 Speech on the Occasion of Proclamation of the Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic, 5 March 1958.  
- Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews, 1958 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 85.
- 39 Address on the Seventh Anniversary of the July 23 Revolution, 22 July 1959.  
- Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews 1959 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 267.



The trial of strength between Neguib and Nasser which could only be expected, came in February 1954, when Neguib resigned from all the posts he occupied. The RCC delayed a decision on the resignation and, in the meanwhile, started on a vilification campaign against the General accusing him of being "a concerted, dictatorial, power-hungry old man". But the RCC had to bow down to the wishes of the Brotherhood- Wafdist - Leftist alliance within and outside the Free Officers' Organization and called back Neguib as President and later also as Prime Minister.

Nasser lost because he let Neguib precipitate a showdown at a time when the purge of pro-Neguib elements within the Army had not been completed, and the RCC and its emerging leader did not yet possess organized popular support among the urban masses. To remedy the situation Nasser acted on two fronts. He obtained control of the most powerful labour union, the Federation of Cairo Transport Workers, the members of which could shout as loudly as the Communists and the Muslim Brothers. On 25 March 1954 the RCC issued a communique which said that the political parties were to be permitted to resume their activities, elections would be held within three months, and that the RCC itself would go out of existence. The Bikbashis would return to the Army. Everything would return to its former state, Nasser said. He went so far as to say that in the new non-military era, he would not even be a candidate for election to any public office. In all this the idea which Nasser wanted to convey was that he was

bowing to reactionary forces led by Neguib, thus casting him as the destroyer of the Revolution. At the same time, he dismissed, demoted and transferred Neguib's men in the Army and promoted officers who would be loyal to him. A stage-managed pro-RCC popular uprising was enough for Nasser to reverse the decision of March 25 when he announced that the RCC would continue to rule until the end of the transitional period (January 1956), that the political parties would again be outlawed and elections postponed. Neguib was stripped of the Prime Ministership in April and after the attempt on Nasser's life by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he was implicated and put under house-arrest. The contest for power between the General and the Colonel had ended in the latter's victory.

#### Consolidation of Power : Action against Political Parties

One of the first acts of the Junta against the political parties was to call on them to publish their programmes and purge themselves of corrupt elements. The programmes were duly published and anticipating the tendencies of the military committee, were all radical, even revolutionary, except for the Muslim Brotherhood's manifesto which advocated an Islamic State. The Wafd defined itself as a "democratic, socialist, political party", the Sa'adists, the party of the industrialists, styled themselves as the "Democratic Socialist Party". This farce only added several nails to the parties' coffin lids. The only party that did put up a fight was the Wafd which when asked to

dismiss its leader, Nahas Pasha, said: "There is no Wafd without Nahas".

In January 1953, all political parties were dissolved and their assets confiscated.

But the Muslim Brotherhood was not. The reasons for this were many. First, the Brotherhood pleaded that it was not a political party,<sup>40</sup> "even though they had been registered as one".<sup>41</sup> Then, Nasser, in his confrontation with political parties, realized that it was not the proper time to antagonize the million members of the Brotherhood. It had to be handled with care not only because numbers were important but also because it had both members and sympathisers in the Army who could be wildly fanatical. Though himself secular in outlook, Nasser still had to tread gently in his relations with the Supreme Guide and his Council. An Additional reason, though perhaps not a very strong one, was that both Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood

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40 It very nearly came to being a political party in 1942. Nahas Pasha having been installed into power with British backing, called for General Elections to be held. Hasan el-Banna, the Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood was ready to run for election but withdrew when Nahas persuaded him not to run. "Had the Brotherhood leader been elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1942, his subsequent career might have been vastly different. He could have followed a constitutional path to power within the framework of government institutions; his 'religious association' would have become a formal political party----."

- Christina Phelps Harris, Nationalism and Revolution in Egypt - The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood (The Hague, 1964) p. 183.

41 Mohammed Neguib, Egypt's Destiny (London, 1955) p. 183.

opposed political parties and denounced them as corrupt, irresponsible and reactionary. Both advocated a single-party system though their view of the nature, functioning and aims of the single-party system were very different. Therefore, "it was decided not to abolish them (the Muslim Brothers) for the time being but to attempt to fuse them with the Liberation Rally,"<sup>42</sup> which was formed immediately after parties were dissolved in January 1953.

Was it then, Nasser's intention from the first to climb to supreme power on the shoulders of the army? Or was he driven by events and experience to abandon early hope of a democratic constitutional system? Support for either thesis can be found. But the fact is that his words mostly stress his early democratic hopes and reluctance to govern, while from the first his actions showed a decided will to power. Whatever democratic intentions the Junta can be said to have had was clearly incompatible with their desire for power. Once this was decided, the next step was consolidation of power at two levels. First, total control over the armed forces. The strong external pressure exerted on the officer group by the activities of the dissolved political parties necessitated an internal purge of the Free Officers' group itself. There were some splits (like the one led by Khalid Mohieddin) and a hard core of centrist officers, the

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42 Ibid., p. 183.

majority faithful to Nasser and to the initial ideological principles of the movement, emerged. They were opposed to the party system as long as it could hinder their original aims of setting up a modern and really independent state. The second entailed neutralization and eventual destruction of existing loci of political power - the monarchy, political parties, senior officials, land-owning, financial, industrial and commercial members of the old ruling class. A necessary corollary of this twin objective was the control of education, the media, professional syndicates, trade unions, rural structures in the countryside, the religious institutions and orders, the administration and the bureaucracy and eventually the whole society. To accomplish this the Junta needed an institutional device. The most efficient device that Nasser could think of was the single-party system.

CHAPTER III

THE THREE 'AVATARS' OF THE SINGLE PARTY IN  
EGYPT : THE LIBERATION RALLY, THE NATIONAL  
UNION, THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION

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#### THE THREE 'AVATARS' OF THE SINGLE PARTY IN EGYPT : THE LIBERATION RALLY, THE NATIONAL UNION, THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION

We have seen in the preceding chapters why leaders in the developing countries of Asia and Africa prefer the single-party system to a two-party or multi-party system. From the justifications generally given by advocates of single-party systems almost all of which apply to Egypt, one can explain why Nasser, despite his basic aversion to political parties, could not completely do away with them and had to take resort to the single-party system.

The greatest danger to any military dictatorship is a military coup d'etat. This has been the fate of military dictatorships in many Latin American, Asian and African countries. The only security against this danger lies in basing the government on a broad popular organization, i.e. a political party. The officer-politicians scorn parties. But they also feel the necessity of organizing public activity and realize that "indifference and passivity may be almost as dangerous to the regime as an opposition or an underground movement".<sup>1</sup> Hence the need to build a support base. Such a popular base and ideology is not only necessary for the existence and security of the regime but becomes essential if the leadership wishes, as Egyptian

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1 Eliezer Be'eri, Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society (London, 1970) p. 448.

leaders did, to bring about changes in matters of ownership, production and social relations.

However, in the case of Egypt, Nasser's distaste for parties combined with his hatred for foreign influence and his emphasis on unity to justify the single party state. In his own words,

... George Washington told you in his famous Farewell Speech, when he decided to retire, that he did not approve of the system of multiple parties in that period when American people were fighting the battle of self-determination. He feared that having multiple parties might lead to a civil war, .... His words were true and experience has shown how true they are in circumstances of countries passing through decisive periods in their history, the periods of war for self-determination and freedom...

... If I allow parties now to come into existence immediately, what will be the result? It is most probable that I shall find three parties. One will advocate alliance with the West and will rely on some reactionaries and feudalists. A second will advocate alliance with the Soviet Union and will rely on Communists. The third will urge a policy of non-alignment and positive neutralism. There could be fierce conflict between the three parties and this would disrupt the unity of our country. Do I want this? No. 2

At the same time, it was realized that without a political organization there could be no guarantee for the continuance of the Revolution. In an article written in January 1965, a leading

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2 Interview granted to the Columbian Broadcasting System of New York, 7 April 1958.  
Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews 1958 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 386.



leftist ideologue of the Nasserite party, Khalid Mohieddin explained that political organization must be the "pivot for the success of socialist policy".<sup>3</sup> The party is needed to meet the challenges of change in a society dominated by big landlords, reluctant to give up their land and the power and influence that go with such ownership and to serve the interests of the small farmers and agricultural workers who still require training and practical political guidance in order to be able to manage their affairs and properly protect their rights. There is no solution to all these problems except the formation of a nuclei of politically aware individuals among the fellahin themselves in each and every village.

We have seen in the previous pages that the political parties after the coup d'etat in July 1952 had acted only to embarrass the new military regime and acquire power for themselves. With the dissolution of political parties by an order issued in January 1953, the political state had been wiped clean. The Muslim Brotherhood which remained was discredited and the symbol of the old system, General Neguib, was ousted by the end of 1954. The problem was what sort of political institutions, if any, could be created to replace them? Clearly, the formal governmental structure was unlikely by itself to provide the mechanism for legitimizing authority and organizing popular

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3 Be'eri, n. 1, p. 452.

participation. The efforts to create political organizations to fill the institutional gap resulted initially in the creation of the Liberation Rally followed later by the National Union and the Arab Socialist Union.

### The Liberation Rally

Though the military leaders dissolved the political parties, they realized that the only way to offset the threats posed by the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood was to develop a "revolutionary party" that could outvote these parties.<sup>4</sup> The Liberation Rally was, therefore, designed as a vehicle through which they could forestall political agitation by rival groups. It was primarily a device created by Nasser to clear out elements subversive to the regime from existing organizations among workers and students. It was not so much a move to broaden the movement's popular base as an attempt to forestall disruption resulting from lack of direct contact with the people. "It was an instrument for the reorganization of popular forces"<sup>5</sup>, a "pen to marshal

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4 Nasser himself admitted in 1953 that if elections were to be held in the near future the Wafd would still stand to win. In his own words: "It remains the strongest electoral force in Egypt"--- "two out of every three of its (Wafd's) electors would still vote for it".

- Jean and Simone Lacouture, Egypt in Transition (New York, 1958) p. 248.

5 Nasser's speech at Mansura, 9 April 1953. Quoted in P.J. Vatikiotis, Nasser and His Generation (London, 1978) p. 134.

the populace<sup>6</sup> and to build student-labour mass support.

The dissolution of political parties eliminated the institutional obstacles to the regime's monopoly of power and to the realization of the people's 'real' interests as the military leaders preferred to put it. From the very beginning official media had been used, negatively through censorship and positively by propaganda, to neutralize the influence of rival ideas and interests. But these tools, although powerful, remained limited in scope as they could only neutralize the opponents. What was needed was positive support for the Junta's reformist programme. The Liberation Rally was designed to do this job. It concretized Nasser's concept of an instrument for mobilizing and "revolutionizing" Egypt. The eleven point programme<sup>7</sup> published on 16 January 1953 and the Rally's slogan of "unity, order, work" was given large scale publicity — the principles were read and explained in places of worship, before women's groups, boy scouts

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6 Ibid., p. 174.

7 The eleven points were: the complete and unconditional evacuation of foreign troops; self-determination for the Sudan; a new constitution; a social system of protection against the ravages of unemployment, disease and old age; an economic system designed to assure an equitable distribution of wealth; a political system in which freedom of speech, of assembly, of the press and of religion was to be guaranteed within the limits of the law; an education system designed to develop the feeling of social responsibility; friendly relations with all Arab states; a regional force to reinforce the influence of the Arab League; the establishment of friendly relations with all friendly states; and, a firm adherence to the principles of the United Nations.

and youth groups. The Liberation Rally was to serve as a "school" in which the people would "learn the true meaning of elections"<sup>8</sup> and would be prepared for participation in the new political parties,<sup>9</sup> that the regime hoped to create before the third anniversary of the revolution.

### Assessment

The Liberation Rally, however, turned out to be a failure. It failed as a political organization because it lacked bold leadership, experienced cadres, efficient organization and coherent ideology. There was a shortage of shrewd, enterprising disciplined organizers and a scarcity of political skills and experience — instead of building a reliable core first, the regime tried to mobilize millions in a few weeks. Vast crowds were assembled to repeat in unison the oath of the Liberation Rally. Entire trade unions and other organizations joined the Rally through the signatures of their leaders, while the rank and file remained unconcerned. As for ideology, besides the eleven point programme which was so broad that no Egyptian inside the movement could readily distinguish himself from those outside it, no further attempt was made to define the ideology of the Revolution which the Rally was supposed to defend.

As a mass organization, too, the Liberation Rally was a failure. Though in its early days the Rally was austere and

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8 Vatikiotis, n. 5, p. 134.

9 Mohammed Neguib, Egypt's Destiny (London, 1955) p. 181.

idealistic in its activities<sup>10</sup> - and this should have brought it closer to the masses — in the long run, it failed to achieve the popularity of its major rival, the Muslim Brotherhood. It could not become a link between the centre and the periphery.

But the Liberation Rally was not a total failure; it did succeed in neutralizing rival forces. The RCC was able, through the Liberation Rally, to clear labour unions, trade-federations and student organizations of antagonistic elements. Kamal al-din Husein, a member of Nasser's cabinet of April 1954, systematically purged trade unions and labour organizations of possible opposition. He performed the same operation successfully among student organizations when he later became Minister of Education. Control over labour and student organizations was utilized by Nasser in his struggle for power against Neguib. Though the Wafdist, Communist and Brotherhood influences among the masses were neutralized to some extent, the fact was that the Brotherhood, not yet dissolved as the other two, was free to act till late 1954 when it too was banned. Till then the "Muslim Brothers instead of cooperating with the Rally, joined it only to

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10 Officers personally settled local blood feuds and sometimes forbade the audiences to whom they spoke to cheer them. 'Liberation Medical Missions' composed of volunteer doctors and nurses and military medical staff freely treated villagers once a week. 'Liberation Classes' by volunteer teachers taught reading to illiterate adults.

- Manfred Halpern, The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963) p. 309.

subvert it".<sup>11</sup> To what extent this is correct is difficult to say but it can be said for sure that had the Brotherhood been dissolved along with the other parties, the Liberation Rally would certainly have gained strength more rapidly than it did.

Considering the primary aims of the Liberation Rally — that of eliminating political rivals and of securing the political independence of Egypt — one can say that they were more or less achieved. By the end of 1954, the RCC having consolidated its control over the polity,<sup>12</sup> the organization had served its main purpose and could be disbanded.

#### The National Union

Having failed to gain mass support, Nasser opted for widening the scope of the RCC and his personal role in the

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11 Neguib, n. 9, p. 209.

12 The basic structure of the Liberation Rally did not indicate any intention of creating a popular base. It was patterned after that of the RCC, thus creating a situation of parallel overlapping. Its President, General Neguib, was intended to be a figurehead. The Secretary General, the all-powerful man dominating policy and appointments, was Nasser. There was also a Deputy Secretary General and an Inspector General: the Deputy was the operating arm of the Liberation Rally, and the Inspector General was in charge of the Rally's political cells and local organs. The Central Executive Committee of the Liberation Rally was composed of the same personnel as the RCC which dominated and duplicated the functions of the former.

Shimon Shamir, "Five Years of the Organization of Liberation Rally in Egypt", The New East, vol. 8, no. 32 (1957) p. 263.

political system. Between 1953 and 1955, the RCC was purged of the 'ideologues' on both the Left and the Right. Several new members joined the RCC including the 'second-generation' Free Officers who were so far non-political.<sup>13</sup> Civil servants were also recruited to the RCC. The military establishment and the army's high command had been purged of recalcitrant elements and non-political senior officers had taken their position. The result was the weakening of the RCC and the strengthening of the Rais. To strengthen further his personal power and weaken the RCC, Nasser then created the National Union, the second avatar of the single-party system.

The Draft of the new Egyptian Constitution was presented to the nation in January 1956 and adopted by plebiscite on 23 June 1956. Article 192 of this Constitution provided that the people of Egypt shall form a National Union "to accomplish the aims of the Revolution and to encourage all means to give the nation a solid foundation in the political, social and economic realms". It was to undertake the development of the state and make the nominations for membership in the National Assembly. It was formally created by a Presidential decree in May 1957 and Anwar al-Sadat appointed its Secretary General.

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13 The percentage of military officers in the Cabinet declined from 52.1 in September 1954 to 36.3 in June 1956 while the percentage of civilian members in the Cabinet increased from 47.7 in September 1954 to 63.6 in June 1956.

- R. Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir - A Study in Political Dynamics (London, 1972) p. 176.

Like the Liberation Rally, the National Union was necessitated by the needs of the Junta. In the pamphlet 'Qaidah Sha'biyyah' (People's Base), the political unit of the National Union, one year after it was founded, Sadat wrote, "It was not an expedient freely adopted, but a necessity forced upon us, dictated by our new conditions and our new responsibilities".<sup>14</sup> What these conditions and responsibilities were can be found in the purpose and aims of the National Union.

If the Liberation Rally was founded to defend the Revolution from subversive elements within and outside the regime, the National Union was formed to accomplish the aims of the Revolution - the establishment of a "socialist, democratic and cooperative society". The National Union was "a way of protecting the spirit...."<sup>15</sup>

But a revolution, according to Nasser and Sadat, not only required a revolutionary elite or cadre to undertake its organization and planning but also a mass apparatus which was then lacking. The National Union was to supply the 'necessary link' between the Junta and the people. It was meant to be a popular instrument and was to make known to the government the demands and desires of the public as they came up from local levels through the Higher Executive and the National Assembly. It was

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14 Quoted in Amos Perlmutter, Egypt - The Praetorian State (New Jersey, 1974) p. 145.

15 Qaidah Sha'biyyah, June 1958, p. 37. Quoted in *ibid.*



also concerned with the transition from a provisional arrangement to a more permanent relationship between the military rulers and the people.

This is, however, not to suggest that it was to be a representative party since it did not recognize classes, groups or competing ideologies. The regime only stipulated that the 'guidance' of the masses was essential as they had seen how the people were usually drawn into extremist movements in the absence of institutional frameworks for their political satisfaction. The regime was also aware of the need of developing a homogeneous citizenry. The National Union, controlling all aspects of public activity -- students, labour, agricultural workers, economic and occupational associations -- was expected to become the appropriate instrument for the development of a homogeneous political culture.

It was perhaps to emphasize this unity of the Egyptian nation and the need of a homogeneous political culture that Nasser rejected the idea of a political party, even that of a single-party organization because "the party by the very meaning of the term represents only a part of the people, and the single party accordingly means the monopolization of political action by a section of the people."<sup>16</sup> Nasser tended to identify the single party with dictatorship. Taken in this sense, the National Union

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16 Nasser's Port Said 'Victory' speech on 23 December 1957, quoted in Vatikiotis, n. 5, p. 191.

was not part of a single-party system but an experiment to avoid any such monopoly or contact between the local parties and foreign bodies. In it "anyone who is inter-ested in politics can exercise his activities inside the National Union".<sup>17</sup> The "National Union idea was to have general elections"<sup>18</sup> --- thus having the whole country participating in the National Union."<sup>19</sup> From this point of view the National Union is to be viewed as truly filling the vacuum created by the dissolution of parties. It was to represent all parties that were abolished and for the same reason within the framework of the National Union opinions may differ and various views may be expressed leaving no room for interference or exploitation. Combining his mistrust of parties with his apprehensions about foreign influence, Nasser, in his usual style, added, "In this way we can develop our country and build a sound political system without being in the middle of the cold war and without being in a position where we could have parties trying to pose as nationalists but in fact really working for their masters abroad".<sup>20</sup>

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17 Speech delivered at Port Said on the occasion of Victory Day, 23 December 1959.  
- Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews 1959 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 512.

18 Elections were to be held at all varying levels, from village units rising gradually up to the General Assembly of the National Union which was to be the highest authority whose decisions were to serve as the bases for government actions.

19 Interview granted to the Representatives of the West German Press, 26 January 1960.  
- Nasser's speeches and Press Interviews, January-March 1960 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 132.

20 Ibid.

The National Union was, thus "the method and the framework"<sup>21</sup> it was the method dictated by national and external conditions for the fulfilment of the Revolution;<sup>22</sup> it was the framework within which the Revolution was to be carried out in order that the national security and independence may be preserved.

The principles and programme of the National Union which spelt out its ideology dealt with the fulfilment of the triple Revolution — a national revolution against colonialism, an Arab revolution to pass artificial barriers between Arabs and a social revolution for the establishment of social democracy and

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21 Interview granted to Hasnein Heikal, Editor-in-chief of al-Ahram, 2 July 1959.

- Nasser, n. 17, p. 567.

22 The tasks enumerated by Nasser for the National Union were more of a socio-economic nature than of a political nature. For instance, the duty of the National Union was to cooperate with its members in carrying out all possible plans such as controlling certain diseases by enlightening rural people about them. It was further expected to form a cooperative society to eliminate intermediaries in trade, to construct roads, remove illiteracy and to consolidate the unity of the people.

- Address on the Seventh Anniversary of the July 23 Revolution, 22 July 1959. Nasser, n. 17, p. 288.

Col. Zakaria Mohiedden, then Minister of the Interior, rightly described the National Union as "a historical, economic and social necessity before it can be thought of as a political necessity". Quoted in P.J. Watikiotis, The Egyptian Army in Politics - Pattern for New Nations? (Bloomington, 1961) p. 104.

economic equality. The emphasis was on the development of a welfare society, on justice and equal opportunities, not on actual political participation of the people for Nasser held that without the initial creation of social democracy, political democracy would not be possible. The new organization was, therefore, hailed as necessary for the achievement of the social revolution while the relation between the National Union and political emancipation, or more specifically, the entry into politics of the Egyptian public was never stated clearly.

That this was so became clear from the manner in which the National Union played its part in the elections of July 1957 for the first Egyptian Assembly. Names of candidates for the 350 seats had to be approved by the National Union Executive Committee consisting of three leading members of the Junta — Abdel Latif al-Boghdadi, Zakaria Mohieddin and Abdel Hakim Amer, Minister for Economic Planning, Minister of the Interior and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces respectively. The Committee screened 2,500 candidates and rejected 1,182 leaving 1,318 to contest the elections. This, as also the £E50 deposit for filling one's candidature, confined the contestants to prosperous lawyers and businessmen (about 33 per cent of those elected), town and village mayors already in office (about 10 per cent of those elected), civil servants, ex-ministers and army officers who resigned their commissions in order to qualify for election (about 30 per cent of those elected) and landowners (about 12 per cent of those elected). Labour accounted for a mere

3 per cent and the peasants practically none.<sup>23</sup> Even those elected to the Assembly just heard lengthy speeches by the President and Cabinet members on government programmes and policies and, with hardly any debate, approved them.

### Assessment

The greatest value of the National Union's pyramidal structure, both to the regime and to the population, was probably at the lower levels of village, town and district. Its local committees were intended to help both to decentralize and democratize Egyptian local government, and to provide centres of initiative in social and cultural affairs among a conservative peasantry. More important for the effectiveness of the party organization is the link between the local levels of the party organization to the higher levels. After the union with Syria in February 1958, the National Union had to be reorganized to include both regions.

The organs of the National Union comprised the Regional Congresses, the General Congress of the National Union and the Supreme Executive Committee. The Regional Congresses, one for each region - the Syrian North and the Egyptian South -- were headed by Inspectors-General. The membership was fixed by Presidential appointment and each Regional Congress had seventeen

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23 Ibid., pp. 105-6.

functional committees dealing with youth, labour, women, public services, industries, finance, health, art, science and other fields. The committees were composed of representatives of local committees, and functional organization and directors of regional departments. The General Congress membership was determined by direct nominations by the President and the Regional Inspectors and by nomination by town and village committees. It was to meet at the direction of the Rais and was to play a key role in the implementation of the three revolutions. The Supreme Executive Committee, United Arab Republic's highest executive instrument, was composed of the President, the Inspectors-General and the UAR Cabinet members. Thus, even in theory, in the former two only can one see any links being established between the local democratically organized bodies and the higher national organs of the Party. One finds the link broken when one reaches the top of the pyramid, the Supreme Executive Committee.

But in practice it was different. What actually made any democracy at the local level ineffective and aided the actual centralization of power was the fact that party structure paralleled that of the UAR government beginning at the village level, continuing through the town district level, and going up to the province or governorate, the regional congresses, the UAR Congress and the President of the National Union. Then, "the pyramid was slow in building" and a greater part of the complex and cumbersome organization remained more a blueprint

than an operable and functioning mechanism. It is difficult to identify precisely which organs were actually put into operation and which really remained on paper. In general, the supreme organs and higher echelons of the National Union were put into operation, middle level and lower organs ranged from that of tentative plans to ineffectively operating units.

Little was done and even less was understood by the people. Thus, the villages, when called upon to vote, voted for the same families who had always been dominant. The representatives in the party were simply the omdehs, the eternal village chieftains who were, as often happens, the richest men in their respective regions who did not have much desire to forge strong links with the people. Nasser was, therefore, perhaps not wrong when he, indulging in mild self-criticism after the secession of Syria from the Union, attributed the failure to the "deficiency of the popular organization."<sup>24</sup> He added,

Our mistake was that we opened the way to the National Union before the forces of reaction. Consequently, reaction managed to infiltrate into the National Union and to paralyse its revolutionary potentialities, and turn it into a mere organizational facade, unstirred by the forces of the masses and their genuine demands. The fact which proved this mistake was that some of those who are in the front ranks of the separatist reactionary movement in Syria had been themselves in the front rank of the National

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24 Address to the Nation, 16 October 1961.  
- Nasser, Speeches and Press Interviews, 1961 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 313.

Union organization.<sup>25</sup>

However, Nasser himself was to be blamed for this. While neither the National Union leaders nor local leaders had enough experience in organization, he, on his own part, "organized no popular nuclei of support, failed to integrate Syrian elites and Egyptian cadres and trained no future political officers. Thus the National Union organization remained merely a bureaucracy, with few links with the people and Nasser's cadres collapsed before the creation of the UAR".<sup>26</sup>

Not only that, Nasser, in his eagerness to counter the influence of the Ba'th in Syria, himself allied with the conservative elements whose elimination had been the declared objective of the regime. In fact, his decision to cement a stronger economic and political union between Syria and Egypt for which the National Union scheme was the best means, was dictated by events in Iraq. But, such a scheme also invited defection by the Ba'th. To protect himself, Nasser had no apparent choice but to impose the National Union scheme on Syria. Since he could not at first rely on military control to fight the Ba'th he had to enter into a rapprochement with the old populist, nationalist and conservative elements. "Thus as the socialist objectives of the Union were being stridently

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25 Ibid.

26 Perlmutter, n. 14, p. 156.



proclaimed, their actual supporters were driven underground."<sup>27</sup>

The Failure of the Union and the Dissolution  
of the National Union

The failure of the Union spelt the failure of the National Union. Rather, it was the inevitable conflict between political parties that existed in Syria at the time of Union and Nasser's efforts to neutralize them as a centre of power which resulted in the failure of the Union. Here again, for Nasser, considerations of better organization, compromise and adaptation and efforts at arriving at a workable formula for real Egyptian-Syrian Union were subordinated to considerations of better Egyptian control, which meant his own control, over the affairs of the UAR.

From the very start, there was a basic misunderstanding between Nasser and the Syrian Ba'th Party, the only serious rival to Nasser. Nasser's condition for the Union was that the army in Syria withdraw from politics and the political parties be dissolved. The Ba'th accepted the abolition of parties and their replacement by the National Union in the belief that it would have a leading role in the National Union and the government. They hoped that the form of the National Union for the UAR would not be simply an extension of its pattern in Egypt but would reflect in its ideology and structure an agreed

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27 Ibid., p. 155.

blend of Ba'thism and Nasserism. At least this was the kind of assurance that Nasser apparently gave to the Ba'th that elections for the National Union would be held and that, as the chief architect of the union, it could expect to emerge triumphant, that with the Ba'th providing the ideas and he the leadership, the new state would become a progressive stronghold. But to Nasser, the Ba'th was only one factor in the Syrian political scene. He relied more on the Syrian army and widespread popular support from all sections of the Syrian population, including the business community who wanted stability and feared communism. Moreover, Nasser had no desire to give the Ba'thists a share in the ideological formation of the UAR as a whole since that would have given them a political influence in Egypt of which he was suspicious.

That the Ba'th had miscalculated became clear when it discovered that it was not even dominant in the Syrian regional Cabinet which was headed by a non-Ba'thist, Dr. Nur ed-din Kahhale. Then in 1959, the Ba'th was unable to win more than five per cent of the 9,500 seats on the higher committees of the National Union in Syria and by the end of 1960 when Abdel Hakim Amer was recalled and Col. Serraj appointed as chairman of the Syrian Executive Council, the Ba'th and its sympathisers in the army had been completely ousted from the government of both Syria and the UAR as a whole. On the ideological front, too, Nasser's ideas on Arab unity became indistinguishable

from those of the Ba'th particularly when he adopted a more socialist economic policy.

A series of actions, one after the other, aimed at strengthening the central government at Cairo at the expense of the northern partner, prepared the way for the dissolution of the Union. Among these was the abolition of party government and parties. In fact, the very concept of the National Union in which "there is no division and no dissension",<sup>28</sup> as an instrument of unity above parties, created dissatisfaction in Syria. Then, the Law of Local Government of March 1960, originally meant for Egypt, was also enforced in Syria in 1961. The Local Government Central Committee was composed of ministers appointed by Nasser and was meant to be divided in such a way that the Ministry and the Inspector-General could closely supervise the directly elected village and town councilships. The Minister of Local Government was to issue all policy directives and to form the lower councils. All this was not taken as merely a step towards centralization of power but as one designed to cut at the nation's traditional interests and to that extent hurt the Ba'th. Finally, "the Egyptian nationalization of Syria was the last act of alienation...".<sup>29</sup> The army revolted, and in September 1961, the

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28 Speech delivered by Nasser at Nasurat-Beni Suef on 19 November 1958.

- Nasser, n. 2, p. 284.

29 Perlmutter, n. 26, p. 157.

UAR came to an end. And with it, the National Union, "a significant formula which tended to preserve the fiction of social and political unanimity"<sup>30</sup> also came to an end.

### The Arab Socialist Union

Nasser's most immediate concern after the serious shock of the Syrian secession was to secure the regime's position in Egypt. Beyond this immediate consideration there was the long-range problem of enlarging the popular base to gain wider legitimacy for the ruling elite. What had taken place in the reverses like the Syrian secession and then the unpopular war in Yemen was the atrophy of Nasser's charisma. He was no longer considered infallible. The external dynamism that failed had, therefore, to be replaced by internal revolutionary action to justify and consolidate the leadership's power. Such stabilization of the system required the early infusion of the leader's personal legitimacy into new political, social and economic structures. Though this process can be said to have started with the formation of the National Union in 1956-7 earnest efforts were made only after 1961 when Nasser was forced to start afresh and consider new ways of grafting a 'political system' on to his personal power".<sup>31</sup> Thus came the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) created by an Act on 7 December 1962.

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30 Jean Lacouture, Nasser : a Biography (London, 1973) p. 241.

31 Vatikiotts, n. 5, p. 342.

The ASU was the first political organ in Nasserite Egypt to be called a political organization.<sup>32</sup> Aided by the final emergence of a comprehensive ideology, greater cohesion and a well-defined action programme, it was more ideological than its predecessors. It was variously presented as an agency for "recruiting the elements fit for leadership",<sup>33</sup> as the watch-dog of the Revolution and its six principles,<sup>34</sup> as a school of democracy and nation-building,<sup>35</sup> as a national forum,

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32 The term 'political organization' (tanjim siyasi) was not used for either the Liberation Rally or the National Union. Later, they were termed as 'tanjim' i.e. organizations. The term 'hizb' (party), however, was purged from the Nasserite political terminology.

- Perlmutter, n. 14, p. 158. He himself got the idea from Sarah Lulko, "The Popular Organization of the Nasserite Regime", mimeographed, Tel Aviv, 1970.

33 Information Department, The Charter (Draft) 21 May 1962 (Cairo, n.d.) pp. 47-48.

34 It was to "safeguard the guarantees embodied in the National Charter presented by President Nasser to the National Congress of Popular Powers in May 1962 i.e., to safeguard the minimum representation of workers and farmers in all popular and political functions and at all levels, thus guaranteeing that at least 50 percent of the membership of the ASU itself is made up of workers and farmers".

- Information Department, Statute of the Arab Socialist Union (Cairo, n.d.), p. 5.

35 It was "to give revolutionary impetus to the potentialities for advancement in the interests of the people" by educating and organizing the masses. The education and problem-solving functions of the ASU were seen as necessary to gain the people's confidence, thereby substituting obedience (and therefore control) based on fear with one grounded on conviction, *ibid.*, p. 5, pp. 8-9,

as an instrument of government and means of communication, both up and down, and at the National Congress level, as the embodiment of the will of the people "clarifying the revolutionary motives of the masses, sounding their needs and endeavouring to satisfy them".<sup>36</sup> Then the ASU was also to fight passivity and deviation and prevent the "infiltration" of capitalist, feudalist, reactionary, opportunistic, and foreign elements.<sup>37</sup>

Nasser had learnt a lesson or two from his experiments in political organization. Neither the Liberation Rally nor the National Union had been able to base the state's power on the allegiance of the population's lower strata. Therefore, rather than continuing to obtain support from these strata, the new programme of the ASU called "state ensured justice" was to be directed from the top with a minimum of popular involvement. The new orientation was definitely managerial at the expense of popular mobilization i.e., the ASU was a party dedicated to the creation of economic and social cadres rather than political or electoral mobilization. The need was for new technocrats and managers who could implement the hopes of the poor, but without mobilizing them. According to the new theory the Revolution was to be based on a state run by military men and

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36 Information Department, n. 33, pp. 47-48.

37 Information Department, n. 34, pp. 6-7.

technocrats because, as Ali Sabri put it "where the masses are backward, ignorant and depressed, the government is the most valid representative".<sup>38</sup> The ASU was intended to create, supervise and control these two types of elites. "This policy of restricted political participation was a concomitant of Nasser's modernization policy, intended to slow political modernization and growth."<sup>39</sup>

It was the result of the lessons drawn from the failure of the Liberation Rally and the National Union that Nasser modified his conception of the type of political organization best suited to Egypt. Neither the popular base of the people, the foundation of the National Union, nor the concept of cadres was adopted. Thus, the ASU was to represent a compromise between Nasser's conception of a popular party centrally controlled, and a cadre party supported by the masses. The ASU was to be formed on the basis of two principles: narrowing the organizational scope of the Party's top-level structure composed mainly of former RCC members; and, forming a permanent party base at the level of party activists, to give the latter significant political influence particularly in the modernization programmes, structures and activities of Egypt.

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38 Quoted in Perlmutter, n. 26, pp. 158-9.

39 Leonard Binder, "Political Recruitment and Participation in Egypt", in La Palombara and Weiner, eds., Political Parties and Political Development (New Jersey, 1966) p. 234.

That political participation was to be restricted is not to suggest that no popular support was sought. For did not the National Charter say that "the value of a true revolution lies in its degree of popularity, in the extent to which it is an expression of the vast masses, in the extent to which it mobilizes their forces to rebuild the future and also in the extent to which it enables these masses to impose their will on life?"<sup>40</sup> Though the mobilization part was to be underplayed, the party had to be popular and, to be popular, it had to embrace a wide range of individuals and organizations.

In the beginning, therefore, all citizens except feudalists and capitalist elements were considered eligible for the ASU membership which resulted in a massive on-rush of applicants causing the regime to terminate all recruitment in February 1963. The number that emerged after the screening process had six million members, fifty per cent of whom were said to be workers and peasants; of the total 250,000 were women.<sup>41</sup> Following further screening and purging the number stood at 4,800,000 in May 1968 but increased to 5,000,000 in June of the same year.<sup>42</sup> But this non-elitist character did not offset the original claim that the party was to entertain minimum actual

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40 Information Department, n. 33, p. 35.

41 Arab Observer (Cairo), 31 May 1965.

42 al-Ahram, 20 May 1968; 25 June 1968, quoted in Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasser: A Study in Political Dynamics (London, 1972) p. 146.



popular participation. Despite all official pronouncements against elitism, the ASU was said to have "a qualitative and not a quantitative character".<sup>43</sup> Within the organization two "vanguards" existed. The first was a category of "active" members numbering half a million that was to represent the "most dynamic and unselfish elements" of society and the "catalyst" of the ASU.<sup>44</sup> The rest were labelled "adherents" or "inactive" members who had the right to elect but could not be elected. To gain "active status," these "active aspirants" would have to give "proof of their lack of self-interest" manifest dynamism, and a willingness to cooperate for the general good.<sup>45</sup> There was also a middle cadre of about 20,000 socially cultured individuals who were to be carefully chosen and trained<sup>46</sup> to become what the President called "a self-reliant inter-communicating cadre". These were to constitute the ASU's "political vanguard", the full-time party professionals whose identity was to be secret.

Though the ASU was not to replace labour unions, cooperatives or youth formations, but was to achieve its objectives with their "help", the latter were to implement the

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43 Information Department, n. 34, p. 4.

44 Ibid., p. 8.

45 Ibid.

46 In May 1965 was opened the Institute of Socialist Studies by the ASU Supreme Executive Committee. \*

policy drawn up by the ASU. In so doing they were to act more as instruments of the party than as help-mates as the Statute of the ASU states.

Only a cursory glance at the elaborate organizational structure of the ASU is enough to demonstrate that the ultimate control lay in the hands not of the masses but the top leaders. It was organized in 6,000-7,000 basic units in village, towns, factories with fifty or more workers, large companies, universities, schools and hospitals. These basic units sent delegates to district councils, above which there were provincial councils, while at the head of the pyramid was a "General National Congress" of the Union. Each basic unit was to meet once every four months and elect once every two years a committee which would meet at least twice a month. The district and provincial councils would meet every six months, their committees also meeting twice a month. The General National Congress (1500 members) was to have annual sessions and elect, every six years, a General Central Committee (250-300 members) from which the supreme party organ, the Supreme Executive Committee, would be appointed. Such an organizational chart would suggest that ultimate control lay in the people and that they could influence the top leadership. However, the instrument established to prevent the activists from becoming an ideological political cadre was the Political Bureau which was not mentioned in either the July 1962 Charter or the December 1962 ASU Directive.

"The Political Bureau began as neither a party nor a cadre, but rather a group of super activists."<sup>47</sup> They envisioned the Political Bureau as a revolutionary cadre, but Nasser refused to give it his official sanction. In the end, it was neither a cadre nor a committee of activists, but a group of functionaries similar to the Executive Committee of the National Union. There were two levels of political domination- functional level handled by the Political Bureau; and the other, policy level, managed by the government, i.e., the Cabinet. The Cabinet did not act as a committee of the National Assembly as in the case of competitive party systems -- Nasser selected his Cabinet in 1961 without consulting the Assembly. The Cabinet became an administrative and technocratic body selected and approved by Nasser. It, therefore, means that, "although never explicitly stated, the organization was designed to function according to the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, whereby the system would ensure the downward channelling of orders from the top and the upward flow of information from lower levels. Thus, it would perform the functions of aggregation, adjudication, integration, and communication".<sup>48</sup> Another similarity with Leninist type of political party was the inter-locking relationship, especially at the top, between the governmental and party

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47 Lulko, n. 32, p. 8; quoted in Perlmutter, n. 14, p. 161.

48 Dekmejian, n. 42, p. 145.

structures. All the 18 members of the Supreme Executive Committee of the ASU between 1962 and 1964 belonged to the old core of Free Officers and the half-dozen civilians who became associated with them soon after the coup d'etat also held important positions in the government.<sup>49</sup> This interlocking relationship continued after the governmental reorganization of March 1964 and the formation of the 22-member ASU Provisional Secretariat in December 1964.<sup>50</sup> With the exception of the armed forces, almost every governmental organization and endeavour from the presidency to ideological propagation was represented. However, half of the members held positions in the party but not in the government devoting themselves to full-time party work.

#### Assessment (1962-67)

How successful was the ASU in the years before the June 1967 Arab-Israel War which turned out to be not only the test of the Arab's military power but also a test of the political organizational set-up of the United Arab Republic? Any assessment is difficult — not only are many facts not known but the leadership itself, it appears, was unable to resolve the dilemma of having a popular organization professing a socialist

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49 Ibid., pp. 148-9.

50 For a detailed table showing the inter-locking relationship between the government and party structures, see Dekmejian, n. 42, pp. 149-52.

ideology on the one hand, and on the other, not allowing it a natural growth into an independent body for fear of letting power slip out of their hands. It was a result of this dilemma that the formal construction of the ASU was never completed; the crucial Central Committee never came into being. Nor was the required number of competent cadres prepared by the Supreme Executive Committee which left a political organizational vacuum for the "centres of powers", large pockets of illegitimate authority in the political system, to emerge. Besides, the ASU, designed to eliminate political rivals, recruited politically impotent and pliable members rather than establish a cadre of dedicated party professionals and ideologues.

Then, Nasser seemed to stick to his opinion expressed in his Philosophy of the Revolution<sup>51</sup> that only the army could meet and solve the praetorian conditions of Egypt and that the army played the role of vanguard in the Egyptian Revolution. The military's pervasive presence in the system which had stifled the effective development of the National Union, continued in the ASU, though in contrast to the former, there was greater reliance on civilian help.<sup>52</sup> Even then, the ASU

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51 Gamal Abdel Nasser, The Philosophy of the Revolution (Cairo, 1954) pp. 32-45.

52 In the Supreme Executive Committee between 1962 and 1964, against six civilians there were twelve officers and in the Provisional Secretariat, against nine civilians there were sixteen officers.  
- Dekmejian, n. 42, pp. 148-9.

was perceived by the army class as a potential threat to the influence of the army, an alternative source of power of a more radical kind. Such being the perception, the army headed by Amer tended to emerge as a "centre of power", Nasser had to create his own power centre inside the ASU, i.e. a "secret organization".<sup>53</sup> As early as 1964, therefore, Nasser appeared to have concentrated efforts on building the organization stronger and even considered not running for election in order to be able to devote himself to political organization.

Nasser vacillated between creating a "people's party" likely to be bogged down by its size and factional strife or an "elitist party" with potential to force the heretic or semi-heretics (communists and the reactionaries) into the opposition camp or into reorganization of their own ranks. The ASU having been designed to avoid some of the weaknesses of the Liberation Rally and the National Union, its leaders shifted the emphasis from a mass organization to an elite or cadre organization, with a division between active and inactive membership and with its

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53 Robert Stephens, Nasser: A Political Biography (New York, 1971), p. 374.

54 In 1964, Nasser reportedly did attempt to supplement the ASU with yet another group which would have only 4,000 members, and which would function as the 'Government Party' within the ASU. It was to enforce peaceful transfer of power and a continuation of his policies if anything happened to him.  
- Washington Post, 9 February 1964.

membership originally limited to ten per cent of the population in due course, however, the ASU also mushroomed in size and after two years was said to have five million members.<sup>54</sup> But even then the power and influence had not been transferred to the poor peasants. They had gone in the first instance either to government officials or to the medium farmers and lesser notables. The provision that the ASU and the National Assembly would have half its elected members and officials from among workers and farmers were meant in part to challenge and change the situation. But the definition of a 'worker' and a 'peasant' was at first so elastic that anyone drawing a salary without responsibility for hiring or firing including high-grade professional men, specialists and technicians, or anyone on their own land upto a substantial acreage, would claim to stand for election in these categories. It ultimately brought the same old social class with their vested interests in control of the organization.<sup>55</sup>

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55 The correspondent of Ruz al-Yusuf wrote after interviewing several people in the streets of Damietta: "Many people told me that numerous members of the district council<sup>th</sup> of Socialist Union should be dismissed. Several of them have previously been members of the Liberation Rally, then they went over to the National Union and now they intend to take over the Socialist Union. This means that what will happen is simply a change in the label..." (Ruz al-Yusuf) 18 March 1953.

"In the village of Sa'ad landlords who possess large holdings in the vicinity were sitting up in the front at the meeting, these were the ones who had seized control of the National Union by means of an agreement among the big land-owning families and without any elections at all ---" (Ruz al-Yusuf, 25 March 1953)  
- Quoted in Be'eri, n. 1, pp. 451-452.

The Six-Day War and After

The June 1967 defeat shook the very roots of the Egyptian political system. Never before since the 1952 coup d'etat had the system been under such stress generating so much criticism and self-criticism, never before was faith in the system been so much run down, never before had the need for basic social and political changes become so obvious, and never before was the time more opportune to conduct a review of the system, make the required amendments and put it back on the rails.

The immediate focus of attack was the military. There was an irrepressible public criticism of the military's performance in the battlefield. The military had become such an autonomous centre of power that there was an alleged 'quasi-coup d'etat' masterminded by Nasser's old friend and confidant, Field-Marshal Amer. During the first part of 1968, grassroots anti-military sentiment reached a high point with the outbreak of student-worker rioting in February protesting the light sentences given to the Generals accused of laxity, corruption and incompetence. The most serious mass demonstration took place on 24 February 1968 at the military factory complex in Helwan. This touched off other demonstrations by thousands of students in Cairo and Alexandria who shouted slogans calling for freedom, democracy with a multi-party system, a civilian cabinet, freedom of the Press and the abolition of the 'stooge-parliament' and the ASU. This mass upsurge and the military's ill-repute was



sought to be exploited by leftist forces to advance their own cause. In fact, they had started doing so way back in 1965 when Ali Sabri was appointed the Secretary-General of the ASU. From 1965 to 1967 there existed a struggle for power between the praetorians allied with the governmental bureaucracy and supported by Nasser, and the ASU led by its Secretary-General. Sabri planned to enhance the role of his activists, the steering groups in the state, and turn the ASU into a power source through the judicious management of economic production. He sought to establish the political legitimacy of the UAR in the ASU, following the Leninist structural model in which the party is superior to the state government. The defenders of the status quo argued that sovereignty rested with the people, not the party, and the UAR represented the people. The Sabri group argued that sovereignty should be with the ASU. The typical flavour of the debate was characterized by the struggle of the contending advocates trying to define the terms "people" and "social forces". "People" included workers and peasants, 50 per cent of UAR's National Assembly was to be composed of this group. The 'social forces' were composed of fellahin, intellectuals, national capitalists, professionals and local capitalists and were hardly represented as such in the Assembly and the ASU which actually were composed of the various elites of modernization, the bureaucracy and the military. Since no independent associations or political groups were permitted in Egypt, how could the UAR National Assembly or the ASU truly

represent "social forces" or "people"? Sabri's far-reaching reorganization of the ASU at the end of 1965 reflected the same debate. He intended to make "the ASU a source of political legitimacy in the UAR and eventually the dominant party in the National Assembly, the bureaucracy and the government. The ASU was to radicalize Egypt and to create a power base and an elite- structure that would present an alternative to the praetorian-bureaucratic-military cabal surrounding the Rais."<sup>56</sup> To this end, Sabri reorganized the ASU's structure, 'liberated' the Central Executive Committee and assigned to it the functions of leading the movement of national struggle and mobilizing all resources for an equal and just society. The real power, however, was to remain in the Secretariat of the ASU and the newly-formed party cadres, the Steering Groups or Activists, selected from among the members of the production units not only for their technical merit but also their political activities. After the 1967 war, Ali Sabri went ahead with renewed vigour reorganizing and streamlining the Public Sector. He made the ASU steering Groups responsible for the Public Sector corporations.

The task for Nasser immediately after the war, his resignation followed by mass rallies asking him to remain in office and his subsequent resumption of power, was three-fold. First, he had to take the attention of the people away from the

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56 Perlmutter, n. 14, p. 170.

military's failure, and at the same time, deal with the threat from the Amer clique in the army. Second, the leftist forces had to be countered. Third, something had to be done to restore the credibility of the system and make it more acceptable to the people. All these tasks had to be accomplished simultaneously.

The major defendant after the 1967 disaster should have been the Rais; yet, in a typically shrewd manoeuver, Nasser succeeded in laying the sole blame for it on the military. Not only did he escape unscathed (nothing came out of the alleged coup d'etat attempt and Amer committed suicide) but he also finally purged the army high command. More than 300 senior officers of the army were dismissed.<sup>57</sup> This was followed by the purge in the middle and junior officers' group.

Following the debacle, the debate over the ASU's future became more intense and better publicized. The conflicting views of the leftists and the Nasserite group clashed through the Press. The Tali'ah magazine, representing the Left, openly attacked Heikal who represented Nasser's concept of the political party 'type' and called for a 'new' party. Nasser and Heikal rebutted that the problem was not who controlled the means of production (the reference being to the Steering Groups) so much as how production proceeds. The need was, they felt, for unity of ranks, not class divisiveness. The ASU must

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57 Ibid., p. 183.

remain a mass party; it should not compete with the government. Nasser believed that the kind of party the Leftists wanted would only be a party of reaction, and would represent privileged interests. He could not, he said, approve of a workers' party or a proletarian dictatorship, nor the dictatorship of the toilers since the party that would emerge in such a case (a cadre-oriented vanguard type party) would represent a false democracy.

The declaration of a programme of political reconstruction and liberalization at once struck a blow to the Left's attempts of turning the ASU into a cadre party and helped weather the storm of domestic unrest. As if to prepare the desired atmosphere, it was no less a person than Heikal himself who came out with the criticism of the ASU which he said had begun acting like "a government within a government". He called for the liberalization of the Egyptian political system by creating a sound broadly based democracy. "It is not enough to have democracy of assent, what we are in need of is democracy of participation", he added.<sup>58</sup> What was necessary was "cooperative democracy" whereby "the masses should participate in evolving a policy before a decision is made".<sup>59</sup> The right and sound form of unity, he said, was one which was achieved through a variety of views, discussions and joint thinking

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58 al-Ahram, 11 August 1967; quoted in Be'eri, n. 1, p. 458.

59 The Guardian (Manchester), 12 August 1967.

and not one which is achieved through order and blind obedience.<sup>60</sup>

The first step towards liberalization was the announcement, of a largely technical and non-political cabinet.<sup>61</sup> Then came the 30 March 1968 Programme "for the mobilization of all our popular masses and of their potentialities and energies"<sup>62</sup> and to throw a bridge across the gulf between the Rais and the people. The 30 March Programme aimed at absorbing and rechannelling the growing worker-student demonstrations of February 1968. It sought to retain and consolidate the lessons and gains achieved in the liberalization period after the June war in which "guided but genuine debate and inquiry" had taken place. It also provided a comprehensive and long range plan for political and social reform.

The ASU was described as the most appropriate instrument for mobilizing popular forces on a democratic base. After saying that the "defects and shortcomings" of the ASU were essentially due to its hierarchical structure notably "the fact that this organization is not based upon free elections from the base to the summit", Nasser outlined the programme for its reform.<sup>63</sup>

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60 Ibid., 24 July 1967.

61 New blood was infused into the Cabinet - 14 new members were inducted, all civilians. The percentage of the officer members went down from 65.4 in June 1967 to 39.4 in March 1968.

62 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol. 16, 1967-68, p. 22663.

63 Ibid.

Accordingly elections were to be held to elect the units at the base of the ASU. The National Congress (to meet every three months) was to elect the Central Committee which in turn was to elect a Supreme Executive Committee, the principal organ of the ASU. The Central Committee was to remain in permanent session and was to have specialized committees for laying down guidelines for state policy in all spheres. The electoral process chosen to maximize the popular legitimacy of the ASU also contained the ingredients for making the organization an instrument of accountability the lack of which had become one of the main issues of the post-war period. The elections were held in June 1968 after the Programme had been approved by plebiscite earlier in May. Members of the National Congress elected, in September, the 150 member Central Committee which, in turn, elected the Supreme Executive Committee a month later. The National Assembly whose term was to end in March 1969 was dissolved in November 1968 and a new one elected three months later.

Assessment (1967-70)

There was nothing new in Egypt's "fourth revolution" as Heikal described the 30 March Programme. All that was said had already been said in the Charter of 1962<sup>64</sup> which "had never been applied".<sup>65</sup> It was "the organic extension of the

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64 Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 3 April 1968.

65 Anwar al-Sadat, In Search of Identity (London, 1978) p. 132.

Charter."<sup>66</sup> Nor did it come up to the expectations of the people. They had expected the Statement to usher an era of democracy and free parliamentary elections on a party-basis that some had been hoping for. Nasser chose the ASU rather than the Assembly as the channel for greater democratization, but he did not sanction the kind of political party within the ASU that the left-wing had been urging. Even personal freedom was not guaranteed. "The March 30 Statement simply maintained the regime's dictatorial grip; it upheld the right of arrest without referring charges..."<sup>67</sup>

The 1968 elections went further than ever before in broadening the base of popular participation. This was made possible by the adoption of a new, stricter definition<sup>68</sup> of 'peasant' and 'worker' which contrasted sharply with that employed after 1962 stipulating landholdings of upto twenty-five

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66 Address to the National Assembly, 7 October 1970.  
- Sadat, Speeches and Press Interviews, September 1970  
March 1971 (Cairo, n.d.) p. 11.

67 Sadat, n. 65, p. 132.

68 According to this new definition, a peasant was one whose personal and family holdings did not exceed ten faddans, whose main occupation and source of income was agriculture and who lived in the countryside. A labourer (worker) was one who was not eligible for membership in the professional unions, and was not a graduate of a university, higher education institute or military college.

-al-Ahram, 15 November 1968; quoted in Dekmejian, n. 42, p. 271.

faddans for peasants and a loose definition for workers that included technicians and intellectuals as well. Fifty percent of the National Congress was said to be composed of peasants and workers according to the new definition.<sup>69</sup> In the National Assembly also the effect of the new definition was visible. As a result of the automatic elimination from candidacy of those ex-deputies whose occupational-financial status did not conform with the tighter laws regarding the peasants and the workers, only 117 of the 350 former elected deputies became candidates in the January 1969 elections to the National Assembly out of which only 92 were elected.<sup>66</sup>

The elections were presumably free and impartial, too. In the elections to the National Congress, many prominent personalities, including two of President Nasser's brothers, were defeated. More significant was the election of 23 deputies to the National Assembly who had run on their own without ASU support. The fact that the regime had permitted a list of opposition candidates to run against its chosen candidates, welcomed those independents who get elected and pledged to give them the same treatment as party-backed deputies, was proof enough that the flexible approach adopted since the June War was being continued. Finally, the overlapping between the government and the party was sought to be reduced. To this end,

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69 al-Akhbar, 17 July 1968, quoted in *ibid*.



four cabinet ministers who got elected to the Supreme Executive Committee of the ASU in October 1968 resigned their cabinet posts.

However, too much should not be read in these developments for one must not forget that it was all an exercise to gain legitimacy and to counter the leftist opposition within the party. To begin with, Nasser did appoint 14 new civilians to the Cabinet in March 1968, but all the important portfolios remained in the hands of former military officers. Then, it should not be surprising, also, to note that in the elections to the National Congress several left-wingers were defeated, only four were returned. Finally, the newly found electoral democracy did not extend to the composition of the crucial Central Committee of the ASU. During discussions in the National Congress, among intellectuals and journalists, there was substantial opposition to extending the 50 per cent worker and peasant quota into the Central Committee; Heikal and Fikri Abaza recommended a larger number of intellectuals instead of peasants and workers. The electoral system ultimately instituted was a complex one which combined the leadership's authority with a measure of membership participation. The 'political leadership' - in effect, President Nasser - selected 125 full members and 50 alternates out of the 250 candidates elected by the Governorate Councils. The remaining 25 full members were directly appointed from above. Thus, the leadership's hold on the important policy forming body was secured.

Nasser had all along succeeded in balancing the ideologically divergent elements in the party and in acting as the Supreme arbiter. The balance appeared to have been disturbed when the left wing came to have better control over the party organization. The leftists having been tackled through elections the balancing act was resumed in its former form. However, the bifurcation between the Left and Centre continued and it appeared that the only person who could create a modus vivendi between the various ideological groups was Nasser. At the National Congress and Central Committee sessions the President had been able to minimize overt manifestations of ideological conflict through the sheer weight of his personality, reinforced by popular support. The candidates who ran for the Supreme Executive Committee represented the whole political spectrum (with the exception of the Brotherhood). For example, the presence of Khalid Mohieddin and Ali Sabri on the Left was counter-balanced by Husain Shafi'i and Anwar al-Sadat on the Right. Months later, the government crisis of autumn 1969, when Nasser dismissed Ali Sabri as Secretary General of the ASU, was again a clear manifestation of the balancing act. At the end of the year, Nasser was President, Prime Minister, President of the National Congress of the ASU and the Chairman of its Higher Executive Committee. He thus controlled that is, policy making, the minor legislative functions of the Assembly and the executive powers of Government. Once again Nasser had come out of a major crisis unscathed. But the ASU that he left

behind was "from all indications political only on paper", it was "an administrative and bureaucratic arm of the leadership" which remained centered in the military and the government. "Its trade mark (was) rhetoric, not reform, manipulation, not mobilization."<sup>70</sup> It had more than seven million members but less than 100 full-time, salaried party organizers. For most, membership was collective i.e., workers and peasants became members when membership fee was deducted from their salaries.<sup>71</sup> It was filled with young careerists, opportunists and intelligence personnel, socialism was confined to slogans. Without a cadre of genuine political activists within it, the ASU remained in its lower echelons almost as tame and inert an organization as the National Union before it, although on the village level it developed a degree of local democracy and collective discussion".<sup>72</sup> The reformist period through which it passed brought no basic change in its mode of operation. "Sadat himself admitted in 1968 that the ASU elections which Nasser announced to revitalize the organization and strengthen the home-front were rigged."<sup>73</sup>

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70 Alvin, Z. Rubinstein, "Egypt since Nasser", Current History , vol. 62, no. 365, January 1972, p. 22.

71 Ibid.

72 Stephen, n. 53, p. 375.

73 Rubinstein, n. 70, p. 12.

The successive changes - from the Liberation Rally to the National Union and from the National Union to the Arab Socialist Union -- these repeated attempts to start afresh did not reflect the inability of either the leadership or the Egyptian people to set up stable organization; they only represented a dilemma with which the military leaders had begun and which they tried to resolve but failed. Were these organizations to be made instruments for the regimes control of the masses to guide them more effectively along the road of social and economic planning? Or were these meant to give the public more control over the regime, i.e., greater responsibility and participation by the public in political life? Probably Nasser had both aims in mind - he wanted both to mobilize and educate the masses politically but also to keep ultimate power in his own hands. Where the two aims clashed, as they were bound to do, it was the second which prevailed.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

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## THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

Any new ruler, regime or governmental system when once in a position of power seeks to consolidate this power, to be able to manage and resolve internal conflicts and to attain long term stability. For this they strive for legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Dahl, the fundamental reason why leaders try to convert rule by naked force to authority — which is legitimate — is because this form of rule is more reliable, durable and generally efficient".<sup>2</sup> While the stability of an order may be maintained for a time through fear or expediency or customs, the most harmonious relationship between the ruler and the ruled is that

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1 "The quest for legitimacy is the process by which elites strive for mass acceptability on the basis of some ideological justification for their positions of leadership. To the extent that the people accept these ideological justifications, the leadership is considered legitimate".

- Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasser : A Study in Political Dynamics (London, 1972) p. 2.

Regimes are legitimate "to the extent that their citizens regard them as proper and deserving of support".

- Ted Robert Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton, 1970) pp. 183-5.

It is to the extent to which leadership and regimes are perceived by elites and masses as congruent and compatible with the society's fundamental myths those "value impregnated beliefs".

- Robert M. McIver, The Web of Government (New York, 1947) pp. 4-5.

2 Robert A. Dahl, Modern Political Analysis, (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963) p. 19.

in which the ruled accept the rightness of the ruler's superior power.

Legitimacy had been the central political problem both under the old regime before 1952 and the one that took over after the military coup d'etat. The army was propelled into action because civilian groups had failed to legitimize themselves. But the seizure of power by the Free Officers did not solve the problem of legitimacy. Rather, like all other such revolutions, the Egyptian revolution, too, required a new legitimacy formula. This chapter is concerned with the Egyptian leaders' quest for legitimacy, the instruments used for gaining legitimacy and the extent of their success in this endeavour, the main focus being the single party system as a source of legitimacy.

#### The Legitimacy Problem in Egypt : The Initial Years

Immediately after the coup d'etat, the problem of legitimacy was acute and the task for the officers difficult. While the traditional order had been partly transformed during colonial rule, and whatever remained of it was shattered by the new regime, there no longer existed clear-cut and generally acceptable norms for the legitimacy of authority and the mode of its exercise. However, the ideals had been set; the appeal of Arabism, democracy, freedom and social justice were widespread. The failure to achieve these did not in any way vitiate the importance of these ideals as the functional pre-requisite of legitimacy though the fact remains that it did complicate the task of building a

legitimate order.

The immediate source of legitimacy for the military regime - one that was self-generated and not the result of any pre-conceived action — was its Egyptianness. After centuries the Egyptians were to be ruled by fellow Egyptians and not by foreigners. The officers, on their part and initiative, pursued their quest for self-legitimation almost exclusively through a continuation of what Max Weber<sup>3</sup> has called traditional and legal-rational means as their predecessors had done before them. The cooption of General Neguib to invest the July coup d'etat with legitimacy of his heroism and senior officer's status constituted one example. After the takeover, both in its pronouncements and actions, the Junta maintained a degree of adherence to legal rational means which involved a semblance of constitutional freedom and periodic relaxation of control. Thus, at the outset, the RCC released hundreds of political prisoners, abolished the king's secret police, lifted press censorship, punished corruption,

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3 Max Weber distinguishes between three types of authority: traditional authority is one which is based on belief in the sanctity of traditions; in rational or legal authority the claim to authority is based on belief in legality of rules and in the right of those holding authoritative positions by virtue of those rules; and, charismatic authority which is based on "devotion to the specific sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person and of the normative pattern or order revealed by him".

Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, A.M. Henderson and Talcot Parsons, trans. (London, 1954) p. 328.



installed a civilian cabinet, initiated land reform, passed labour and social legislation and repeatedly promised an early return to full constitutional rule.

However, in the view of the revolution-makers, legitimacy was being acquired by someone who himself was to be an instrument of gaining legitimacy for the real authors of the Revolution. Neguib was enjoying the fruits of the revolution and all that it was accomplishing. The Nasserites were, therefore, compelled to seek legitimacy through an alternative means - their sole instrument of mass support — the Liberation Rally.

The crisis of legitimacy loomed larger than ever after Neguib's overthrow and the Brotherhood's suppression. While relying heavily on force as its main instrument of control, the regime continued to use the old combination of traditional and legal-rational devices of self-legitimation. Islamic orthodoxy — a traditional legitimacy device — was used to neutralize the Muslim Brotherhood's influence and transfer legitimacy to itself. In concrete terms, it concluded Prime Minister Nasser's pilgrimage to Mecca in August 1954 where he met leaders of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and issued the call for Islamic unity against the West. In September, Sadat called an Islamic Congress in Cairo to stress the regime's orthodoxy and two months later the Council of the Ulama at al-Azhar went on record denouncing Brotherhood terrorism and supporting the regime. At the same time, the Presidency was offered to the highly respected octogenerian, Lutfi al-Sayyid,

who declined the post. The fact that the regime increasingly aligned itself with popular opinion by making anti-British pronouncements, bringing to trial certain spies for Israel and reiterating its promise to restore constitutional life by January 1956, shows that the regime was still groping for traditional and legal legitimacy on the basis of the old value systems of Egyptian nationalism and Islamic orthodoxy. If there was in Nasser's mind a scheme to build a radically new foundation for legitimacy through a massive ideologically conditioned social economic transformation, it was not made explicit at this stage.

Charisma: the New Legitimacy Formula

But certainly once the revolution had occurred, there had to be some change in the legitimacy formula. The new base for legitimacy was Nasser's popular appeal which was generated by his phenomenal success in the international arena during 1955 and 1956. Nasser's shift from a purely domestic to a pan-Arab level, though not entirely well planned, brought him great popularity that extended beyond the frontiers of Egypt to the neighbouring Arab states. Not only that, the pan-Arab slogan brought about a substantial normative change in the belief system of Egyptians themselves who, because of their leader, had now started treating themselves as the leaders of the Arab world and were accepted as such by others. It was in this new role that Nasser was able to generate his deepest and strongest legitimacy for his regime and for the Egyptians.

It was also through the pursuit of a pan-Arab policy that Nasser can be said to have derived his charisma. But there was something in the man, too. Much of his charisma and appeal was due to the 'man to man' approach which came over impressively on the television. Even people who hated him after him watching on T.V. would shake their heads and say, "he is a good man".<sup>4</sup> He possessed that "extraordinary duality", the "gift of grace", "the charm" that elevates the individual above ordinary men, confers "exceptional powers" on him and confirms him "as a leader".<sup>5</sup> But charisma is not just real or innate gifts, nor is it composed of demonstrable traits of psychology or character; "what is important is the impact exerted upon the environment, the 'effect' of behaviour. Charisma is to a great extent, a sociological, not a personal duality. For the same reason, ideas of charismatic type and milieu must be understood sociologically. Charismatic qualities are in the realm of belief, they are the radiations of a personality in the beliefs of others."<sup>6</sup> That is, to be a charismatic leader is to be perceived as such. "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority

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4 Raymond Flower, Napoleon to Nasser - The Story of Modern Egypt (London, 1972) p. 230.

5 Jean Lacouture, The Demigods; Charismatic Leadership in the Third World (New York, 1970) p. 15.

6 W.E. Mulhmann, Messianismes revolutionnaires du Tiers-Monde (Paris: Gallinard, 1968) p. 186. Quoted in ibid., pp. 15-16.

which is decisive for the validity of charisma."<sup>7</sup> The attention that Nasser attracted from the big nations of the world at the Bandung Conference in 1955, the nationalization of the Suez canal specially the bold manner in which it was affected and the Suez War ending in the withdrawal of Britain and France — all this imparted the halo of a superman to Nasser.

Charisma is, thus, not a property, but a relationship of an individual to others, an individual to his environment, i.e., "there is no such thing as charismatic power, (there are) only charismatic situations". Weber tells us that charismatic leaders have been natural leaders "in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress" and elsewhere that charisma inspires its followers with a devotion born of distress and enthusiasm.<sup>8</sup> Such a state of acute distress predisposes people to perceive as extraordinarily qualified and to follow with enthusiastic loyalty, a leadership offering salvation from distress. Thus, from the point of view of the people, a charismatic leader is one who offers them protection, identity, or ritual. Nasser did precisely this. He was able to focus and channel diverse grievances and interests in a common appeal unifying a segmented population in pursuit of a common goal. The revolution itself was such an act. Then the activities of the regime after the

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7 Max Weber, n. 3, p. 354.

8 H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (London, 1970) pp. 245, 249.

revolution were all directed against the British, the king and the traditional parties which the people wanted. That Nasser addressed himself to the issues make him popular, not so much that he occasionally succeeded.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Inadequacy of Charisma

"By its very nature, the existence of charismatic authority is specifically unstable."<sup>10</sup> In so far as it is increasingly vulnerable to erosion as societies modernize and become exposed to norms hostile to absolutism and dictatorship, it cannot be the solution of the legitimacy problem. The principal cure for the legitimacy problem is a significant degree of institutionalized participation through parliaments, parties and equivalent bodies because the political realities of expanding, more differentiated, more representative institutions of a higher degree of political legitimacy is to be achieved. Thus, the need is to "routinize" charisma by attaching it to secular institutions till the latter themselves are accepted as legitimate. In this way, charisma can create and assist in the creation of the foundations upon which stability can be established. The Bureaucracy can be one such institution. So can be the parliament. But only parties, preferably single parties, can organize enthusiasm on the basis of a solidarity of interests with citizens

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9 Michael C. Hudson, Arab Politics - The Search for Legitimacy (London, 1977) p. 243.

10 S.N. Eisentadt, ed., Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building (Chicago, 1968) p. 22.

outside the government. Such routinization of charisma in political parties becomes possible as the leader makes consistent use of that organization, speaks in its name and lends it his mantle. The single party is, thus, the logical extension of the efforts of the charismatic leader with foresight and political understanding to perpetuate his rule in a manner that it remains acceptable. The charisma of the leader can be taken as the psychological reward offered to a people denied democratic participation by the single party structure. At the same time the single party system meets the crisis of legitimacy and the challenge of participation while not allowing true participation.

The evolution of one-party systems is, therefore, to be conceived as articulation of new legitimizing criteria derived by and for the party. Not only has the party to impart legitimacy to the ruling elite but it also has to legitimize or institutionalize<sup>11</sup> itself. However, the party cannot impart legitimacy unless it acquires autonomy as an instrument of recruiting top political leaders, an ideology aimed at creating a more equitable distribution of wealth and the institutionalization of such political structures as to which charisma is sought to be transferred. The absence of any of these inter-related<sup>12</sup> prerequisites render a

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11 "Institutionalization is the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability",  
- Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies  
(New Haven, 1968) p. 12.

12 The nature of the inter-relatedness in this: without the former two (autonomy and ideology) institutionalization cannot take place.

party or party-system incapable of acting as a source of legitimacy.

To be autonomous, a party must not only be a relatively stable organization enjoining some degree of mass support, it must also retain a significant role in the political recruitment process. The ideal situation is for the party to go beyond the function of a reward giving political machine, which can generate power not legitimacy,<sup>13</sup> towards a more independent -- independent from the charismatic leader -- recruiting body. This is not always the case because of inherent difficulties foremost among which is the basic contradiction between an entirely autonomous political party possessing the potential to undermine if not openly challenge the decisions of the charismatic leader at some later date and the latter's desire to retain his charismatic hold on the system as long as he can without losing it or passing it on to other political structures. Because of this dilemma do rulers who attain power through other bases of support as Nasser did through the military, find it difficult to create a political party that can legitimize their regimes. Nasser tried thrice and succeeded only partially. Relying on military support to stay in power he was unwilling to grant the Liberation Rally, the National Union and the Arab Socialist Union any autonomy in

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13 Clement Henry Moore, "The Single-Party System as Source of Legitimacy", in Samuel P. Huntington and C.H. Moore, eds., Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society -- The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems (New York, 1970) p. 49.

selecting leaders or even any significant influence, for that matter, over policy making.

### Why the Party Failed to Legitimize

Two categories of reasons can be adduced to explain Nasser's failure to grant autonomy to the single-party systems that he created. In the first fall reasons which can be said to emerge from the charismatic situation about which Nasser could not do much, the second includes Nasser's own actions, the effect of which was to stifle the growth of the party as an autonomous, independent organization respected for its own sake.

A charismatic situation entails a peculiar relationship between the charismatic leader and his followers. In the absence of mediating groups and structures which can gradually assume the mantle of legitimacy beyond the charismatic leader, this relationship is perceived by both to be direct; the party is always considered as secondary to the direct bonds which are constantly renewed in mass gatherings, through radio and television telecasts, in plebiscitary elections and via other forms of exhortation and appeals. For the same reason, the total trust of the masses and the leader's staff remains in the leader alone, the leader becomes the only source from which commands can legitimately flow. In the eyes of the masses, the party does not possess an independent will or any authority of its own except that derived directly from the leader.

"Success and succession are the two words that sum up the



instability of charisma".<sup>14</sup> Nasser's diplomatic successes in the latter half of the 1950s did boost up the morale of the Egyptians but came in the way of the development of healthy institutions. Nasser tended to postpone the stabilization and institutionalization of his regime. During the ten years before the formation of the ASU, the regime relied on the tremendous magnetic force of its leadership which tended to blind it to the need for political party organization.

The "neo-patrimonial model"<sup>15</sup> of the regime was not less responsible for the stunted growth of the party. In such a model, the legitimacy of the ruler's authority rests in the society's concession that the ruler has the right freely to appropriate the rule over the community for himself, due to his power, charisma, link with the divinity and so on. In Egypt, the immense powers of the President of the Republic to appoint persons to any position in public life, be it a university chancellorship, the chairmanship of an Egyptian public corporation or a cabinet post, resembled closely the power of the patrimonial prince.

Despite his charisma, Nasser felt the necessity of taking

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14 Dankwart Rustow, A World of Nations - Problems of Political Modernization (Washington D.C., 1967) p. 168.

15 Shahrough Akhavi, "Egypt: Neo-Patrimonial Elite", in Frank Tachau, ed., Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East (Massachusetts, 1975) p. 76.

steps to enhance his personal hold on the system. In surveying Nasser's repeated attempts at constructing a public political base for his regime, from the Liberation Rally to the ASU, one observes that he managed to abolish the difference between the state and government,<sup>16</sup> between these two and himself.<sup>17</sup> Instead of separating the powers of government, he fused them; instead of separating religion and state, he re-integrated them.<sup>18</sup>

Added to this is the fact that military rule or the predominance of the army in a country's politics is politically restrictive and fails to integrate new men and economically and socially liberated groups and classes; and the level of political institutionalization is restricted, rigid and non-adaptive. After the coup d'etat Nasser shared power with a civilian 'front' government only briefly. By February 1953 the autocratic collegial

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16 See Chapter III, pp. 67, 82

17 See Chapter III, p. 91

18 The reliance on religion to justify the state policies ranged from efforts to create the historical bases for Nasserite socialism to publicizing the idea of Nasser being endowed with a divine mission. Thus, the regime's position on monopoly, social justice, property and taxes was justified on the basis of Islam. Socialism was said to have existed in the Islamic state from the very beginning; in the days of Omar, land was nationalized and distributed among agricultural workers. And as a part of the massive propaganda scheme was works like Taha Abdul Baqi Srur's Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Man who changed the Face of History which showed Nasser as the providential being predestined by God to be a second Saladin to remove the humiliation endured by the Arab and Muslim world.

rule of the RCC established military control over ministers in government and all other structures including the Liberation Rally. Decision-making was centralized in and monopolized by the soldiers in the RCC, and after 1956, in Nasser himself. All important positions within the National Union, and later the ASU, were again held by former RCC members. The dominant role of the military had the effect of enabling Nasser to wield ultimate control. The army in general, and the RCC in particular, did come to share the fruits of power, but not power itself.<sup>19</sup> It also had the effect of alienating the intellectuals — the military presence and its ideological orientation prevented a genuine rapprochement between the elite and the intelligentsia. In the muzzling and belittling of the only group of Egyptians that could have provided the required cadre of the ASU so necessary for its autonomy, Nasser made the party system rigid. The system could not absorb the Rightist traditional intellectuals because of their class position, neither could it absorb the Leftist intellectuals because of their political position.

While Nasser depended for survival on the secret police and the army, he drew the legality of his authority and his political and social revolution from the support of the masses. In order to ensure the support of the people and keep them impressed with the results and successes of the revolution and with Nasser's

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19 P.J. Vatikiotis, Nasser and His Generation (London, 1978) p. 170.

paternalistic concern for their welfare the Nasserite regime developed a highly sophisticated propaganda machine potent instruments of which were the communication media, mass rallies, public trials of enemies of the regime etc.. Nasser's visit to the National Assembly, his visits abroad, his movements with foreign visitors and mass rallies were well publicized and were accompanied by organized cheering and a costly display of splendour. Thousands of people were transported in trucks to applaud at rallies. In the daily press as well as magazines and books the "nationalized writers" and authors<sup>20</sup> flattered Nasser sometimes to the extent of idolization. Within the ASU, Nasser allowed the growth of a "secret vanguard organization". This personal agency of Nasser along with his secret services countered potential rival power cliques in the army as well as the party.

#### Ideology as a Source of Legitimacy

Yet another instrument of legitimation was ideology. One can at least say that Nasser showed his sincerity in giving significant importance to ideology. He realized that if the party was to be the prime source of legitimacy, its organization must be "infused with value". Ideology, in so far as it provides the foundation for the development of consistent attitudes towards the elite and the state and unites thought and action,

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20 George M. Haddad, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States, Part II - Egypt, the Sudan, Yemen and Libya (New York, 1973) p. 81.

legitimizes the elites exercise of power by basing it on superior morality and rationality. A socialist ideology such as Nasser adopted, in a situation such as Egypt found itself in, is not only desirable but is a necessary tool to promote elite legitimation and control. Nationalism alone cannot produce an action programme needed for large scale internal transformation to meet the people's aspirations and expectations of improving their lot.

The view that Nasser was a 'convert' to socialism and that the conversion had taken place in 1961 is an oversimplification of a complex situation.<sup>21</sup> It overlooks the fact that there may be different degrees of commitment to a social ideal and that an initial propensity towards a certain idea may develop into a

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21 What makes people believe that the Nasserite regime had no socialist ideology before the 1960s is explained by the fact that the Free Officers had no coherent ideology when they took over power and that they relied more on free enterprise in the initial years to improve the economic situation. Then, Nasser never mentioned the word "socialism" before February 1955 when in a speech he used it in a rather negative tone as punishment to the business elite which had proved incompetent to assume responsibilities for Egyptian development. The word was again mentioned two and a half years later in December 1957 when the goal of the revolution was defined as the creation of "a cooperative, democratic, socialist society". The word also found no mention either in Nasser's Philosophy of the Revolution or the 1956 Constitution. It is also suggested by some that the new radicalism in economic policy was not simply a result of any new ideological orientation towards socialism as it was a consequence of the impact of external events upon Egypt, as well as the clear failure of the regime's earlier policy to stimulate economic development by encouraging private native and foreign enterprise.

conviction in response to certain stimuli especially when the person concerned is a pragmatic one like Nasser. "To conclude that Nasser shortly before 1961 suddenly found himself a socialist would be as inadequate an interpretation of the situation as would the belief that he had been a full-fledged socialist from the start".<sup>22</sup>

To begin with, Nasser himself admitted that when the revolution took place it had "no doctrine, no programme and no political organization". Not that an ideology could not be developed but only that Nasser prudently thought that spelling out an ideology before the revolution or immediately after it was accomplished would only lead to splits and differences among the officers which would jeopardise the success of the revolution. But it should not be taken to mean that there was an ideological void for there were the six principles and the belief in the idea of two revolutions.<sup>23</sup> Then action had preceded theory. A case in point is the land reforms of 1952. True, they were intended to forestall potential rivals and undercut the support

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22 Fayez Sayegh, "The Theoretical Structure of Nasser's Arab Socialism" in Albert Hourani, ed., Middle Eastern Affairs No.4, St. Antony's Paper no. 17 (London, 1965) p. 14.

23 The six principles spoke of the liquidation of colonialism, feudalism and the domination of power by capital, and the establishment of social equality. Though not well defined, these clearly pointed to a socialist policy which Nasser was to embark upon later. The philosophy of two revolution stated that while in the case of the West the 'political revolution' (i.e., political independence) preceded the 'social revolution' (i.e., social justice) Egypt had to face both simultaneously. It can be argued that by delaying the clear declaration of a socialist policy Nasser was trying to create the 'desirable' gap between the two revolutions: he consolidated political power first (till 1956) and only then spoke of a socialist programme which he had put into action in a small way even in 1952.

base of the powerful wafd, but they were as much a measure to gain the goodwill of the poor peasantry and legitimize the rule of the new regime.

That the process of ideology formation was gradual was acknowledged by Nasser when he said,

We reached our ideologies as a natural outcome of our experience ... we did not indulge in search for theories.... The freedom of action preceded the ideologies and so the ideologies were the product of nature....<sup>24</sup>

Nasser realized that agrarian reforms, nationalization of the Suez Canal and expropriation of property of foreigners did not help much. Besides, the disappointment with private initiative drew the leaders toward state control of enterprise. "With every step he took, he was coming closer to what he would later on come to recognize as "socialism"; with every step he was becoming more and more a socialist."<sup>25</sup>

What one can conclude from what has been said so far is that despite the creation of such ostensible political organizations for public participation in the country's political life as the Liberation Rally, the National Union and the ASU, and amidst all the plots and counter-plots throughout the eighteen years of rule, Nasser never trusted any of them, whether

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24 Eliezer Be'eri, Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society (London, 1969) p. 392.

25 Sayegh, n. 22, p. 14.

progressive or conservative. Instead he preferred to appeal to a popular base for his political power and supremacy. He consistently refused to establish any popular political body unless the latter could offer him absolute unquestioned loyalty. Thus all political structures created by Nasser were led and controlled by him. Indeed their very existence depended on the Rais' will. All impression that their existence gave of the regime being based on institutions capable of functioning entirely by themselves and strong enough to sustain national crises was deceptive and was shattered as a result of the 1967 defeat. Even ideology was heavily personalized. Arab nationalism and Arab socialism had meaning in Egypt due to their close and virtually indistinguishable identification with their creator.<sup>26</sup>

The 1967 war proved disastrous for the Egyptians. If the defeat was dramatic so was Nasser's resignation immediately after the declaration of cease-fire. More dramatic, however, was his reinstatement to power to face a situation when the entire system was under heavy fire. Nasser was not only able to meet the challenge but succeeded in a few months time to contain political dissent within the party, and overhaul the party structure without in any way loosening his own grip on its organization and functioning. The question to be asked now is whether this was evidence of the "great persistence of the

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26 John P. Entellis, "Nasser's Egypt - The Failure of Charismatic Leadership", Orbis (Philadelphia), vol. 18, no. 2, Summer 1974, p. 457.



Egyptian political system to endure despite the enormity of defeat",<sup>27</sup> whether it testified to the great "absorptive capacity" of the system and whether it was proof of the successful routinization of personal charisma and the "transference of legitimacy from the charismatic to other individuals and new institutions".<sup>28</sup> Or the system endured because of the sheer weight of Nasser's personality who put it to the best use to tide over the systemic crisis? Evidence can be found to support both views. It would be in the fitness of things to briefly discuss them before a final word is said about Nasser, his party and its success or failure.

Dekmejian, in his Egypt under Nasser, has developed a framework for the routinization of charisma. After applying it to the case of Egypt he puts forward the view that by 1970 the pattern of authority in Egypt was the consequence of routinized charisma and institutionalization. To support this thesis he, however, relies completely on the test of 1967 which showed that the system was strong enough in terms of legitimacy and control to successfully deal with a situation which could in all probability prove a catastrophe. The dynamic factors responsible for the high degree of stability, he enumerates, "include the internal cohesion of the Free Officer's group and the military,

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27 Dekmejian, n. 1, p. 244.

28 Ibid., p. 246.

the systematic routinization of competing elites, the legitimizing role of charismatic authority, the solidifying effect of foreign confrontations, the adoption and implementation of ideology, and the partial routinization of ideology, and the partial routinization of charisma. To be sure, these stabilizing features were not always introduced effectively and systematically. What is distinctive about the Egyptian political system is that they occurred at all in such a short time."<sup>29</sup>

Entellis, in an article in the Orbis, contests Dekmejian's view and offers empirical evidence against it. He points to the regime's inability to promulgate a permanent national constitution, the assassination plots, planned coups d'etat and abortive attempts against Nasser, chronic cabinet reshuffling,<sup>30</sup> the restructuring on two occasions of local and regional administrative units of the ASU,<sup>31</sup> serious ideological

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29 Ibid., p. 226.

30 Nasser played musical chairs with ministers. Between 1952 and 1969, 131 different individuals held cabinet posts while in the USA less than a third of this number held similar posts.

- Entellis, n. 26, p. 458.

31 The ASU underwent a major reorganization in 1968 only three years after the original lengthy process of establishing it.

attacks<sup>32</sup> by the Left (Marxists, Maoists, communists) and the Right (particularly the Muslim Brotherhood), and the greater use of coercive military force to ensure control.<sup>33</sup>

The great "persistence of the system to endure despite the enormity of the defeat" does not, Entellis goes on to say, "testify to its great absorptive capacity but rather to the

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32 The success of Nasser to absorb these attacks was only partial. The charismatic legitimacy that he had come to possess enabled him to balance ideological rival groups of the regime. He could not eliminate all civilian opposition and dissatisfaction nor was he able to destroy the people's loyalty to some of their old leaders. The funeral of Nahas Pasha, leader of the dissolved Wafd, in August 1965, turned into a demonstration against the regime and the police had to be called to restore order. The ASU and the National Assembly provided neither an adequate safety valve for the opposition nor a serious instrument for checking and influencing government policy. The real political struggle remained clandestine. It was conducted either through what was left of Nasser's two most active challengers, the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists, or by local notables who still maintained a hold on the countryside against the influence of the government machine, or within the regime itself between rival groups including the army.

Because the popular support to the ASU was commanded and not spontaneous, the Muslim Brotherhood, with its sentimental appeal to tradition and interpretation of Quranic tenets, offered a real attraction to a dissatisfied peasantry and a deceived lower middle class. The Communist Party, however, under directions from the Soviet Union which was ready to compromise for longer gains through friendship with Egypt, dissolved itself in 1965 and its ranks were asked to join the ASU.

33 Entellis, n. 26, p. 456.

overpowering charismatic impact of President Nasser and the loyalty of the military and the bureaucracy... the personal acclaim accorded the leader by his people on 9 June 1967 was evidence of the great awe, love and adulation the people had for their Rais, none of which, however, had any spill-over effect on the system or its staff".<sup>34</sup> In fact, never was the system so "de-legitimized", so scorned or distrusted as it was in the dark months following the Six-Day war. But the Rais was never personally criticized. In 1967-68, Hamrush of the Left, and Heikal of the mainstream, maintained that the system worked because of the leader's personality and the "magnetic" force of its leadership".<sup>35</sup> Dekmejian himself sums up the personalized rule of Nasser: "... the legitimacy Nasir possessed did not always encompass others in the leadership of the government itself. Certain privileged officials in the Cabinet; the military and the security ... were always a source of complaint... all the shortcomings of the regime ... were blamed on incompetent and corrupt subordinates".<sup>36</sup> "Nasser's charisma rather than being the vehicle for institutionalization itself became the institution".<sup>37</sup> So great was Nasser's personal charisma that after Nasser had

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34 Ibid., p. 459.

35 Ruz al-Yusuf, 24 July 1967; al-Ahram, 15 November 1968. Quoted in Dekmejian, n. 1, p. 269.

36 Ibid., p. 246.

37 Entellis, n. 26, p. 461.

resigned in June 1967 and named Zakaria Mohieddin as his successor, the Vice-President of the National Assembly who went to a post-office to send a congratulatory telegram to the new President was called a traitor by the clerk who refused to send the telegram.<sup>38</sup>

After the war, there was genuine "self-criticism" and introspection among Egyptians during which the most sacrosanct institutions and practices were questioned and dissent openly expressed. "That a generally authoritarian regime permitted significant liberalization and dissent during a time of national emergency" was not a demonstration of systemic strength as Dekmejian would have us believe,<sup>39</sup> but of the shrewd political understanding of Nasser who realized that crushing the counter-revolution was not the way to save the revolution. While he embarked upon a programme of political reform which, we have seen in the previous chapter, proved rather hollow later on, was not so important as the broadening of the legitimacy formula. The elite augmented its legitimacy formula — i.e., charisma and Egyptian-ness — with a revival of traditional Islamic themes and symbols and a limited but significant reversion to Egyptian nationalism. Without sacrificing the commitment to socialism or Arabism, the leadership broadened its legitimacy formula to neutralize the appeal of the counter-elite (particularly the Brotherhood) and

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38 Jean Lacouture, n. 6, p. 131.

39 Dekmejian, n. 1, p. 253.

to minimize popular support.

What such a renewed effort to legitimize can show is that the system had enough strength and legitimacy to provide Nasser with a degree of support against his enemies in the army during the crucial days after the defeat and keep him in power, but not enough strength and legitimacy to continue in its present form. The basis of the strength of the system was, as Dekmejian<sup>40</sup> later clarified, the fact the certain political structure like the Presidency, the Cabinet and the coercive components were much more institutionalized than certain others like the ASU and the National Assembly.

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40 Hrair Dekmejian, "Marx, Weber and the Egyptian Revolution", The Middle East Journal, vol. 3, no. 2, Spring 1976, pp. 158-72.

CHAPTER V

PARTY SYSTEM UNDER SADAT : CHANGE OR CONTINUITY?

## PARTY SYSTEM UNDER SADAT - CHANGE OR CONTINUITY?

A lot has changed in Egypt since Sadat came to power in October 1970. In the first few months, at least till the May 1971 showdown with his leftist colleague, Ali Sabri, Sadat repeatedly vowed to follow Nasser's objectives and to respect his legacy. In fact, the over-riding consideration in the choice of Anwar al-Sadat by the political leadership and the committees of the ASU was undoubtedly his closeness to Nasser and his willingness to follow Nasser's policies. In its unanimous vote for the nomination of Sadat on 7 October 1970, the National Assembly stressed the fact that he was "a comrade of Nasser in all stages of his struggle".<sup>1</sup> It expected Sadat to follow Nasser's path towards socialism, anti-imperialism, ties with the Arab states and friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Even the man in the street indicated the popular will to carry on Nasser's tradition as they shouted "Sadat, Sadat do not think that Nasser is dead".<sup>2</sup>

But this was not to be. As soon as Sadat found himself firmly saddled in power after eliminating his rival Nasserite group led by Ali Sabri, he forgot his promises to follow the Nasserite path. He very discretely stopped mentioning Nasser and the Nasserite path in his speeches. The expulsion of the Soviet experts from Egypt in July 1972, only a little more than

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1 New York Times, 8 October 1970.

2 Los Angeles Times, 1 October 1970.



a year after the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty in May 1971, clearly indicated a major shift in the foreign policy of Egypt. On the domestic front, a soft line was taken right from the beginning so far as state enterprise was concerned. Capitalism no more remained a sin, rather, it was said, the sectors of the economy which effectively can be managed by private enterprise in a mixed economy would be given sufficient protection.

But in one sphere of general policy - and this he will never admit — Sadat has really followed Nasser. This is Nasser's style of politics, especially the use of the party system to perpetuate personal rule while creating a semblance of popular participation. Sadat has liberalized his regime and has created a multi-party system of sorts. The endeavour here is to examine how real is this apparent change in the party system under Sadat and to identify the points of convergence and divergence; in short, to see whether the changes brought about by Sadat in the party system represent change or continuity.

#### Basic Similarities between the Nasser and Sadat Eras

The similarities between the initial years of Nasser and Sadat is striking. It took two years for Nasser to eliminate his rivals within and outside the Junta, Sadat took around nine months. The challenge to Nasser came from the Right, chiefly from the Muslim Brotherhood which apparently had the sympathies of General Neguib; Sadat faced the challenge from the pro-Nasser Leftist group led by Sabri. Both Nasser and Sadat, having once

eliminated their rivals consolidated their power -- Nasser eliminated his rivals in 1954 and consolidated power till 1956; Sadat eliminated his rivals in 1971 and consolidated power till the October War in 1973. Only then did they think of affecting structural changes and experimenting with them. But it was always a controlled experiment -- never did they allow the experiments to endanger their position and hold on power.

### The Legitimacy Problem : A Common Feature

The basic problem for both Nasser and Sadat was that of legitimacy, Saddled with the bitter and seemingly permanent legacy of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and burdened by mounting economic problems, lacking the personal magnetism of his predecessor and unable to maintain the ideological momentum of the Nasser regime, Egypt at the time Sadat took over, seemed headed for a legitimacy crisis. Even the inevitable - inevitable because Nasser had left little or no institutional legacy - struggle for power between Sadat and Ali Sabri should be taken as a conflict arising out of a crisis of legitimacy. Although Sadat legally succeeded Nasser and was later overwhelmingly confirmed as President by a national referendum, he was challenged by some of Nasser's men, especially Ali Sabri, who considered themselves equally legitimate and qualified to fill Nasser's place.

Nasser had never vested political power in any Egyptian political structure and though he did prefer some structures over others, the ASU certainly was not his favourite political

instrument. The ASU was his own innovation, yet he did not trust it. But after his death, outside the formal governmental, bureaucratic and military structures on which Nasser had heavily relied, the only arena for political debate and constitutional procedure was the ASU. Sabri and his aides, Sami Sharaf and Sharawi Goum'ah, the Minister for Interior, with the ASU as their source of power<sup>3</sup> and supported by the leftist al-Tali'ah intellectuals and the managerial class in the factories, appeared poised to win against Sadat and his group. However, Sabri and his ASU associates made a mistake in assuming that the ASU had become the powerful party that they wanted it to become. They ignored the fact that the army was powerful and that they could not be sure of its support. They also ignored the fact that the people saw them as a tyrinnical group which had turned itself, after Nasser's death, from the status of "instruments of power" to one

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3 Since 1967, the ASU had been in the ascendancy. Sabri who was reappointed (he was replaced by Nasser himself immediately after the Six-Day War) the Secretary-General of the ASU in 1968, grabbed the opportunity, when Nasser needed his support. While he purged the army, to recruit cadres from the technocratic-industrial sections, organize leadership groups in the rival areas, increase the general membership and spread the wide network of the ASU, and organize militia and guardsmen, all into the ASU network. After Nasser's death, the ASU leftist paper, al-Tali'ah, emerged from obscurity and became the stronghold of extreme left oriented intellectuals and journalists. The al-Goumhuriyah was infiltrated by Sabri loyalists. Both publications launched a bitter journalistic war against al-Ahram's Heikal and, indirectly, against the Sadat regime.

of "holders of power".<sup>4</sup> Besides, they made no attempt to forge close links with the people, a relationship which could have stood them in good stead. Sadat realized, after his proposal for an Egyptian merger with Libya, Syria and the Sudan was voted down by the ASU Executive Committee, that a coup d'etat against him was in the making. It was as a defensive measure, therefore, that he proceeded to purge the party and the government after announcing the discovery of a conspiracy; and in a matter of days, dismissed Ali Sabri from the ASU's Supreme Executive Committee and four other members of the Committee one of whom, Sharawi Goum'ah, was a Cabinet Minister. Five other Cabinet Ministers including the Minister of war, General Mohammed Fawzi, were also fired. In one stroke, Sadat had eliminated almost everyone who could pose a threat to him and in the process, had crippled the ASU. He abolished whole time work in the party and dissolved all the old party committees in the provinces. The ASU was virtually dissolved and ordered to be recreated in May 1971 through elections from the base to the apex. The explanation given was not new. Nasser had ordered elections in 1968 because the ASU at that time, he said, was not built on free elections; Sadat, alleged that the whole organization as it existed then was based on elections rigged by the "centers of power".<sup>5</sup>

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4 Per Gahrton, "President Sadat's New Brand of Egyptian Nationalism", New Middle East, no. 40, January 1970, p. 11.

5 Indian Express (Delhi), 24 April 1972.

Means of Gaining Legitimacy : Another Similarity

What is really striking is not that both Nasser and Sadat had to face a legitimacy crisis but that they used more or less the same themes to gain legitimacy - pan-Arabism, economic policy, Islamism and so on. Nasser relied heavily on sources of legitimacy other than the political party. So did Sadat in the beginning of his rule.

To begin with, Sadat embarked upon a policy, rather a show, of pan-Arabism, one which Nasser had so successfully used to gain legitimacy. Like Nasser, again, Sadat resorted to what has already been referred to as a traditional legitimacy device — Islamic orthodoxy. There was a strong trend towards Islamic revivalism and political conservatism. In a definite shift to the right Sadat "abandoned the middle position in ideological affairs" and came "to rely increasingly on a mixture of elements from the liberal bourgeois and the Islamic right".<sup>6</sup> If Nasser enforced land reforms, confiscated foreign property and later nationalized private enterprise in a bid to win support and legitimize his rule, Sadat attempted to undo this while the object remained the same. He found small presents to placate each class. As early as December 1970, Sadat ordered the review of expropriation measures and the restoration of sequestrated property to its original owners. Even before this was done, price cuts

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6 John Waterbury, "A Note on Egypt: 1973", Field Staff Reports, North East Africa Series (American Universities Field Staff XVIII, No. 4, July 1973) p. 4.

in consumer goods like grain and rice and non-consumer goods had been affected and imports liberalized. The wholesale promotion of about 150,000 government employees with promises of a pay-rise,<sup>7</sup> new schemes for better health, housing and transport and the release of around 3,000 prisoners within a few weeks of coming into power - were all measures taken to give the impression that a new era had begun, more liberal than the previous one, in which Egyptians could hope to improve their lot.

After May 1971, Sadat went further with these policies. While the pan-Arab slogan was played down in favour of a policy which can be described as "Egypt first",<sup>8</sup> the role of Islam was stepped up. Article 2 of the new Constitution of September 1971 stated: "Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language. Islamic jurisprudence is the principal source of legislation". Along with a crackdown on the Left<sup>9</sup>, Sadat went in for a progressive easing of pressure from the Right. As if in a bid for support, he granted amnesty and rehabilitated hundreds of those who had suffered during the Nasser era -- the beneficiaries were elements of the Faruq regime, the Muslim Brotherhood, landlords and expelled judges.<sup>10</sup>

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7 The Guardian (Manchester), 13 March 1971.

8 Michael C. Hudson, Arab Politics - The Search for Legitimacy (London, 1977) p. 248.

9 Ninety leftist intellectuals, charged with causing tension, spreading false information and undermining national unity, were expelled from the ASU in January 1973. Arab Report and Record, 15 January 1973.

10 Najib E. Saliba, "Decline of Nasserism in Sadat's Egypt", World Affairs, vol. 138, no. 1, Summer 1975, p. 52.

The October 1973 War was a crowning success for Sadat. He felt strong enough now to claim that the former regime had lost all its legitimacy as a result of its defeat in 1967, implying thereby that his regime had established its own legitimacy by its successes. The new group of journalists who were released or allowed to return from exile included the Amin brothers—Mustafa Amin and Ali Amin — Ahmed Abu al-Fath and top army officers considered responsible for the defeat in 1967 and also some of those like General Fawzi who had been implicated in the leftist plot in May 1971.<sup>11</sup> A high court order in May 1974 declared that all expropriation under Nasser was illegal and must be returned.<sup>12</sup> The huge public sector was blamed for the visible deterioration of the Egyptian economy and infrastructure. An open door policy was then openly accepted as the cure for the country's economic ills.

#### The Liberalization

Lacking Nasser's overwhelming symbolic magic Sadat was, therefore, in no position to carry on in the same tradition as Nasser. Between 1967 and 1970 enough had happened to raise expectations of a new, more liberal system in the near future. After Nasser's death it appeared that any Egyptian leader who took over would have to become "a broker among the emergent interests

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11 The Guardian, 16 March 1974.

12 New York Times, 25 May 1974.

in the country and less of a patrimonial autocrat."<sup>13</sup> It was expected that the vacuum created would be filled by some kind of a collective leadership than by the sole political organization, the ASU, which will, however, be called upon to play an increasingly important role. At the same time people hoped that the National Assembly and the various mass organizations would be more closely associated with the elaboration of general policy.<sup>14</sup> That a certain amount of liberalization was expected/desired is clear from certain proposals presented to Sadat (after he has elected President) by three of Nasser's prominent associates and fellow RCC members - Zakaria Mohieddin, Abdul Latif Boghdadi and Kamal ed-din Hussein (all rightists)- which demanded, inter alia, an open political system with at least one opposition party, a free Press and collective authority to reside in the head of the government instead of a single strong man.<sup>15</sup> These proposals had to be rejected because it was not an opportune moment.

Some liberalization did take place. For instance, debates in the National Assembly<sup>16</sup> became more free. The 1964 Constitution stipulated that the government submit its programme of action

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13 Shahrough Akhavi, "Egypt-New Patrimonial Elite", in Frank Tachau, ed., Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East (Massachusetts, 1975) pp. 86-87.

14 Le Monde (Paris), 7 October, 1970.

15 New York Times, 10 October 1970.

16 The Egyptian Parliament according to the September 1971 Constitution was to be called the People's Assembly.



to the Parliament. In 1964, when Ali Sabri was Prime Minister, the programme was not even discussed for it "covered everything". During the 1966-67 session when Zakaria Mohieddin was Prime Minister, till the death of Nasser, no debate on government programmes took place; there was only unanimous approval. But after Sadat took over, the programme was debated but without dissent. In February 1972, the debate was mild mannered. In 1973, the People's Assembly demonstrated that it was not after all entirely impotent.<sup>17</sup> The Press, too, was permitted to write and criticize much more freely. For the first time since the coup d'etat, the Egyptian Press afforded a rather reliable picture of the nations economic and social problems.

#### Changes in the Party System

Perhaps it was as a result of this freedom that in March 1972, for the first time, it was officially admitted that Egypt's hopes of building a sound political party had not been realized — Syad Mara'i, first Secretary of the ASU Central Committee, admitted that democracy was limited inside the party, superficial political flattery was widespread, the institution considered itself an organ for producing excuses and justifications for government action, and reports were drawn up to please the leaders rather than represent the true feelings of the people.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Fuad Mater, "After the Deluge: Egypt's Parliament Finds Its Voice", New Middle East, no. 52/53, January/February 1973, p. 45.

18 Indian Express, 24 April 1972.

But it was only after the positive outcome of the October war of 1973 that Sadat felt strong enough to take steps to modify the party system. He touched off a debate when in August 1974 he issued a 7,000 word "working paper" on reform of the ASU. Egyptians engaged in a spirited debate on the return of political parties. In newspaper columns and meeting halls all over the country politicians, intellectuals, students, workers and peasants mulled over the reform proposals. The views expressed ranged from the abolition of the 50 per cent quota system for peasants and workers to the abolition of the ASU and the setting up of a second political party.<sup>19</sup> However, when the Egyptian Parliamentary

19 Some of the prominent views that emerged during the debate were:

- i) Hafez Badawy, Speaker of the Assembly, echoed the views of Sadat who was not against political parties but confrontation with Israel was to be resolved first. Badawy said: "We object to parties as long as war continues. We also object to any encroachment of 50 per cent minimum representation of workers and farmers in all political institutions."
- ii) Mohammed Abdel Shafie, a member of the Assembly, called for the abolition of the quota system. He said that the return of political parties would be the only safeguard against a return of "centers of power".
- iii) Many saw the ASU as designed to blur issues and soften political confrontation.
- iv) Youssef Idris, a Marxist, said that the ASU was "artificial" and should not be reformed but abandoned. "We should be fully socialist or fully capitalist and not a mixture of both as we are now".
- v) Ali Amin, chairman of Al-Akhbar said: "We need 'socialism with freedom' along European lines."  
International Herald Tribune (Paris), 11 September 1974.
- vi) There were at the same time some attempts to found a second political party in addition to the ASU. Certain Egyptians had wanted to name the new party to be formed as "October 6" the date of crossing the Suez Canal. The new party was to support Sadat's leadership more firmly.  
B.K. Narayan, Anwar el-Sadat- Man with a Mission (New Delhi, 1977) pp. 97-98.

Commission set up to study the reorganization of political parties recommended the maintenance of the one party system, it became clear that Sadat had settled for breathing a new life into the ASU rather than forming a new party. All that he seemed to want was that the ASU be a center for healthy dialogue and a focal point for opposing views rather than rigidly endorse conformism. Accordingly, a year later Sadat announced the creation of a new political grouping within the ASU. Mustafa Kamel Mured, a member of the ASU Central Committee, said that it would be called the "Free Socialists".<sup>20</sup>

Then, in January 1976, Sadat formed the Commission on the Future of Political Action of the People's Assembly. And on 14 March 1976, he announced that on the basis of the report of the Commission and in implementation of his policy of liberalizing the country's political and economic institutions, the ASU would be permitted to have three different groupings or "platforms" — a liberal right wing, a governmental center and a Marxist Left. He ruled out an early return to a multi-party system adding that there were "no solid foundations at present for the formation of parties."<sup>21</sup>

The 1953 ban on political parties remained in effect. However, within the ASU, three permanent "platforms" representing the Right, the Center and the Left were permitted. Each platform

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20 The Statesman (Delhi), 27 October 1975.

21 Ceylon Daily News (Colombo), 16 March 1976.

could lobby for its ideas, disseminate its views through the media, and prepare a programme and a list of candidates for election. All platforms were to work under the legitimizing formula of the ASU; none was to impose its opinion upon others. That is, the ASU was to be a framework "to safeguard national unity, the inevitability of the socialist solution and social peace"<sup>22</sup> while the platforms were to be the actual political organizations to carry out all their political activities and programmes in full freedom and submit candidates who, if they reached the People's Assembly, were to exercise full constitutional rights. The President himself declined to belong to any platform stating that he should be an arbitrator among all authorities, unbiased and a "safety valve protecting the masses".<sup>23</sup>

Through these legitimizing "platforms"<sup>24</sup> Sadat hoped to deflect the pressure for a multi-party system and to encourage the People's Assembly to function as a representative body capable of constructive criticism and useful legislative initiative and oversight e.g., modification of the budget in 1976.

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22 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol. 22, 1976, p. 27810.

23 Ibid.

24 This was not the first time that such an idea had come up. Way back in 1964, Nasser had reportedly attempted to supplement the ASU with yet another group of 4000 members which would function as the "Government Party" within the ASU. The new organization was designed by Nasser "to enforce a peaceful transfer of power and a continuation of his policies if anything happened to him". Washington Post, 9 February 1964.

The three "platforms" represented very different sectors of the Egyptian government spectrum. The Left group was called the National Progressive Unionist Rally. Led by the "Red Colonel", Khaled Mohieddin, it was for closer ties with the Soviet Union, stress on public sector investment and reliance on class struggle. The Centre "platform" was the Egyptian Arab Socialist Organization and included the Prime Minister, Cabinet members, key civil servants and heads of the 26 governorates. It was for the continuance of the government policy, a theme of gradualism and guided democracy, a mixed economy with a healthy dose of private sector investment and closer ties with the West. The third "platform" was named the Socialist Liberals. It "was neither socialist nor liberal"<sup>25</sup> and was for a return to capitalism, greater private enterprise and a heavy reliance on market forces to solve Egypt's economic problems.

Seeing that the trial balloon was doing well, Sadat, in November 1976, one week after elections to the People's Assembly, announced that the three "platforms" were to be called political parties. Though the ASU was to continue supervisory and financial controls over the parties and at least for the time being, only the three parties were to be allowed to function, it did appear that the way for a multi-party system in the near future was being set. Hopes were, however, soon to be belied.

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25 A.Z. Rubinstein, "Egypt of Sadat", Current History, vol. 72, no. 423, January 1977, p. 20.

On 29 June 1977, the Egyptian Parliament adopted a new law on political parties which for the first time since their abolition in 1953, permitted the establishment of political parties subject to certain conditions. The conditions are important for it was because of these conditions that the members of the opposition — Right as well as Left - boycotted the vote on the new law. The conditions meant that the ASU would continue to maintain control over the formation and life of parties.

They were:

- (i) Any new party must have the authorization of the ASU.
- (ii) It must include at least 20 members of the Egyptian Parliament.<sup>26</sup>
- (iii) It should not have been in existence at the time of the monarchy, i.e., parties which had been dissolved in 1953 could not be revived in their former form.

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26 This condition did not apply to the three parties already existing. The distribution of seats in the Assembly among these three was:

Liberal Socialists Party	- 12
Egyptian Arab Socialist Organization	- 280
National Progressive Unionist Rally	- 2
Independents	- 48

The minimum number of members in the Assembly required for a new party to be formed was reduced according to an announcement made by Sadat in July 1978. The new number, however, was not given.

West Asia Diary (New Delhi), vol. 3, no. 36, 1978  
p. 1220.

- (iv) Any new party must support national unity and acknowledge that Egypt's problems can only be solved by "socialist" means.
- (v) The aims and principles of any new party must be different from those of the groups affiliated to the ASU.

The third condition had the clear implication that the Egyptian Communist Party, the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood could not be legally reconstituted.<sup>27</sup> It was indeed from these three organizations that opposition to Sadat could come.

The Muslim Brotherhood was not so much of a challenge. With the release from prison of most of the Muslim Brothers in the 1960s, and after Sadat came to power in the 1970s, the message went around: "the Brotherhood has arisen". The Muslim Brotherhood reorganized itself in small secret cells in villages to begin with and then in religious schools, towns and cities. The pressure on the regime from the Brotherhood quarters was for a further movement towards Islam. Sadat went out of his way to court the conservative, religiously directed Brotherhood in proclaiming the Arab Republic of Egypt as an Islamic state. Limiting the sale of alcoholic beverage (May 1976) and the adoption of certain legislation based on the Sharia were also placatory gestures. When the platforms in the ASU were formed, the Muslim Brotherhood with a following of about 50,000, perhaps more, was

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<sup>27</sup> However, the Wafd was reported to have decided at a meeting in May 1977, to reconstitute itself. Le Monde, 1 June 1977.

reported have decided to reconstitute itself not as a political party but as a religious organization, pending the official restoration of the right to form political parties, under two former free officers -- Kamal ed-din Hussein and Hussein Shafie -- without joining any of the three platforms.

But the Left<sup>28</sup> was taken as a real threat even when it had never enjoyed any significant political power in the past. Sadat's attitude towards the Left was clearly reflected in the manner in which he attacked the National Progressive Unionist Rally while discussions for legalizing political parties were in progress. He called them "traitors" and "agents" and emphasized that he wanted a Left wing that "was Egyptian and not Soviet".<sup>29</sup> The Progressive Union, however, reiterated its stand in June 1977 and said that it supported better relations with the USSR as that

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28 The debate for the reactivation of the Egyptian Communist party which voluntarily disbanded itself in 1965, had started as early as 1966. The 1967 debacle and Nasser's inclinations towards compromise solutions strengthened the trend. The death of Nasser and the purge of the Sabri group forced the pace. So did the Egyptian help to General Nimeiry of the Sudan to crush the Communists and the expulsion of Soviet experts from Egypt in 1972. They paused a little, to detract any accusation of a Soviet plot, till de-Nasserization was well underway. Then seeing the poor economic conditions, the Communist Party thought of harnessing the disaffections and rumblings among the people and on May Day 1975 revived itself.

Times of India, 18 August 1975.

29 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol. 23, 1977, p. 28516.



was in Egypt's interests. But they were cautious. They clearly accepted that there were nationalist groups and elements in the ruling authority. Khaled Moheiddin is reported to have said: "We have to work within the system... there can be points beyond which we cannot go. They can finish us off. But what will be the use of that".<sup>30</sup> This attitude of fear as well as mistrust continues. Even as late as 26 October 1978, a communist plot to overthrow Sadat was said to have been discovered.<sup>31</sup>

Ever since it was banned in 1953, the Wafd remained "no more than the throbbing of the city's inner life, the great elusive mumber which serves as a barometer if not a guide to the ups and downs of public opinion."<sup>32</sup> All through, it is said, it remained the strongest electoral force in Egypt wherein lay its role as a potential threat to the regime.<sup>33</sup> This was proved when the New Wafd was officially registered as a party on 4 February 1978.

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30 Hindustan Times, 3 February 1977.

31 West Asia Diary, vol. 3, no. 25, 1978, p. 1104.

32 Jean and Simone Lacouture, Egypt in Transition (New York, 1958) p. 242.

33 It is alleged that the Wafd had planned to exploit the student demonstrations in 1968 to overthrow Nasser's regime but withdrew when it found that another party was competing with it to exploit the situation. A leading Wafd member had admitted to organizing demonstrations at the funeral of Nahas Pasha in 1965.

Daily Telegraph (London), 18 September 1968.

The New Wafd<sup>34</sup> came up as the first freely created political party since 1953. Having 24 members<sup>35</sup> in the Assembly, it was the second largest party in the Egyptian Parliament. It was an instant success. For the student, no less than for the peasants, Serageddin's party represented an alternative to the government and a chance for genuine political expression. It claimed a membership of 50,000 which, they said, represented only a fraction of the potential membership. The party said that the number in the Assembly would have been more had it not been for the stage managing of their re-emergence by the ASU.

However, it can be said, that the New Wafd did over-estimate its pre-revolutionary support. For one thing, the following of the young people was superficial; they attended the Monday night gathering because their parents used to vote for the old Wafd. For another, its appeal was not real; rather it was the result of the all-inclusive character it had come to assume. It had members both from the extreme Left and the extreme Right. Finally, in their enthusiasm to embarrass the government, the approach of the New Wafdists was naive. For example, one of them -

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34 The New Wafd was accepted because it declared its allegiance to the 1952 revolution and principles of Socialism, democracy and the rights of workers and peasants. More important, it supported Sadat's peace initiative. Domestically, it said, it would prefer a more capitalist economy and would like to see more power in the hands of the government than the President.

35 The biggest loser was the Right -- out of its 12 members in the Assembly, 9 joined the New Wafd. An equal number left the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party to join the New Wafd. The rest were independents.

Sheikh Ashur Nasr — shouted in the Assembly "down with Sadat", and was expelled.<sup>36</sup>

A word about the state of the Press here would not be out of place.<sup>37</sup> The first opposition newspaper, the weekly al-Ahra (The Liberals), was the organ of the Liberal Socialists and made its appearance on 14 November 1977. It did criticize the government for its game of Cabinet reshuffles but was on the whole mild and cautious in its attack. It was the leftist al-Ahali (the People), an organ of the Unionist Party, that was really critical of the government. For the same reason perhaps its circulation shot up from 50,000 to 135,000 in only four months.<sup>38</sup> And it was for the same reason again, that its 11 April 1978 issue was seized by the authorities for in it was published an interview with Heikal.<sup>39</sup> The Party had to halt its publication until the newspaper could publish the views of the Party freely. However, it started publication again in July 1978

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36 Times of India, 3 June 1978.

37 The Press was nationalized in the 1960s. The ASU owned all the publications. But after the three parties had been formed within the ASU framework the question was: who owns what? There were calls for the ASU to renounce its ownership of the Press and for shareholder companies to be set up to run the newspapers. Others suggested that each of the principal dailies be assigned to one of the three parties. The matter was, however, left to the Higher Council of the Press to decide.

Kuwait Times, 5 January 1977.

38 Times of India, 3 June 1978.

39 West Asia Diary, vol. 3, no. 22, 1978, p. 1076.

but was banned in August 1978 because it had criticized Sadat's peace initiative. In the place of the al-Ahali the Unionist Party launched a new paper, al-Taqaddum (Progress) which was closed down by the authorities in January 1979 when it protested against Sadat playing host to the exiled Shah of Iran.<sup>40</sup>

The popularity of the New Wa'fd as also open criticism by the Left, aroused concern in the ruling circles. The government felt that they were becoming serious opposition groups which were bound to affect their hold on the system. It even instilled fear in the privileged armed forces who were fearful of being swept out of power and influence by a genuinely civilian administration. Thus to prevent the opposition to go out of hand Sadat ordered a referendum on 15 May 1978 to decide (i) whether to allow Communists to hold key posts in the government or the press, (ii) whether those who served the system of the pre-1952 era be allowed to participate in political life, (iii) whether all former political parties be allowed to return to political life, and (iv) whether the condition of working within the national unity framework, social peace and the inevitability of the socialist solution be imposed. The referendum, necessitated because of the fear of Nasserism (as many Nasserites had been released from prison and were thinking of forming a party)<sup>41</sup>, was generally opposed but as could be expected, 98.29 per cent of the people voted

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40 New Statesman, 16 February 1979.

41 Indian Express, 26 May 1978.

'yes'.<sup>42</sup>

The 'yes' vote affected two parties - the New Wafd and the Unionists. A thirteen-point Bill in accordance with the referendum verdict was to purge at least three top New Wafd leaders — Chairman Serageddin, its Secretary-General, Ibrahim Farag and its Deputy Chairman Abdel Fattah Hassan. The latter two had held posts in governments of the old Wafd before 1952. Similarly, it was to ban the Marxists and pro-Moscow officials who had served under Nasser because they supported an ideology "incompatible with religion". The result was that on 2 June 1978, the New Wafd dissolved itself rather than submit to the political restrictions imposed by Sadat which rendered political parties a "mere facade".<sup>43</sup> Three days later, the Unionist Party announced that it was suspending all political activity to protest against the new law. A week later, it, however, postponed a decision to dissolve itself for another two months and decided to contest the constitutionality of the law on court.<sup>44</sup>

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42 It is to be noted that the opposition was never allowed to voice its opinion. The last edition of the weekly, al-Ahali which called on the people to vote 'no' was seized before it could reach the streets.

West Asia Diary, vol. 3, no. 32, 1978, p. 1176.

43 The Times (London), 3 June 1978.

44 The Unionist Party held that the new law violated article 40 of the 1971 Constitution prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, origin or language....

West Asia Diary, vol. 3, no. 29, 1978, p. 1147.

This left only two political parties - the governing Egyptian Arab Socialist Party with 300 of the 360 seats in the Assembly and the Right wing Liberal Socialist Party which supported the government in important issues.

Sadat announced on 22 July 1978 that after a lot of hesitation and thought he had decided to set up his own political party. This step was aimed at countering criticism about the repressive measures after the recent referendum. The new party, modelled on lines of social-democratic parties of Western Europe and named the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed in August 1978.<sup>45</sup> The party headed by Sadat<sup>46</sup> set prosperity for Egyptian citizens as its chief goal. A 10,000 word policy document released in August stressed the "need to build a modern state on science and faith in which every citizen can realize his legitimate ambition, free from fear and hunger."<sup>47</sup> To strike a balance between the interests of the individual and the community, the programme provided for the adoption of Democratic Socialism based on Islamic and Christian values, and the principles of the 1952 Revolution and the corrective Revolution of May 1971. Referring to the absence of the word "socialist" from the party's name, Fikry Makram Ebeid, the Secretary-General of the party, said that this was not a slight on socialism for the constitution

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45 The ASU announced that it would merge with the National Democratic Party.

46 Sadat had remained out of the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party.

47 Cairo Bulletin (Press Bureau of the Egyptian Embassy in India, Delhi) 23 August 1978.

mentions the word many times and there is no need for repetition.<sup>48</sup> Obviously, the NDP was more positive than the former ruling party towards private enterprise.

In order to preserve the democratic image of the regime and facilitate the formation of an "honest" opposition, Sadat asked some of the People's Assembly members to form a new "honest" opposition according to the Parties Law. Soon two very small opposition parties were formed - the Socialist Labour Party and the National Front. The two enjoy very little popular support and do not indulge in any outspoken criticism of the government.

Sadat's continuing experiment with the party system means at least one thing: that the problem of legitimacy for the Egyptian regime still remains unsolved. Two questions arise : what made Sadat change the very form of the party system in Egypt and to what extent is he making a break with the Nasserite past?

What Sadat had said long back in 1958 about the National Union appeared to be equally fitting twenty years later to his own experiments with the party system. In 1958 he had said : "It [the National Union] is not an expedient freely adopted, but a necessity forced upon us, dictated by our new condition

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48 Ibid., 16 August 1978.

and our new responsibilities."<sup>49</sup> What were these new conditions and responsibilities? First, there was need for legitimacy especially in the face of the reemergence of organized opposition on the Right and Left of the political spectrum. Second, Sadat's turn-about on pan-Arabism and his moderation toward Israel, and more important, the massive assistance from the Arab Gulf states and the United States of America necessitated a show of liberalism and the creation of political structures comparable to that of the democratic West. So strong was this urge to present a semblance of Western political structures that in December 1976 Sadat allowed the Liberal Socialist Party which had only 12 members in the Assembly (as compared to 280 of the ruling Egyptian Arab Socialist Party) to form a shadow cabinet headed by Ahmed Sayed Darwish.

Yet, President Sadat has not made a clear break with the Nasserite past. Like Nasser he would like to have an ideal democracy where the opposition would be neither 'insolent' nor 'impertinent'. At least that is what his measures against the opposition parties have shown. He proposes to reserve the right not to allow 'anti-national' parties to grow. When he came down heavily on the Left and formed his own party, he was playing Nasser's old balancing act -- balancing the Right and the Left

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49 Qaidah Sha'biyyah (Cairo), June 1958. Quoted in Perlmutter, Egypt : The Practorian State (New Jersey, 1974) p. 145.



and never allowing either to become a danger to his rule. His role is one of an arbitrator. The fact is that the pluralist regime he has tried to set up was rotten at the base in as much as the opposition was merely tolerated. That the primary aim of all these exercises has been to strengthen Sadat's own position is clear from the sharp criticism levelled against him by the former Egyptian Ambassador in Lisbon and former armed forces chief, Saad Shazly. After the Referendum in May 1978 he denounced the government as a dictatorship "hiding behind a face of powerless democratic institutions".

CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

The single-party system is not always a product of deliberate policy. In some cases, at least, it has been the product of historical process. This is particularly true of countries which after a unified struggle against a colonial power, and not having any previous experience of competitive politics, found themselves under a single-party system. In other cases, it is the reformist/revolutionary elite which opt for a single-party system as the most convenient means of coping with popular expectations and aspirations and/or containing divisive forces and inducting the masses into the political processes in a controlled fashion. The single-party system has been instrumental in maintaining a facade of unity, in creating a semblance of political activity and participation, and in legitimizing rule.

The first political parties in Egypt grew out of secret societies founded by some officers in the army. Loosely organized and based on personal ties with the leadership, they were parties more in name than in fact. Quite a few of these were inspired by the Monarch or the British. In the inter-war period, the Wafd did hold out some promise but gradually degenerated because of its fluid ideology, readiness to compromise and its inability to face the challenges of pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and socialism. The superficial hold that European liberal ideas had on the Egyptian leaders accounted for the rise of extremist parties — the Young Egypt, the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. The two together were responsible

for the political chaos, the frequent breakdowns in public order, and the coup d'etat of July 1952.

Each of the main political parties — the Wafd, the Communists and the Muslim Brotherhood — expected to be able to use the new regime to strengthen its own position. On the other hand, Nasser, starting with a strong aversion to political parties, was desirous as much of accomplishing certain reforms as of holding on to power. It was, therefore, as much the high hopes that the political parties pinned on the new military regime as it was the latter's desire to continue in power that led to the abolition of political parties in January 1953 and the establishment of a single-party system.

The Liberation Rally had the limited aim of forestalling opposition and defending the Revolution. Once this was accomplished, it was dissolved to be replaced by the National Union. Neither the Liberation Rally nor the National Union was intended to be a representative body; they were only to create a popular support base for the regime. For the same reason, decentralization at the local, village and city levels was offset by centralization of policy-making at the top of the organizational pyramid. A series of actions directed against the Syrian political parties and aimed at strengthening the central government at Cairo at the expense of the Northern partner in the newly created United Arab Republic led to the dissolution both of the union with Syria and the National Union. The Arab Socialist Union (ASU)<sup>was</sup> originally intended to broaden the base of

the regime through participation of the peasantry and the working class; but ultimate control of its affairs still rested with the top leadership. Nor did the 30 March 1968 Programme designed to meet the growing pressures for liberalization after the 1967 War go far in effecting the proclaimed change. Rather it only helped Nasser to balance ideologically divergent elements in the Party and maintain his personal hold on the polity. In sum, the successive changes — from the Liberation Rally to the ASU — failed to resolve the perennial dilemma, namely, the leadership's desire to mobilize and educate the masses politically in order to enlist their support (and thus gain legitimacy) without abandoning its own pivotal role in the polity. The latter consideration unmistakably prevailed over the former.

The dilemma, in other words, was how to legitimize the Junta's rule. This had been the main concern of both the old regime before the Revolution and the new one that followed it. The crucial instruments of legitimacy in the early years were the person of Neguib, a civilian cabinet, land reforms and an appeal to concepts such as Africanism, Pan-Arabism and Islamism. The factor of charisma entered the political calculus through stages — the Czech arms deal, nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the Suez War — culminating in the emergence of Nasser as a pan-Arab leader. It required the traumatic experience of the 1961 Syrian secession for Nasser to turn his attention to the establishment of a broad organizational and ideological base to sustain his leadership. After the 1967 War, the renewed effort

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to legitimize, through a dose of liberalization without loosening control, showed that the system had acquired enough legitimacy and strength to help Nasser tide over the trauma of military defeat, but not enough to sustain the system in its pre-1967 form.

The Sadat era has been marked by a controlled experiment insofar as the party-system is concerned. The party-system has undergone a drastic change of form though in essence it remains the same as it was under Nasser. Nasser opted for the single-party system to legitimize his rule and to maintain his own hold on the polity. Eager to appear different from his predecessor and to present a more liberal picture of his regime, Sadat has, in the changed political dispensation, opted for a multi-party system. But in order to perpetuate his own personalized rule, he has not permitted the parties to function freely. Not much has changed in the basic nature of the party system in Egypt since the Revolution.

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