

Class Polarization in Egypt Today

Interview with the Egyptian Communist Party

Below is an interview with Comrade Ahmed, Politbureau member of the Egyptian Communist Party, as was printed in the no. 12, 1986 issue of *Al Nahj*, the journal of the Arab communist parties.

This interview is of special importance because of the critical stage through which the Egyptian people's struggle is passing. The economic and political 'open door' policy moved Egypt from a forward position in the Arab front opposing imperialism, to a forward position in the imperialist-Zionist-reactionary activities in the area. The Egyptian Communist Party has played an important role in opening the eyes of the Egyptian people to the reality of the trap into which they were dragged via Camp David and the 'open door' policy.

What were the main lines of the struggle after the Communist Party was revived in 1975?

The Communist Party was declared on May 1, 1975, consisting of three Marxist organizations that united early in 1973. Earlier, efforts had started to rebuild the party, through Marxist study groups that discussed this task and worked to achieve it. This coincided with the first signs of the retreat and ensuing crisis of the system of 'national capitalism', which was the prelude to the 1967 defeat.

The period from the 1967 defeat until 1975 was rich in national, democratic and social struggles. Faced with the 1967 'catastrophe', our people chose to challenge the defeat. Millions took to the streets on June 9th and 10th, refusing to accept Nasser's resignation. This was not just an emotional move as some have portrayed it. On the contrary, it expressed the people's awareness of the necessity of blocking the way to capitulation. Popular consensus was predicated on the demand for 'change' and popular participation in the political life and decision-making. The people were demanding a revolutionary program that focused on arming the masses, forming a popular defense army and calling for democracy and freedom of expression. This also meant redefining the role of the proletariat and the peasants to guarantee more genuine representation within the political and mass organizations; purifying the state apparatus and army of reactionary elements; adhering to the economic and social achievements; demanding a real war economy; standing firm against all wasteful tendencies and controlling elements of capital accumulation in the private sector, etc.

Despite the spontaneous nature of their movement, the masses became a strong popular censor on the regime's policies. The mass upsurge in February and November of 1968 were among the factors that motivated the regime to wage the 1968-9 war of attrition. Sadat came to power in late 1970 in a difficult period. The people were tired of the no-war, no-peace situation. Sadat had to adjust to the escalating nationalist tide. He promoted the slogan of 'decisiveness' all through 1972, but soon his lies were uncovered. The year of decisiveness was almost over when huge student demonstrations broke out, demanding armed struggle to liberate the occupied land. University students held a sit-in. Sadat barbarically suppressed the student movement. At the end of 1972, the security forces invaded the university campus for the first time in Egypt's history. More than 1,000 students were arrested at Cairo and Ain Shams universities. The Helwan workers played a major role in this event. They and the communists joined the students in their battle; the communists' role was very prominent.

Under the pressure of popular demands, Sadat was forced to enter the October War that the people wanted as a liberation war. Sadat, in contrast, only wanted to maneuver; he viewed

the war as a short-term investment for launching his march towards retreat and capitulation. At the same time, the economic 'open door' policy that he intensified after the October War, led to the deterioration of the living conditions of the toiling masses. Due to this situation, social struggle increased in the early seventies. There were many workers' strikes and peasants' movements. In the Shubra Al Khaima area, there was a wide-spread strike by textile workers in the private sector. Helwan workers also organized strikes early in January 1975, and marched to Cairo in a demonstration. Workers at Al Muhallah (Egypt's largest textile factory) organized a huge strike that Sadat put down, using tanks, armed vehicles and airplanes.

This period also witnessed important democratic struggles that enforced the masses' right to organize themselves. The masses rejected the single organization formula (the one-party system). Egyptian communists made an important initiative in this regard; they started reorganizing their ranks and called for freedom to form parties and democratic organizations.

In fact, the decision to dissolve the Communist Party, in the mid-sixties, did not last for long. Developments soon revealed the seriousness of this mistake. There was realization of the necessity of having a party for the working class. There were many attempts to meet this need in different forms. Many imagined that a party of the working class could be achieved by transforming the vanguard elements within the Arab Socialist Union into a scientific socialist party. However, it was soon discovered that this was an illusion, especially since the Nasserite experience had faltered after the failure of the first five-year plan to achieve its goals in 1965, and after the development of the private sector at the expense of the public sector, and the development of the rural bourgeoisie. Then the crisis of the Nasserite regime's structure surfaced and was manifest in the 1967 'setback'. This completely eliminated what remained of the illusions about the possibility of making the regime progressive, in the absence of the working class and its communist party.

Preparations began for the formation of Marxist organizations. Even the Nasserite youth started working independently. After the 1967 defeat, groups of the youth organization were arrested and accused of forming secret Marxist circles in the youth organization. A blow was dealt to the leftist elements in the central committee of the youth organization, and later it was suspended.

The declaration of the communist party was the first violation of the ban on the right to form political organizations. Months later, the Sadat regime, for many reasons, was forced to allow the formation of trends within the Arab Socialist Union. These were developed into political parties.

In general, these were the main lines of the revolutionary struggle that coincided with the declaration of the Egyptian Communist Party.

What are the most prominent signs of class polarization at present in Egypt? Does the political alignment reflect class interests?

A number of factors are accelerating class polarization. Among these are the intensification of the present regime's crisis and isolation; the increasing gravity of the class struggle; the growing rejection of the policies of subordination; the