

Following the coup of Sadat in the interests of domestic and foreign capital, the workers' movement was subjected to double hardship. There was vicious, direct suppression and confinement of the labor movement, and an attack on all of the workers' social and economic gains. This attack culminated in the open door policy. For example, after adoption of the laws to encourage «foreign and Arab capital», law 43 was issued in 1974, prohibiting the formation of labor unions among workers in Arab and foreign firms.

When the growth of the trade union movement is accompanied by the escalation of the national struggle, and their reciprocal influence, the workers' movement can rise to lead the national struggle. We are aware of this phenomenon in the history of our struggle, during the nationalist revolution of 1919, and after the second world war when the Executive Committee for Workers and Students led the movement for national and social struggle. After the defeat of 1967, it again occupied an effective position with the escalation of the social and national struggle against Camp David and the open door policy, which are the two basic components of Egypt's political and economic dependency.

Currently, the Labor Union Confederation includes 23 general unions and 2,350 labor committees. Its membership reaches two million workers. The rules and regulations for forming unions and electing the leadership were especially formulated to prevent honorable workers from being represented. This makes the unions a plaything in the hands of the authority. The labor minister is president of the general union. A series of laws, especially no. 35 of 1979 and no. 1 of 1981, eliminate most of the jurisdiction and rights of the labor unions, and strengthen the central leadership of the general unions. This leadership is composed of mercenaries and agents of the regime - big administrators and technocrats, i.e., a yellow leadership. The attorney general is entitled to object to the workers' nominations, which serves as a filter to eliminate 'undesirable elements'.

The struggle is intensifying between the workers and the yellow leadership of the confederation; the workers are gaining strength and have made some accomplishments in the political and trade union fields. In many instance, they have been able to impose their will on the authority and its agents within the unions. This reality has been confirmed in the escalation of the struggle for economic and social demands, and in the political arena as well. As an example, the head of the confederation accompanied Sadat on his visit to Jerusalem and endorsed the Camp David accords, whereas the working masses rejected the accords. The authority failed to impose the visit of the former Israeli president Navon as planned to a series of work places, because the workers threatened to prevent his visit by force. These are indications that the trade union movement has liberated itself from the imposed yellow leadership. The movement attained a tangible victory in the most recent elections, especially in the trade union committees. This advance is attributable to the increased influence and persistent activity of the leftist and revolutionary parties, particularly our party, in the ranks of the workers' movement.

The same phenomenon is apparent in the rural areas where agricultural workers have been deprived of unions, even in Nasser's era. However, at that time, the cooperative movement was activated and expanded with the land reform laws, even though it remained under the control of the bureaucracy, agricultural supervisors and the rich in the rural areas. Still, even in the absence of unions, there was a revolutionary movement, as was seen in the 1919 revolution, in the peasant uprisings prior to the July 1952 revolution and during Nasser's era. The revolutionary peasant forces formed a union in 1983; it imposed its existence and widened its field of activity, despite being deprived of legitimate status. It functions independently of the legal political parties. A violent struggle is going on now against the authority's efforts to apply the law for «organizing relations between owners and tenants», which was formulated in the interests of rural capitalism. In March and April, the peasants took up arms to confront the security forces that came to evict them from their land. This happened in the Bahout area, Talkha and Al Hamra mansion in Buheirah, and the Qanayat Center and Akyad village in the eastern province.

The 1919 revolution, in the course of its battles, gave rise to

the slogan of «Long live the students and workers.» This expressed the particularity of the Egyptian student movement and its nationalist and socialist character in the liberation struggle. Throughout the student movement's history, the Marxist and revolutionary organizations have had a significant impact, especially since the mid-forties and the organization of the Student Executive Committees. On February 17, 1946, the Executive Committee for Students and Workers was formed; it proved capable of leading an important stage in the national struggle.

The July 1952 revolution led to the stagnation of the student struggle, but the 1967 defeat quickly reignited student demonstrations in February and November 1968. This was the beginning of the large student uprising in January 1972, and led to the formation of the National Committee for Students which included approximately 100,000 students. The left, especially the Marxists, played a principal role in leading this battle.

The regime used police repression, and consolidated the religious groups, as tools for confronting the revolutionary and leftist groups at the universities. The movement fluctuated until the February 1984 uprising which was also joined by the university professors. The essence of this uprising was the demand to cancel the student rules and regulations, and the university guards; to liberate the student union from the regime's control; for freedom of political, social and cultural activities, and restricting the union's membership to students. The current bylaws stipulate teachers' membership and assigns one of them veto power over the union's decisions. This caused the International Student Union to refuse to recognize the union.

There was an upsurge in the student movement, concurrent with the regression of the religious groups, the advance of the leftists and the development of the national movement's struggle. There were a series of strikes, demonstrations and marches of university, college and school students, protesting the weakness of the authority in the face of US and Israeli aggression which reached a climax in the bombing of the PLO's headquarters in Tunis, and the hijacking of an Egyptian civil aircraft by the US Air Force, during and after the trial and assassination of Suleiman Khater. The left made some gains in the 1984-5 student union elections, despite all the pressure, restrictions, diversions and fraudulence, and despite the fact that hundreds of leftist leaders were prevented from being nominated.

In the arena of youth work, all the parties have formed youth organizations. These are limited in influence, functioning as offices subordinate to the parties to which they are connected. In contrast, the Egyptian Democratic Youth Union, the first youth organization to be organizationally independent of all the parties, has a comprehensive program for youth and is led by progressives.

The professional unions have played a prominent role in defending the interests of the various sectors and in the political arena. The lawyers' guild led major struggles, defending their rights and resisting Sadat's policy, Camp David and the normalization of relations with 'Israel'. The lawyers' guild has supported the nationalist and progressive movements throughout the Arab world, especially the Palestinian revolution. In this, they were joined by nationalist members and leaders of other unions and clubs at educational institutions. These unions and clubs are fields of continuous struggle between the authority's desire to dominate, and the nationalist and democratic forces.

Our party is present in all these fields. We play an influential role in mobilizing for political, economic and social demands, in coordination with other leftist and nationalist forces. We took initiative to form defense committees for the causes of the masses and the Arab nation, such as the Egyptian Committee to Defend Freedom, the National Committee to Defend Democracy, the Committees to Defend the Public Sector, the Committee to Defend Nationalist Education, and the Support Committee for the Palestinian and Lebanese People. However, the ideological and political influence of the left generally is much greater than its accomplishments in the mass organizations.

To be continued in the next issue.