



# Sudan

*In early May, a PFLP delegation headed by Politbureau member Salah Salah visited Sudan. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with several ministers in Sudan's new cabinet, as well as with all the democratic and progressive organizations.*

There can be no doubt that the overthrow of the Numeiri dictatorship was an act of the Sudanese people, and a victory for all national and progressive forces in the area as well. The critical questions now posed concern the character of the new regime and what policies it will pursue.

Numeiri's demise was something of a foregone conclusion. Having long ago put the progressive and popular forces in opposition to his reactionary policies, Numeiri this year purged his right-wing allies, the Muslim Brotherhood. Significant sectors of the bourgeoisie were appalled by the regime's corruption, economic bankruptcy and counter-productive repression, exercised under the cover of Islamic law. By the end of 1984, the US administration gravely doubted Numeiri's ability to manage Sudan. Some had predicted that the Reagan administration and/or Mubarak's regime might foment a coup to insure their interests, in view of Sudan's strategic location, resources and support to Camp David. However, the dynamic that unleashed the April 6th power change was an entirely different one, driven forward by the popular uprising.

As Numeiri flew to visit Reagan, student protests erupted against dramatic, unannounced price increases; they were joined by broader sectors of the masses. This was followed by the doctors' strike which grew into a general strike with the stated aim of toppling the regime. The professionals' strike

assumed real dimensions as millions of Sudanese thronged to the streets, attacking the institutions of the dictatorship.

Soldiers and young officers instinctively sympathized with the popular uprising, having already become disenchanted with the regime, chiefly due to its unjust and unsuccessful war on South Sudan. Their initial efforts to persuade the army leadership to move against the regime failed, but finally seeing that Numeiri was doomed, General Swaredahab, Defense Minister and Army Commander, led a coup on April 6th.

It can be said that while the people acted, the generals reacted. Those who compose the new military council can be labeled conservative, but they had not had pivotal roles in relations with the US or Mubarak's Egypt. Swaredahab himself had only three weeks before assumed his top posts, previously held by Numeiri himself. In the Sudanese army, 60% of the soldiers come from the South. In view of these facts and the strength of the popular movement, it is difficult to imagine that the new military council can establish itself as a real dictatorship. What has been occurring since April 6th is a struggle within the bounds of the newly achieved democracy, between the Military Council and the National Alliance, the coalition of forces that actually overthrew the regime.<sup>1</sup> This struggle has national as well as class overtones. Its result will determine the regime's future course.

To assess the internal balance of power and what prospects this paints, it is useful to look briefly at the popular struggle over the years, the state of the main political forces today, and the changes now underway.

## Struggle traditions

The background for the uprising that toppled Numeiri is years of popular struggle. In addition to increasingly frequent, spontaneous revolts of the hungry against escalating food prices (at least ten this year), there was the persistent organized struggle of progressive forces such as the Communist Party. Of special importance is the long tradition of militant trade union struggle waged by Sudan's relatively developed working class. Moreover, popular opposition to the regime in the South had developed into a full-scale liberation war led by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

One indication of the workers' potential was seen in 1981, when a 42-day strike, initiated by railway workers, brought the country to a standstill. Initially Numeiri was forced to backtrack, but he then retaliated by murdering, firing and imprisoning hundreds of labor activists, especially democrats and communists. This was one incident in a recurring pattern: 10,000 workers have been fired as punishment for militant activities in the 16 years of Numeiri's rule. This massive repression sheds light on the fact that proletarian organizations were not the apparent leadership of the movement that toppled Numeiri. Rather professional unions, which Numeiri never dared hit so hard, came to the fore in the national interests. However, the trade unions and progressive forces now have greater freedom of action. They stand as the ultimate guarantee that a genuine national