

SUEZ—TEN YEARS AFTER

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ON November 5, 1956, British paratroops were dropped on Port Said. The following day, Eden's invasion of Egypt started in earnest with the landing of troops from the massive armada that had been assembled during the summer. Its immediate target was to recapture the Suez Canal, held in fief by an international monopoly for 90 years but nationalised in July 1956. On December 22, less than seven weeks after the start of the invasion, the last British soldiers sailed from Port Said, leaving the canal in Egyptian hands. The French contingents in the joint adventure had already re-embarked, and the Israeli advance towards the Eastern bank of the canal had been made to stop.

Today, ten years after the tripartite aggression, an official inquiry into the accusation of collusion between the three Governments is still awaited. Eden's hypocrisy in describing the landing of British troops as a 'peace-making move' to separate the Israelis and the Egyptians has been repeatedly exposed. He has been given the lie by no less a person than Mr. Pineau, then French Foreign Minister, who has admitted that the whole operation was carefully planned beforehand by the British, French and Israeli Governments, who bound themselves by a treaty in October 1956.

The story of Eden's sordid deals with his French and Israeli counterparts may not yet be complete. An inquiry into Tory methods may well be a profitable exercise for Mr. Wilson. But much more to the point in the present world situation would be an inquiry into the motives of imperialist policies.

Eden's aim in attacking Egypt in 1956 was the same as the U.S. aim in Vietnam today: to try to suppress the liberation movement in countries struggling for their real independence and perpetuate imperialist control in one form or another. This is the aim that is being furthered by Mr. Wilson's support of the war in Vietnam and his continuation of Tory policy 'East of Suez'.

The collapse of Eden's plan for a colonialist come-back in Egypt was due above all to the strength of the anti-colonial forces throughout the world, the firm stand of the Socialist camp, of the Egyptian people and of other emergent nations in Africa and Asia. His criminal folly in 1956 was to believe that it was possible to reverse the wheels of history. He dreamed of putting down the nationalist

movement not only in Egypt but also, by repercussion, in other emergent nations and above all in the oil-rich Middle East. He mounted the military invasion with two objectives: to protect the foreign interests exploiting the Suez Canal and to teach a lesson to the nationalists in Egypt and in other Arab countries still in the clutches of foreign monopoly companies. Both aims have been defeated.

To start with the Canal itself, the fiction that the foreign exploiting company was indispensable to serve world shipping has been exploded. The Suez Canal Company was only there to serve the interests of its international shareholders. The alleged fears that the Egyptians did not have the 'necessary technical and managerial skills' have been proved utterly false. The tonnage of shipping using the Suez Canal more than doubled between 1955 and 1965. The Canal has been deepened and widened meanwhile under a development programme still in progress. Of the 240 pilots today, only 50 are non-Egyptian, and it is planned to dispense altogether with foreign pilots in the near future.

Even more important perhaps is the fact that the invasion of 1956 became the starting point of the real battle for Egyptian economic independence, of a chain of economic and social reforms that have made Cairo the focal point of the progressive movement in the Middle East.

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company was the first of a series of measures which have gradually destroyed the bases of monopoly capital, first foreign then local, in the United Arab Republic. Immediately after the defeat of the invasion, British and French banks, insurance companies, industrial and commercial concerns—a large slice of foreign interests that had controlled the economy of the country for so long—were taken over by the State. The battle for national independence on the beaches of Port Said thus provided a base for State control over an important sector of the economy. This base was enlarged later with the nationalisation of other foreign interests.

This was an important step for the economic advance of an underdeveloped country, with a population of nearly 30 million increasing at the rate of 3 per cent a year, urgently needing a quick industrial development to increase its resources and to give work to the millions of unemployed. For as long as the construction of new industries was largely dependent on foreign capital and the support of foreign banks, little could be achieved.

For a while, the UAR Government adopted the policy of using the State sector as a stimulant for industrial development, relying on local private capital to provide a substantial part of the necessary investment and leaving it all the usual profits. The State for its part was financing heavy industries and starting on the construction of the high dam with the technical and financial help of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Egyptian capitalist class was entitled to believe that it was then in the command of the situation. While continuing an active role on the anti-imperialist front, the Government was entrenched at home in a policy of repression of working-class organisations, characterised by its persecution of militant trade unionists, communists and left-wing intellectuals. At the same time, it was trying to press on with industrialisation.

The contradictions of the situation became apparent when planning began in earnest. The investments in the new industries were to come partly from foreign loans—secured on easy terms from Socialist countries, on hard terms from the Western world—and partly from local private capital. But private capital was not prepared to co-operate, except under conditions that would have meant slowing down the programme in order to safeguard its own profit.

Moreover, it had been thought that the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 would have released capital from the landowning class; but many big landowners had managed to avoid the land reform legislation, and in any case they were inclined to invest their compensation and profits in real estate rather than in industry. The battle for economic progress was thus reaching an impasse.

The turning point was the series of nationalisation measures of July 1961, by which the State took over most of the Egyptian-owned enterprises, including banks and insurance companies. At the same time the Agrarian Reform was tightened up, the maximum ownership reduced to 100 acres, and compensation reduced to a maximum of £15,000. This was followed some time later by other blows at private capital, including the sequestration of private fortunes in some cases.

As its conflict with the local capitalists came to a head, the Government turned to the working class for support. True, the trade unions have remained strictly controlled by the State and strikes have remained illegal, but there have been important gains: the representation of the workers on the boards of management, the allocation of 25 per cent of the profits for the workers (10 per cent in cash and 15 per cent in the form of social services), the reduction of the

working week to 42 hours, the improvement of the wages of the skilled workers, and the introduction of a minimum wage.

It has been acknowledged that capitalist methods have failed to solve the UAR's economic problems, and must be discarded. The Charter of National Action of May 1962 recognised that 'the socialist solution is an historic inevitability imposed by reality and by the hopes of the masses as well as the changing nature of the world in the second half of the twentieth century'. The Charter itself is not a socialist Constitution. But it opens the way for future political and social advances. An illustration of both its value and its limitations is the clause allocating half the National Assembly seats to representatives of the working class and the peasantry, but extending the definition of the term 'worker' to company directors, even those with a salary of £4,000 a year, and the definition of peasants to owners of up to 25 acres (in a country where nearly two-thirds of the landowners have under 5 acres).

The Egyptian working class and the peasantry will no doubt assert their rights as they assert their role in building their country's economy and in doing away with the remnants of the past. While building and operating hundreds of new factories and reclaiming enormous areas of land, they are also setting up their new social centres, hospitals and schools, in some places taking over the palaces of the rich. They have a long way to socialism, but socialism has become their watchword.

In an area of the world where many young nations have still to free themselves from the grip of imperialism, the changes taking place in the UAR have put the fighters for social progress and their enemies on the alert. The success of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the advance of the UAR on the non-capitalist path have had deep echoes. Nationalised industries are becoming an important part of the economies of Syria and Iraq. The word 'nationalisation' is haunting the foreign oil companies still exploiting the black gold of the Middle East. To hang on to their concessions, the U.S. and British Governments are propping up the archaic rulers from whom they expect docility. But the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq and Yemen is rightly seen as a sign that the Arab peoples are determined to get rid of their reactionary rulers and of their supporters.

The Islamic Alliance, sponsored by the Kings of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco, is the latest device to resist the advance of progressive policies in the Arab countries and in the Middle East as a whole. It has been praised in Washington as the alliance of

righteous rulers against the spread of heretical socialism, and it has earned the blessing of our Labour Government in the form of the sale of bombers and other war equipment for King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. What is expected from King Faisal is not only that he will be strengthened on his throne to protect the oil companies, but that he will continue to build up and finance the anti-democratic forces in the area, to help the petty rulers in Southern Arabia against the Aden nationalists and the claimant to the throne against the Republicans in the Yemen, and that he will support the opponents of President Nasser in the United Arab Republic. For it is no coincidence that the opposition to President Nasser's policy in the UAR is now led by the Moslem Brotherhood, a reactionary political party disguised as a religious movement and as such enjoying the assistance of King Faisal and his Islamic Alliance.

Mr. Wilson's co-operation with the forces of reaction in the Middle East must be denounced, and he must be forced to change course, as the late Mr. Gaitskell was forced to change from support for Eden in the early stages of the Suez crisis into opposition to the invasion in November 1956. The lesson of Suez has not been lost on the peoples of the Middle East. It must not be lost on us.

BOOK REVIEWS

Lucifer and Other Poems

Salme Dutt

Mitre Press, 104 pp., 10s. 6d.

THESE ARE THE POEMS written during four years (1933-36) of the life of a woman who from the age of seventeen until she died two years ago, aged seventy-six, devoted her energy, intelligence and imagination to the struggles for national independence and Communism. Born in Esthonia, educated in Russia, living first in Finland, later in England, a friend of Lenin's, a moving spirit in the foundation of the British Communist Party, she led the life of a revolutionary of an heroic generation.

The first half of the book consists of

a series of longish satirical poems about Lucifer as the agent of fascism. For example, Lucifer invents a shirt—a black one—with which to unify the nation.

I think we've solved the problem
of disunity

Long live the classless society
Where shirt has banished all
distinction

And people live in peace until
extinction

The second half of the book includes shorter, more lyrical poems. One of the poems I like best is simply called *Landscape*.

A desolate unfruitful field
Scattered scraggy trees shaking
Their tired-out heads
Looking accusingly
At a forgotten field-gun
In the corner of a