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New York, N.Y.

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78

~~BarryxSheppard~~

Dear Barry,

As I'm sure you can imagine, I've followed the material in the world Trotskyist press on Sadat's trip to Israel and the negotiations in the Middle East with special interest. It seems to me that there are obvious differences in assessment, and since I think that Sadat's trip represents a major turning point in the area, perhaps it would be worthwhile discussing some of the questions that have come up with the comrades in the leadership ~~in~~ of the international.

It seems to me that the most important question is one of overall tone and emphasis in regard to the trip.

There is no doubt about what the American and Israeli ruling classes think. They have been overjoyed by Sadat's trip and have hailed it as a breakthrough for their policies in the Middle East. But in our own articles in the international, it was occasionally portrayed as if the trip had dual consequences.

This came out most clearly in an article by M. Jafar in the December 1 issue of Socialist Challenge. Jafar says that ". . . Sadat's intervention has probably placed more long term pressure on the Zionist establishment than any other political act since the October war."

Exactly what pressures have Sadat's visit generated? It is true that Carter is now pressing both Begin and Sadat to come up with a ~~political~~ diplomatic formula that would leave the door open to the other Arab regimes, but no pressure has been put on Is-

rael for real concessions. Emphasis on the supposed pressures against Israel generated by Sadat's trip can only obscure the extent of the ~~the~~ victory registered by Zionism when Sadat made his trip.

Another question is also raised in the articles I have seen--the relationship of American imperialism to the Arab regimes and Israel.

We have always analyzed events in the Middle East with the understanding that the Israeli state is the main base of imperialism in the region, and moreover, ^{in my opinion,} has developed into an imperialist power in its own right. But in some of the articles in our press there is a tendency, if not to put Israel on the same plane as Saudi Arabia, at least to imply that the gap between them has narrowed, and hence Israel's special role in maintaining imperialist control over the Middle East has lessened, with greater U.S. reliance on Saudi Arabia--and even Sadat.

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Political stability in the Middle East, as far as the imperialists are concerned, depends upon Israeli domination of the region. Militarily and politically, that rules out the possibility of Israel giving up basic control over the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. And, as far as the West Bank and Gaza are concerned, there are also growing economic reasons that rule out their relinquishment by Israel.

Ultimately, the talk in the bourgeois press about U.S. "pressure" on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories is part of the attempt to portray Washington as neutral and even-handed --a well-intentioned peacemaker attempting to

3
mediate between the two sides. The fact is that there is no U.S. pressure against Israel on these really substantive points--Washington has no desire to weaken Israel militarily or politically.

This brings us to the role of the Arab regimes. Looked at from the point of view of Washington, any increase in the independence of the Arab ruling classes necessitates strengthening Israel, not forcing concessions on it. Israel not only helps to keep the Jordanian and Saudi regimes in power-- it also helps to ensure that they remain submissive to American imperialism. Any imperialist adventure in the region, like the Suez campaign of 1956 or the threat of intervention in Jordan in 1970, would naturally involve Israel.

Furthermore, the American imperialists know that however useful Sadat or the Saudi royal family may be today, they may be gone tomorrow. Israel remains their only reliable base in the long run. The Saudi regime can be as servile as it likes and beg for U.S. pressure all it wants, but it can't overcome that reality.

If it is wrong to think that the Saudi regime could pressure Washington to lean on Israel, it is doubly wrong to talk about Egyptian pressure, or the supposedly growing strength of the Egyptian bourgeoisie. It is true that since the death of Nasser, the Egyptian ~~regime~~^{regime} has followed a more openly right-wing course, abandoning previous socialist pretenses. But this is certainly not an indication of strength.

Nasser's policy had led to a dead end. Sadat promised a solution by creating an "opening" to the imperialists. So far, he has been able to remove some of the legal restrictions on capitalist investment and speculation, and as a result new opportunities have opened up for the Egyptian

capitalists. The rich feel more secure and are able to flaunt their money. In that sense, they are politically stronger and more confident. But there has not been any decisive test of strength. When Sadat tried to impose austerity measures in January, he had to back down.

Moreover, on other fronts the situation of the Egyptian capitalists has been weakened. Militarily, they are certainly weaker than they were in 1973, especially in comparison to Israel. Economically, the Egyptian foreign debt has reached staggering proportions, and there is no prospect of any substantial improvement.

The American imperialists are not about to bank on the long-run stability of Sadat's regime. Or of the Saudi regime either, for that matter.

What I find disturbing about some of the articles in the press of the international is not that we happen to differ on our assessment of how much Washington would like the Israelis to give up in exchange for a deal, or on the ~~extent~~ exact outlines of what we expect such a deal to be like. Such differences are natural. But it seems to me that the differing analyses ~~x~~ on this point could have broader implications for what our view is of the Israeli state and its role in the Mideast, compared to that of the Arab regimes.

I should also say in this regard that I thought that the Inprecor article by Warshavsky was an improvement over ^{his} earlier articles in Rouge on the points I have mentioned.

Comradely,

Dave