

# **THE SUDANESE COMMUNIST PARTY WILL SURVIVE**

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DECEMBER 22nd, 1966, will figure prominently in the annals of the struggle for democracy in the Sudan. On that day, Mr. Salah Hassan, the judge of the Khartoum High Court uttered his verdict on the constitutional case lodged by the Communist Party of the Sudan a year earlier. The verdict stated that the law, passed by mechanical majority in the Constituent Assembly on December 8th, 1965, which banned the Communist Party, deprived its deputies from their lawful parliamentary seats and prohibited the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism, 'is unconstitutional and is therefore void with all consequential legislation passed on the force of it, and should be struck off and treated as if it never existed'.

The verdict was received with great joy by the masses and was greeted with huge mass demonstrations. It was a big victory for the cause of democracy.

It seemed that everybody should have abided by the rule of the law. Weeks before the utterance of the verdict the Prime Minister stated that his government would respect the judgement of the court. Indeed, almost a year ago during the initial stages of the case, the High Court of Appeals sustained the decision of the Khartoum High Court in overruling an objection from the Attorney-General concerning its capacity to look into the case. Judging by the fact that the Attorney-General continued to participate in the court proceedings till the end,

it seemed that the government were therefore prepared to accept the findings of the court. But it turned out otherwise.

No sooner was the verdict made public than an emergency sitting of the Assembly was called for the next day. At the outset a resolution was passed which prevented the Communist deputies from attending the sittings of the Assembly. A second resolution stated that since the Assembly is entrusted with the task of formulating a permanent constitution, it is therefore within its capacity to alter and 'amend' the present interim constitution.\* The resolution stated further that since the Assembly represents the will of the whole people and is the supreme legislative authority, no court has the right to interfere with the laws it passes.†

Paradoxically the government, that same day, filed an appeal against the verdict. This demonstrates the confusion into which they were thrown. On the one hand they refuse, 'on principle' to admit the capacity of the judiciary to interfere in the matter; on the other, they appeal to higher judicial authorities to reverse the verdict of the Khartoum High Court!

To assert their opposition to the return to legality of the Communist Party, the reactionaries brought their fanatic religious followers from the more backward regions into the capital, hoping thereby to overwhelm and intimidate the revolutionary forces. Collaborating with the Moslem Brothers, paid agents of imperialism and Arab reaction, they attempted to use violence against the mass demonstrations of the democratic forces. The Communist Party issued the slogan 'Meet violence with violence!' The retaliation of the masses was so effective that, after two or three attempts, the reactionaries came soon to realise the futility of their efforts and abandoned frontal attack tactics.

The extreme Right reaped several storms from their attitude in what came to be dubbed 'the constitutional case'.

In one of the rare moments in history the reactionaries were stripped of their false garments as defenders of law and order. Their whole position in the 'crisis' was that of political bandits. Their arguments for banning the Communist Party, allegedly because of its atheism, were revealed in the eyes of the masses as a mere disguise for stifling democracy and trampling upon the constitution.

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\* This is not true. In fact all articles referring to the introduction of amendments were deleted from the present constitution.

† This is sheer political brigandism, since the constitution explicitly stipulates that the judiciary is its sole interpreter and that the Khartoum High Court is the authority which judges constitutional cases.

On the other hand they offended the judiciary as a whole. By refusing to accept the verdict of the court and by their arrogant public speeches they showed utter contempt for the judicial system. A crisis between the government and the judiciary materialised. As the days passed this became more pronounced. When the Communists started to put the verdict into effect, by openly conducting their activities, the police arrested them and brought them before courts. The courts, acting on the verdict of the K.H.C., summarily dismissed these cases, set the Communist defendants free and returned their confiscated materials to them!

The attitude of the government helped in further isolating it. Trade unions, lawyers', doctors' and teachers' associations and various mass organisations protested against the actions of the government. The press, almost unanimously, criticised these actions. Influential personalities, including several from the ruling parties, including even a member of the Supreme State Council (a body of five that acts as head of state) disapproved the government's position. The pressure was so strong that the junior partner in the coalition, the National Unionist Party, showed signs of vacillation.

Thus reaction was landed in a desperate situation. Exposed as enemies of democracy and the constitution, antagonising the judiciary and deprived of the full support even of their partners, they sought madly for a solution—any solution!

## **THE 'COUP' THAT NEVER WAS**

And so, in the early hours of Wednesday, December 28th, 1966, the Prime Minister himself announced over the radio that an attempt at a coup d'état was discovered and crushed. He added that all the threads of the plot were under the hands of the government and that the culprits shall receive severe punishment. Hours later, Abdel Khalig Mahjoub, General Secretary of the Communist Party, Shafie Ahmed El Sheikh, General Secretary of the Sudan Federation of Workers' Trade Unions and several others were arrested 'for investigation'! Comrade Mahjoub, in a statement to the press at the time of his arrest, declared that the Communist Party was not a putschist party and that it is inconceivable that the Communists, who fought six years against the military dictatorship would plot a coup. He added that the alleged 'coup' was planned by the rightists in an attempt to find a way out of their troubles and to use it in delivering a blow to the revolutionary movement.

On the Thursday evening the Prime Minister told a press conference that the 'coup' was still a mystery, that investigations would reveal

whether it was part of a big plot (throwing out a hint that a foreign power might be involved) or an adventure of a reckless young officer.\* Questioned why the Communists were arrested, he replied that it was just a precautionary measure. Pressed by the journalists he said that the arrests were made because the Communists 'hastened' to denounce the 'coup' and to disassociate themselves from it without being accused!

The intrigue was, however, soon unmasked. Apart from having nothing to gain from staging a coup at that particular time, the Communists had enough facts, not only to establish their disassociation with that particular 'event', but also to point an accusing finger at the government.

For example, the Prime Minister in his first broadcast statement said that the government knew the exact timing of the 'coup' several hours ahead. The question was raised, and with justice, why did the government allow the soldiers to move and to occupy several strategic positions (bridges, the post office, telephones, broadcasting station, the Republican Palace, etc.)? The implication is that, had this been a real coup d'état the alternatives would have been either the overthrow of the government or its victory at the cost of much blood. No sane government would behave in such an irresponsible manner. The only explanation for the behaviour of those in power on the night of December 28th in Khartoum is that they had a hand in plotting the alleged 'coup', and were therefore fully aware that it was under 'control'.

Fearing that any action to bring the detained Communists to court would further its embroilment in this intrigue, the government ordered their release a few days later.

But the reactionaries are still busy with their intrigues against the Communist Party, the staunch vanguard in the struggle against the encroachments of neo-colonialism, against the so-called 'Islamic' pact, for democracy and social progress. However, the revolutionary forces are showing increasing vigilance, their unity is growing and they are in a better position to defeat the plans of reaction and its allies.

### **'TO BE OR NOT TO BE'**

The reactionaries are striving to resolve a philosophical question by means of violence. This merely underlines their political and ideological

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\* The leader of the alleged 'coup' was a first-lieutenant twenty-five years old. 'His' forces consisted of fresh draftees under training! During the trial of the officer it transpired that the whole plot was organised and carried out in one day, Tuesday 27th! There is much to suggest that he was threatened into doing what he did.

bankruptcy. Whether the Communist Party is 'to be or not to be' is beyond subjective speculations and desires.

Our Party was founded in 1946. This fact in itself is significant. The upsurge in the working class and national liberation movements, which swept the whole world after the war, had its repercussions in the Sudan. Already towards the end of the war political parties emerged. The anti-colonial struggle assumed a pronounced mass character. But the parties which led this struggle reflected the weakness of the Sudanese middle class. They relied strongly on the Egyptian ruling class and even on the monarchy.

For the young generation of the intellectuals and students of that time, these parties gave no inspiration. While the world revolutionary movement was seething with new ideas, the leaders of the petty-bourgeois parties showed not the least sign of reacting to these ideas. The young generation, awakened to life at a crucial turn in history, had to do the searching themselves for something that would quench their thirst. In feverish enthusiasm they devoured literature about revolution—Egyptian, Indian, Turkish, French, Irish, American, etc., etc. It was in those days that the most promising youth discovered Marxism. Only then did they acquire mental peace. Through Marxism it was possible to understand such phenomena, incomprehensible at the time, of how a section of the people could be pro-colonialist, why the anti-colonial petty-bourgeois parties were weak, cowardly and vacillating, why it was of no avail to expect genuine help from the ruling classes in Egypt, etc., etc.

The birth of the Communist movement in the Sudan was therefore neither arbitrary nor artificial. The international situation was favourable. The mass movement lacked a sufficiently revolutionary leadership. The Communist Party was born of a historical necessity. The fact that it continued to live, to consolidate its positions and to multiply its prestige, stresses the objectivity of this necessity.

In the 1958 general elections, less than 5,000 votes were cast for Communist candidates. In 1965 the Communist Party polled more than 73,000 votes and had 11 deputies in the Constituent Assembly. This is a sign of a living party, a party that is striking its roots deeper and deeper in the life of the people.

During the past twenty years the Communist Party of the Sudan travelled along a difficult road. Young, inexperienced and living in an extremely undeveloped country without industry, with a small working class and a smaller intelligentsia, the party fought against severe odds to become a real mass Marxist-Leninist party.

From the outset we waged a struggle against the intellectual leaders who sought to transform the party into a 'revolutionary' wing for the

petty-bourgeois parties. Victory in this first battle ensured the political and organisational independence of the Communists. The party then directed its efforts to the working class which was hitherto neglected by the former leaders. The first groups of Communist workers were formed. It was due to the initiative of the party and the direct participation of its new revolutionary leaders that these groups led the struggle for the right of the workers to organise in trade unions. This struggle was crowned with success in 1948. Since then the Communist Party had maintained its close ties with the working-class movement.

Next the party strove to organise the student movement. In 1950 the first peasant unions came into being, thanks also to its initiative.

In the struggle against colonialism, the Communist Party played a prominent role. In contrast to the leaderships of the petty-bourgeois parties, who were content with issuing statements of denunciation, the Communists organised mass meetings, street demonstrations and led clashes against the police.

## **THE COMMUNISTS AND SOUTHERN SUDAN**

After independence in 1956 they fought for doing away with all the remnants of colonialism, for taking the revolution further along the path of social progress and for a genuine democracy. Despite its shortcomings, their programme was the only positive one. For example, many Africans know that there is a 'Southern Question' in the Sudan. Since their occupation of the country the colonialists did their best to set South against North, to sow hatred and distrust between the two parts and to sever them in the end.

As far back as 1953 the Communists called for a realistic attitude towards the South, taking into consideration the necessity of respecting the special characteristics of the Southerners. When in August 1955 the colonialists succeeded in leading the Southern soldiers to mutiny, hoping thereby to undermine our imminent independence, and when this mutiny was suppressed and when there was high chauvinistic feeling in the North for the hundreds of Northerners slain during the mutiny, our party courageously came out against any severe punishments. Our party warned that such punishments would play into the hands of imperialism and would open a wound that could never heal. Unfortunately our warning was not heeded, with grave consequences during the following years, entailing great misery and loss of life.

In February 1956, one month after independence, the Third Congress of the Communist Party adopted a new programme. It contained a clear formulation for the solution of the 'Southern Question'. Proceeding from the fact that from the geographical and other points of

view the Southern Sudan stands the best chance of progress in uniting with the North, and from the fact that it is at the same time different from the North, the programme of the Communist Party called for regional autonomy for the Southern national groupings.

Opposing the policies of successive governments the party pointed out that the 'Southern Question' was a political question, that what it required was not a military solution but a democratic solution, and that only in this way can the unity of the Sudan be preserved and strengthened in the interests of both the North and the South.

The Communist point of view was consistently ignored by the parties of the propertied classes. Only after the 1964 October revolution and under pressure from public opinion did these parties concede its correctness. But only in words. As to deeds these parties still pursue the old chauvinistic, great-nationality policy towards the South, thus feeding the fire of hatred between compatriots and serving the interests of colonialism.

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST ABBOUD**

This example can, in a certain measure, convey the magnitude of the effort which the Communist Party had to shoulder in coping with the problems of the revolutionary movement in the Sudan. Despite that, and despite the fact that the party enjoyed respect among wide sections, it remained a small party numerically. The masses were still in the grip of the parties of the propertied classes. It was only towards the second half of 1958 that an appreciable swing to the left was apparent. This was reflected in the formation of joint-action committees, including the Communists, to fight against the policies of the reactionary government, in workers' strikes, especially the general strike of October 21st, 1958, and in the mounting opposition to the American 'aid' agreement. The situation of the government was so precarious that its Prime Minister conspired to install the army in power. That was how the Abboud military dictatorship came into being.

During the Abboud regime the Communist Party was the staunchest fighter for democracy. In terms of prison years the Communists served tens of times as much as all other parties taken together.

In the six years of military rule all the parties were put to severe tests. Moreover those years gave food for reflection over the experience of the masses since independence. Not only were the parties of the propertied classes discredited in the eyes of the advanced sections of the people, but the whole system, the whole path of capitalist development, was also discredited. The Communists won the respect of all honest people for their courageous conduct against the dictatorship.

That is why the Communist Party, which played the leading role in the 1964 revolution, has attracted tens of thousands of new members after the victory of that revolution.

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Our party is still searching for ways of being a real Marxist-Leninist party. Even immediately after the ban, the Central Committee opened a general discussion on this question. The result is that we are treading with firm and wide steps towards that goal.

I hope that I have not been understood as conveying a picture of unerring policies and tactics. In fact we have committed several grave mistakes—adventurous ones, dogmatic and opportunist. They did us great harm. But we also fought against them. On the whole the net result is on the credit side. We are confidently advancing towards the realisation of the slogan of our Third Congress: *Transform the Communist Party into a great social force!* We are coping with the intricate problem of building, in the conditions of Africa, a mass Marxist-Leninist party which is not merely a pressure group, but is the vanguard of a revolution that will radically change the face of our country.

Judging by the fact that objective conditions exist for accomplishing this task, and that subjective conditions mature with every passing day, it is impossible to 'finish off' our party. Whatever their ravings and intrigues the Communist Party is here 'to be'.