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**COMMUNIST AND PRO-SOVIET GROUPS
IN THE ARAB WORLD**

Communist and pro-Soviet groups in the Arab World have continued to be active since the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943. Although the rising international prestige of the Soviet Union has favored these organizations, their development has depended largely on the degree to which they have adjusted their programs to local political issues. Communist progress has been greatest in Syria and Lebanon. In Iran the Tudeh Party, a non-Communist but strongly pro-Soviet workers' organization, has become a real political power. In Palestine, on the other hand, the local Communist Party has split and weakened. In no Arab country except Iran has a Communist or pro-Soviet group reached the stage where it offers serious competition to the established political forces.

The opposition to Communism in the Arab countries has a broad social base. The orthodox Moslem clergy and their followers continue to regard Communism as an anti-religious movement which promotes undesirable social practices. Landowners and other propertied groups continue to oppose Communism as a threat to their social and economic positions. Although the local governments are anxious not to do anything to alienate the USSR, whose support they wish to play off against the British or the French, all except perhaps the Lebanese Government regard Communists as agents of a foreign power and a threat to the state.

Apart from a few Russian-trained leaders and a small group of intellectual radicals, the following of the Communist Parties of Syria and Lebanon is drawn chiefly from the proletariat which, though growing in importance, is not yet a decisive political force. Despite the fact that the official membership of the two parties totals little more than 10,000, they nevertheless have developed into the only reasonably effective Communist Parties in the Arab World. Officially they have adopted a strictly nationalistic program and have avoided any apparent connection with a foreign power. Since 1944, however, Franco-British tension in the Levant and alleged British attempts to undermine Communist influence in this area appear to have led the local Communists to an opportunistic collaboration with the French. Local Communist propaganda has taken on an anti-British bias and has thereby attracted an increasing number of pro-French adherents. The recent Franco-Soviet treaty has also improved Franco-Communist relations in the Levant, and better relations between the Communists and the Levant governments seem unlikely.

In Iran, the Tudeh (Masses) Party appears to illustrate a new Soviet policy of encouraging existing labor movements rather than working through an officially designated Communist Party. Founded before the

first World War by a group of socialist intellectuals, the Tudeh Party was suppressed in 1924 but was revived again in 1941 a few days after the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. It now claims a membership of 100,000, and although it represents a minority of the people is one of the two most strongly organized political groups in Iran. The revived Tudeh Party is socialist in program, advocating gradual constitutional reforms rather than revolutionary change, but its organizational techniques particularly since 1943 have been strongly reminiscent of procedures employed by the Communist Party in the USSR. A new type of leadership, including many young men who had been living in the Soviet Union, has infiltrated the party and taken over its real direction. The party has enjoyed considerable support from the Soviet press and has in turn supported Soviet policy. The Tudeh was the most prominent of the leftist groups which attacked the Iranian Government for its refusal to grant Soviet demands in the recent controversy over oil concessions in northern Iran.

Many upper and middle class Iranians believe that the Soviet Union means to absorb the northern border area of Azerbaijan. However, the USSR, whose interest in maintaining "the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Iran" was expressed in the Tehran Declaration, would probably not risk alienating the other signatories of the declaration by outright annexation. On the other hand, since the present Iranian Government admittedly speaks for only a small part of the population, the Soviet Union might see no contravention of the Tehran Declaration or of the "Four Freedoms" in assisting a workers' movement such as the Tudeh Party to establish a popular government in Iran.

During the past two years the Communist Party of Palestine, in contrast to pro-Soviet groups in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, has been weakened by divisions due largely to conflicting nationalist aims. From its inception in 1924 the Palestine Communist Party had been a joint Arab-Jewish body, never very large or influential but always vocal. Although a majority of its founders and members were Jews, its program was outspokenly anti-Zionist. Immediately following the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943, when the Party and its many splinters totalled no more than 3,000 members, the bulk of Arab and Jewish Communists broke away to form their own respective nationalist factions. The cleavage has since been widened by Arab charges that the Jewish Communists are secretly supporting the Zionist program, while the Jewish group has accused the Arab Communist factions of being not only anti-Zionist but anti-Jewish as well. More favorable conditions for Communist expansion may be provided by substantial post-war unemployment, which is expected to follow the withdrawal of Allied forces from Palestine. Until the Arab-Jewish conflict is settled, however, the bulk of politically articulate groups among both Arabs and Jews will probably remain absorbed in their respective nationalist struggles and are unlikely to be influenced by Communist propaganda.

In Iraq it is doubtful whether any of the so-called Communist groups

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can accurately be described as such. In any case their membership is very small and personal rivalries among the various leaders have prevented unification of pro-Soviet groups and vitiated their political effectiveness.

In Egypt there is no Communist or Communist-affiliated party. The strongest nucleus of pro-Soviet feeling is among local Armenians, who have responded to Soviet propaganda for support of the Armenian SSR. Their response, however, has been due chiefly to Armenian nationalist feelings rather than to Communist leanings. The Moslem clerics and propertied groups who control Egyptian politics remain strongly opposed to Communism, and the government itself, aware of the rising political importance of the working class, endeavors to maintain control over all political activity in labor circles.

Saudi Arabia under the absolute rule of King Abd-al-Aziz Ibn Saud has no political parties, and any future development of Communist groups would be strongly hampered by the largely tribal economy and social structure of the country.

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3 ~~CONFIDENTIAL/CONTROL~~