

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRAQ
SINCE THE JULY 1958 REVOLUTION

Based on Information
Available as of November 1959

I. Organization and Leadership

A. The Overt Mechanism

The Communist Party of Iraq (CPI) has made some information concerning its upper-level organization available to the public since the 14 July 1958 coup. However, there is still a wide gap between the amount of such data officially released by the CPI and that made available by Communist parties in power or those in the Free World with a long history of legality. This fact reflects the anomalous status of all political parties in Iraq, none of which has been granted formal recognition by the Qasim government. The situation was further complicated during May 1959 when the premier called on all parties to suspend their political activities. In spite of this demand, the CPI continues to operate in the political arena with apparent impunity, behind a barrage of protestations of its adherence to the policies of Qasim.

As stated in publicly released Party documents, the highest CPI organ that has operated since the revolution is the "Enlarged Central Committee," which met in September 1958 and again in July 1959. This body includes the Central Committee proper plus certain other important Party members invited for a specific purpose. Neither a National Congress nor a National Conference, the next largest type of Party meeting, has been held in the post-coup period. Because of this, the Central Committee during this time has been a co-opted rather than an elected body.

The CPI announced that both a Political Bureau and a secretary were elected at the September 1958 Enlarged Central Committee meeting, and Party documents since the coup have come out under the imprint of the Political Bureau as well as the Central Committee. Furthermore, authoritative statements regarding Party policy were credited to the "secretary of the CPI Central Committee" at the Twenty-First Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Moscow, January - February 1959) by Soviet Bloc propaganda organs and in a March 1959 interview by the CPI's official newspaper, Ittihad al-Sha'ab. Aside from the Central Committee, Political Bureau, and secretary, the only other organizational units publicly acknowledged by the CPI in the post-coup period are its "Kurdish Branch" and its cells.

The CPI has not seen fit to make public the identities of the members of its Central Committee, Political Bureau, or Kurdish Branch; however, certain Communists do speak officially on behalf of the Party, and it is believed that they constitute at least a portion of the top leadership. Abd-al-Qadir Ismail Bustani and Aziz al-Hajj Ali Haydar, respectively associated with Ittihad al-Sha'ab and Sawt al-Ahrar (a semi-official CPI newspaper), have served as the main representatives of the CPI in united front activities over the past year and a half. Other signatories of the June 1959 National United Front (NUF) Charter on behalf of the CPI were Amir Abdullah, Zaki Khayri, Muhammad Husayn Abu-al-Is, Baha-al-Din Nuri, and Karim Ahmad. This is the most complete list of its leaders that the CPI has published. All of these except Ahmad, on whom there has been little post-coup reporting, have been writing signed articles in Ittihad al-Sha'ab, of which Khayri is the self-styled "chairman of the Editorial Board." Abd-al-Rahman Sharif, by virtue of his stated position of co-editor of Ittihad, also appears to be a completely overt high-level Communist. Jamal-al-Din Haydar al-Haydari, by the publication of a definitive CPI article on Kurdish affairs in the CPI's Iraqi Review, would also seem to be important in the Communist leadership. The CPI lists its secretary (chief) as Salam Adil.

The question of leadership recently has been one of great concern to the CPI. The self-criticism coming out of the mid-July 1959 Enlarged Central Committee meeting accused certain unspecified individual members of the Politbureau of violating the principle of collective leadership during the period of March - July 1959 by illegally bypassing the Central Committee. The report also decried the weakness in supervision and control over the lower Party organs, blaming the degree of secrecy under which the Party has been operating as a contributing factor.

B. The Semi-Overt Mechanism

More information on leading Party officials comes from overt sources not affiliated with the CPI. For instance, Link magazine (New Delhi) of 22 March 1959 lists "Husayn Radi, alias Salam Adil," as "secretary general" and the following others as the top Party leaders: Abd-al-Qadir Ismail Bustani, Aziz Sharif (brother of the Abd-al-Rahman Sharif noted above), Amir Abdullah, Muhammad Husayn Abu-al-Is, Kamil Kazanchi (killed in the March 1959 Mosul uprising), Baha-al-Din Nuri, and Sadiq Jaffar al-Fallahi.

It is probable that Aziz Sharif and Sadiq Fallahi, the only two members of this group not publicly acknowledged by the Party itself, wish to play down their Communist connections because of their front activity, the former being secretary general of the Peace Partisans and the latter, president of the General Federation of Trade Unions. Yusif Ismail Bustani (brother of the forementioned Abd-al-Qadir), Da'ud Sayigh, Aziz as-Shaykh, and Sharif as-Shaykh (uncle of Aziz as-Shaykh) have been listed as top-level Communists in other overt publications.

It seems logical that the sixteen CPI leaders mentioned above are at least members of the Central Committee. It might also be assumed that the Political Bureau is largely drawn from this list. The emphasis on collective leadership, democratic centralism, and criticism of individual leaders (all contained in the July 1959 self-criticism) suggests that, like a number of other Communist parties where these same questions have been highlighted, the CPI may have a large Central Committee and Political Bureau.

II. Party Policy

A. Estimate of the Situation (What the Party Believes, Stated in Its Own Language)

1. Constant Elements

The new Iraqi Republic is bourgeois-democratic and operates within a capitalistic framework. However, given the present state of development in the Middle East, it is progressive, generally going in the direction of "completing national independence and democracy." Withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact (24 March 1959) and the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law (30 September 1958) have, so far, been the two greatest achievements of the Iraqi revolution.

The revolutionary, national, or patriotic forces are institutionally embodied in the government, the army, the patriotic political parties, and the various popular or mass organizations. Sociologically, these national forces consist of four classes: the national (middle, anti-imperialist) bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeoisie, the peasants, and the workers. The CPI is the only party representing the interests of the latter two classes, which comprise the overwhelming majority of the people, but so far it has not been able to exercise a controlling influence over them. Feudalists, reactionaries, and imperialist agents oppose the revolutionary forces within Iraq.

External support to the new regime is furnished primarily by the Socialist Bloc, headed by the USSR, with most of the liberated Afro-Asian nations playing a secondary role. On the other hand, imperialism, specifically the forces of America and Britain, furnishes the major external threat to the Qasim government, with a secondary role here being played by the Yugoslavs. Yugoslavia constitutes a specific danger to the CPI itself by the promotion of "right revisionist" ideologies both within Party ranks and among the Communists' allies.

Comment: These constant elements of the CPI's estimate of the situation, aside from being continuously proclaimed by Party propaganda, are in line with standard Marxist theory as applied to an underdeveloped nation just emerging from a colonial political

status and a feudal economy. Thus it can be assumed that the Communists' statements regarding the subjects treated in this section accurately reflect their thinking.]

2. Variable Elements

At the beginning of the republican era, Nasir and his Iraqi Ba'athist and Istiqlal sympathizers were progressive and were necessary allies in the face of a then possible British or American invasion. As this danger receded into the background, these pro-Egyptian elements, at first under the leadership of Deputy Premier (Col.) Abd-as-Salam Arif, became subverted by the forces of imperialism. This was apparent by mid-September 1958, at which time the Arif-Ba'ath-Istiqlal combination became openly anti-Communist, and was further manifested during November 1958 - March 1959 in three attempts by this group and its allies to overthrow the Qasim regime. The Egyptian leaders actively supported these subversive efforts, while the Communists, in alliance with the parties of the national bourgeoisie, the National Democratic Party (NDP) and United Democratic Party of Kurdistan (UDPK), were instrumental in defeating them. Following the late December 1958 stepping up of the anti-Communist campaign within the UAR, it became apparent that Nasir was generally being backed by the American imperialists.

The failure of the early March 1959 Mosul uprising, an event that eliminated from the political arena those groups that had until that time been most actively opposing the Communists, ushered in "the peak of the upsurge of the national movement." This period, marked by relative freedom for the Party in its organization and agitational activities, ended in mid-May 1959, when both the government and the national bourgeois parties began to take certain actions running counter to the spirit of the revolution. There were two general reasons why these groups began to embark on a more anti-Communist policy: first, the CPI itself had been too extreme in its demands on the Qasim regime, the NDP, and the UDPK during the early March - mid-July 1959 period; and second, this situation enabled the forces of British imperialism, more subtle and sophisticated than their American counterparts, to exploit latent differences between the components of the national movement. The Party committed its mistakes because it had overestimated both its own strength among the patriotic forces and the democratic nature of the government and national bourgeois parties.

Comment: Regarding the lineup of the anti-Egyptian forces in the September 1958 - March 1959 period, it is evident that Premier Qasim, the UDFK, and the NDP all had a community of interest with the Communists in opposing union with the UAR, the battle-cry of the Ba'ath, part of the Istiqlal, and allied leaders and groups. The premier did not desire to take a back seat to Nasir in the "Arab liberation movement," the Kurds did not wish to be submerged in a vast Arab majority, and the business interests represented by the NDP did not wish to operate under the less favorable economic conditions prevalent in the UAR. The Communists, of course, did not want Iraq to be incorporated into a system where normal political party activity is completely suppressed and where their political counterparts are singled out for especially vigorous governmental repression. Also, during early 1959 there was a growing rapprochement between America and Egypt.

Furthermore, just as Col. Arif, then Rashid Ali Gaylani, and finally Col. Shawaf were successively becoming the major threat to Qasim's political position during this period, their Ba'athist supporters were giving the CPI its major competition among the mass organizations. Because of such situations as this, it is normal practice for Communists in underdeveloped areas to line up with the more amenable national bourgeoisie (here the NDP and UDFK), to which they make concessions, against the Socialists (here represented by the Ba'ath), who at this stage usually offer a much more radical economic program.

Regarding the Party's allegations that the mid-1959 anti-Communist activities on the part of the government, the UDFK, and the NDP were being sparked by British imperialists and their agents, it should be remembered that the regime had completed an arms agreement with the UK in May 1959, that the British have always been considered to have excellent contacts among the Kurds, and that several of the National Democratic leaders had been educated in England.

The present paper has used the above facts in sifting out what the CPI really thought concerning the variable elements in its estimate of the situation from among the Party's numerous and highly propagandistic statements. The deductions regarding the Party's thinking on these subjects cannot be made with the same degree of certainty that they can be made in the case of the more stable elements discussed in Section II.A.1.7

B. Party Line (What the Party says)

1. Constant Elements

According to the CPI, "safeguarding the republic" has been and is the main task for all the patriotic forces. Positively, this involves "unity of the national forces," specifically of the masses with the army and government; allowing patriotic political parties complete freedom of operation during the transition period;* and strengthening ties with the "Socialist Bloc." Negatively, "safeguarding the republic" involves vigilance against imperialist plots, which attempt to split the national movement; strict supervision of imperialist companies; and "firmness toward the traitors." In line with this last demand, the Party calls for a purge of the army and governmental apparatus and the confiscation of lands of "traitors" without compensation.

The Party line on the nature of the Iraqi Republic, its patriotic forces, and its consistent friends and enemies is identical to the Party analysis of these elements contained in Section II.A.1., above. What is added in this section are the specific actions for which the CPI has consistently called since the 14 July 1958 coup.

2. Variable Elements

a. Variable Because of Government Fulfillment

The republican government has completely fulfilled many CPI demands and partially fulfilled a great many others. To what extent in each case this action was due to the demand and to what extent the demand itself was due to foreknowledge or second-guessing of government actions is not known. In any case, the general trend of the Qasim regime was favorable enough so that "preservation of the gains of the republic" soon became a key slogan in Communist propaganda. It should be noted that several of the constant and

*The period between the establishment of the republic (14 July 1958) and the creation of a parliamentary-democratic regime (promised for 6 January 1960).

continuous demands of the Party, especially in the fields of Communist Bloc relations and governmental purging, have been partially met by the regime even though such action has not appreciably changed the Party's propaganda line on the subject.

There is one group of CPI propaganda demands, however, which were so specific and which were so completely fulfilled by the government that they have now apparently been dropped by the Party. Included here were the amnesty of old regime political prisoners and exiles (August 1958); the permission to form or resurrect "popular" (mass, front) organizations (apparently receiving open official sanction from at least January 1959 onward); the ending of Iraq's "imperialist obligations," specifically withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact (March 1959), abrogation of the American economic aid agreements (June 1959), and withdrawal from the Sterling Bloc (June 1959); and the promise of a constitutional convention and parliamentary elections (in July 1959 for 1960). Allied to this category are the calls for such things as Kurdish "national rights" within the Iraqi state, improvement in the equipment and training of the army, and the encouragement in general of both light industry and "national" (pro-regime, Iraqi) capital with Communist Bloc help, in which there is such an identity of interest between Party and government that it is hard to tell whether the sporadic CPI slogans in these fields are demands or expressions of support.*

Another category of CPI demands has rather obviously been met only partially by the Qasim regime. With the formation of the Popular Resistance Forces (PRF) by the government in August 1958, the CPI switched from calling on the people to organize such units to calling on the regime to expand and arm the organization it had set up; upon the suppression of PRF activity by June 1959, the Party has alternately decried the situation and called for the organization's revival. With the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law in September 1958, the Party's demand changed from merely a vague ceiling on land ownership to rapid implementation of the new law coupled with an amendment to it cutting in half the maximum allowable holding.

*It is difficult to tell to what degree the government has fulfilled them and to what degree they are constant themes in Party propaganda; hence their inclusion in this section.

b. Variable Because of Other Factors

At the time of the 14 July 1958 coup the CPI called for "federation" (loose union) with the UAR and attributed to Nasir the leadership of the "Arab liberation movement." By the time of the Arif arrest (early November 1958) the federation formula had been dropped and the Party merely called for "solidarity with all the Arab countries." By early January 1959 Nasir himself was being attacked by the CPI, which linked him to the American imperialists following the failure of the early March Mosul uprising.

Another group of Communist demands was altered because of governmental opposition. From the day of the revolution until the mid-July 1959 Central Committee meeting, the Party had promoted a National United Front (NUF) as a major element in bringing about "unity of the national forces." However, the late June resurrection of the NUF on a more openly pro-Communist basis and at a time just after the premier had called for a cessation of political activity antagonized both Qasim and the bourgeois parties so much that the CPI apparently came to the conclusion that the organization should be allowed to die a natural death. The CPI's call for worker and peasant representation in the government, noted from September 1958, gave way during April and May 1959 to an outright demand for CPI representation in the Cabinet; the demand was stated by the Party to have been dropped at the end of May because of the unfavorable reaction it had produced on the part of the government. Similarly, the March - April demand of the CPI for the execution of the death sentences passed by the People's (Military) Court* was apparently called off because of the premier's displeasure. The partial fulfillment of these last two demands by the inclusion in the Cabinet of two Communists and two Communist-fronters, all chosen by the premier himself, in mid-July 1959, and the execution, between late March and early September 1959, of some of those sentenced to death suggests, however, that prior knowledge as well as the open disfavor of the regime might have had something to do with the Party's change of policy.

*A revolutionary court dominated by pro-Communists set up to try political offences.