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1 March 1979

TRANSLATIONS ON NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
(FOUO 5/79)



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ALGERIA

POSSIBLE CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENCY DISCUSSED

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 11-17 Jan 79 pp 20-22

[Article: "Surprises in Search for Successor to Boumediene; Algiers: Unopposed Candidate Is Not Available and There Is More Than One Compromise Candidate; Yahiaoui Is Continuation of Boumediene But Collective Leadership Is One of Projected Solutions; Zbiri Group: Democracy Is Fundamental Demand of All Algerians"]

[Text] Algiers--AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI correspondent's dispatch--"They may disavow me after my death and some of them may spit on my grave, but nobody will spit on these edifices that I have built here and there by employing the oil revenues to create a real industrial base in Algeria..."

This is what Boumediene said in an hour of contemplation during an interview with a prominent European journalist who met with Boumediene a few months before his death, when there were no indications that Boumediene would fall the victim of a sudden malignant disease.

It seems obvious that President Boumediene felt, being a realistic man, that people would disagree in judging him. But he also expressed absolute confidence that the establishments that he founded will survive by virtue of their being the true support for any ruler who would succeed him if such a ruler wants to actually rule the country of the 2 million martyrs and the 2 million problems.

It also seems obvious that the scope of selecting new establishments to replace the existing ones as executive and guidance bases is an extremely narrow scope under the canopy of the transitional conditions under which Algeria lives and under which the heirs coexist.

The awareness of this fact and acknowledging it as a measure for excluding any disagreement on the post-Boumediene era were the motive for the unanimous agreement in issuing the Revolution Command Council statement on continuation of Boumediene's course and policy in the immediate phase.

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But does this mean that the only change will be in the identity of the ruler and not in his policy, even though the ruler's personal qualities and characteristics are usually reflected in his directions and courses and even though everything assumes, by the logic of things, the personal imprint of the ruler?

Yahiaoui on Boumediene's Line

There is an almost unanimous agreement that no noteworthy change will occur in the first stage if agreement is reached on Col Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui as the sole candidate for the presidency, because the man is similar in many of his qualities and characteristics to the departed president. He may even surpass him in austerity and in the desire to keep away from the limelight. Yahiaoui lives a modest life. Those close to him note that his wife, who has borne him six children, each time entered a popular obstetrics hospital and was treated like any other ordinary woman, because Yahiaoui has always refused any privileges for his family and has refused any allowances exceeding his salary--a salary rapidly consumed by the needs of his large family and by inflation.

But this unanimous speculation is not based on a unanimous agreement to select Yahiaoui. Perhaps the list of candidates which will be presented to the party congress on the 29th [sic] of this month so that the congress may select one of the candidates is much longer than many think, especially if there continues to be in the Revolution Command Council a lack of agreement on selecting one candidate from among the council members.

Ahmed Ben Cherif Is Compromise Candidate

On the occasion, some circles have begun to project the name of Ahmed Ben Cherif, one of the Revolution Command Council members, who is 41 years old, as a compromise candidate whose selection can put an end to the competition of the various wings and forces, in addition to the fact that Ben Cherif does not evoke the fears that Yahiaoui does.

It is said in informed circles that there are high-level discussions to make the new regime assume the quality of a collective leadership through a solution stipulating that Yahiaoui be selected as presidential candidate, provided that he appoint in return Abdelaziz Bouteflike prime minister and Ahmed Ben Cherif, vice president.

In any case, everything seems to be hanging on the course and discussions of the FLN Party congress which will be held in 2 weeks.

A decision has been taken setting the 25th of this month as the date for convening the special FLN congress. The decision was taken at the beginning of the new year at a joint meeting between Rabah Bitat, the interim president, and the Revolution Command Council members.

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At that meeting, it was decided to form a preparatory committee to assume the task of holding the congress, which will nominate the sole candidate to succeed Boumediene. The committee includes Mrs (Jenroud), chairman of the Women's Federation, and a number of ministers, including Ben Hamouda, the minister of public works, and Belaid Abdesselam, the minister of light industry (as representative of the Kabyle sector).

The participation of Col Slimane Hoffman, who is in charge of extra sensitive security tasks and whose role has been expanding since President Boumediene got sick, has drawn the attention of observers. It has also been noticed that the statement concerning his participation in the committee describes him as "chairman of the Foreign Relations Bureau."

A new military element, namely Col Hachemi Hadjeres who is commander of one of the military districts, has entered the preparatory committee. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, who was tied by special friendship to the late president, has also been included in the committee.

Contacts With Opposition

Informed Algerian sources have also said that the Revolution Command Council has entrusted Col Slimane Hoffman with the task of contacting the opposition leaders living abroad in an attempt to achieve a national reconciliation before the congress is held on 25 January to get complete agreement on one candidate.

These sources have added that to win over domestic and external opposition and to put an end to its attacks, the higher authorities are now studying the possibility of introducing a constitutional amendment limiting the president's term to 4 or 5 years as an initiative intended to reassure that the door of discussions for amendments will remain open so as to preserve national unity.

It might be premature to speculate on what developments may crop up in these 2 weeks before the convocation of the FLN Party congress, but observers do not find it unlikely that the element of surprise will play its role at any moment, especially if the present shaky balance between the various agencies in this period of compulsory truce is upset.

The consultative conference of the National Youth Federation, which started its works at the Palace of Nations last Saturday and ended them at the beginning of this week, is part of the preparations for the congress and for completing its fundamental bases.

This conference is considered the last in a series of conferences to lay down the permanent foundations of the FLN Party agencies. This conference was preceded by a conference of the labor unions in March last year, a conference of the peasants in April, a conference of the war veterans in May and a conference of the women's organizations in October.

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This student conference has attracted the special attention of observers because of the state of restlessness that began to emerge among the students, especially at the beginning of the current academic year, and because of the emergence of signs indicating an independent inclination that rejects or disagrees with the organizations suggested for the student councils, and that demands greater freedom in the university campus, as it demands that the stipulated student aid not be reduced, especially in regard to reduced transportation fares and to housing.

Perhaps the source of the observers' interest in the student gathering is due to the fact that it represents more than 70,000 students, who constitute the future technical cadres in the various departments, and due to the ability of the students to establish contact with and to influence the masses, in addition to the presence of evidence that many of the student elements sympathize with the underground opposition.

On the occasion of [the start of] the academic year, the security agencies prepared a report on the situation in the student circles in which they said that the student circles have turned into a center for infiltration by the Socialist Vanguard Party which uses many of the student gatherings sympathizing with it as instruments, and which has inherited the cadres of the Algerian Communist Party that turned into underground action after it was dissolved in 1962.

It seems that conflict has escalated recently in the student circles between the leftist elements and the traditional Islamic elements. This conflict was crystallized in the violent quarrels that erupted on the eve of the conference in the city of Constantine because of differences over the method of selecting delegation members to the conference.

Perhaps this explains the strict security measures which were supervised by Col Slimane Hoffman on the occasion of the holding of the conference, which is considered a barometer of the political mood of the Algerian elite.

Lights on External Opposition

Even though there are indications of the escalating whisper campaigns that are being launched by the domestic opposition which has refused the idea of a truce until the convocation of the congress on the 25th of this month, considering such a truce an obstacle preventing it from expressing its opinions in an effective direct or indirect manner in the congress or on its peripheries, other signs indicate that the external opposition is still feeling its way to reach a common program toward the real goals of the inclinations of the ruling Algerian agencies and establishments [to be founded] through the FLN Party congress.

Interview With Ahmed Mahsas

Contrary to what has been recently said and reiterated by the western press, no official contacts in the full sense of the word have yet been made between

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the opposition and the officials of the ruling leadership in Algeria. This is at least what Ahmed Mahsas, one of the most prominent opposition leaders, has stressed to AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI.

Mahsas (a former member of the Revolution Command Council and of the FLN Political Bureau and a former minister of agriculture and agrarian reform) formed with his two colleagues Taher Zbiri (commander of the chiefs of staff of the people's army and former member of the Revolution Command Council, and the well-known hero of the coup attempt against the late President Boumediene) and Kaid Ahmed, known as Major Slimane (a former member of the Revolution Command Council and minister of finance, planning and tourism and former FLN official)--the three formed a popular organization known as the National Coalition for Democracy and Revolution in Algeria.

This coalition has several opinions on the developments in Algeria and on the post-Boumediene era. These opinions were expressed by Mahsas in this interview with AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI:

[Question] How do you evaluate the post-Boumediene era or how do you view things after Boumediene's departure?

[Answer] We believe that the late President Boumediene constituted the backbone of the entire regime. His departure means the fall of the main layer of this regime, along with the subsequent results. We believe that the existing regime is not fit for the Algerian society for several reasons, the most important being the absence of democracy and the handling of the country's affairs in a dictatorial manner. Democracy is the fundamental demand of all the Algerians inside and outside the country. We are fully aware that the ruling group believes that the people are not qualified to receive and absorb democracy to solve their historical problems. This is a mistake, because there are political figures, currents and leaders capable of organizing and directing democracy in the interest of the people. Recent years have proven that the existing regime is incapable of solving the existing problems with the means that it is using, be they economic, social or political problems.

Therefore, our view of the post-Boumediene era relies on the following mainstays: Regardless of the type of developments that we or the new phase will witness, it is important to lay down the foundations of the new regime on democratic structures and establishments. This is a fundamental right of every Algerian citizen and a right that should not be squandered.

Democracy is capable of safeguarding the revolutionary gains and the genuine heritage, contrary to all claims to the opposite.

Socialist Democracy

[Question] What kind of democracy specifically?

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[Answer] To put it briefly, we demand a socialist democracy based on the multiplicity of parties, freedom of the press and of publication and freedom of elections.

[Question] Does this require a comprehensive reexamination of all the existing establishments, and perhaps projected goals?

[Answer] As for the revolutionary goals and options, we express no reservations or opposition that would foil these options. We agree on the main goals, but reject the means adopted to achieve these goals. Specifically, we reject the realization of the economic goals with the dictatorial method adopted. This means that we call for adopting the method of democratic dialogue when discussing or examining any political or economic plan or visualization.

[Question] Have there been any contacts between you and the leaders of the present regime?

[Answer] There are numerous rumors that have been circulated by many papers on this issue, but we cannot say officially that such contacts have actually taken place. All that can be said is that opinions and viewpoints have been exchanged on several issues

We Will Take Part in Government if...

[Question] Can this exchange of opinions result in any certain developments? We mean: Is there any possibility of your returning to the country to take part in the government, for example?

[Answer] The issue does not lie in this question, i.e. it does not lie in the possibility of our participating or not participating in the government. The issue goes beyond opposition as individuals to reach goals and options in whose light we must work.

In other words, the fundamental issue of concern to us as opposition lies in this question: Will the new regime produced by the post-Boumediene era be capable of proceeding in democratic directions?

Our position on participating or not participating in government will be determined in the light of the answer to this question.

[Question] To put it differently, are there certain conditions for your acceptance to participate in the new government?

[Answer] We will participate in the government if a specific agreement is reached on the democratic options.

[Question] Do you have certain candidates to succeed Boumediene?

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[Answer] The names are not important. I will repeat: What is important is changing the system.

[Question] Are you personally optimistic in this respect?

[Answer] Yes. The will for change is present among the various sectors of the people and this will must be ultimately translated at the practical level.

[Question] But the opposition did not move until after Boumediene's death. Where was this opposition throughout the preceding period?

[Answer] No, the opposition has been and is still moving domestically and externally. Otherwise, how can you explain the liquidations to which many of those who had been in the opposition were exposed? As for the information blackout, the harassment and the persecutions, they are all problems emanating from the oppressive character of the regime.

Our Position Toward Sahara Problem.

[Question] Where does the opposition's strength lie: in the army or in the people? What is, exactly, the opposition's strength?

[Answer] (Mahsas laughs before answering) Why do you want me to reveal our cards to you? Be sure that the opposition has roots in the various sectors of the people.

[Question] Would a call to the opposition for a national reconciliation be possible if the opposition itself is fragmented?

[Answer] The opposition is not united yet. This is true. However, ceaseless contacts have been made to unite this opposition or to reach agreement on a future cooperation formula. As for the issue of national reconciliation, this is possible when democracy is achieved. This is the fundamental condition and inlet.

[Question] A final question: What is the National Coalition's position on the Sahara problem?

[Answer] Our position is clear. We are against any solution that leads to the outbreak of war between Morocco and Algeria. Is it permissible to have 100,000 people killed, for example, in a war to have a state with a population of no more than 60,000 people created? This is just a question.

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MAURITANIA

OULD SALECK FACING DIFFICULTIES AT EVERY TURN

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 17 Jan 79 pp 30-34

[Article by Siradiou Diallo: "Power Sometimes Feels Impotent Against Harsh Reality"; passages in slantlines are emphasized in the text]

[Text] At dawn on 10 July 1978 the Mauritanian army overthrew President Mokhtar Ould Daddah. Six months have gone by. The new leaders have had to confront the same problems as the preceding government, in a Maghreb that is still teetering between war and peace. Siradiou Diallo went to see what they have already done and what they expect to do. "I never thought peace would be an easy weapon to use," President Ould Saleck told him.

Six months after the coup that ended in the overthrow of President Mokhtar Ould Daddah (10 July 1978) and the army's taking power, Mauritania lives in the expectation of some miracle.

In the euphoria of their victory, Colonel Mcustafa Ould Mohamed Saleck and his comrades on the Military Committee for National Recovery (CMRN) promised all at once a quick peace in the Sahara, an early recovery of the economic situation, the complete and immediate liberalization of commerce and measures furthering national unity and assuring social justice.

But measured against the weight of the responsibility and the size of the job, Mokhtar Ould Daddah's "losers" now seem to have been both prudent and careful. Like many others before them, they quickly learned that power is only a shiny veneer hiding the bedrock of special interests and that when faced with the hard facts of domestic and foreign affairs, princes sometimes find they are impotent. So it is in the Sahara affair.

Obviously no one can doubt their sincere wish quickly to achieve peace and harmony in the region.

Under the circumstances, however, good intentions are not enough. The new masters of Nouakchott have increased their contacts and held secret meetings with representatives of the Polisario Front and requested the mediation and blessings of friendly capitals like Paris, Abidjan, Tripoli, Madrid or Bamako, but all in vain: they have been unable to untangle the Saharan knot. At most

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they are said to be willing to let go of Tiris el-Gharbia, the piece of Sahara that fell to them by virtue of the Madrid agreements of November 1975. However, they have realized in the last 6 months that giving it up unilaterally would not solve the problem. Morocco does not intend to yield its Saharan province at any price. As long as that is the case, the war will go on in the region, dragging the Mauriticians willy-nilly into its wake.

It is hard for Mauritania alone to get out of the Saharan hornets' nest.

The sudden realization of these hard geopolitical facts sheds new light on the hesitations and temporizing that occur in Mauritanian officials' contradictory declarations.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate their embarrassment and outline the changing shape of their diplomacy, where an increasing number of mistakes are due to inexperience. On 28 September 1978 the government press published a list of important prefectural changes. All the appointed prefects were on it except the one for Tiris el-Gharbia. /"We didn't want to upset the Polisario,"/ a high official told us.

A second example: to respond to the good-will gestures by the Polisario, the government decided to set free some 50 Saharan prisoners on 8 December. As the Arab telephone works better in Nouakchott than in any other south Saharan capital, the whole city was informed of it well before it happened. Thus, when 18 prisoners left headquarters that day to take the main road to town, a large crowd was waiting for them. There was even an exchange of greetings between the headquarters commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla, and a spokesman for the liberated prisoners. The former regretted having had to put /"brothers"/ in jail, and the latter thanked the army for its /"good treatment, especially since the events of 10 July."/

In a lordly manner the headquarters commander did not hesitate to summon forth an officer designated to provide pocket money and provisions for the prisoners, who were without supplies and obliged to make a long trek home. Curiously, the government media (radio and press) did not breathe a word about this amazing display of fraternization, which was filmed by French television and broadcast to the four corners of the earth that very evening. Why this excess of discretion? Because, a high-ranking officer informed us, /"we men of the desert do not like to blow our own trumpet."/

The facts are much more prosaic. In both cases the authorities' behavior is explained above all by their inability to extricate Mauritania alone from the Saharan hornets' nest. Colonel Ould Saleck is a cat on a hot tin roof: he is being called by Algeria and the Saharan fighters on the one hand to recognize immediately the full and complete independence of Western Sahara, while Morocco is urging him, on the other hand, to honor the commitments stemming from the Madrid agreements and, consequently, to continue the "war of resistance." Saleck's all-points missions, which often conclude with declarations about /"contacts with the Polisario,"/ do not fool anyone.

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Waiting for Algeria, Waiting for Morocco...

A foreign diplomat confided to us that both Nouakchott and Rabat now think that /"nothing is possible before a new team takes over in Algeria."/ The presence of Mr Cheikhna Ould Mohamed Laghdaf, Mauritanian minister of Foreign Affairs, at the funeral of President Houari Boumedienne, then, at the beginning of January, friendly official declarations regarding Algeria and the Polisario confirm this. Nouakchott seems to be seeking a rapprochement with Algiers in hopes that Boumedienne's successors will allow them to move toward the "general, definite" peace they desire.

The Mauritanian leaders' room for maneuver is all the more limited because Morocco is dragging its feet in evacuating the troops it has stationed in the northern part of the country. In Nouakchott, it is being whispered about that the Moroccans flatly refused to leave. /"There's nothing to it,"/ Colonel Moustafa Ould Saleck confided to us. The Mauritanian head of state nevertheless admits the Moroccans /"are being a little slow in organizing their transportation for the evacuation."/ This did not keep him from stating that /"between now and the end of the first quarter of 1979, the Moroccan troops will be completely gone."/

The Heavy Burden of Foreign Debt

Though it is not as difficult, the economic situation is nonetheless delicate. An official document entitled as a financial and economic recovery plan has been prepared by the ministry of Planning with the help of two experts from the World Bank. This document states that a /"precarious situation"/ exists in the balance of payments and public finances. The result is that the foreign finance situation is /"very disquieting."/ There are several reasons. First, the persistent bad situation on the world iron market means less foreign currency coming in (almost exclusively from the sale of iron ore). Second, import prices continue to increase.

Added to that is the heavy burden of foreign debt resulting from past commitments. The report states that in the last 5 years Mauritania borrowed about \$115 million a year (about 25 billion francs CFA [African Financial Community]) for projects that will have no short or medium term effect on the gross domestic product. This is especially the case with the deep-water port of Nouakchott and the Nouakchott-Kiffa-Nema road.

There are also the prestige projects of doubtful profitability, like the sugar complex built in the port zone of Nouakchott and the Nouadhibou oil refinery: these two fine, completely built plants are rusting away because they cannot be used, the former because after the plant was finished it was found that the machinery did not meet the desired sugar cake production norms; the latter because it was designed to process Algerian oil and can no longer be supplied.

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At the end of April 1978 foreign public debt reached \$711 million. Even if the refinancing of debts to Libya and Morocco is taken into account, the amount will still reach about \$62 million (about 14 billion francs CFA) a year between 1978 and 1983. This amounts to 30 percent of export earnings. It is understandable that moneylenders would hesitate to commit themselves in the absence of measures being taken to correct the situation quickly.

The government has undertaken to change course by putting a ceiling on operating expenses and by increasing receipts. While endeavoring to have creditors refinance the debt, the government is thus striving to be very strict in the choice of new investments. In particular, it intends to be very prudent in granting endorsements or guaranteeing foreign loans to private or semi-public concerns.

Liberalizing in Austerity

The experts' report recommends abandoning all projects that /"cannot be justified financially and economically."/ Because of the tight budget, the government will no longer grant subsidies to projects that are in trouble, be they public or private. The World Bank experts even recommend that the Nouadhibou oil refinery and the Nouakchott sugar complex not go into operation /"until it is clearly established that their operation will not encumber either the balance of payments or the budget."/

As for the three important projects that started up a few weeks ago, the guelbs, the port of Nouakchott and the Kiffa-Nema road, the first seems to have won the approval of the experts called to the bedside of the Mauritanian economy while the other two appear to have been saved from the World Bank experts' knife only because they were so far advanced.

The austerity measures are already causing a certain morose outlook among Mauritanian businessmen. Since the government is here, as elsewhere, the biggest customer, a tight-budget policy could not fail to have repercussions on the marketplace. That is why many companies have stopped work and laid off workers. /"We will start up again,"/ a businessman told us, /"once the new government has passed the exam that Saudi Arabia is now giving it."/ In fact, even the immense mosque under construction in the center of Nouakchott through the generosity of King Khalid is now only a giant ghost of steel and concrete where sea birds brazenly hide from sandstorms and the dread desert wind.

The members of the liberal professions had been promised by the new government that their activities would be quickly and completely liberalized, but they continue to wait and are getting a little impatient. Doctors are in a hurry to open private clinics and pharmacists, their own stores, but on the whole they remain resolutely optimistic especially because the liberalization they wish for has found an initial application in the nerve center of money.

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Since September 1978, the Central Bank of Mauritania has given up its power to authorize imports in the area of products of prime necessity. Such operations are now given over to appointed intermediaries. Likewise, Mauritians are no longer required to declare how much foreign currency they have in their possession when they return to the country. A recent measure also tends to align the ouguiya (the national monetary unit, equivalent to 5 francs CFA) with the CFA franc. The new government is not satisfied with easing its control over exchange rates; it has also decided to join within the next few months the West Africa clearing house, whence some have already hastened to predict that Mauritania will soon rejoin the West African Monetary Union (UMOA), a bank of issue that includes Benin, the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

Of course, Colonel Moustafa Ould Mohamed Saleck and his comrades on the CNRN are in favor of close cooperation between the Central Bank of Mauritania and the BCEAO (Central Bank of the West African States), the headquarters of which was recently transferred from Paris to Dakar. Contacts are being made between the two banks to establish the means of this cooperation, and Colonel Ould Saleck has asked President Houphouet-Boigny to help him find a formula that is both quick and acceptable for both monetary systems.

However, in Mauritania itself, officials who are knowledgeable about the matter do not seem enthusiastic about a possible return to the UMOA, at least as it now operates. They think that its credit mechanisms are so restrictive that they deliberately block the economic development of member countries. It is /"a real economic Malthusianism,"/ one of the opponents of such a return told us.

The Mauritanian businessmen who were at first all for returning to the franc zone are also beginning to show some reservations. /"It seems that the credit we now get without too much trouble will be doled out in an eye-dropper,"/ we were told by a seemingly disillusioned businessman who obviously no longer knew where to turn.

As though the disenchantment caused by the situation of neither war nor peace and economic difficulties were not enough, there is a third, even worse handicap: the deep unrest of Mauritania's black community. It is an old problem that was, as early as 1966 and 1971, behind violent riots between Moors and blacks. It was only through the skill and prestige of Mokhtar Ould Daddah that the matter was hushed up for long.

Now waves of black opposition are threatening. A document that was furtively slipped to us at the airplane gangway as we were leaving Nouakchott is revealing in this respect. It is entitled: /"Black Africans and Oppression by the Mauritanian Arab-Berber Government, or the Necessity of Solving the National Problem."/.

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It is a real cry of alarm from black Mauritanian officials. It states that black Africans are becoming disenchanting at all levels. They all believed for a while that the coup would bring about a real change in national socio-economic, political and cultural structures and that since the different ethnic groups would finally have the same rights they would unite against foreign domination and confront the same threats. According to the authors of this document, /"the Arabicity of the Moorish ethnic group is no argument for Arabizing black Mauritanians."/

After denouncing political practices that keep all planning work for the Moors while leaving the blacks to be satisfied with carrying out the jobs, the authors of the manifesto advocate creating a new constitution /"that cannot forget that Mauritania is a nation of convention made up of two ethnic groups, neither of which shall force the other to become Arab or black African, lest the state split apart."/ However, it must be recognized that Mauritania is not the only country in Africa to live under the threat of centrifugal forces caused by ethnic and regional antagonisms. In this respect, all African nations are in the same boat, whether they realize it or not. That in no way diminishes the seriousness of the problem presented by the coexistence of the Moorish and black communities in Mauritania.

Colonel Ould Saleck has his work cut out for him, whether it is Saharan entanglement, economic recovery or national unity. Wherever he turns, he finds himself faced with inextricable difficulties, problems that are all the more serious because they demand both just and quick solutions. Of course, the 6 months that have gone by since the overthrow of Ould Daddah have only been a period of "observation," to use the expression of Colonel Ould Saleck.

The latest positions taken on Western Sahara seem to indicate that a new and more dynamic phase has begun.

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MAURITANIA

PLANNING MINISTER DISCUSSES COUNTRY'S POOR ECONOMIC SITUATION

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 11-17 Jan 79 p 42

[Interview with Mohamed El Moktar Ould Zamel, minister of planning and mines: "Nouakchott Opens Its Doors for Foreign Investments"; in Paris, date not given]

[Text] Mohamed El Moktar Ould Zamel, the Mauritanian minister of planning and mines and acting minister of finance, visited Paris this week to hold economic consultations with a number of French officials. This was an occasion to conduct this interview.

The minister of planning is considered one of the prominent economic figures in Mauritania. He is currently engaged in drawing up a comprehensive economic plan to rescue the country from the financial and economic decline which it has been experiencing since the time of the previous regime. The Military Committee for National Salvation and the government have entrusted him with the responsibility of taking the necessary measures to lay down the foundations of development in the country.

He says in this respect: We are currently trying to encourage the inflow of foreign capital, since it has been decided to draw up a new investment law (expected to be promulgated any day now) that would assure such capital of full protection and of the necessary guarantees, in addition to tax advantages. Our economic visualization of the situation is based on the adoption of a liberal economy that encourages private establishments. In this context, it has been decided to encourage small and medium-size establishments, in addition to facilitating the administrative and financial procedures concerning the creation of such establishments. We are also encouraging cooperation between Mauritanian and foreign capital with the aim of enhancing economic and development projects in the country. This can provide new work opportunities for the country's citizens.

Almost Catastrophe

[Question] How do you evaluate the current economic situation in the country after the passage of more than 5 months on the corrective movement?

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[Answer] I will not hide from you the fact that we have inherited a legacy burdened with debts. There was such a big deficit in the budget that the previous regime had to stop paying a part of the salaries of the civil servants.

The situation was almost catastrophic. That regime resorted to borrowing large sums of money from abroad and at home to secure the payment of salaries. State expenditures rose by 65 percent under the previous regime, which failed to secure any additional revenues capable of meeting this deficit. Thus, the state budget was previously prepared in a haphazard manner that relies on no sound objective yardstick or criterion.

As for the current situation, we are facing a critical phase in the sense that we are trying to impose some sort of austerity to deal with the legacy of the previous regime.

It has thus been decided to adopt an austerity budget in the light of the actual expenditures and revenues. In the 1979 budget, the expenditures have been set at 10 billion (uqiyahs) whereas the revenues will not exceed 5 billion. This means that we will experience a deficit of 5 billion. To make up for this deficit, we will resort to foreign aid. The austerity will continue for 5 years before the budget can avoid any deficit.

[Question] Why were the state coffers so empty in the previous period?

[Answer] For a simple reason, namely the absence of planning. This absence led to unchecked extravagance and waste.

I will be content here with two examples. The previous regime agreed with a U.S. firm to build the oil refinery. The project costs amounted to 100 million dollars. What has been the result?

It has become evident to us that the firm's installations are faulty and the refinery has not operated for a single moment. When we tried to contact and pursue the U.S. firm, it became evident that it was an "imaginary" firm with no legal presence.

You may ask me: Who collected these monies? How was the deal concluded? Who is behind the bribes and other similar questions? I will answer: I will let you have the freedom to make your own conclusions.

There is another example. The previous regime agreed in 1973 with an Austrian firm to build a sugar plant which cost 9.5 million dollars. As in the previous case, the plant has never operated. We are now in the process of suing the firm concerned.

(He added:) Thus, a lot of money has been wasted on imaginary projects, whereas no single development project was implemented: Not a single school was built, not a single clinic was constructed...

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I will also mention this example: The Rosso-Akjouji highway is 600 kilometers long, and is one of the most important highways in the country. No maintenance work whatsoever was performed on this highway. The same applies to the Nouakchott-(Nimah) highway which links eastern with western Mauritania. The asphalt is no longer fit and maintenance of the two roads now requires additional money because of this negligence.

[Question] What about your visit to France?

[Answer] It is for the purpose of discussing the economic and financial relations between the two countries. It is an "economic" visit that seeks to discuss all the spheres of technical and economic cooperation between Mauritania and France.

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SAUDI ARABIA

OFFICIALS VIEW SOVIET ENCIRCLEMENT DANGER

Paris L'EXPRESS in French 13 Jan 79 pp 92-93

[Article by Jerome Dumoulin, special correspondent for L'EXPRESS in Saudi Arabia: "Saudi Arabia: Soviet Encirclement"]

[Text] Iran, the Middle East, Soviet imperialism, so many worries face the principal petroleum supplier. Saudi officials emphasize the limits of their power to Jerome Dumoulin.

"We are afraid," confessed a high Saudi government official. "We are gradually being surrounded." Seen from Saudi Arabia, the Iranian crisis, which cut off the vast umbrella which the Shah had erected between the USSR and the Gulf, has taken its place within a dramatic series of events: the arrival of the Soviets in South Yemen on the very frontier of Saudi territory, the pro-Soviet coup in Afghanistan and the continuation of the Soviet-Cuban offensive in Eritrea.

"In the months to come, we fear the fall of President Numeiri," continued the Saudi official. "If pro-Soviet forces take control of the Sudan, the encirclement will be complete."

The Iranian crisis has caused renewed activity in the field of military cooperation between the countries of the Gulf: in December Saudi diplomats increased their contacts with the emirates--from Kuwait in the north to Oman in the south--and also, it seems, with Iraq.

The emirates, always preoccupied with their traditional petty disputes, are not yet ready to sign a defense pact. But the idea is in the air.

The French Embassy at Jeddah is following these developments with interest, as they may provide a stimulus to the project for an Arab Military-Industrial Organization (OAI). This organization depends for the most part on Saudi money, European technology and Egyptian industrial potential. The French point out that several emirates and Iraq have been equipped with Mirage aircraft, and that Prince Sultan has just named a person from the United Arab Emirates as head of the OAI.

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In the Horn of Africa, where the Saudis acknowledge having spent "enormous sums" to support Eritrean independence movements, they have practically no hope left. Now they are reinforcing their stake in Somalia: General Mohamed Ali Samantar, the second highest ranking Somali, has just received a lengthy reception in Riyadh.

But the strategic successes of the USSR may also push Saudi diplomacy in other directions.

Certain officials, while totally excluding any "reversal of alliances," think that Riyadh could take a new attitude toward Moscow, going to the point of establishing diplomatic relations. "American inaction," stated one high official, "risks leading us to a sort of neutrality which takes into account the new alignment of forces in the area." The Saudis are clear: their army is still embryonic, their oil wells are very vulnerable, and the financial weapon is not always effective. But above all, they believe that the United States has been overtaken by events.

A high Saudi official seized a copy of the American weekly, U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT dated 18 December 1973 and opened it to a page headed "Washington Rumors." "Read this," he said. The passage was underlined. "Members of the American administration, on their return from Saudi Arabia, fear that this country will follow Iran as the next hot spot in the Middle East. It has the key elements of a future crisis: weak leadership and malcontent officers."

"The Americans should never write such things," exclaimed the official, "or we will come to believe that they are against us. Certain people here believe that America will drop us as they have already dropped the Shah."

This suspicion, which brings no word or gesture from the Carter administration--which, on the contrary, has just sent a dozen ultra-modern F15 fighters to Saudi Arabia--explains the profound feelings of insecurity of the leading Saudis. Even those who do not fear the termination of the "special relationship," sometimes said to be as vital as that which links Washington to Bonn, are questioning the ability of the White House to think and to act.

"Venitian-type Spies"

The abandonment without warning of Taiwan, one of the oldest and most loyal friends of the Saudi monarchy, has raised the level of indignation here and amplified doubts as to the value of American commitments.

The office of this Saudi diplomat overlooks the Red Sea, across the terraced roofs of Jeddah. "Iran," he said, "is not Africa. Neither you nor we have the means by which to intervene directly in this crisis. We are simply spectators. One thing is certain: it is absolutely necessary that additional oil must flow." Jeddah, the great commercial port of Saudi Arabia, will continue for several years to be the home of the Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs and the embassies. The U.S. Embassy is not inconspicuous. It is in the center of the city, surrounded by a dark red wall guarded here and there by nonchalant guards and enclosing a space of 10 or 12 hectares. "Of course," remarked an American diplomat, "the Saudi monarchy has a weakness for crowned heads. But it is also fond of rapid solutions to crises such as that which befell the Shah."

Actually, the Saudis were alarmed and surprised by the confusion and passivity of America during the Iranian affair. In the words of a French diplomat, those who possess "a network of Venitian-type spies" are shocked by the disintegration of the CIA, with which they have a long history of cooperation. And they see the influence of Moscow in the Iranian developments.

"Fifth Column"

The problem of the two Yemens in itself demonstrates the relative powerlessness of Saudi Arabia and that of its American ally. In spite of the financial aid given to the one against the other, moderate North Yemen remains fragile, and marxist South Yemen is still in Soviet hands. In North Yemen, Riyadh, with millions of dollars, tries with perseverance to maintain this little country as sparsely populated as she is--and which provides the bulk of her unskilled labor--in the wake of her own development. Prince Sultan ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, the minister of defense, is personally in charge of Yemeni affairs.

In Marxist South Yemen, Saudi Arabia has resumed the financial seduction of South Yemen according to good sources. Without many illusions. Because Soviets, Cubans and East Germans are well established in Aden. At the American Embassy in Jedda it is realized that the Saudis were disappointed to see the United States abandon to the USSR a lightly populated but strategically important territory. They said, "Riyadh wanted direct intervention. In other times, we would undoubtedly have tried it."

For the Saudis, the problem of Soviet imperialism has overtaken that of limiting the Arab-Israeli conflict. More exactly, they include the second in the context of the first. "For us," said a high Saudi official, "the settlement of the Palestinian question is the primary objective of Camp David, because if the Palestinians continue to wander from camp to camp they will continue to be terrorists manipulated by Moscow. It is necessary to get rid of this 'fifth column.' And to accomplish this they must be given land."

President Sadat's position, insisting on the indispensable link between the peace treaty and the subsequent creation of a Palestinian state is now in perfect harmony with that of Saudi Arabia. Because, beyond the peace, the guardian of the holy places of Islam has two major objectives: the reunion of Arab countries under its high spiritual patronage, and the expulsion of the Soviets from the region.

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According to the Saudis, Menachem Begin is jeopardizing the effort: in trying for a separate peace with Egypt he wishes to prevent Arab unity. But at the same time he tries to force the triple and tacit anti-Soviet alliance, symbolized last spring by the simultaneous sale of American combat aircraft to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

At Jeddah there was an optimistic note in the midst of much concern: Saudi officials and foreign diplomats agree that there is "good" in the delays of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations. They say, "This way all the Arab countries have time to become accustomed to how nice it is to have peace with Israel. Psychologically, that is excellent."

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SUDAN

NUMAYRI FACES DIVERSE INTERNAL, EXTERNAL PROBLEMS

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic 14-20 Dec 78 p 21

[Article: "Sadat's Disaster Will Overtake the Sudanese Compromise; al-Mahdi Has Withdrawn, al-Hindi Has Refused To Return and the Brethren and the Communists Are Angry"]

[Text] Khartoum--Informed sources have revealed that President Numayri's support of the policies of President al-Sadat, particularly his support of the two Camp David agreements, has begun to encounter increasing tacit opposition within the political office. This rising opposition has begun to take forms at which observers are taking a long look.

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of al-Ansar, resigned the membership in the political office, and again left the Sudan for New York to visit his sick wife. He then headed for London, but without any fanfare. That was possibly in order not to destroy the bridges [leading to] completing the national compromise, and possibly to resume coordinating positions with al-Sharif al-Hindi.

This development caused sudden complications. President Numayri was about to issue a republican decree appointing al-Sadiq al-Mahdi as first deputy president of the republic. However, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi requested that the decree be postponed. He then suddenly submitted a letter in which he requested that he be discharged from his membership in the political office of the Socialist Union. Evidently al-Sadiq al-Mahdi left without seeking permission for the trip.

The Moslem Brethren Protest

Observers have noticed that the Moslem Brethren, under the leadership of Dr Hasan al-Turabi, have begun to intensify a campaign of revenge on the Sudanese Government's being carried away with support for al-Sadat.

Dr al-Turabi was the only member of the political office who announced his party's rejection of the two Camp David agreements, warning of the consequences to which the Sudan might be exposed as a result of its rash support of President al-Sadat's course.

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That was when President Numayri discussed with the members of the office-- which consists of the higher coalition advisory committee in the Sudan-- the results of his trip to the United States and the communiques that he issued in agreement with the accomplishments of Camp David.

At that meeting the only member who expressed support was Mr Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibrahim, the first deputy to President Numayri. The other members preferred to remain silent at that time.

It was said that the incentive for President Numayri's point of view is hidden in American promises to support the efforts that are being made to discover oil fields in the Sudan and develop them, and on the basis of mobilizing American and international assistance in implementing the pipeline project for carrying the oil to an outlet on the Sudanese coast through facilities that will cost approximately \$2 billion.

The Activity of the Communists

The intensifying campaign of the Moslem Brethren is meeting increasing communist opposition to the point that it has roused the anxiety of the official Sudanese circles who recently deliberately leaked a rumor to the effect that the Sudanese Communist Party has renewed its attempts to mobilize a revolution against the regime of President Numayri.

Informed sources have interpreted these rumors as preparation for an arrest campaign that has been launched by the concerned authorities with respect to a large number of the officers suspected of membership in the Communist Party and the National Democratic Union which is headed by al-Sharif al-Mahdi.

At the same time, sources close to President Numayri are saying that these arrests were a result of the sweeping Ethiopian attack which has so far resulted in the reconquest of a number of Eritrean cities especially those opposite the Sudanese border. This, in the opinion of these persons, is what constitutes a danger to the entire Sudanese regime and requires the removal of the leftwing elements in the army. Thus, because of the speed of these developments, President Numayri had no choice but to take this step lest the Soviet Union instigate its group to take control over the government.

The Deterioration of Living Conditions

In this environment the average Sudanese is experiencing unprecedented inflation. The terrible inflation has hit all the essential foodstuffs. Good bread is continually absent from the markets, and the citizens stand in long lines every dawn and evening in front of the bakeries to get a small number of loaves. A small number of stores has cornered the market in sugar, and its price recently reached 30 Sudanese piasters a kilo. This price amounts to double the officially fixed price for it. There has been

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a constant gasoline shortage for a long time. The officials attribute the continued shortage to the difficulty of transporting gasoline from the port of Port Sudan to Khartoum because of the dilapidated condition of the railroad lines and the continual strikes by the railroad workers.

Furthermore, informed sources are expressing their belief that during the next few months President Numayri will again reshuffle the cabinet. Perhaps that will be the new shot in the arm that will relieve the enormous resentment among the Sudanese people throughout the country, and will open new lines of communication with the nationalist opposition. Until that is accomplished the Sudan will continue to be an area wide open for surprises.

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TUNISIA

BRAHIM TOBAL CALLS ROLE OF ARMY INCREASINGLY OPPRESSIVE

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 22 Jan-4 Feb 79 pp 19-20

[Article by Brahim Tobal, leader of the National Tunisian Opposition:
"The Power and the Army"]

[Text] The Role of the Military Must be Conceived in Terms of National
Edification Action

At a time when arbitrariness is reaching its peak by suppressing the emancipation movement of the Tunisian youth in its totality and systematically destroying the trade union movement as a form of expression of the population aspirations, relying on Sayah's fascist militia and openly using the opportunist and repressive faction of the army, the palace intrigues are increasing in an effort to resolve the succession problem. At the same time, the opposition current within the people is developing with the same intensity.

However, this mobilization of the Tunisian people aspiring toward democratic freedoms triggers among the powers that be a reflex which tends to strengthen this repressive apparatus.

This dialectics of violence between the powers and the masses tragically poses the problem of the function of the army in terms of maintaining or eliminating the Bourguiba movement as a power system.

The fact that a minority of officials, molded by Bourguibian "ideology" and by Western concepts within the establishment seems to provide an initial answer as to the utilization of the army against the claims of the people demanding a radical change in Tunisian political life.

The open utilization of this army trend was verified in the course of the 26 January 1978 events. This plot against the people and national sovereignty was contained in the frequency of trips to Tunis of American Pentagon officials, officials from the French Defense Ministry, Gen Mery specifically, and West German military experts, the lengthy visits paid by the Sixth U.S. Fleet, and increased Western technical aid (training and equipment). The purpose of all such maneuvers, in fact, is to integrate the Tunisian army within the "defensive" NATO military forces.

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The number of those who died on 26 January 1978 proves the desire to turn the army into a "mercenary" whose repressive role has been growing further and further, specifically after the Ksar Hellal incidents. The reticence of young officers, noncommissioned officers, and privates to accept their assigned repressive role to checkmate the popular revolt and the condemnation triggered by the declarations of allegiance of zealous superior officers, who publicly intervened on 15 October 1977 and 26 January 1978, confirm, nevertheless, that matters are not that simple in the case of a government engaged in the implacable struggle which marks this pre-succession period.

Bunker Plans

A great deal could be said on the nature of the conflicts and disagreements among rival groups which, within the powers that be or standing on the margins, are sharpening their weapons to take over. This, however, is not the subject of our discussion. Let us simply note that both will try, more or less skillfully, to protect basic neo-colonial interests and take into consideration the military imperatives of defending the West in the Mediterranean and in the Arab world.

This balance of forces is so close within the political class that the intrusion of an unexpected element in the classical game could mislead or even mischannel its course. This is what explains the interventionism of the reactionary trend of the "great silent mass" aimed at neutralizing the army majority whose interests coincide with those of the people.

The bunker, consisting of Sayah, Nouira, Abdallah Farhat, Bourguiba Jr, and Col Ben Ali, actually removed its mask in the course of the tragic 26 January 1978 events by making the army carry out the most hateful task in history: Drown in blood peaceful popular demonstrations infiltrated by provocatory elements of Sayah's fascist militia. The twin purpose of this diabolically conceived operation was the following: On the one hand, to discredit the army in its totality by presenting it as an anti-popular force; on the other, to suppress a movement by beheading the trade unions. This defines, yet once again, the bunker design: To tame the army by increasing its "complexity," in order to remove it once and for all from the national arena, after eventually using it to settle internal contradictions within the bunker, contradictions which are bound to develop when the time to succeed Bourguiba comes. Bourguiba is still nurturing the dream of seeing his son as the proper successor to the throne of the Bourguibian dynasty!

It is true that the Bourguibian system has long tried to keep the Tunisian army in a ghetto, isolating it from all patriotic and revolutionary currents within the country. Yet, by virtue of his political incompetence and abdication of all will to promote national independence, he was unable to block the opening of breaches within such a strictly controlled

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institution. Clearly stated, today it is a question of reestablishing the link between the people and their army. The purpose is no other than to coordinate the claims of the live forces within this army and the requirements of the struggle against the regime. Let no one be mistaken. A jump on the part of the Tunisian army would not be a simple concept or abstract plan we would do everything possible to promote. By virtue of its social roots, the Tunisian army has always been particularly sensitive to the deep aspirations and legitimate claims of the people. This is an undeniable fact of historical evidence. This sensitivity is alive like coal under ashes. It was manifested, the first time, 16 years ago.

Whatever may have been said and written on the December 1962 attempt, it was, first of all and above all, the manifestation of an alliance between radical patriotic forces and honest nationalistic officers willing to put an end to the Destourian regime. The uprising showed the extent of the Bourguiba movement crisis which was already then opposed, through their specific means, by the various national social strata. At that time the army proved that even "confined" to barracks it listened to the people and watched the country's evolution. Therefore, it is on the basis of an objective reevaluation of the missed step of 1962 that we should lay the foundations of a daring but indispensable revision of the rather rigid positions adopted by some Tunisian politically and military revolutionary leaders concerning the armed question.

Would the failure of the 1962 attempt have meant that we had to abandon further activities within the armed forces so that they may not be utilized as the weapon of the regime against revolutionary intellectuals, workers, and peasants or, in other words, the Tunisian people? This is a decisive question.

Unquestionably, it was necessary, at all times, to fight the idea that the military could assume the power and its exclusive exercise. However, it was important, above all, not to fall into the opposite trap of ignoring the military institution or considering it a homogeneous body affiliated in its entirety with the camp of the enemies of the revolution.

Actually, there are circumstances in which the army could act as a catalyzer to resolve situations or speed up processes which otherwise we may tend to consider immutable.

In what is today known as the third world the military institution cannot be accurately analyzed unless taking into consideration the following essential factors: The professional nature, ideological training, and political sympathies of soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers. In order to determine its position toward the system and society, we should avoid two equally threatening and misleading dangers.

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The first is related to the heritage of an idealistic vision inherited from European culture. Starting from the postulate that the state is neutral, above social classes, it reaches the conclusion that the army is, by the same token, above the class struggle, uninvolved with political struggles.

The Second Danger

In practical terms, the institution of military forces should, therefore, be kept outside the political play, i.e., in its barracks. Such a vision is absolutely inconsistent with the lessons of history. The latter, conversely, proves that the armed forces is an organized social force for the purpose of exercising a form of violence (generally reactionary) to the benefit of the dominant social strata. It is precisely this that is the vision, plan, and the target of the bunker, as has been claimed, with all its contradictions and internal strife which, in fact, reveal merely the allegiance of its members to different imperialist forces.

The second danger is that of militarism.

The role of the army in the state and its position within the power system assume an even greater importance as problems to be studied as the state reveals, as is today the case in Tunisia, the complex and unstable class realities and the fact that the ratio of forces has become closer among the various interest groups belonging to the middle classes and local bourgeoisie. In such a case the role of the army could range from tacit and silent approval of a faction or political clan, against its rivals, to direct and open intervention in favor of one such clan. No revolutionary movement could or should ignore this fact.

It is not a question, therefore, to call for a conspiracy or a military coup d'etat to promote a "revolution" or political change but of criticizing a basic attitude systematically hostile to the armed forces, unacceptable to the extent to which this could only consolidate the power of those who benefit from the current situation.

Taking all this into consideration, we could consider a different concept which would reject equally the liberal Western approach to the military institution and the putchist and adventuristic approach.

To sum it up, we must consider the role of the army in close connection with the national edification action. This can be achieved only through deep interaction and reciprocal understanding between the mass of soldiers and noncommissioned officers and patriotic and progressive officers and the popular, patriotic, and revolutionary movement, reaching its maturity on the level of an efficient organization and proper political line. At that point it could encourage the patriotic and progressive elements within the armed forces to dislodge from their strong positions all the superior officers installed and supported by the regime, thus turning, finally, the armed forces into the progressive tool leading to a revolutionary transformation of Tunisian society.

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Both the Bourguiba "successors" as well as the "rightful" leftist elements who, for the past several months, have been making the final scalping preparations around the agonizing High Man on the Totem Pole, in an effort to preserve the essential aspects of the Destourian system, will never be able to understand the need for such an alliance. For essentially such an alliance would reject any notion of Bourguiba-leaning heritage and continuity in order to inaugurate an era of political, social, economic, and cultural renovation within a popular Maghreb and Arab environment. . . .

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TUNISIA

TIJANI ABID LEADERSHIP OF UGTT DENOUNCED, OPPOSITION PRAISED

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 25 Dec 78-7 Jan 79 pp 19-20

[Article by Cherif Rachid: "The 5 December Call"]

[Text] On 5 December 1952 Farhat Hached, a leader of the trade union movement and of the Tunisian National Movement fell stricken by the bullets of the Red Hand, the colonialist organization. Through this action those related with the most irredentist circles of the French general residency in Tunisia hoped both to behead the UGTT [Tunisian General Federation of Labor], founded six years previously by Hached and stop the thrust which the trade union movement had given to the fight for independence. But this failed. . . .

Now, 25 years later, after enduring for the first 20 years of Bourguiba's reign the oppressive tutorship of the single Destourian Party, in the autumn of 1977 the trade union organization underwent a decisive change. Gradually, in a meandering fashion, a democratic evolution had developed within the Tunisian trade union movement, facing the neo-colonial jumble-sale and exploitation of the Nouire government.¹

The latter, ruled by the Destourian "bunker," and controlled by such as Sayah, Abdallah Farhat, Bourguiba Junior, and the likes, chose the way of provocation and conspiracy against the UGTT and for a show of force which was to result, the day following the call to a general strike, in the slaughter of 26 January 1978.

Abid Isolated

Once again the trade union movement was beheaded and its members and leaders jailed, tortured, and sentenced in obvious violation of the February-March 1978 terms and the terms of last summer's trials which were real judicial parodies.

In appealing to Tijani Abid, the only renegade of the leadership elected at the 14th UGTT Congress, the system had hastened to put him at the head of a leadership which, itself, had been hastily appointed in February 1978 by an extraordinary make-believe congress boycotted by the overwhelming majority of the trade unions and the international trade union organizations.

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Isolated, Tijani Abid's henchmen were unable, regardless of the support of the administration, the bosses, and the single party, to promote a diversion. It was on the basis of the support of the resolutions and line affirmed at the 14th Congress and the January 1978 National Congress that, under last year's difficult circumstances, the trade union resistance was organized, inspired by the legitimate most active structures of the UGTT. This will to resist along with a powerful international solidarity were, in fact, to trigger defections among the rare cadres who had joined Tijani Abid.

It is within this context that we should put the solemn appeal issued on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of Farhat Hached's assassination. The appeal was issued by three members of the executive bureau and 17 secretaries general of the national trade unions or sectorial UGTT federations.

Bearing in mind that the Banks and Insurances Federation has been, for the past six months, the instigator of this resistance movement, despite the defection of Mr Grami, its secretary general, there are in fact 18 national trade unions or federations which supported the 5 December appeal which rejects "any leadership of the UGTT other than the one elected at the 14th National Congress, headed by Comrade Habib Achour."²

After denouncing the "severe attempts against trade union freedoms," the appeal "notes with satisfaction the awareness of the workers who have expressed their support for their trade union organization and its legitimate leadership and who are pursuing their trade union action within the framework of this legitimacy." It expresses the "deep gratitude (on the part of the Tunisian working class) to all national Tunisian democratic groups which have supported and still support, under such historical circumstances, the UGTT and its legitimate leadership (as well as) all international and national trade union and political organizations which are taking an ever stronger position of active solidarity with and continuous support of the Tunisian workers and, particularly, their legitimate trade union leadership jailed since 26 January last."

In conclusion, the signatories state being "convinced that the current political climate cannot be improved without the opening of a frank and general debate. This could not take place in the least without the release of all jailed comrades."

Along with the signatures of Abdellaziz Bouraoui and Sadok Allouche, members of the UGTT bureau, released at the end of the 10 October trial, we see, for the first time, the signatures at the bottom of such an appeal of the Deputy Khelifa Abdi, another member of the executive bureau who, confined to his bed, had not been involved in the January 1978 repression.

Naturally, we also find the signatures of the central trade unions which have been most active over the past 10 months (higher school teachers, lecturers, university hospital physicians, secondary teachers, and

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technical and vocational teachers), along with members of sectors which, so far, have been merely watching or whose secretaries general had been imprisoned (national teachers' federation, primary school teachers, food and tourism workers, national education, transportation, electricity and gas, petroleum and chemical industries, construction, ports agencies, Equipment Ministry, railroads, general justice trade union, and national agricultural trade union workers).

This list in itself represents a definitive and unappealable condemnation of the mis-elected Tijani Abid "leadership," the more so since the cadres around him, who dropped him on the eve of the 10 October verdict, include the promoters of the trade union machinery of two major areas: Bizerte, an important industrial center, and Gafsa and, particularly, the mining workers' trade union whose militancy has never failed.

A Model Debate

Thus the 5 December historical appeal assumes a very great importance. The events which preceded its adoption enhance its model status. In a clandestine fashion, the debate within the bases and headquarters of legal trade unions have been quite lively and fruitful over the past six weeks. "Beyond any polemics or of resorting to calumnies which, most certainly, we vigorously denounce, we should take into consideration," some trade union leaders stated, "the fact the discussions held in November and October and, particularly, those involving Comrade Abdellaziz Bouraoui, did not divide or weaken in the least the movement but, on the contrary, made possible a substantial progress in the area of trade union resistance."

In fact, after Habib Achour, Abdellaziz Bouraoui is one of the UGIT veterans. After long years of work within the trade union apparatus, he has gained undeniable fame and his support of the secretary general in the course of the critical December 1977-January 1978 phase commands respect.

Acquitted on 10 October, having been in Sfax rather than Tunis on 26 January, immediately after his release from jail he tried to "resume control." Whether his activities had been interpreted rather strictly by the most radical trade union resistance elements, or else whether Abdellaziz Bouraoui had effectively taken the initiative, something which he vigorously refutes today, aimed at a power split, the answer to this question is, to say the least, embarrassing. In any case, nothing allows us to question the loyalty of a man who may be quite close to the international circles of "free trade unionism" but who, for eight months faced all sorts of pressures and imprisonment difficulties with all their consequences.

What matters is, in fact, the convergence which was displayed at the conclusion of this model debate.

In addition to the 5 December appeal which, in a way, is the epilogue of the debate, three other documents draw our attention from this viewpoint. This includes, above all, the text entitled "Remarks on the Characteristics

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of the Current Trade Union Situation," which defines the six essential principles as a condition for the formulation of the trade union answer based on support for the legitimate UGTT structures, the demand for the liberation of jailed trade union members, and the refusal to make up with Tijani Abid.

According to the authors of the document which was extensively disseminated among trade union cadres, these six points must "constitute a constructive base for discussions aimed at defining and strengthening trade union action strategy which could oppose the maneuvers of the regime. Having assumed responsibility for the 26 January blood bath and having beheaded the trade union organization, it is not excluded, in fact," notes a comment issued by the 26 January Tunisian Collective, "for the government to try to change an unsubstantial and all too compromised leadership."³

This text "which, under such conditions, represents a healthy warning to anyone who would be tempted to support an operation aimed at neutralizing trade union resistance and gild the rather tarnished coat of arms of the Destourian," has triggered, in turn, the answer of the members of the jailed leadership. This second document,⁴ sober and very clear, confirms, in its essential aspects, the basic requests listed in the "six points." In addition to its aggressive nature, Abdellaziz Bouraoui's answer, published in the weekly AL-RA', together with the 5 December appeal, is both useful and interesting. It puts an end to the speculations of these past few weeks but, above all, confirms the tenor of the consensus which rallies today the broadest possible and most active sectors of the Tunisian trade union movement, providing that sectarian and spontaneous behavior is surmounted.

The firm attitude displayed by Habib Achour, specifically during his talks in jail, following the verdict, with representatives of the ICFU and the ILO, had an unquestionable stimulating affect on the development of this debate.

The AL-SHA'B Affair

Following the nonsuit directive issued by the grand jury of the State Security Court in the case of 84 of the 100 trade union members charged in Sousse, 16 leaders and members are still awaiting, in any case, their trial. The action of solidarity with them, as well as with trade union members already sentenced became more vigorous, the more so since, using as a pretext the investigation opened against those who disseminate a publication called the "Clandestine AL-SHA'B," published abroad, the police, naturally, are trying to spread their net further and intimidate trade union circles and their families. Let us note on this subject that Amnesty International has launched an urgent campaign in support of eight trade union members detained in Sfax in November.

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The 26 January Tunisian Collective has noted "its solidarity in the face of repression with these new victims of the renewed offensive of repression and anti-labor launched by the system." Yet, it insisted on expressing "its most emphatic reservations concerning the orientation which consists, judging by the adventures of some groups abroad, to usurp the name of the UGTT newspaper AL SHA'B and speak on behalf of the trade union organization in its totality, outside the legitimate trade union structures."

Beyond the trade union debate, however, the big question, naturally, remains that of the ability of the patriotic and progressive opposition to impose itself as a force to be considered and whose leadership could promote an alternative to Dastourien power. From this viewpoint neither excessive polemics or nasty internal quarrels, or sectarian practices, whether aimed at dominating or recovering positions, that would contribute to the development of a spirit of unity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Recently the Tunisian prime minister was received at the White House with the pomp usually reserved for chiefs of state. The American manna will cauterize for a while, to a certain extent, the wounds of the Tunisian economy. In the silent battles for succession it is not a fact to be neglected that Nouira, reputed to represent the French, was able to succeed in obtaining the American agreement. An Atlantic policy obligation.
2. The latter, sentenced to 10 years of hard labor as a result of the shameful 10 October trial, has just been transferred, together with Abderrazak Ghorbal, sentenced to the same term, from the civilian prison in Tunis to the Nador Convict Prison in Bizerte. The family of the UGTT president is most legitimately concerned with the inevitable consequences of such a transfer to the already poor state of Habib Achour's health.
3. "Flash Information Bulletin No 13 of the 26 January Tunisian Collective," 46 Rue de Vaugirard, 75006 Paris.
4. "Flash Information Bulletin No 14."

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