

HARRY HANSON

Britain and the Arabs

This summer's Middle Eastern crisis has had some extraordinary features. Superficially, much of it has been outrageously farcical. The Lebanese situation, for instance, at times looked like sheer opera bouffe. The spectacle of fierce, moustacheed Druzes, each a walking arsenal, waging a very limited and cautious civil war under the leadership of a tired-looking, lounge-suited, westernised, social-democratic chieftain, Kemal Jumblatt, was comedy of a high order. So was the caricature of D-day produced by the landing, among the bathers, on the Beirut beaches of battle-ordered American marines, equipped with all the latest warlike machines, prepared to do or die for the Eisenhower Doctrine - and all dressed up with nowhere to go. The bewilderment of these innocents was epitomised by the tank captain who could not understand why 'these guys', the Lebanese, showed so little enthusiasm for their liberators. Not far away, in Jordan, there was the small, grotesque figure of Hussein, simultaneously tribal chief and leader of Amman's *jeunesse doree*, whose fulminations reminded one irresistibly of Kipling's Butterfly that Stamped. And in the background hovered that gigantic and formidably intelligent grotesque, Nikita Krushchev, laughing his head off as the British and Americans sank up to their necks in Middle Eastern sands.

Things were much less funny, of course, in Iraq, where Nuri and Feisal had been murdered; and it goes without saying that they were not really funny anywhere. Even the most superficial observer could not fail to see the deadly menace in the whole series of events, for the spectacle had nothing in common with a mere game of *coup d'etat* and gunboat diplomacy. The Arab liberation struggle, in spite of the occasional comic turns that it puts on for the delectation of the less serious-minded members of the Western audience, is as real and as earnest as the great 19th century European liberation struggles led by Garibaldi and Kossuth; and imperialism is no less imperialistic because Macmillan and Selwyn Lloyd are caricatures of Salisbury and Chamberlain, or because Eisenhower and Dulles are politically out of their depth. We could not forget that the throwers of custard pie concealed in their pockets the most deadly weapons ever known. At any moment, up to the end of July, it seemed as though the farcical elements in the situation were on the point of being blotted out by tragedy on a literally cosmic scale.

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Even on the narrowest view of national self-interest, the actions of our Government stood condemned. 'We must tell the Prime Minister, the House and the country', said Aneurin Bevan, 'that we consider that our troops have been placed in unnecessary jeopardy, that the interests of the people of Great Britain will not be served either in the short or the long run by what the Government have done, and that the Government may have taken a long step forward towards plunging this country into war'. Telling the Prime Minister, the House and the country should have meant the mounting of a campaign to dwarf the Suez agitation, but Labour's leaders were too occupied in doing their electoral sums to have the time or energy for rousing the people. Neither Government nor Opposition, therefore, could take any credit for the surprising denouement at the United Nations as a result of which the Middle Eastern situation, at the moment, looks better than it has looked for years. The credit, as far as one can see, goes entirely to the Arabs themselves, the 'neutralist' bloc of countries, and Dag Hammarskiöld. It is they who deserve our heartfelt thanks for the breathing space that has been won.

The duty of the British Labour Movement, now, is to take full advantage of the respite. For it is no more than that. If no pressure is exerted on the British and American Governments there can be a degeneration as rapid as the recent improvement. As yet, there is no clear evidence that 'the West' has broken with the old policies, nor that public opinion has been sufficiently educated by the experience of their failure to place an insuperable obstacle in the way of their revival. We should deceive ourselves to imagine that the neo-imperialism exemplified by the Suez adventure and the sending of troops to Jordan is no longer capable of evoking significant public support. Enthusiasm for the wielding of the imperialist big stick is still to be found, not only in the respectable bar parlour but in the working men's club itself; and we must clearly recognise that it is support for *imperialism*, not for 'defending small nations' or acting in anticipation of a too-lethargic United Nations or any of the other nonsense with which our imperialists enshroud their activities. The feeling that the decline in Britain's power to give the law to the lesser breeds is something shameful and that 'we' ought not to allow the lion's tail to be twisted quite so vigorously is by no means confined to the Suez Group. It is present in the Labour Party itself, even among active workers for the Labour cause; and this is not surprising, for Labour has never had a consistent attitude towards imperialism and other people are only too ready to rush in and fill the thought-vacuum. Vigorous educational work is therefore needed on the part of those who see the realities and dangers of the situation.

In particular, it is of great importance that sound information about the nature of the Arabs' national movement should be disseminated as widely as possible. For it is not enough to say - as many, to their credit, are already saying - that we have to try to 'go along with' Arab nationalism instead of attempting to shore up the remains of our imperial position in the Middle Eastern world by using force in support of what the *Economist* calls 'a sturdy pro-western half of that world' which 'no longer exists'. Under the influence of neo-Lawrencian conceptions of how to deal with Arabs, 'we' have already done so much damage that the prospects of repairing it in the near future, even by a complete reversal of policy, are slight. The danger, therefore, is that a government which appeared to respond to the 'go along with the Arabs' demand by making a few vague, conciliatory gestures could then come back to a sympathetic public with the announcement that it had tried and failed, and that there was no alternative but to return to the old policies. To render such manoeuvres more difficult, we must make British Labour people realise that the Arab national movement is not just one of those 'wog' nuisances that we have to 'go along' with, simply because any other policy is made difficult by our weakness and dangerous by the existence of a cold war threatening to become hot. We must show them that, despite its disorderliness, its confusion of objectives, its superficially farcical features, its exaggerated xenophobia, its apparent resemblance, in certain of its aspects, to Fascism or Nazism, and - most serious of all - its vitriolic hatred of the State of Israel, it is fundamentally and essentially a progressive movement, with which we ought to be ready, as socialists, to express solidarity, even when it does things which run counter to Britain's real or supposed interests in the Middle East. For as long as we think of these interests as primary and of Arab interests as secondary, it will not be too difficult for the British Government to mobilise our support for or secure our acquiescence in still further actions that make the name of Britain stink in the nostrils of the 'uncommitted' world.

2. Arab Nationalism.

Even if objective information were consistently available, the ordinary man might be forgiven for finding some difficulty in making head or tail of Arab politics. Indeed, the Arabs themselves are not yet very good at giving explanations, and the reader of Professor N. A. Ziadeh's recent book on Syria and Lebanon (Benn, 1957), might reasonably come to the conclusion that it simply replaced obscurity with opacity. One source of confusion is the different phenomena to which the word 'nationalism' has been applied, for what we call Arab nationalism, although a compara-

tively recent movement, has already gone through three stages, of which the last, with which we are now confronted, has features very different from either of the previous two.

If one were to delve as deeply as possible into its origins, one would have to talk of the impact of the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt, and of the meteoric career of the Arab world's abortive Bismarck, Mohamet Ali. These, however, were false dawns. One can distinguish the first phase of modern nationalism in the literary and historical movement, 'western' in inspiration but 'Arabist' in outlook, which was begun by Ibrahim Yazeji and Butrus Bustani in the Lebanon in the 1850s and 1860s. Like many a similar movement, it saw the development of implicit into explicit political attitudes. In the later years of the 19th and early years of the 20th centuries, there were secret societies and manifestos, directed against the 'excesses' of Ottoman rule rather than at the Empire itself. The extreme weakness of the Arab middle class, however, gave even moderate 'bourgeois' reform, let alone 'bourgeois' revolution, scant chance of success, particularly when the odious and wily Sultan Abdul Hamid (1876-1908), having nipped in the bud the constitutionalism of Midhat Pasha, was showering favours on traditional Arab rulers who agreed to become the instruments of his despotism. For the Arab masses, still sunk in abject poverty and a prey to the crassest ignorance and superstition, were politically immovable. Arab national consciousness, writes George Antonius, lay 'prone as though in sleep, held down by Abdul Hamid's tyranny and drugged with the opiates of his Arab policy'. Little could be done, at this stage or for a long time afterwards, so long as the traditional rulers were satisfied with the *status quo*.

Such, at least, was the situation in the Arab heartlands; Syria, Palestine, Iraq and the Arabian peninsula. In Egypt, more advanced and more subject to cosmopolitan influences, political nationalism, first evoked by the Arabi revolt and then directed against the British occupation, developed along independent lines. Cultural ties there were, and Cairo became a haven of refuge for those on whom Abdul Hamid's heavy hand had fallen, 'but in the field of specific nationalist activity the disseverance was complete.' That it was long to continue a source of Arab weakness is seen in the fact that, even after the Ottoman Empire had gone the way of all empires, Great Britain could continue to conduct her relations with a half-independent Egypt without paying more than sporadic attention to what was happening in the rest of the Arab world. Not until Gamal Abdul Nasser succeeded in making himself the undisputed leader of a new form of Arab nationalism did Egyptian politics become fully integrated with those of the remainder of the Arab Middle East.

The second stage of Arab nationalism begins, not, as some have imagined, with the First World War and the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence, but with the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which deposed Abdul Hamid and ushered in a period of bogus and abortive Turkish 'constitutionalism'. False to their original declarations in favour of national equality, the Young Turk politicians pursued towards the Arab subjects of the Empire, including the traditional rulers, a chauvinistic, integrationist policy, with the result that resistance developed in the more central Arab lands and revolts became endemic on the peripheries. Even the pacific Grand Sharif of the Hejaz, Hussein, succeeded, 'after a long tussle which threatened to bring about an insurrection', in compelling the Turkish governor to accept his terms for peaceful co-existence. It was this same Hussein who, after Turkey had joined up with the Germans in the First World War, was persuaded by vague and ambiguous British promises to lead that famous Arab Revolt of which readers of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars* receive such partial and one-sided information.

When western imperialism succeeded to the heritage of the Ottoman Empire, giving a dusty answer to Arab aspirations, 'liberation' became a mass movement. Yet it was the forms and conditions rather than the nature of the struggle that changed; for leadership remained in the hands of the royal families, the landowners and the political parties which reflected both the unity and the diversity of the interests of this upper stratum. With the new imperialism, as with the old, they had a love-hate relationship. Ready enough to mobilise the town mobs, and even to lead revolts, in order to extract the maximum concessions, they had neither the power nor the will to strike a mortal blow. In their custody, moreover, 'liberation' remained a purely political movement, divorced from the demands for social and economic change that were already beginning to activate the more advanced urban elements.

For these reasons, and because of the whole character of the post-war settlement, the situation in the Middle East became extremely complex. While the most backward parts of the former Empire, the Arabian kingdoms, received formal recognition of an independence they had already *de facto* enjoyed, the more civilised parts were divided between the two victors, Britain and France, to be ruled either directly (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine), or through uneasy puppet regimes (Iraq). Within this framework, there developed a confused series of conflicts, in which the conception of a united Arab liberation movement was almost completely submerged. Imperialism - and particularly the British variety - showed extraordinary skill in playing the familiar divide and rule game in this new setting. Revolts, when they occurred, were sternly sup-

pressed, the Royal Air Force developing a flexible technique of 'strikes' which economised both ground forces and the British taxpayer's money. Minorities (e.g., Kurds, Assyrians), were bribed with favours; the Bedouin Arabs given 'gentlemanly' status; refractory rulers (e.g., Abdullah of Transjordan), provided with kingdoms whose continued existence depended upon British subsidies; rivalries between ruling families (e.g., Hashemite and Saudi), fully utilised; 'democratic' political concessions (culminating in qualified independence for Iraq in 1932 and for Egypt in 1936), employed simultaneously to reduce Britain's direct responsibilities and to absorb the energies of upper-class politicians in internecine 'constitutional' struggle; and, in general, the scales heavily tipped in favour of all those elements who saw safety under the imperialist umbrella, and against the more radical sections - still weak and confused of purpose - which looked forward to a social as well as a political revolution. Most deadly of all, from the Arab liberation point of view, the virus of Zionism was allowed to develop in Palestine, and to infect the whole of the Arab body politic with a futile and energy-wasting anti-semitism, whereby traditional rulers, upper classes, middle classes, Bedouins, peasants, and town mobs were drawn together in an unnatural Jew-hating alliance. All this, of course, was not the result of any deep-laid plot concerted by the 'imperialists' in London, on the advice of their Coxes, Bells, Bullards, Lukes, Longriggs, Wilsons, Allenbys, and Lloyds. Policy was often fumbling and hesitant, disagreements were frequent, unresolved difficulties abounded. It must not be imagined, moreover, that the local men, many of whom had a genuine love of Arab civilisation, were not anxious to serve, according to their lights and within the limits of externally-prescribed policy, the peoples whom they were helping to rule. But the fact remains that during the inter-war period the new imperialism was unable to give to the Middle East even that measure of stability that it had had under the old, because the attempt to preserve imperial privileges added a major de-stabilising element to an already unstable situation.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, neither Britain nor France was sitting pretty in this area. In Syria, the French High Commissioner had been forced to suspend the constitution, and was about to do the same in Lebanon. In Palestine the conflict between Jew and Arab reached a critical point. In Iraq, hostility to Britain was so intense, in spite of the so-called 'independence' that had been granted in 1932, that nationalists found no difficulty in believing that the motor accident in which King Ghazi died was 'arranged' by the British. In Egypt, there was a close connection between some sections of the nationalist movement and German

and Italian Fascism, and even King Farouk was wondering whether any contribution to the British war effort above the compulsory minimum was likely to pay dividends. In the event, the immediate effects of the Second World War on the Middle Eastern situation seemed less spectacular than those of the first. There was nothing equivalent to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire - although the French were eventually 'persuaded' by a combination of nationalist agitation and British prodding to get out of Syria and Lebanon. Egypt did not fall to direct Axis attack, and the German-inspired rebellion of Raschid Ali in Iraq was quickly suppressed by a boldly-led expeditionary force from Transjordan. But, at a deeper level, the war had a transforming effect without parallel in the previous history of the Arab countries. Not only did it give a further shake to the already unsound structure of 'western' domination; by causing a replacement of the previous policy of 'going slow' on economic development by one of stimulating, through the Middle Eastern Supply Centre, every conceivable form of economic activity that contributed to the war effort, it created new expectations, pointed to wider horizons, and strengthened the forces whose self-realisation could be achieved only through fundamental political and social change. These forces were further strengthened by the great Oil Revolution, which pushed up the area's export of petroleum from 250,000 barrels daily in 1938 to 1,800,000 barrels daily in 1952.

It is for these reasons that the Second World War may be regarded as the beginning of the third stage of Arab nationalism. Not until several years after the end of the war, however, did the political effects of the new socio-economic situation become fully evident. In the immediate post-war years, the old politicians appeared to be playing the old games. Admittedly, the strength of anti-imperialist sentiments among their peoples, together with the reluctance of a war-weakened Britain to extend her military commitments, enabled them to 'twist the lion's tail' more vigorously than ever before, particularly as the Americans were giving our policies, to say the least, no positive support. But feudal landowners and tribal sheiks still appeared to call the political tune, whether the country concerned happened to be, at the moment, a parliamentary 'democracy' or a military dictatorship. So-called 'parties' seemed little more than the means whereby rival groups of upper-class families struggled with one another for the fruits of office. Realisation of the idea of Arab unity, supposed to be embodied in the Arab League, looked as far off as ever, with the continuation of pre-war dynastic feuds and with the previous differences in level of civilisation accentuated by the unequal pace of economic development. Of the comparatively new political forces, the one

that appeared most important, the Muslim Brotherhood, offered the peoples of the Middle East nothing better than a kind of cultural Luddism dressed up as anti-imperialism.

Here we encounter the major difficulty which even comparatively well-informed people experience in grasping the realities of the contemporary Middle East. Because the contemporary situation still has some of these features, we can easily conclude that nothing has really changed, except to the extent that one of the Middle East's ephemeral military dictators, President Nasser, has developed marked imperialistic ambitions and shown exceptional skill in promoting them. Why, it may be asked, should Nasser be regarded as in any way different from - say - Shishakli in Syria, except that he has had a somewhat longer run for his money? What evidence is there that he is "really" a Kemal Ataturk type of figure, and that his leading supporters, in Egypt and elsewhere, are of better quality than the members of the old, corrupt political parties? Why should we come to the conclusion that Arab nationalism, hitherto a pretty scruffy sort of movement, has been taken charge of and transformed by genuinely 'progressive' forces? Can we be certain that it has, in fact, reached the 'third stage', or that it ever will?

I do not say that our attitudes will entirely depend on the answers to these questions. Even the 'scruffiest' anti-imperialist movement may demand our support. But, clearly, the more responsible and progressive it is, the more positive enthusiasm we shall feel for it and the more powerful will be the sentiments of solidarity it stimulates in us. We may be, in principle, on the side of the Imam of Yemen in his dispute with the Aden Protectorate, but few of us, I think, will rejoice when that bloodthirsty old horror wins a victory. If, therefore, Nasser represents something both new and better, our moral senses will be more positively engaged than they would be if he was no more than a comparatively cultured and civilised version of the Imam.

The whole purpose of this article is to suggest that, with the advent of Nasser and the Baath Socialist Party, the Arab nationalist movement has indeed reached its 'third stage', where forces that are not only more consistently anti-imperialist but more genuinely progressive in the social, economic and political sense have taken effective control. This does not mean that there can be no going back, or that Middle Eastern feudalism and tribalism have met their Waterloo. The balance is still a delicate one, even after the formation of the United Arab Republic and the Iraqi Revolution. But whatever may happen to the particular movement that labels itself Nasserite, we can see that the new forces have definitely emerged, and hazard a fairly confident guess that, in the long run, they will prove the decisive ones. Marxists would say that the Arab

world is undergoing its 'bourgeois-nationalist' revolution, and the implied European analogy is not entirely inapposite. We are in the presence of a great historical transformation of the Middle Eastern picture which can be compared in scope and importance with the 'classical' bourgeois revolutions and even, in certain respects, with the Russian Revolution itself.

What, then, is new about Nasser? First, there is the universality of his appeal. No personality, in recent times, has been so generally regarded and so fervently supported as leader, not of a particular Arab country, but of the whole Arab people. To Nasser and his huge following the artificial divisions imposed on the Arab world by the post-1918 settlement are meaningless - a fact which ought to be remembered by those who affect to act in the defence of 'small countries' such as Jordan. It is not that Nasser has created an Arab national consciousness, which existed, in embryonic forms, long before he was born. What he has done is to give that consciousness, for the first time, a measure of unified political expression - something that the so-called Middle Eastern experts formerly regarded, and perhaps in some cases still regard, as an idle dream. What the Arab League signally failed to do he, to a remarkable extent and in a very short time, has achieved. As yet, admittedly, the achievement is incomplete, because of the extreme inequalities of political and social development as between different parts of the Arab world. The tribal monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, Trucial Coast and Oman are still flies in the Nasserite ointment, whatever the formal diplomatic relations between Egypt and these political units may be. Lebanon, with its advanced commercial economy, so dependent upon the 'west', and with its complex balance, so easily disturbed, between religious communities, does not fit easily into a pan-Arab movement. There is also the problem of Israel, which cannot and must not be 'solved' the Arab way, however much historical justice there may be in Arab claims. Nevertheless, the tide is flowing strongly in favour of the new leadership. Tribal kings and chiefs on the peripheries of the Arab world no longer feel confident of the ability of the 'west' to protect them against Nasser-inspired forces of political change; their very dependence on the 'west' increases their unpopularity with their subjects; and the 'western' orientation of the outgoing Lebanese government, expressed by its acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine, so shook its hold on the people that it had to call in American marines for its defence. The 'unattainable ideal' of Arab unity is at least within sight, and with it the spectre, so ominous for 'cold war' enthusiasts, of a politically-unified 'neutralist' area in one of the world's most sensitive spots.

How has this happened? One cannot attribute it to Nasser's personality 'charismatic' as this may be, nor to the fact that he is a soldier whose military reputation emerged comparatively untarnished from the disastrous muddle of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, though this undoubtedly helps. The essence of the matter is that Nasser has gathered under his leadership those forces of progress in the Arab world which, strengthened by war-time and post-war economic changes, were waiting for the sort of lead that he, a politician of consummate ability, has been able to give. His success, moreover, is not the product of mere propaganda; it is the reward of deeds that he and his lieutenants have performed in Egypt itself.

Here we come, I think, to the essential point. The significance of Nasser and Nasserism has been missed by many of those who thought that they 'knew the Middle East' because they refused to be convinced, despite plenty of available evidence, that he was anything more than the kind of military dictator with which they were already familiar. They mistook him for a Bakr Sidqi or a Shishakli, and even produced the ridiculous comparison with Hitler. Every tin-pot dictator, they argued, promises 'reforms', which always turn out to be no more than shop-window dressing and Nasser's are of the familiar showy and unsubstantial kind. Thus argued, for instance, Julian Amery at a meeting of the Fifty-One Society held at the time of the Suez crisis. I told him then, on the basis of the very incomplete evidence available to me, that he was wrong. Since the publication, subsequently, of Jean and Simone Lacouture's *L'Egypte en Mouvement*, of Doreen Warriner's *Land Reform and Economic Development in the Middle East*, and of Mrs. Garzouzi's *Egypt, Old and New*, I am more than ever convinced of it. Nasser may fail in Egypt, which presents perhaps the most intractable problems of any underdeveloped country; he may even, as Walter Z. Laqueur suggests, simply prepare the way for Communism (which would by no means be the disaster for Egypt that it would be for Britain); but he has at least made, and is still making, a serious and determined effort to raise the level of her civilisation. Land reform, extended irrigation, better cultivation, industrialisation, education, and honest and competent administration are needs that Egypt shares with most of the other Arab countries. Of these, land reform comes first, for without it the peasant, on whose efforts economic development ultimately rests, remains a two-footed beast, and the landlord class, the mainstay of all forms of reaction, continues to dominate the political scene. The test of any Middle Eastern regime that claims to be progressive is its willingness and ability to attack the landlord's power literally at the grass-roots. By such a test, President Nasser's government, while by no means scoring full marks, puts up a performance unrivalled by any other

Arab government, previous or contemporary.

In Egypt, the landlords' power is not yet broken, but the carrying out of the legislation of 1952 has undermined it to an extent that the peasant can feel, for the first time, that the government is on his side; and the new regime, basing itself on the army (which is officered, in the main, by 'petty-bourgeois elements'), and on the co-operation of a partly-awakened people, has acquired, through land reform, the elbow-room necessary for serious economic and social planning and an accompanying assault on traditional administrative slackness and corruption. Details of the reform, of the system of 'compulsory co-operatives' which goes together with it, of Egypt's first experiment in collective farming, the 'Liberation Province', and of the effects of these measures on the people, are carefully and sympathetically described in the first chapter of Miss Warriner's book. The full significance of what has been done is brought out in her last paragraph, where she makes the contrast between Egypt and Iraq, a country which has attempted economic development (under much more favourable conditions, as a result of the oil royalties) *without* land reform. There, she writes:

Money for the dams is available and to spare, and foreign firms are doing the work which will bring the new water-supplies forward. But unless things change, the water and land will be used to grow poor barley crops with half-starved labour; there is no prospect that the resources will be used to serve the people. Egypt, on the other hand, has set its human values first, and gets the men and women and the land ready for the water, while raising funds and the whirlwind by playing Great Power politics. If the pitch seems rather too high, and the expenditure rather too lavish, that is probably the only way in which anything can be achieved in this very old country.

No further explanation is needed of the prestige which Nasser enjoys among 'progressives' throughout the Arab world, of the growing strength of those parties (such as the Baath Socialist Party) which advocate policies similar to those which he has put into operation, and of the Iraqi Revolution which has been the immediate cause of the present international crisis.

But Nasser, we are told, is no democrat, and therefore cannot be encouraged by people who put democratic values first. This argument falls curiously from the lips of those who regard Chamoun and Hussein and the Persian Gulf Sheiks as bastions of the free world; but it must be considered on its merits. It would be very nice indeed if national liberation and economic development in the Arab world could be effected by democratically-elected parliaments; for western democrats naturally feel a greater sense of solidarity with a regime which reproduces at least the externals of the political structure with which they are familiar. Hence the popularity of India, which has succeeded in reproducing considerably more. Unfortunately, there is hardly any part of the world

less 'ready' for parliamentary democracy than the Middle East. It has been 'tried', in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, with disastrous results. Even in Lebanon it is little more than the facade behind which the various communities make the corruption-ridden compromises necessary to preserve themselves from mutual destruction. The experience that is necessary for the successful working of democratic institutions, the social and economic conditions which form their essential basis, and the habits of thought which give them living reality are simply not present. National unity and economic development, the two major and complementary demands with which history confronts the Arab countries, will have to find their fulfilment in other ways and by sterner methods. 'Kemalism' provides these countries with the pattern that, consciously or unconsciously, they are trying to follow. If we attempt to stop them, they will turn, not to democracy but to Communism, which provides the only viable alternative. Even the Baathists, whose devotion to individual liberty is more evident than that of most other Arab politicians, would not, says Harvey O'Connor, 'qualify as full-fledged members of an American civil-liberties organisation'. Nor would it be sensible for them to attempt to do so; and it is not sensible for us to bring classical liberal criteria to the judgment of the 'third stage' of the Arabs' struggle for unity and progress.

That the British and American Governments have, so far, refused to see that the new character of this struggle renders their former policies obsolete is partly due, as I have suggested, to the bone-headed stupidity of much of the 'expert' advice they have received. It must also be partly ascribed to the unimaginative single-mindedness with which they have been pursuing cold war policies, in virtue of which every regime which refuses to commit itself to 'the West' is regarded as a satellite or potential satellite of the Soviet Union and every proposed diplomatic manoeuvre is assessed in terms of its apparent contribution to a near-military struggle against the forces of 'international Communism'. But behind these unprofitable attitudes there are, of course, the profits of the oil companies, who constitute, both in Britain and in America, a most powerful pressure group and have succeeded, through their propaganda, in preventing the public from distinguishing between the West's legitimate interest in continuing to have *access* to Middle Eastern oil and their own illegitimate one of 'standing astride' that oil and doling it out at 'administrative prices' so high as to 'call for action by the U.S. Department of Justice' (to quote Charles F. Edmundson of *The Nation*). It is now known that Dulles, at a meeting of representatives of the major U.S. oil companies in August, 1956, indicated that threatened nationalisation of Middle Eastern oil interests 'should call for international intervention', and it seems probable

that American action in Lebanon and British in Jordan would have been followed by action in Iraq if the nationalisation of the Iraq Petroleum Company had been immediately contemplated by the new revolutionary government - compensation or no compensation.

It is therefore not only the consistent wrongness of the 'experts' and the alleged demands of the cold war that are responsible for the presentation to the British people of a distorted picture of the Arab national movement. Behind it lie the vested interests of one of the most powerful groups of monopolists in the world. The picture is falsified, not merely because the painter is ignorant and foolish, but because he is being told what to paint by people whose financial interests are not served by the truth. I should be the last to suggest that the truth about the Middle East is easy to discover, or to pretend that I know the whole of it. But I am convinced that the part of it I have attempted to present is vital knowledge to all who wish our Middle Eastern policies to be based on common-sense, fair dealing and respect for human values, and not on ignorance, prejudice, and the vested interests of exploitative minorities.