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Promise of Civilian Rule Is Unlikely To Satisfy Militant Revolutionists

By ROBERT C. DOTY
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

CAIRO, March 13—Maj. Gen. Mohammed Naguib, Egypt's President, and members of the ruling military junta have learned in the political upheavals of the last fifteen days how badly they need each other. But the lesson was an expensive one.

While President Naguib and Lieut. Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser, motivator of the army revolution, were struggling for dominance, their enemies, including some of the most sinister elements of Egyptian life, as well as some of the best, seized the opportunity to raise voices in political agitation. To appease them, the military rulers were forced to give pledges that they can redeem only at the cost of surrender of their control to an unpredictable civilian Parliament.

Questionable "Settlement"

There was hope here, but little conviction, that the arrangement by which General Naguib and Colonel Nasser patched up their differences would hold. In fact, the "settlement" settled nothing. General Naguib had back his posts — President, Premier and head of the Revolution Command Council—of which he had been divested. But close associates of Colonel Nasser were asserting openly that the general had no more real power than he had had before the break.

Maj. Salah Salem, Minister of National Guidance and Sudan Affairs, summed up the situation in the most candid statement by any of the military leaders when he said recently:

"What happened in Egypt has greatly weakened us externally and internally."

In the opinion of most observers, the military regime has failed to build any real popularity with any significant segment of the population. Because of the difficult economic and social situation inherited, the military leaders have been forced to take steps ill-calculated to win popular favor.

Cotton Troubles

They alienated powerful landlords by seizing big estates. The distribution of land to the peasants had been held up for lack of cooperative and credit facilities, and meanwhile world conditions caused a drop in cotton prices that brought discontent to growers, large and small.

To balance the budget the Government cut food subsidies and reduced both the number and the pay of civil servants and froze promotions. The first action caused a rise in the cost of living, lowering the leaders' popularity with urban workers. The second lost them the sympathy of governmental workers.

Finally, the military leaders dissolved the old political parties and the more sinister associations, such as the fanatical, terrorist Moslem Brotherhood and the Communists, and made the unruly university students toe the line.

At the same time the regime was relatively sparing in its use of the customary antidote for domestic discontent in Egypt—demagogic abuse of the British. There were occasional lapses into saber rattling, but by and large Naguib, Nasser and company worked seriously toward a negotiated agreement on the evacuation of the large British garrison in the Suez Canal Zone.

On the credit side of the ledger, there was only General Naguib's personal popularity with the masses, which apparently transcends issues, and the support of the army.

Army Fissures

The crisis revealed fissures in the Army. Colonel Nasser's adroit handling averted an open break; but it is impossible to predict how long the present unity will last.

In assessing these conditions and prospects, the enthusiasm of the military leaders for a popularly elected civilian parliament cooled noticeably. They talked of appointing some proportion of the membership. Without specifically mentioning the plan for the return to parliamentary life, Major Salem and other spokesmen proclaimed an unwillingness "to turn our revolution over to corrupt, retrogressive elements."

In the opinion of some competent observers, Egyptian and foreign, the chances of getting a settlement of the Suez Canal Zone issue that would pave the way for Egyptian cooperation in the defense of the Middle East will shrink once a civilian Parliament is installed. On past performance, the civilian politicians are unlikely to resist the temptation to win easy cheers and votes by sounding the battle cry, "No compromise with Britain!"

Tentative Approach

The Egyptians have put out feelers indicating a willingness to compromise on two unresolved issues that caused the breakdown of the negotiations last Oct. 21. They are (1) the conditions under which British forces would be permitted to reoccupy the key military base once the present garrison had evacuated it, and (2) the status of this force of 4,000 British military technicians who would remain to keep the base in stand-by condition.

On the first point, Egypt originally insisted the Suez base should be reopened to Western forces only in case of direct attack on a member of the Arab League. Britain insisted this arrangement was too limited. Egypt six weeks ago let it be known she would be willing to open the base in event of an attack on Iran or Turkey, or both, if Britain yielded on the demand that the base technicians be permitted to wear British uniforms after the canal zone was transferred to Egyptian control.

Thus far London has made no response to these overtures. The recent evidence of instability may have caused the British Government to doubt the value of an agreement entered into by this regime. However, in the view of some diplomatic observers, the chances of reaching a workable agreement will virtually end with the opening of the electoral campaign early in June. In the words of one British analyst: "We want political stability before an agreement, but the Egyptians apparently need an agreement on the canal zone before they can achieve stability."

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