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Egypt's Naguib—Kerensky With a Fez On

By C. L. SULZBERGER

PARIS, Nov. 16—The revolution in Egypt is not yet over and the principal reason for this is the accumulated misery of fifty centuries. Poverty, disease and lassitude are fastened around the Egyptian people like the sticky mud of the Nile. It will require prolonged effort to prod the nation from its ancient lethargy into the twentieth century.

The ouster of General Naguib as Cairo's first President is part of a volcanic process whose end is still uncertain. Naguib is the Kerensky of the Egyptian revolution; but he might not be the only Kerensky. Before it runs its turgid course the revolution on the Nile may devour others of its children.

Alexander Kerensky headed the short-lived liberal Government in Russia that served as stepping-stone from czardom to commissardom. Mohammed Naguib was the figurehead of national upsurge in his own country. But just as Kerensky misjudged the dynamic force of bolshevism, Naguib never correctly analyzed the tight little military junta that first installed him in the seat of power and then kicked him out.

Naguib's Character

It is difficult to imagine Naguib as a tool of the Moslem Brotherhood, although he is accused of plotting with that nefarious and fanatical group. The ex-President is a kindly, modest man whose personality harbors no traits of bigotry. He used to keep in his desk drawer a silver Torah presented to him by Cairo's Jewish community.

Naguib, unlike the "brotherhood" with which he is linked by his opponents, claimed to believe in fraternity regardless of race or creed. Although he was given leadership of the state after a coup ousted the despicable Farouk, General Naguib wished to limit the powers of a future monarch and to retain the throne as a lode for national unity. Even then he didn't know what his own revolutionary junta was planning. In June, 1953, the Republic of Egypt was proclaimed. Named as first President was the popular Mohammed Naguib, Kerensky with a fez.

Communists at Work

In a land where life is cheap and eternal happiness is depicted as the reward for many an assassin the present dictator, Gamal Abdel Nasser, will indeed be lucky if he can carry along his processes of reform.

The Communists have been working desperately to infiltrate the country's few labor unions and universities. They have also sought to insinuate agents into that ferociously medieval band of zealots, the Moslem Brotherhood. Moscow desires to install chaos on the Nile. For Egypt remains the most important Arab land with political influence extending all the way from Pakistan to Morocco. If the Kremlin could capture the revolutionary momentum gathering in Cairo, it would deal a tremendous blow to the democratic world. The Middle East, although by no means ready to cast its lot in with the West, is not yet sympathetic to the Soviets.

Egypt's Basic Problem

The Egyptian masses are largely illiterate and politically naïve. However, thanks to radios installed even in the coffee shops of remote villages, the intellectual impact of modern propaganda can skip the barrier of illiteracy. Egypt's basic problem is too little land for too many people. Despite the country's huge area, only the thin Nile Valley is habitable except for oases and coastal strips. The British, who governed for decades, never were able to solve this—and never seriously tried despite a leavening of social and industrial reform.

Farouk, the obese and contemptible last monarch, had an opportunity to do something. He was an exceptionally intelligent young man who came to the throne with popular acclaim. He was in a position to join himself with the people against the cynical landowners and profiteers in a classical alliance of crown and nation against an unworthy aristocracy. He could have crushed the corrupt pashas. Instead he frittered away his time in obscenities, proclaiming that upon his death the only kings extant would be the King of England and those in a pack of cards.

A Personal Experience

Now that revolution has started to roll, its course cannot be checked until social improvement comes. This must inevitably take years. A poignant incident in the writer's own experience may serve to emphasize the point. During World War II I spent one Easter at the palace of the Lotfallahs, a princely Arab Christian family. The paschal lamb was carried in upon a golden tray borne by six Sudanese. We lunched off golden plates with golden forks and spoons.

That afternoon I commandeered a taxi and together with my interpreter drove out of Cairo, stopping in the very first village encountered. We entered one of a row of squalid mud huts where a family together with goat and chickens dwelt in a single room. On a cluster of rags lay a baby with an infected eye. "What is the matter with him?" I asked the mother, thinking it was trachoma, curse of the Middle East. The interpreter explained in a low voice: "No. She had his eye stabbed out with a needle. That way the Government won't mobilize the boy when he is 18. They need him at home to help pull the plow."

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