

NATIONALISM, REVOLUTION, AND FANTASY IN EGYPT

Behind the Arms Deal with Czechoslovakia

GEORGE LICHTHEIM

IN THE checkered history of the Egyptian nationalist revolution inaugurated by the army coup of July 23, 1952, the autumn of 1955 stands out as a time when the regime clarified some of its long-term aspirations. Until then the military Junta had given the appearance of functioning in a hand-to-mouth fashion. It had indeed got rid of the hated "British occupation" (at the cost of signing a treaty whose value is considered doubtful by the well informed), and it had intrigued, rather unsuccessfully, for preeminence in the Sudan. But long-range political and economic planning seemed to be conspicuously absent. This is no longer so; the period between September and December 1955 saw some significant developments which make up a distinctive pattern.

Internally, some not very important facets of conservatism have been attacked, as in a decree aimed at the jurisdiction of the Sharia (Islamic) courts. Externally, this action was characteristically matched by a reinforcement of pan-Islamic radio demagogy to North and East Africa, thus leaving no doubt that the Junta intends to couple secu-

THE dismay aroused in Western capitals by the announcement last fall of the Egyptian-Soviet arms deal was followed first by a mood of optimistic resignation, and then by one of confusion and doubt. Israel's fate is very much involved in the whole question—but she seems to be too reliable an ally of the West for Western diplomats to take into account. GEORGE LICHTHEIM, who elucidates the complexities of Egypt's situation today, is a regular commentator on Middle Eastern subjects. He contributed "Soviet Expansion into the Middle East" to our issue of November 1955 and "Changing Alignments in the Middle East" in October. Mr. Lichtheim was formerly an editor of *Twentieth Century*.

lar reformism at home with calculated exploitation of religious solidarity abroad.*

The arms deal with the USSR and Czechoslovakia—first publicly announced by Colonel Nasser in a stirring broadcast on September 27, in which he poured copious abuse upon the three Western powers—fell in the middle of this propaganda campaign, the apparent purpose of which was to project Egypt as a power intent on liberating North and East Africa (and perhaps West Africa too) from the shackles of foreign control. Although the campaign centered on the Sudan, where things had not been going too well from the Egyptian viewpoint, it picked up other topics as it rolled along, until there was scarcely a territory in Africa that did not appear to stand in need of liberation from some sort of peril. North Africa was specifically mentioned by Colonel Nasser in his September 27 broadcast as a source of conflict with France, "our Arab feelings" not permitting the Egyptian government to preserve an ignominious silence (as the price of French

*A Cairo radio broadcast to the Sudan on September 14 made play not only with the customary pan-Arab argument stressing the historic role of the Arabs in the Northern Sudan, but expressly underlined the importance of Islam in linking the two countries; it directed its diatribes against Western propagandists who—not content with harping on the record of Arab slave traders in Sudanese history—sought to weaken the religious link by trying "to keep the people ignorant of the greatness of Islam and the important role it has played in Africa." By contrast a broadcast in Swahili, beamed at East Africa on August 14, contented itself with describing the nefarious role of Europeans and Indians in Kenya, now faced with a rising tide of national feeling among "the people of mixed Arab-African or pure African origin." In broadcasting to British West Africa, on the other hand, the Islamic tune was well to the fore, Egypt being represented as the center of modern Islam, as well as the slayer of "imperialism."