

REBIRTH ON THE EUPHRATES

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The wide and tranquil Euphrates, rather shallow in summertime, not infrequently swells mightily and wreaks havoc with the fields of the Syrian and Iraqi peasants in the rainy winter and spring. Ever since one of the world's earliest civilizations arose in Mesopotamia, the area between the Euphrates and the Tigris, people have tried to harness the wilful river: to make maximum use of its waters for irrigation in the northern and middle reaches and by means of dams to prevent swamping in the south. According to the testimony of historians, the ancient state of Palmyra, which occupied the territory now forming Syria, was a land of abundance. Remains of ancient irrigation works, the basis of this abundance, have survived to this day.

This area—so richly endowed by nature saw many rulers before it became today's Syria and Iraq: the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Greeks under Alexander, the Romans, Arab caliphs, Ottoman sultans. Devastating wars and the barbarity of medieval conquerors left little of the old irrigation systems. The orchards and grainfields of Palmyra

and Mesopotamia were buried under the sands. Desert sprawls around the towering ruins of the palaces of Queen Zenobia, famed for her beauty and statesmanship. Thousands of hectares of fertile land in Iraq are not cultivated for lack of irrigation, while in the south of the country vast tracts have turned into impassable saltmarshes, which even the scorching Arabian sun cannot dry up.

The British and French colonialists, who lorded it in Iraq and Syria for decades and were so proud of their "civilizing mission," only thought of plundering these countries' natural resources and flooding their markets with British and French goods. Local industry was discouraged. What land was cultivated belonged to the feudals. No serious attempts to reclaim new land or build irrigation facilities were made.

Syria and Iraq's road to national regeneration was not easy. The victory in World War II of the anti-fascist forces, with the Soviet Union at their head, helped the two countries win

political independence. But their rise as states in their own right, the formation of their national political institutions and organizations and their choice of paths of economic development were accompanied by bitter clashes between the forces of the old and the new. Indicatively, the champions of national independence and progress were drawing inspiration from the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, while those who sought to perpetuate feudal rule or direct the economy along capitalist lines were looking for support to the old and new colonialists. The fierceness of the struggle over what development path to choose is reflected in the fact that Syria had about twenty military coups in the first twenty years of its independence. This precarious condition continued until 1966, when the progressive wing of the Arab Socialist Renaissance (Baath) Party firmly established itself in power.

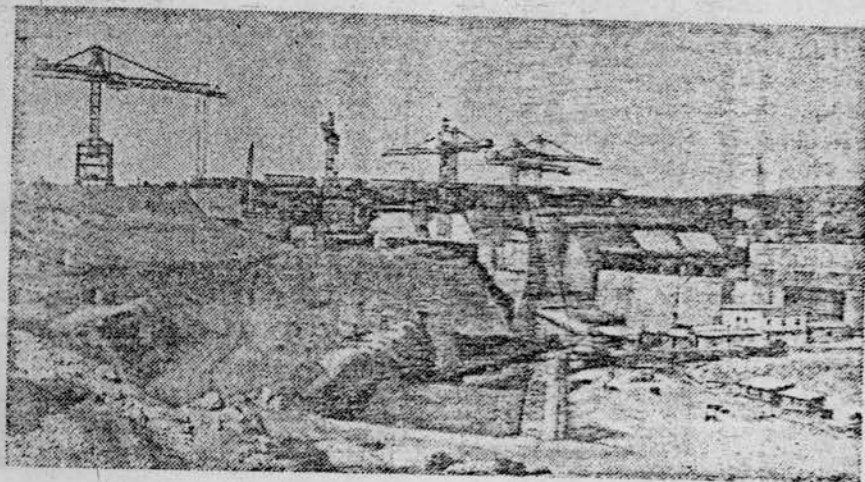
In Iraq, the overthrow of the monarchy in July 1958 was followed by a decade of bitter internal political struggles, in which the reactionary forces sought to capitalize on fanning strife between the Arabs and the Kurds and between the various Moslem sects. For nine long years there was war between the Kurds and the government forces in the north of the country. The intrigues of local reactionaries and imperialist agents repeatedly sparked off bloody conflicts between different detachments of the national patriotic forces. The most diverse social and political groups clashed together. Some of them were made use of by the foreign-owned Iraq Petroleum Company, which was striving to maintain its dominant role in the country's political and economic life. The way towards solution of the internal conflicts was opened in July 1968, when the Iraqi Arab Socialist Renaissance (Baath) Party came to power.

The national regeneration of the peoples of this once prosperous region has opened up good opportunities for economic progress. The development objectives of the two newly independent Arab states are spelled out in Syrian and Iraqi government and party documents.

On January 31 of this year the Syrian People's Council (Parliament) adopted a permanent Constitution which officially commits the Syrian republic to a socialist orientation. The country's economy is to develop on the basis of

The main building of the Euphrates Hydropower Station in Syria in construction.

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Every form of exploitation of man by man is to be abolished. While allowing the existence of private property, along with co-operative and state property, the Constitution stipulates that the private sector shall be subordinated to the interests of state and society. The Constitution ensures democratic rights to the people and provides for majority representation of workers and peasants in the organs of state power. It recognizes the guiding role of the Progressive National Front, comprised of the ruling Baath Party, the Communist Party and other progressive organizations, and emphasizes that the Arab revolutionary movement is part of the world liberation movement.

Iraq's draft National Action Charter, currently the subject of a nation-wide discussion, proclaims similar goals. It calls for revolutionary, anti-imperialist reforms and the building of an independent national economy. The time has passed when the Iraqi Baath Party maintained narrow nationalistic and sometimes anti-Communist positions. Now it draws its support from the working people, has a clear-cut anti-imperialist programme and favours co-operation with the countries of the socialist community. Along with Baath leaders, the Iraqi government, like the Syrian, today includes Communists and representatives of other progressive forces.

The progressive regimes that have taken shape in the two countries in the past few years have achieved notable successes in economic development. They are all the more significant considering that Syria is directly confronted by the Israeli aggressors and forced to spend vast sums for military purposes, while Iraq, contributing to the struggle against Zionist aggression and assisting the Palestinian resistance movement, also has a substantial defence budget.

One of the first measures of the two progressive regimes was to launch big irrigation and power projects. The hydroengineering complex on the Eu-

phrates in Syria, which is being built with Soviet co-operation, is the most important of them.

The Syrians are proud of their achievements in industrialization over the last few years. According to Minister of Economics and Foreign Trade Mustapha Hallageh, Syria's industrial production rose by 9 per cent in 1971. Its third five-year plan (1971-75) calls for a 50 per cent increase in the national income. Nearly 80 per cent of all investments are to be in the state sector, which at present accounts for 70 per cent of foreign trade and 75 per cent of the means of production in industry.

Syria's agricultural performance last year was very encouraging. The country harvested 2 million tons of wheat (three times as much as in 1971) 700,000 tons of barley, 100,000 tons of lentils, and 116,000 tons of potatoes. The cotton crop had gone up 10 per cent. These high crops were due in particular to the measures taken to improve land cultivation. For instance, Syria's co-operative farms—there are more than 1,600 at present—are increasingly proving a success. The country's leadership is encouraging production co-operation among the peasants.

Iraq too has achieved a great deal. Before agrarian reform, about 70 per cent of the land was owned by the feudals, who made up 2 per cent of the rural population. Under the reform, the government has taken over more than 2 million hectares of surplus land from the big landowners. Two-thirds of this has already been distributed among the poorest peasants. There are more than 800 co-operative and state farms in the country. In 1970, the peasants were exempted from payment for land received under the reform. The big landowners were forbidden to choose the best plots when surplus land was taken from them.

There is growing Soviet-Syrian and Soviet-Iraqi co-operation in various spheres: mineral prospecting, extraction

and transportation of oil, railway construction, and others. The Soviet Union is helping in the construction of a number of plants and factories and in training manpower and specialists. Iraq's first government-operated oil fields in North Rumaila, which had been opened with Soviet assistance, are to produce at the rate of 18 million tons by 1975, and 40-50 million tons in subsequent years. The nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company last June gave the government control over the bulk of the oil extracted in the country. Supported by the Soviet Union and other socialist states and doing business with some European and Asian countries, which have agreed to buy Iraqi oil, the country is more and more confidently overcoming the effects of the economic blockade organized by Iraq Petroleum. The Soviet-Iraqi ties are based on the friendship and co-operation treaty the two countries signed in April 1972.

Latterly Syria and Iraq have taken serious steps to expand mutual relations. They have concluded an agreement on the shipment of Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean via Syria. Exchanges of visits by statesmen are becoming more frequent. Discussion of the joint utilization of the waters of the Euphrates began in Baghdad recently. The closer ties between the two progressive Arab states are having a favourable effect on inter-Arab relations generally.

... In the last few years peace on the Euphrates has increasingly often been interrupted by artillery and air bombardments. The Israeli military are nit-picking out at Palestinian refugee camps and peaceful Syrian villages. Dozens of innocent people are killed in these raids.

The realization is growing among the widest sections of the Arab public that success in the struggle against aggression, to free the Arab lands seized in 1967 and to safeguard the lawful rights of the Palestinian people hinges on closer Arab solidarity and co-ordinated action.