

THE INVASION OF EGYPT

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LAST February, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whose decisions have been recognised as momentous beyond precedent, by friend and foe alike, drew those decisions from its recognition of a new situation in the world. By the side of the Socialist camp numbering some 900 million people—from the German Democratic Republic to China and the Democratic Republics in Korea and Viet Nam—there was now a group of non-Socialist and non-imperialist States in Europe and Asia, equally interested in peace (their populations add up to another 600 millions). The core of these were the former colonial countries:

The disintegration of the imperialist colonial system now taking place is a post-war development of world-historic significance. The national liberation struggle of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples has been crowned with great victories: in the past decade more than 1,200 million people, or nearly half the world's population, have been freed from colonial or semi-colonial dependence. The complete abolition of the system of colonialism has now been put on the agenda. The new period in world history which Lenin predicted has arrived, and the peoples of the East are playing an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world, are becoming a new mighty factor in international relations.

The Congress pointed out what tremendous significance such a change in the balance of world forces implied—particularly for the better chances of peaceful development, not only as between the nations but, by isolating the imperialists, inside individual countries where the overthrow of capitalism has become an urgent condition of human advance. Yet at the same time the Congress warned:

In these conditions Lenin's thesis that, in so far as imperialism exists, there exists an economic basis for wars, remains of course valid. That is why we must be extremely vigilant. While there is capitalism in the world the forces of reaction, representing the interests of capitalist monopolies, will persist in military gambles and aggression and may try to start another war.

The Anglo-French invasion of Egypt which began on October 31 is all-too-brutal confirmation of this analysis. Earlier articles in these pages have dealt with the preparation for this attack from the end of July, when the Egyptian Government nationalised the Suez Canal Company. Let us only recall the four phases through which those preparations passed, in the homely phrases used recently by the *Manchester Guardian*—the early 'gunboat era' (including the threat to withdraw foreign pilots from the Canal) which failed to frighten the Egyptians: then Premier Menzies of Australia's 'accept it or else' mission (which followed Eden's hand-picked London Conference, from which he excluded Egypt by the simple device of publicly insulting President Nasser on its eve): then the plan 'to put a guinea-pig ship through the Canal, to test the power of the users' association' (which broke down on American opposition): and finally the acceptance by the United Nations and Egypt on October 14 of the 'Six Points' for a reasonable settlement (which Eden unsuccessfully tried to torpedo by tacking on to them the demand that Egypt should accept the Menzies terms).

There matters stood when Israel invaded Egypt on October 29. Not a single step had been taken by Eden to implement the United Nations agreement during the previous fortnight—though a bare-faced attempt *was* made to influence the elections in Jordan against Egypt, a few days later, by crowding R.A.F. planes into the country. The attempt failed, because the Arab nations have gone past the stage of intimidation. But within 24 hours of Israel's attack, the British and French Governments presented an ultimatum to Egypt, and when it was rejected began their infamous bombing of Egyptian towns.

The brazen hypocrisy which has attended all Eden's moves in the Middle East was not absent on this occasion. The world was told that it was to 'separate the combatants'—although why in that case the Egyptian Army had to be attacked in its rear, instead of the invading Israeli Army: or why the British forces were not dropped in the path of the Israeli forces: or why a simple warning had not been given to the Israeli Government at Tel-Aviv that Egypt would be backed against aggression, remains a mystery—or rather, would remain one if the real reason for Eden's perfidious

attack were not obvious. Similarly the world was told that navigation through the Suez Canal was threatened—as though everyone didn't understand that the immediate effect of the Anglo-French invasion would be that, for the first time since July, the Canal would be well and truly blocked in self-defence by the Egyptians. The world was told that British lives were in danger—when the truth is that, a fortnight after the invasion began, not a hair on any British head in Egypt had been harmed.

Above all, the British Government indignantly denied that its piratical attack on Egypt was made in collusion with Israel. Talking of piracy reminds one that exactly sixty years ago the then Tory Government denied with equal fervour that it had any hand in the notorious Jameson Raid on the South African Republics, which was aimed at provoking a full scale British invasion. It took nearly all that time for the truth to emerge, thanks to a Dutch scholar—that the British Prime Minister and Colonial Secretary were fully aware of Jameson's plans. This time we have not had to wait so long. It has been revealed that (i) France and Israel agreed to a joint attack on Egypt between October 13 and 15 (ii) Eden and Selwyn Lloyd met the French Premier and Foreign Minister in Paris on October 16, all advisers being excluded from the room (iii) thereafter French troops, with vehicles camouflaged for the desert, began to be massed in the Marseilles-Toulon area (thus far the *Observer* of November 11, 1956) (iv) on October 28 Israeli senior staff officers were in discussion with French military leaders at the Paris Defence Ministry (*Manchester Guardian*, November 6) (v) the same day a French Socialist leader tried unsuccessfully to warn British Labour leaders that British and French invasion of Egypt was coming (the *Observer* again).

There can be no doubt whatever that the attack on Egypt was planned as a joint operation by the three Governments. And that is believed by the whole world.

What was the real aim? On that, too, there has been little concealment from the start. 'A regime for the Suez Canal which will give, at the least, not less than the safeguards provided for in the 18-Power proposals', wrote the *Daily Telegraph* Diplomatic Correspondent (November 3)—the proposals, we may remark, which had been rejected by the United Nations. 'The Suez Canal cannot, and must not, be solely the concern of the Egyptian Government. That is what all this has been about', said Defence Minister Anthony Head in the House of Commons (November 8). 'Anything short of the complete occupation of the Suez Canal may leave our

cause a long way from victory . . . the United Nations force must not be allowed to withdraw before a long-term settlement is reached, both of the Suez Canal affair on the lines of the original 18-nation scheme and of the future of Israel' (*Sunday Times* leading article, November 11). Both the newspapers quoted here are particularly faithful echoes of the diehard Tories 'running' Eden.

Risk world war for the sake of the Suez Canal shares, someone may ask? No—and that is where the wider view of the world situation comes in. Risk world war in a desperate throw to smash Egypt—an important member of one of the great peace-columns threatening world imperialism! That purpose can be read, thinly veiled, in the outraged outcries in the Tory press after the cease-fire had been forced on Eden—by a threatened split in the Cabinet, according to widely varied sources of information (November 6). 'How to stabilise the Middle East: the longer that is delayed, the more dangerous will the situation become' cries the *Daily Telegraph* (November 9). Dangerous to whom? Not to the Middle East, but to those foreign octopuses who have drained it for so long. 'The plaudits of all Asia are ringing in Colonel Nasser's ears', laments the *Sunday Times* (November 11). All Asia! True, and all Africa too, as United Nations voting showed: in fact, all the peoples recently 'freed from colonial or semi-colonial dependence'—or hoping soon to be freed.

How was the cease-fire forced on Eden, though?

It was not by the votes of the United Nations alone—64 to 5, with 6 abstentions, appealing on November 2 to Britain and France to stop using force: 59 to 5, with 12 abstentions, renewing the appeal two days later: 57 to 0, with 19 abstentions, resolving to set up an international police force, also on November 4. Even at that late hour, after four days' unhindered bombardment of Egypt, the British and French Governments showed what they thought of these appeals. Almost at the very hour, 5 a.m. on November 5, when they were asked by the United Nations Secretary-General to cease their attacks, they began dropping their parachutists instead! Moreover, at times like the present serious Socialists need to be reminded of the class realities behind the United Nations, as beyond doubt they are present in the minds of the warmongering imperialists of Downing Street.

At one pole of the United Nations is the group of Socialist countries, with the U.S.S.R. in the lead—'the real enemy', as the *Daily Express*, the *Economist* and the *Daily Telegraph* have assured us in touching unison. They represent one column of the peace

movement. Then there are the 26 countries of the Afro-Asian bloc—countries whose social order varies from bourgeois democracy to feudal autocracy, but which in these times are determined not to allow the heel of imperialism on their necks again, for reasons we all know. At the opposite pole is the United States, with its client dictatorships and kept men in some Latin American countries. Eden well knows that the fury of its moneykings, militarists and politicians is due, not to ‘unprovoked aggression’ (they committed it themselves in Guatemala only the other day) or in ‘contempt for international law’ (they have been breaking it every day for years in their backing of the puppet Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan against the real government of China), but to the fact that they were outsmarted in their own ambitions to manoeuvre Egypt into becoming their loyal stooge—as they did with Iran and Turkey. Thus in the large majority of the United Nations Anglo-French imperialism sees either its direct opponents in the struggle to drive back one or other of the two victoriously advancing peace columns—or its rival. The rest are the smaller capitalist countries who, in any conflict between the Great Powers, have always suffered heavily, or know that they will do so in a third world war—or they are the other countries with colonial empires of their own, Belgium and Holland, Portugal and Spain, who alone may be expected to stand with their friends the bigger pirates at this juncture.

When British and French imperialism took up the cudgels against ‘all Asia’, therefore, they were bound to discount beforehand the line-up against them by Lake Success.

Regrettable though it is to admit it, the same applies, as matters stand, to the unprecedented opposition which broke loose in Great Britain itself. The rise of militant and Socialist sentiment in the trade unions and the Labour Party, which has shown itself in the mounting strike wave during 1956, at the T.U.C. and at the Labour Party Conference, was given full rein in the House of Commons debates, and responded with an avalanche of protest meetings, petitions and resolutions. It drew after it a considerable section of the bourgeoisie itself, as the quite unprecedented outbreak of political dissension in the Universities, Churches and cultural bodies revealed. The giant Labour Party demonstration in London on Sunday, November 4, for ‘Law, Not War’, opened the eyes of many till then unseeing: not least so, by the conduct of the mounted police in attacking the crowds—a feature which, when the militant rank-and-file had complained of it on previous occasions (for example, under the Labour Government) had only aroused disbelief-

ing or cynical contempt among many M.P.s and good-mannered citizens. Britain, certainly, has seethed with opposition, this November, in a way not known since the years 1942-3, of the struggle for the Second Front.

Yet the opposition was hamstrung from the start. From the rank and file the demand for strike action was rising: on November 1, a feature article in the *Daily Herald* heavily underlined Robert Smillie's call when war on Republican Turkey (then not sold to the U.S.A.) was threatening—'anything that organised Labour can do by any means in its power should be done in order to stop this new war'. But then the hammer came down from the National Council of Labour: no strikes for political ends, no demand for action outside Parliament to force the Tory Government to resign. This was followed up by Gaitskell with his memorable appeal—to the Tories: to find some other Tory Prime Minister! As though the Devil would smell sweeter were his name Beelzebub.

Why this strait-jacket on the people? Respect for the Constitution (so scantily respected by the Tories when it suits them)? Yes, but more than that. If you can promote strikes against imperialist aggression, what of Malaya, of British Guiana, of Cyprus? What of the next Labour Government's freedom to defend imperialism? The battle for a Socialist foreign policy has not yet been won in the Labour Party and the trade unions: and that showed itself in Britain in November, 1956, in spite of the wonderful and heartening protests against the attack on Egypt.

What then did turn the scale? On this there is a remarkable consensus of opinion, pointing to the Soviet Notes to Britain and France, Israel and the U.S.A., of November 5. It warned them that the Anglo-French unprovoked war on Egypt—'for the purpose of restoring the regime of colonial slavery' in the Near and Middle East—might spread to other countries and become a third world war. It asked Britain and France how they would like it if, in their turn, they too were attacked by States more powerful than themselves—say, with the use of rocket weapons. It declared that the U.S.S.R. was prepared for the use of naval and air forces, together with the U.S.A. and other United Nations members, to stop aggression, adding: 'We are filled with the determination to crush aggressors and restore peace in the East through the use of force'.

On November 6 *The Times* said it would be 'rash to write it (the Soviet Note) off simply as bluster'. That evening Eden announced the cease-fire. Next morning the *Manchester Guardian* thought it 'highly probable' that the Note had 'some connection' with the

change of policy: the *Daily Telegraph* admitted it 'must have carried considerable weight with the Cabinet': and the *Daily Herald* called it 'the final blow'. The *Economist* (November 10) called it the 'decisive new development . . . which it was possible neither to accept with a good grace nor to ignore with safety'. By that time Nehru had told the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress that Bulganin's warning had been 'the most decisive factor' leading to the cease-fire (November 9). Earlier still this opinion had been widely expressed in all other countries—Arab countries like Jordan, where Parliament on November 8 passed a vote of thanks to the U.S.S.R.: the U.S.A.: even in France itself, where it came from Mendès-France, no friend of the Soviet Union.

At the time of writing, there is still no certainty that the conditions of the cease-fire accepted by Eden—withdrawal of Anglo-French invading force—are to be observed. There is still the problem of how to return to balance and normality among the Great Powers—without which normal relations in the Middle East can never be established. Three months ago it was pointed out in these columns that Eden had completely ignored the pledge to co-operate with the U.S.S.R. on this very question, embodied in the Anglo-Soviet Declaration of London on April 27. He should be reminded of this.

The Swiss Government on November 6 offered a further way—in its invitation to the Big Four who held the Summit Conference of July, 1955, to meet with India on Swiss territory, to save peace and avert a third world war, 'with all its tragic consequences'—a threat which 'is weighing on mankind'. India and the Soviet Union accepted the proposal: France spoke of her 'very great interest' in it (November 9): Eden said, the same day, that he would 'go anywhere and meet anybody'. Only Eisenhower rejected it for the time being—a salutary reminder that declarations of principle, coming from imperialist statesmen, have to be examined for the class interests behind them. In the light of matters mentioned earlier, it is not difficult to divine that the spokesman of Wall Street wants to see the British and French troops safely out of Suez first, before beginning to bargain.

Yet for the working class the Swiss proposal offers very great advantages: such a meeting would impose the obligation to return to methods of negotiation—particularly those laid down by the United Nations on October 14—and that in itself would be a great gain for the world.

The invasion of Egypt and its consequences can be turned to the advantage of the working people in this and all other countries, indeed, if the British Labour movement—with its exceptional power—recognises the crime for what it has been: the first great armed attempt of British and French finance-capital (let us hope unsuccessful) to drive back and defeat *one* of the two camps which, in their growth, spell humanity's advance to peace and socialism.