

IN THE WORLD

MIDDLE EAST

Mr. Sadat comes to Jerusalem

Had the Begin regime known that Sadat would accept their invitation, they might not have invited him. Now Begin is on the spot: he must now show that he is willing to promote peace.

By David Mandel

JERUSALEM—In explaining his dramatic decision to seek peace by going to Jerusalem, Egyptian President Mohammed Anwar Al-Sadat explained that "70 percent of the problem is psychological." The 45-minute flight from Isma'iliya to Lod was indeed a giant step towards breaking down massive psychological barriers erected—on both sides—since Israel's creation in 1948. But following Sadat's and Prime Minister Begin's speeches before the Israeli parliament, it is clear that the remaining substance is much more than a mere 30 percent. For the Middle East conflict, perhaps the laws of arithmetic must be stretched.

President Sadat's speech was impressive, but its substance was the same as what he has been saying for some time now, more clearly than any Arab leader: the main Arab parties are willing to welcome Israel into the Middle East, to end completely the state of war, if—and only if—the territories occupied in 1967 are returned to Egypt and Syria, and a Palestinian state is established in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Sadat especially emphasized his longing for peace and for Israel's well-being, greeted the Israeli peace forces, and did not mention the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) by name. The omission perhaps reflected uncertainty about the PLO's support of Egypt's



Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Anwar Sadat at press conference in Jerusalem Nov. 21.

Wide World

peace campaign, hinting that at least a formal alternative might be found for negotiations. Sadat was also surely anxious not to provoke his hosts unnecessarily.

Begin's reply did not include mention of the PLO either. He did not restate Israel's total opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

But he did stress the Jewish people's "right" to the "land of Israel" (which to him, includes the West Bank).

Begin described the destruction of European Jewry in World War II and dwelt on prior Arab wars against Israel. The Israeli leader's only concrete suggestion was that unconditional negotiations

should begin, also nothing new.

A tremendous gap still exists between the two leaders' stated positions. Even if they and the other parties do actually begin to talk at Geneva, someone is going to have to do a lot of pushing and pulling to arrive at a settlement.

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Syria and PLO blast Sadat initiative

By Carole Collins

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's three-day visit to Israel and his address before the Israeli Knesset hit the Arab world like a bombshell. Although several Arab commentators have noted that Sadat's astounding diplomatic concession (recognition of the Israeli state) throws the onus on Menachem Begin's government to make comparable concessions, Arab reaction has mostly been outrage at an initiative that has fragmented the common negotiating front of the Arab states.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) believes Sadat has betrayed their cause by sacrificing the essence of the Palestinian stance—non-recognition of the legitimacy of the Israeli state, whose existence was based on a massive uprooting of the Palestinian people. A particularly bitter pill was Sadat's failure to mention the PLO by name in his Knesset speech. Several Arab sources saw this as a significant concession to the U.S. and Israel, neither of which recognizes the umbrella guerrilla group.

The PLO has initiated a series of meetings of its Central Council in Damascus to plan a strategy for consolidating a unified position among and with the five Arab countries that have condemned Sadat's visit: Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Libya and Southern Yemen.

Syrian Ambassador Mowaffak Allaf

told the United Nations General Assembly Nov. 22, "As a result of this diversionary tragicomedy, the Middle East has become a theater of the absurd. We are so confused that we are no longer able to tell an ally from an enemy. We don't know whether we should weep or laugh feel shame or pity." As Allaf spoke, the Egyptian ambassador walked out of the assembly hall in protest, the first time an Arab delegate protested another Arab delegate's speech in the history of the UN.

Perhaps as significant has been the muted and equivocal response from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf states that have been subsidizing the precarious Egyptian economy since the 1967 war. Although Saudi Arabia expressed strong reservations and serious concern about the implications of the visit, they have not denounced Sadat's recognition of Israel's legitimacy.

Sadat has received support most notably from Jordan, Oman, Morocco and Sudan (Sudanese President Jaafar Numeiry even went so far as to call Sadat's trip a big victory), all considered to be conservative forces aligned increasingly with Saudi and other reactionary forces in the Mideast.

In a shambles.

Sadat has been acting within the framework of the Vance/Dayan working paper, hammered out about a month ago. It pro-

posed procedures for a re-convened Geneva conference that would allow Israel to have bilateral negotiations with bordering Arab states (Jordan, Syria and Egypt) but only multilateral "discussions" on the question of Palestinian rights.

Syria and the PLO both want a unified Arab delegation with one negotiating strategy, something they tried to achieve at the Foreign Ministers' meeting a few weeks ago. Indeed, several sources speculate that Sadat's announcement of his willingness to go to Israel was made precisely to undermine this trend at the Foreign Ministers' meeting. (It was made on the very day of heavy Israeli raids into Lebanon.)

Sadat, it is speculated, was trying to pressure Syria and the PLO to make concessions on procedures so that Geneva would be more likely to occur and not founder on Israeli intransigence. That would leave Egypt with no change in its situation. The limits of Sadat's room for maneuver on this is his dependence on Arab funds for Egypt's survival. Although the Sadat government would probably be happy with a bilateral agreement with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. want nothing less than a full settlement of all outstanding issues, including Palestinian rights. Anything less would be destabilizing.

Sadat's move has left Arab strategy in shambles, with the PLO and Syria trying to consolidate a new unified front against

Egypt (difficult because of Egypt's paramount position and size in the Mideast). Sadat, in turn, must come up with some concrete concessions from the Begin government to match his diplomatic concession in recognizing Israel.

In the short run, Sadat has made it more difficult for Israel to launch another pre-emptive attack, but this could backfire and the probability of war increase without substantial concessions from the Israeli government. As one Arab commentator put it, "I will believe that when I see it."

The most bitter perspective, of course, is reflected by the Palestinians. As one said, "Can you imagine a Samora Machel, a Kaunda, flying to Salisbury and speaking before the all-white Parliament, reassuring them of their right to maintain white rule, to only make a few cosmetic changes and grant a 'mini-state' bantustan to the African population?"

The Israeli Communist party member who interrupted Begin's Knesset speech posed the question as Palestinians see it. After Begin had expressed his willingness to make peace with the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Jordanians and Lebanese, the member shouted: "And the Palestinians? Are you willing to make peace with the Palestinians?" Begin did not mention the Palestinians once in his whole speech. ■

Carole Collins has worked with MERIP.

GREAT BRITAIN

A manic-depressive British economy

By Mervyn Jones

LONDON—A POLITICAL COMMENTATOR HAS JUST compared the state of the British economy to that of a manic-depressive, and there's truth in the remark. A depressive winter may well lie ahead of us, and I hope IN THESE TIMES readers will bear in mind that emotion will exaggerate realities. First, however, to summarize the manic phase of the summer and early fall.

Over that period, the inherent ailments of the economy have been exactly what they were before. Growth is zero, productivity is poor, the export effort is feeble. Nevertheless...

The unexpectedly rapid output of North Sea oil—meeting one-third of our needs this year and likely to meet total needs in 1979—has cast a rosy glow over financial prospects.

The inflation rate has been slowed, though not so much as the government promised. There has even been a slight reduction in unemployment, but this may well prove temporary.

Foreign money has been pouring into Britain. This trend is the most irrational of all, especially since our interest rates (which supposedly attract speculative money) have been re-

duced. Bond-holders, who were behaving last spring like hotel guests panicked by a fire, abruptly wheeled round and started to behave like holiday crowds heading for the beaches. Foreign deposits, from a low of \$1.5 billion, have zoomed to \$10 billion.

The pound, which had seemed doomed to an inexorable fall, started to rise—so much so that the Bank of England, which sees a low parity as helpful to exports and tourism, tried to hold it down. When this bank policy was relaxed, the pound shot up six cents in a day to reach \$1.85. (The low in early 1977 had been \$1.60.)

Small businesses have been helped by reductions in domestic interest rates; home-buyers by cheaper mortgages; and wage and salary earners—especially those on fat salaries—by tax cuts.

No need for an election.

Despite the return to free collective bargaining and the unions' declared refusal to be bound by the government's 10 percent ceiling on wage increases, there were no early signs of big wage demands. Leyland auto workers voted to accept the wage structure sought by management; Ford workers voted to accept modest raises (these averaged 13 percent and thus exceeded the government limit, but not much was said about that.) Even the policemen, whose demands for a massive raise had been eagerly sponsored by the Tories as an issue likely to embarrass the government, settled for 10 percent and a subsequent inquiry into their grievances.

In this climate, Callaghan's government—on the verge of collapse in March—looked more solid every week. The pact with the Liberal party ensured a Commons majority, put a brake on such "socialist" plans as had been contemplated, and made Margaret Thatcher's

warnings of Bolshevik horrors sound increasingly hollow. Among unattached voters, approval grew. "I see no need for an election," Callaghan told the Commons calmly on Nov. 3. Commentators inclined to the view that when he does see the need, he can win it. In March the Tories had a 23 percent lead in opinion polls; by October Labour and Tories were neck-and-neck.

Thus, the Commons reassembled on Nov. 3 to hear a Queen's Speech—the traditional vehicle for an announcement of government policy—which exuded bland confidence. Parliament will be occupied mainly in putting through the devolution plans for Scotland and Wales, and the pact with the Liberals appears to guarantee the necessary majority. Other proposals in the speech (such as aid to decaying city centers, and interest-free loans to home-buyers to start them on a mortgage) will arouse little or no contention.

Yet, at this happy moment, cause for alarm had suddenly arisen. On Nov. 1 the miners had voted to embark on a challenge to the government's wages policy.

Miners reject agreement.

Back in July, the National Union of Mine-workers' conference had carried a resolution mandating the executive to press for wage rates almost double those now in force. The executive majority, headed by president Joe Gormley, disliked this instruction and—to the fury of the left-wingers—sidetracked it by coming to terms with the National Coal Board on a productivity scheme, which would have meant higher earnings only when validated by output.

In the NUM, which is a democratic union, such agreements have to be confirmed by ballot. The jump in earnings would in



fact have been substantial for most miners, so observers agreed in predicting a majority in favor. However, the scale was turned by the miners' firm objection to schemes which encourage greater effort at possible risk to health and safety, and promote disparities between one pit and another. The agreement was rejected by 110,000 votes to 87,000.

Gormley and the whole executive now agree that the original wage demand must be pressed. True, there is room for negotiation and something less than the full claim would be acceptable. But a mere 10 percent increase would be seen as utterly inadequate, and Gormley has promptly said that he wouldn't try to sell it to the miners.

The course of events now envisaged is an inadequate offer by the board; a rejection by the NUM; recommendation of a strike or at least an overtime ban (this alone has drastic effects); and a ballot on the strike or overtime ban, which under NUM rules must win a 55 percent majority to be put into effect.

If the miners do win a big raise, by strike action or by advance concession, three consequences are on the cards. Pressure for similar increases by other groups of workers could become irresistible, wrecking the whole 10 percent policy. Since the government is pledged not to finance an "excessive" pay increase, it would be passed on to the consumer in higher prices for coal and electricity, giving a thrust to inflation. And the Liberals could denounce the pact, bringing about the fall of the government and an immediate election. Liberal leader David Steel has greeted the news of the ballot with a warning that he expects the government to take a firm stand "against the small minority who wish to press their selfish demands."

Atmosphere darkens.

It's hard to believe that a resourceful politician like Callaghan will land himself helplessly in the kind of showdown that destroyed the Heath government in 1974. What plans he has to avert it, we shall see in coming weeks.

His most obvious strategy is to mount a persuasion campaign with hopes that 55 percent of miners won't vote for a strike. The miners' rooted loyalty to the Labour party is a strong card in his hand.

In 1974, the prospect that a strike would imperil a Tory government didn't worry them and indeed spurred them on. Bringing about the fall of a Labour government is another matter.

Callaghan's initial statement was certainly on "firm stand" lines. While disclaiming any wish for confrontation, he repeated his faith in the 10 percent ceiling and said: "It would not be right for any group to secure advantages through strength which others are ready and willing to forego."

Symbolically and also literally, the atmosphere darkened while he spoke. Power station workers (at the behest of a rank-and-file committee not backed by their union) are reducing output to win higher shift pay. Homes and streets are being plunged into darkness for three-hour periods. London traffic, impeded in any case by diversions caused by the Queen's procession to Parliament in her horse-drawn coach, was thrown into chaos when traffic lights went out.

It's a preview of what would happen in a miners' strike. Depression is in the wings. Candles have already become almost unobtainable or are fetching fancy prices. IN THESE TIMES' London correspondent, luckily, still has several boxes of candles left over from the 1974 strike. ■

JAMAICA

Assassination attempt on Jamaican left leader

Havana radio reported Nov. 14 that there have been two conspiracy attempts by Jamaican rightists and the Central Intelligence Agency against the life of former Secretary General of the ruling People's National Party of Jamaica, Dr. D. J. Duncan. An official communique by Michael Manley revealed that Duncan was targeted for assassination by arsenic poisoning.

The communique describes the results of a meeting between Prime Minister Manley, Foreign Minister Patterson, National Security Minister Munn, PNP Sec. Gen. Ralph Brown and Duncan himself. "I have learned with shock and horror

about the unequivocal medical evidence that has shed light on the attempt to poison Duncan with arsenic," said Manley.

The epidemiological investigation, which was conducted along with various analyses and tests of Duncan's urine samples by specialized laboratories reportedly established that poisoning occurred at the beginning of July and the middle of October.

According to Manley, "This outrage appears to be yet another indication of the desperate lengths to which the reactionary forces will go in their attempt to stop progressive change in Jamaica."

—John Judis



Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley with Cuban President Fidel Castro during National Hero Day in Jamaica, Oct. 18.