

IN THE WORLD

MIDEAST

Jordan's Hussein skeptical about Sadat initiative

By Geoffrey Aronson

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ANWAR el-Sadat's decision to visit Jerusalem was greeted coolly in Jordan. While sympathetic with Sadat's desire for peace and supportive of Sadat's pro-Western orientation, Jordan's King Hussein, like the Saudi's, is unhappy to "go it alone" in defiance of Arab attempts to devise an agreed-upon negotiating strategy.

Hussein has been very busy in the past weeks shuttling among Arab capitals, trying to mend Arab fences in the hope of attaining such a consensus. He has met not only with Arab leaders but also with President Carter and the Shah of Iran, whose nation is the principal anti-communist anti-radical bulwark on the eastern Middle East front and who is taking an active interest in promoting a successful resolution of the current Egyptian-Israeli talks.

Many are critical of Sadat for not having developed a "reasoned strategy" for the negotiations with Israel, beyond the initial dramatic visit to Jerusalem. "His are the actions of a visionary, not a statesman," noted Abdel Azziz Hay Ahmed, who was deported from the West Bank to Jordan proper in March 1976 after having announced his candidacy for mayor of Al Bireh. "We, unlike Sadat, know the Israelis well from the Occupation. Israel is not ready to withdraw from all the occupied territories."

Sadat's motives are praised by some, suspected by others. Fears that he will disengage Egyptian demands from Arab demands, enabling the achievement of less than a comprehensive settlement are expressed openly. With Palestinians forming a majority in Jordan and with the bitter memories of the Black September civil war still fresh, Jordan has no desire to see Egypt conclude a separate agreement that would leave the Palestinians question festering. They also don't want to see the eastern Arab states isolated. "We are hoping that Sadat sticks to his statements demanding satisfaction of Arab demands," noted a source in the Foreign Minister's office. "If he does sign an agreement detrimental to the Arabs, this will in no way aid progress to a just peace in the area," he added.

"He'll be burned," predicted another.

Garantees wanted.

A separate Egyptian-Israeli agreement on the Sinai would signal the failure of the American-backed, moderate Arab preference for a negotiated comprehensive settlement and would strengthen the legitimacy of rejectionist Arab sentiments whose long-standing belief in Israeli intransigence would be vindicated. Commented Maher Irshaid, a member of the Jordanian parliament, "It is becoming harder for moderates to speak up, even more difficult than three months ago. I am afraid that if 1978-79 does not show any real progress, the moderates will disappear—they will be silenced and a new wave of radicalism will move into the Middle East."

The prospect of the rise of an anti-American tide in the Arab world is a subject of great concern to Jordanian capitalists, entrepreneurs, and members of the Hashemite regime, whose allegiance to the West would make them targets of a radicalized Arab world.

King Hussein wants the talks between Sadat and Begin to succeed, but he doubts from Jordan's experience that Israel will give up its occupied territories, and he doesn't want to be seen as a traitor in some Arab capitals.

An important reason for Jordanian unwillingness to get involved in the negotiations is the improbability of Israel even acceding to Jordanian demands—Israeli withdrawal and reestablishment of Arab, not necessarily Palestinian, sovereignty over the West Bank. Jordan has unsuccessfully attempted to reach agreement with Israel throughout the past decade. The Begin plan changes none of this.

"Hussein wants guarantees. He does not want to be seen as a traitor. If he believed that Israel would actually withdraw, then he would reassess the idea of participation," one Jordanian journalist said.

A "more mature partnership."

Jordanian reluctance to participate in the talks is also affected by other considera-



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tions. "It must be remembered," pointed out Hanna Nassir, president of Beirzeit University on the West Bank, who was deported two years ago, "that formally Jordan isn't even in the picture." The Rabat decision removed Jordan from deliberations concerning the West Bank by recognizing the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

In the ten years of Israeli occupation, Palestinian national consciousness, inspired and directed by the PLO, has become a political fact in the Occupied Territories. Any attempt to reimpose Jordanian authority by force or to exclude the PLO from the process of self-determination would be an expensive and politically disruptive endeavor.

The Royal Family is aware of this. Crown Prince Hassan and the Queen Mother are known to be adamantly opposed to any reestablishment of Jordanian authority on the West Bank under any conditions. "The current Israeli plan," explained a source in the Prime Minister's office, "would only put Hussein into the position of policeman on the West Bank whose role would be to assure Palestinian passivity."

It is clear, however, that in spite of internal opposition and international recognition of the PLO as the Arab sovereign in Palestinian affairs, Hussein wants to return to his former position as King of Jerusalem. Questions of pride and dignity aside, the West Bank was once the agri-

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Sadat jails noted Egyptian poet

By Bert Johanson

ANWAR EL-SADAT WAS UNABLE to embark upon his "historic mission" to Jerusalem without a crack-down on dissenters. Dozens of Palestinians were deported from Egypt, while security police imprisoned hundreds of Egyptians opposed to Sadat's policies. Prominent among those imprisoned is the well-known colloquial poet Ahmed Fouad Negm.

Negm is known primarily for his collaboration with the blind singer Sheikh Imam Issa. Together Negm and Sheikh Imam have been closely identified with the workers and student movement that emerged following the defeat of the Nasserist regime in the June War of 1967; their songs and poems have been labeled "the conscience and voice of the Egyptian masses."

Negm's colloquial poetry, unlike the poetry of "classical" or literary Arabic, is easily understood by the Egyptian people, and is in the tradition of earlier poets who were active in the national struggle against the British occupation. Sheikh Imam, schooled in the singing of traditional Islamic chants, accompanies himself on the oud (the oriental lute), unlike most officially-sanctioned Egyptian popu-

lar singers, who are backed by bands playing in a "westernized" Arabic style.

More than 200 of their songs deal with the everyday life of the workers and peasants, the Palestinian resistance, the decadence of the Egyptian and Arab ruling classes, Pablo Neruda, and the peoples of Indochina. Their songs cannot pass the all-powerful Egyptian censor-general, and have never been heard on record, radio or television. But the popularity of their songs spreads steadily by word of mouth and smuggled cassette tapes.

Eventually the government tried to buy off Negm and Sheikh Imam, offering them regular radio and television shows if they would only produce "acceptable" songs. Negm and Sheikh Imam refused and continue to live in poverty. They have been jailed on an almost annual basis. (Recently, however, the Sadat regime has not jailed Sheikh Imam, for fear that the poor prison conditions combined with his advanced age might kill him and make him a martyr of the movement.)

Negm was previously arrested on Jan. 22, 1977 and charged with inspiring the January uprising against Sadat's cancellation of food subsidies. He was held eight months without trial. Released on Sept. 4, he was imprisoned again on Nov. 16 along with his wife. In a letter smuggled out of

Egypt, Negm details the awful conditions at Tora prison, typical of the conditions under which all Egyptian political prisoners are held:

We are...living four to a cell of two-by-three meters, without ventilation or daylight. These cells are a haven for rats and cockroaches and all kinds of insects. We are deprived of all medical care, are suffering from malnutrition, and are denied any contact with the outside world—no radios or newspapers. We are also prevented from seeing our lawyers and families, although we have been under arrest for varying lengths of time. They close these graves on us 21 hours a day. We face torture and humiliation at the hands of the prison manager who is one of the well-known princes of torture in Egypt.

Some time in December Negm and the 20 other political prisoners at Tora prison went on a hunger strike in protest over these conditions. They have called on those concerned with human rights to protest the Egyptian government's treatment of its political prisoners and to demand their immediate release.

Bert Johanson is a Washington-based writer on Middle East affairs. Thanks to MERIP for a copy of Negm's letter and background on Negm and Sheikh Imam.

SPAIN

Spanish women suffer setbacks

By Amy Schwartz

IN POST-FRANCO SPAIN, DESPITE certain democratic reforms and an active women's movement, there still exists discriminatory legislation against women. Under Spanish law, all matters involving the family are vested in the male. It is illegal for a woman to use contraceptives. Abortions are illegal. Prostitutes and women accused of adultery receive long jail sentences. It is because of these barbaric laws that *Amnestia per la Dona*, Amnesty for Women, has become a vital part of the women's movement in Spain.

The Spanish Cortes, in its last general session, rejected a bill that would have allowed amnesty for women and men jailed for adultery and cohabitation. Men must be accused of cohabitation to be considered adulterers. The bill would also have allowed the use and distribution of contraceptives and legalized abortion.

Despite such setbacks, women's demands are slowly gaining recognition.

In the June 15 elections most of the participating parties included women's issues in their campaign promises; 52 percent of the vote was at stake. In fall 1977 the Ministry of Culture suggested forming a sub-secretariat on the condition of women—recognition of a growing political movement.

About 2,000 people turned out for a march in December under the slogan, Amnesty for Women. Held in Barcelona, it was followed by several days of meetings by the participants.

These developments have caused public opinion to shift in favor of the need to change laws that prohibit divorce, abortion and contraceptives. A poll by a

major weekly magazine showed an increase of about 10 percent from 1976-77 in the number of people advocating legalization of divorce and de-penalization of abortion and the distribution of contraceptives.

Six years for adultery.

Under Spanish law it is a crime to abort; both the woman who undergoes the operation and the abortionist are subject to jail sentences of up to six years. Despite this law and social and religious taboos on abortion, there are many clandestine abortions—as many as natural births (400,000) occur each year, all under conditions that are dangerous and fatal for many women.

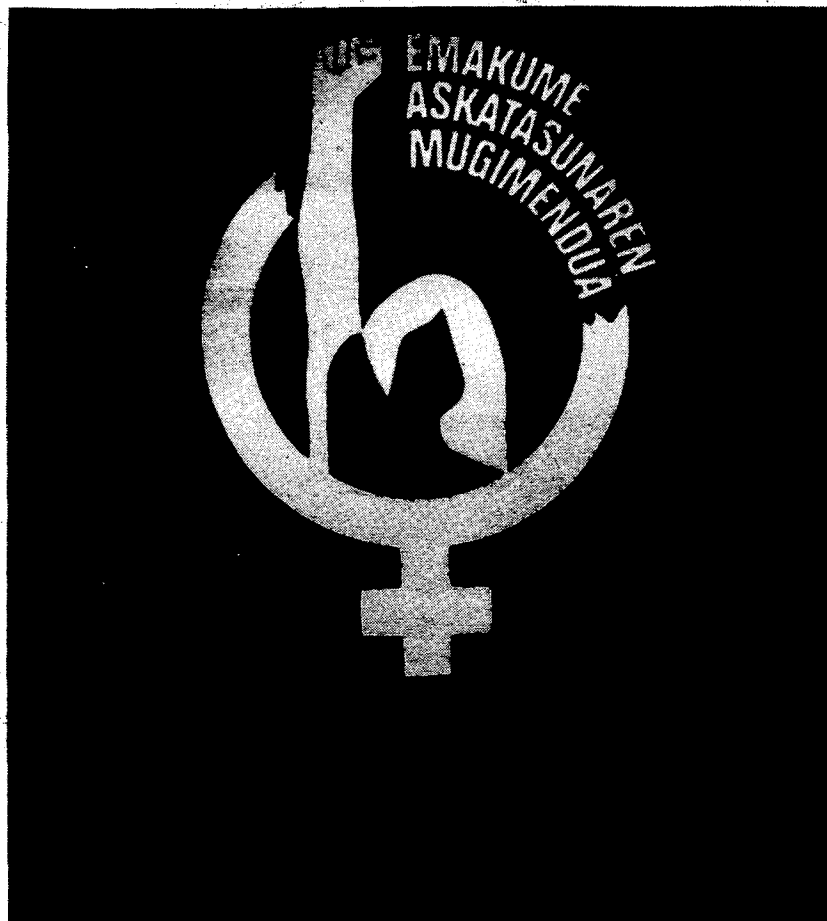
Condoms are sold freely, as one of their functions is to protect men from venereal disease. But only men can legally use them.

In Catholic Spain divorce is not allowed. Legal separation is expensive and difficult to obtain. Within marriage, the husband has "paternal authority"—including rights over common property, the salaries of both parties and custody of any children.

Also, according to the Spanish code, a wife can be accused of adultery and sentenced to six years in jail for having extramarital sex—even after a couple is legally separated.

For a man to be accused of adultery it must be proven that he knew that his consort was married. Only the wronged husband can bring charges.

Amnesty for Women demands that women held in prison for "women's crimes" be released. An Oct. 14 Amnesty law pardoned only those who could prove that their "crimes" were specifically related to one of the movements for civil rights or autonomy in Spain.



The slogan, "Amnesty for Women," has become a focus for the women's movement.

"Social prisoners" (as "common" prisoners are called), among them many women, have been left jailed. The result has been repeated prison uprisings, hunger strikes, and self-mutilation: the prisoners' desperate cries for some sort of recognition.

Agreement not implemented.

The Moncloa Pact has served to confuse the picture. Billed as a step towards true democracy, this agreement signed by Suarez and political party leaders, has been variously interpreted by the press and its signers, and arbitrarily implemented by the government.

The Moncloa Pact promised among other reforms the de-penalization of adultery. A bill to this effect has been presented by the Council of Ministers. It must still go through the slow process of approval by the Cortes.

Also agreed on in the Moncloa Pact was the de-penalization of the use and distribution of contraceptives; but so far not even a bill has been presented, although newspaper headlines played up the point.

Divorce is supposedly part of the new Constitution—Spain is governed right now without one—but it actually isn't even mentioned by name in the draft recently published. Instead, it states that civil law will regulate "separation and dissolution" of marriage. The Constitution of the Second Republic, it is interesting to note, stated clearly that divorce could be obtained through mutual agreement.

Proposed divorce legislation calls for five years of separation before a divorce can be granted. This stipulated requirement for previous separation is longer than any other in the world.

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ITALY

A tired women's organization gets new life

By Jane Hilowitz

ROME

ON JAN. 19-22 2,000 ITALIAN women, delegates from all over Italy, held a conference here. It was the tenth conference of the Union of Italian Women (UDI) but the first in which women of all walks of life reached agreement on an autonomous program that may make them into a political force to be reckoned with in Italian society. Catholics and feminists, housewives and Communist party militants were unanimous about the kind of organization they want and the role they want to play in their country.

Meeting under the slogan, "My conscience as a woman united in a great organized movement to change our lives," the women made clear that they want a mass organization that will promote the interests of *all* women as democratically as possible.

UDI was formerly closely tied to the Italian Communist party. Today, UDI's members and delegates, even the left-wing militants, reject any party affiliation for their organization. They feel that the strength of a women's movement lies in its autonomy in a male-dominated society (although some Catholics objected to the word *maschilista* and the mention of male domination in the concluding statement).

UDI, which was created after the Second World War, used to be staid and bureaucratic—"a tired organization," in the words of one delegate. Now, although the women on the podium were mainly in their 60s, three quarters of the delegates were under 40 and many were very young. In a nation known for its fashionable

dress, there were few very elegant women. And although some members of feminist groups stood out with their long flowered skirts and bulky sweaters, by and large the sartorial sobriety of the conference—which was held in the *Palazzo dei Congressi* outside Rome—reflected the seriousness of the tasks to be accomplished. Women who showed up without delegate status or a press card were firmly turned away at the door.

Defense of working women.

For two days the delegates separated into 20 work groups, each of which discussed all the themes of the conference. They then met in plenary session to vote on a common platform. It was easy to agree on some themes: support for abortion, which is yet to be made legal in Italy; the need for maternity and child clinics; the need for day care; and a law to guarantee the autonomy of women, including minors, in making decisions that affect their own lives (only in 1975 has initial legal progress been made toward guaranteeing the rights of women).

Conference delegates also took a position about working women. "We reject the idea," they stated in their concluding document, "that women entering the work force are taking jobs away from men. On the contrary, women in the work force are a prerequisite for the further development of work itself and a transformation of the quality of work."

Laws on equality and job training programs for women and so forth are seen as weapons to increase the clout of the women's movement; and this clout will also be felt in the movement's relation to the institutions of Italian society. There will be no rigid acceptance or rejection of an

institution, but instead a constructive application of pressure.

Most conference members see the oppression of women as a specific form of the oppression of people by people, and women's emancipation implies not simply a search for equality with men but instead a profound transformation of the whole society. What is usually referred to as "the women's question" has, therefore, potentially revolutionary significance. Yet some conference delegates were troubled about the meaning of "emancipation" as opposed to "liberation," and also about how to effect the needed transition from individual states of oppression to the acquisition of social consciousness. Obviously these issues are bound to crop up again.

A mass organization.

Another difficult theme, one discussed at length in the plenary session, was whether UDI's statutes should permit women who already hold positions in political parties or government to hold office in UDI. Some delegates feared for UDI's newly gained autonomy if politically affiliated women were allowed on the national committee. By a narrow margin, though, the collaboration of all women on all levels of the organization, and hence the intense circulation and utilization of different ideas and experience, was held to be more important than any threat to UDI's freedom of action.

There was long discussion, too, about the relation between the national committee and the membership. Fifty new members were elected to the national committee during the conference, and another 130 will be chosen in provincial conferences throughout Italy by March 8. But

should the national committee "coordinate and decide" UDI's policy or merely "coordinate and direct" it? Self-consciously striving for direct democracy, the delegates were perplexed by this issue.

What now? Given Italy's experience of mass-based organization, and especially the Communist party, Italian women already know what a broadly based movement is like. This makes UDI's work easier. Whether it succeeds will depend on how well it gives expression to what all women have in common, and on how well it gives a political voice to all those women in Italy who have never had one. What happens in the provincial congresses between now and March 8 should be fairly indicative.

But Italy is in the midst of a grave economic and political crisis, a crisis not just of political leadership but of the basic institutions of the society. UDI delegates fear that the uncertainty of the situation, and the malfunctioning of democratic and representative institutions, may restrict the space in which a women's movement can thrive. They are even afraid that, because of the crisis, the degree of participation of Italian women have already gained in the past will be affected negatively.

Women who believe in the possibilities of UDI and who want to construct a strong women's movement must therefore work doubly hard. They have to work to expand as a mass-based, autonomous organization, and at the same time they have to avoid being backed into an overly defensive posture. Clearly UDI, searching for its specific political identity, will not find it overnight.

Jane Hilowitz attended the UDI conference in Rome. She recently returned to the U.S.