

grave and peculiar problem that most of the vital rice trade and other important sectors of the southern economy are in the hands of the Chinese.

### **Freedom to Move**

The division of their country leaves a sense of deep frustration in the minds of the Vietnamese. It is sometimes forgotten in the West that this country is not simply a geographical expression divided into Communist and non-Communist zones. Vietnam as a whole emerged two years ago from an eight-year war against France; and nationalism, rather than anti-Communism, is its motive power. "After years of struggle we are still not really independent," many Vietnamese say. "If only our country were reunited, it could be one of the leading countries of Southeast Asia, with its population of twenty-five million. It would have a chance of being independent, like Yugoslavia, of both blocs. Instead of which we are in the grasp of the rival powers, and completely dependent on their policies, in which we often have little interest."

The political and economic sides of unification are not the only ones. There is also a sad personal side. A few days ago my Vietnamese tailor came to me with tears in his eyes and asked me whether there was anything I could do to get his two daughters down from the north. He had not seen them for more than two years. His is one of innumerable families that are divided by the exigencies of world politics. The 17th parallel divides families and friends, and prevents people from visiting vast areas of their own homeland.

**W**HAT depresses the Vietnamese most is that the West has no plan for reunification and the only hope for it, which was the Geneva Agreement, seems now to have been abandoned. The South Vietnamese people are nationalists first and anti-Communists second. They want American aid, and are grateful for it, but they also want independence—economic as well as political. Above all, they want to be able to move freely from one part of their country to another.

## ***Syria: The Order Of the Ba'ath***

**RAY ALAN**

**S**YRIANS watched Washington's policymaking mountain laboring to bring forth its mouse with keener interest than most other Middle Eastern peoples. The Eisenhower Doctrine might well be too nebulous to affect such earthy matters as Suez, the future of Middle Eastern oil installations, and Arab-Israeli coexistence; but since its proclaimed purpose was to discourage the expansion of international Communism it was expected to have some kind of relevance to the situation in Syria. What would happen if Syrian Communist Party chief Khaled Bakdash, now one of the most influential men in the country, should achieve his declared aim of establishing "first a Popular Front, then a People's Democracy?" How would the United States react to an armed clash between a pro-Soviet Syria and Israel or Iraq? Would it really be indifferent to the fusion of Syria and Jordan, and the consequent establishment of Soviet arms and political influence athwart the American-owned TAPline and at the head of the Red Sea?

As the impression took hold that Washington was more interested in evading such questions than in answering them, the somewhat apprehensive hostility with which Syrian political circles had greeted the Doctrine's advance publicity faded into mere contempt. Fellow-traveling members of the Syrian "socialist" hierarchy laughed approvingly when Syrian Foreign Minister Salah Bitar told them in the course of a policy discussion: "I have informed the Americans that Syria will be willing to adopt an attitude sympathetic to their anti-Communist aspirations when they take the necessary steps to satisfy our national aspirations."

Syria's main concern in the last few years has been more to avoid annexation by Iraq than to strike out in pursuit of ambitions of its own. But Syrian self-confidence has

recently been boosted by Soviet assurances of what Damascus officials call "positive support" as well as by American warnings to Turkey and Iraq against interference in Syrian affairs. And on the tongues of Foreign Minister Bitar and Syrians of his persuasion, the phrase "national aspirations" is a euphemism for the regional aspirations of Hesb el-Ba'ath—the Socialist Resurrectionist Party, which dominates the Syrian political scene. It is also becoming influential in Jordan (Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdullah Rimawi is a Ba'ath stalwart), and is building up clandestine contacts inside Iraq with a view to replacing Premier Nuri es-Said by an anti-western National Front. The Ba'ath is the only organized doctrinaire party of any significance in the Arab Middle East. Far more than President Nasser's bogus "Liberation Movement," it is the ideological pacemaker of politically conscious Arabs throughout the Levant. Unfortunately, its own pace is being set with increasing frequency by the Communists.

### **Aleppo and Damascus**

The end of the French mandate over Syria in 1944 left effective power in the grip of an alliance of near-feudal landowners and mercantile interests whose political instrument was the National Bloc. Its only competitor was the People's Party, which represented somewhat fewer landlords and rather more merchants as well as the owners of Syria's few industries. All either group had to offer was nationalistic slogans carried over from their agitation against the French and a degree of corruption and nepotism surpassed only in neighboring Lebanon.

The stronghold of the People's Party was Aleppo in northern Syria, which is more populous and commercially more important than the capital, Damascus. No two cities could be more dissimilar or more

jealous of one another. Damascus is a lush, easygoing oasis town, built over rippling streams and fountains, its streets and bazaars architecturally undistinguished. Its people are mercurial, passionately dedicated to the fad of the hour and no less ardently attracted to whatever displaces it. Aleppo is arid, dusty, austere, built of a superb honey-colored stone more beautiful even than that of Jerusalem, and dominated by the dramatic citadel erected by the son of Saladin. Its miles of vaulted bazaars are redolent of *The Thousand and One Nights*; its people are variegated—Anatolian, Kurdish, and Armenian as much as Arab—and neither so fickle nor so thriftless as the Damascenes.

For centuries Aleppo was the major commercial link between the Mediterranean at Alexandretta (Iskenderun) and Mesopotamia and points east. But in an independent Syria the city found itself cut off from both its Mediterranean outlet (Alexandretta was annexed by the Turks in 1939) and its Mesopotamian hinterland, now the Kingdom of Iraq. Its economy slumped, and even while Damascus was celebrating the evacuation of British and French troops, voices could be heard in Aleppo advocating a variety of panaceas, some of them secessionist. A plan for a customs union with Iraq gained most support, especially in the People's Party; and soon the idea of political union, too, was being canvassed.

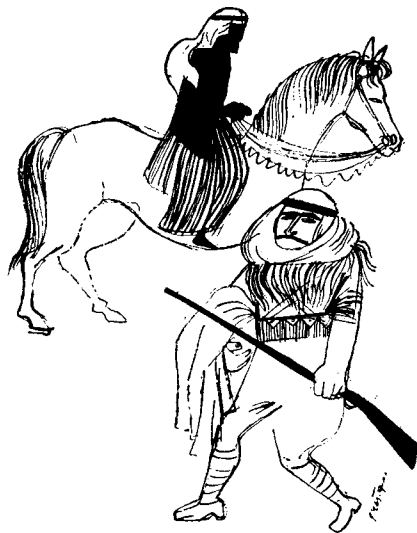
### Some Early Coups

Colonel Husni es-Zaim's *coup d'état* of March, 1949, swept the National Bloc from office and brought onto the political scene the rising reform-minded urban middle class, from which the bulk of the young Syrian Army's officers and noncoms had been recruited. The enthusiasm the revolt evoked took even Zaim by surprise; after introducing a few minor reforms he was clearly at a loss to know how to capitalize on it. In August, 1949, he was overthrown and killed by a counter-coup, but three months later the pendulum swung back in favor of reform with the first Shishekly coup.

Middle-class intellectuals and army officers now began to search for a political philosopher's stone. It was

not sufficient, they realized, merely to acquire power: It was essential to know what to do with it.

Demand created supply, and a whole bazaar of small fascist and Communist groups was soon peddling political blueprints. Most called themselves "socialist," but only two—Akram Haurani's Arab Socialist Party, and a coterie of intellectuals headed by Michel Aflaq—went into business with anything resembling western ideals. The remainder used the "socialist" in the Hitlerian "National Socialist" sense. This was to some extent the fault of the British Labour government of 1945-1950, whose officials not only supported the corrupt oligarchies in every Arab state but had actually



approved the suppression of nascent reformist movements in Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan. Consequently democratic socialism was discredited, and the western-educated intellectuals who had once advocated it were, from 1950 on, the West's most vituperative critics.

### The Rise of Serraj

Yet another coup, the fifth in five years, exiled Shishekly in February, 1954, and made possible Syria's first genuinely free election. Haurani and Aflaq merged their groups, exchanged socialism for demagoguery, and launched the present Socialist Resurrectionist Party, which reached a working arrangement with the Communists and campaigned with strong military backing. Sixteen "socialist" Deputies were elected. Only one Communist was returned—party chief

Bakdash—but five or six pro-Soviet independents and one Islamic "back-to-the-Koran" candidate were elected with Communist support.

Since then the Ba'ath "socialists" and their Communist allies have made continuous headway. A number of independent Deputies and members of smaller groups lost no time in gravitating toward them. Then the politically convenient murder of a popular officer, Lieutenant Colonel Adnan Malki, brother of one of Haurani's associates, afforded a pretext for the discovery of an "American-instigated" plot. In the last few weeks a clumsy Iraqi effort to embarrass the Syrian government by smuggling arms into the Jebel Druse has enabled the head of the Syrian Intelligence Service, Lieutenant Colonel Abdel Hamid Serraj, to uncover an even more spectacular plot involving a whole waxworks museum of horrors—the British military attaché, the British Foreign Office's Arabic-language broadcasting station, Nuri es-Saïd, Glubb Pasha, and the Israeli Army—together with Colonel Shishekly and forty-six other Syrian politicians and officers known to lack enthusiasm for the Hesb el-Ba'ath. They are now on trial.

IN THE SHORT RUN, at least, Colonel Serraj has proved a valuable asset to the Ba'ath. He controls not only the countrywide network of agents and informers built up by Shishekly but also a substantial secret budget fixed in Shishekly's day at \$7 million a year. All military appointments and promotions are subject to his veto, with the result that "socialist" sympathies have become a prerequisite of advancement. Serraj's influence—and that of the Ba'ath—is further strengthened by a leftist, anti-western indoctrination of officers and men.

Many Syrians, in the privacy of their homes, voice the suspicion that Serraj is using the Ba'ath for his personal ends. He is a brisk, bright-eyed young man of about thirty-four with a pleasant, open face and a quick mind, but only a superficial acquaintance with political and economic theory. Nevertheless, as a friend of Khaled Bakdash he is believed to have inspired the decision to purchase Soviet arms. Serraj has risen fast. Less than a year ago he

was a captain. He denies, with a display of surprised amusement, that he has any political ambitions, but Shishekly used to make the same disclaimer and did in fact allow the politicians more or less free rein for two years until events and their incompetence "forced" him to take over. Is Serraj's strategy the same?

### An Old Song

The Hesb el-Ba'ath still promises a modicum of land reform and state planning, but its spokesmen concentrate primarily on foreign affairs, a more fertile field for heroics. They advocate, of course, the destruction of Israel and the liquidation of the Baghdad Pact, the Hashemite régime in Iraq, and all British colonial enclaves and protectorates in the region. They demand the return of Alexandretta from Turkey; and they urge the creation of some kind of federation of Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and ultimately Palestine, in which oil installations, banks, and other foreign enterprises would be taken over by the government.

It was hoped, a Ba'ath leader told me, that Egypt too would join such a federation, though on the same footing as other states. (It was wrong to suppose that Syrian "socialists" were merely Egyptian agents or would accept Egyptian domination.) As for Lebanon, he thought the present "unrepresentative western clique" there would take to their heels the moment such a federation began to crystallize; the Lebanese people would then automatically come in, though if they wished to stay out there would be no coercion or interference in Lebanon's internal affairs. This assurance accounted oddly with recent incursions into Lebanon by Syrian Army "commandos" for the purpose of sabotaging oil installations and kidnaping Syrian political refugees.

I asked next what the Ba'ath movement proposed to do about the Saudi royal family. Was there no room for Saudi Arabia in the coming Arab federation?

One must be realistic, I was told. Political evolution in Saudi Arabia was a generation behind that in Syria and Egypt. The Saudis would undoubtedly pass away in their turn as Arabia evolved, but nothing could be gained by forcing matters. Aram-

co too could remain undisturbed so long as Saudi rule survived. To nationalize it under the Saudis would be meaningless. This led us to the question of America's attitude toward Arab "socialist" plans to redraw the map of the Middle East. Why, my informant asked, should America not help us? "Eisenhower is already dissociating himself as demonstratively as possible from Israel and Britain. Why not go all the way? In return for genuine American support the Arabs would certainly be willing to take the view that Aramco and Dhahran should be considered a strictly Saudi-American affair. What's the alternative? Ten more years or so of agitation, crisis, and pipeline sabotage, with the Arabs turning more and more toward Russia for support . . ."

It was an old song. I remembered the 1943 and 1946-1947 versions, when Britain was playing the male lead. "Help us get the French out and there will be an eternal bond between us." Then: "Help us drive the Jews into the sea and we'll overlook the Canal Zone and Aden." There was always one more task to perform.

### Some Well-laid Plans

The conviction of the principal defendants in the present Damascus treason trial (a foregone conclusion) is expected by competent Syrian observers to throw the country further left. The Ba'ath, its chief adversaries scattered, will almost certainly celebrate the occasion by demanding a bigger share of the portfolios in the present coalition Cabinet. (It already holds the key ones, Foreign Affairs and National Economy, with

a close ally, the independent Khaled el-Azm, in charge of defense.) As soon as possible it will demand a general election, in which it can expect to double its parliamentary representation.

The outcome would then, in all likelihood, be some form of Popular Front with Communist participation. Premier Sabri el-Assali—pro-Egyptian and bitterly anti-Iraqi and anti-British, but no "socialist"—would retire to the house he already has waiting for him in Lebanon. President Shukry al-Kuwatly, an old National Bloc man, would be persuaded to stand down in favor of Khaled el-Azm.

Khaled el-Azm, an old-school professional politician himself and a former director of the French-controlled Banque de Syrie, is an odd character to find in fellow-traveling company. But he is a personal friend of Akram Haurani's, has for years been consumed by an ardent ambition to be President, and has harbored a desire to get even with Shukry al-Kuwatly ever since September, 1954, when political associates of the latter hired a terrorist to throw a bomb at him.

But for all the Ba'ath's optimism, power could slip through its fingers even now. Syria's economic plight is severe. The army's sabotage of the pipeline deprived it of approximately a third of its revenue—and the government's "austerity" measures, in particular the raising of customs duties, have provoked wide protest. There is unrest in the Jebel Druse, where Colonel—then Lieutenant—Serraj is remembered for his part in Shishekly's brutal repression of the Druse minority just three years ago. Separatism is again being advocated in Aleppo.

THE ONLY good-humored Syrian comment I have heard or read to date on the recent trend of American policy toward the Middle East came from a People's Party leader, who said: "If the Americans really take on the job of sorting out the Middle East they will deserve everyone's sympathy. Even God Himself had difficulties with the region. Was it not the Middle East that drove Moses to despair, crucified Christ, and forced Mohammed to flee? Poor Mr. Dulles!"



## Eric Hoffer: Epigrammatist On the Waterfront

EUGENE BURDICK

ONE of the hungry millions of America in the 1930's was a man with big spatulate hands whose name was Eric Hoffer. He had just come from New York to Los Angeles and in the depths of the depression was wandering through Skid Row and slowly starving.

"When I left the family home in New York I was so innocent that I quite literally had never thought about the problem of earning food," Hoffer told me. "Then suddenly I was broke and hungry. After a day of hunger the world seemed much different. It seemed that all of life was a desperate enterprise by which people won food. I felt threatened, haunted, besieged. In the grip of such fear the imagination becomes dwarfed. One cannot think of even the most simple step."

After several days of hunger he was becoming lightheaded. He walked by a pet shop. Two pigeons were in the window. He watched them idly at first. Then he became aware that there was a pattern to their mincing and fluttering. He saw that the intricate, elaborate, and beautiful pattern was a form of love-making. When it ended Hoffer realized suddenly that for the first time in days he did not feel a pang of hunger. He had forgotten it totally.

"I realized very sharply that hunger was not a fearful or fundamental thing," he said. "It could disappear while I was merely watching the courtship of two pigeons. Hunger was something to be avoided, but it was not one of the great things."

He walked away from the pet shop and went into a restaurant and asked for a job washing dishes as if he had known all along that this was the most ancient and surest way of getting fed. He was hired. He washed

mountains of dishes, ate enormously, and never worried about food again.

Today Hoffer is a big barrel-chested man. His head is bald except for a dense white fringe of hair that circles his pate. It is impossible to describe him without suggesting a tonsured friar. But this is inaccurate, for Hoffer has a poised eagerness, a freshness, a ferocious curiosity that is curiously incompatible with deeply held faith. Although he now works at the relatively luxurious job of longshoreman on the San Francisco waterfront, his hands show the nicks and calluses of a lifetime of manual labor. One of his thumbs was ripped by a cargo hook several years ago and new skin was grafted on. The grafted skin is hairy and the thumb has a turred, swollen look.

Since the hungry days in Los Angeles Hoffer has become the author of two widely respected books in political theory, *The True Believer* and *The Passionate State of Mind*.

### A Rage of Self-Doubt

The subtitle of *The True Believer* is *Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, and this is precisely what the book is about. It opens with two acid quotations which, with remarkable economy, catch its spirit. The first of these is from Pascal's *Pensées*: "Man would fain be great and sees that he is little . . ." The second is from Genesis II: "And slime had they for mortar."

Hoffer believes that the bulk of us have, at the secret core of our mind, a desire for greatness and immortality and significance. This private expectation is wildly out of congruence with the public reality of ourselves. The forces of insignificance, irrelevance, and smallness assault us brutally, until in the end we



see the awful reality of our helplessness. For the majority of us there is a pang of frustration so sharp that we twist away from the dread fact and attempt to bury it under whatever social and personal inventions our imaginations can provide. Most individuals turn to hope in the future—and in the process become "true believers." The nature of hope is such that "hatred often speaks the language of hope."

This twisting away, this spasm of avoidance, is not only the germ of all totalitarian movements; it is also the starting point of much that we admire and respect. The man who is pursued, driven, and harassed by a sense of inadequacy can do valuable, interesting, and significant things. Patriotism, great religious movements, philanthropy, individual and social inventiveness are the work of true believers as surely as Communism and fascism are. Good is advanced by zealots and ideologists as surely as is evil. What is critical is to recognize that the original motivation is identical in both cases. In both a rage growing out of self-doubt is the beginning.

### Pursuers and Pursued

Both the promise and menace of passion in politics are caught in the first of the nearly three hundred aphorisms that make up *The Passionate State of Mind*:

"There is in most passions a shrinking away from ourselves. The passionate pursuer has all the earmarks of a fugitive.

"Passions usually have their roots in that which is blemished, crippled, incomplete and insecure within us. The passionate attitude is less a re-