

Sudan: General Strike Brings Down the Government

On April 6, the Sudanese army took power, ending 16 years of dictatorial rule by Marshall Numeiri. But it was a general strike organised by the trade unions which forced the Army to move against the regime. On March 27-28 spontaneous protests broke out against the removal of food subsidies. The security forces fired on the crowds, killing 8 demonstrators. Many more were wounded. The doctors launched a protest against the ill-treatment of victims in the hospitals. Then work stoppages began. Next the unions, led by the white collar ones such as the lawyers, doctors and teachers called for a strike. On April 3, the general strike in Khartoum was 80% effective. On April 5, the government rescinded the price rises on basic foods. On April 6, the Army took over.

The ousted Numeiri held power for so long by playing on internal divisions. Initially Numeiri had been prepared to negotiate with the particularist movement amongst the non-Muslim population in the South, granting a degree of local autonomy. This was ended in 1983. Also, originally, Numeiri came to power in alliance with the Communist Party. At this stage Numeiri also identified with the radical arab nationalism of Nasser's Egypt. Once established, however, Numeiri turned against his more radical allies in a bid for US economic aid. Sudan was to become a pillar of US influence in the Middle East and East Africa. However, Sudan's increased links with the west also resulted in a rising foreign debt. It was the IMF-dictated austerity measures which finally sparked the popular revolt which brought down the government.

Increasingly alienated from broad sections of the population, in 1983, Numeiri turned to the Islamic fundamentalists for support. He introduced the "Sharia" (Islamic law) and a range of barbaric punishments, eg. mutilations. The fundamentalists of the Muslim Brotherhood remain a powerful force, backed by a considerable financial organisation.

The fall of the Numeiri regime was followed by an explosion of political debate and trade union and political organisations: some 28 parties appeared in the first week. Under pressure from the masses, General Ad-Dahab's new military

junta has dismantled Numeiri's "security apparatuses": 3,400
functionaries were arrested and 30-40,000 informers dismiss-
ed. Daily, mass assemblies of 5-20,000 meet to debate their
situation.

But Sudan's economic problems remain. And at a political lev-
el, a number of forces threaten the gains that have been made
the Muslim Brotherhood, the Army, the bourgeois parties and
their foreign allies. The debate and experience on the left
in this period, however, will be very important. It is likely
to influence the socialist and workers movement and the move-
ments of national liberation in the Middle East for some time
to come.

(SALB correspondent, May 1985)

