

Progression of Arab Socialism in Mid-twentieth Century

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Abstract

As a Western ideology and offshoot of communism, the ideology of socialism could prevail in many places. It had a lot of adherents in several parts of the world. In the land of Arabs, socialist ideology grew parallel to communism as a protest against capitalism. After the first world war and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the highly educated middle classes of west Asia thought about the necessity of an ideological upheaval that could end the region's established ruling systems. Socialists called for political liberty and economic changes. They motivated Arabs to be united and acquire their own dignity from the flood of European influence. Social justice and Arab nationalism were the central themes of Arab socialism. There were very few political parties that supported socialism in the Middle East; the Ba'th party and Nasserist Movement were prominent. The ideology has become perished throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords: Ba'th party; United Arab Republic; Nasserism.

INTRODUCTION

The region of West Asia had witnessed plenty of ideological upheavals and influential rational movements throughout history, especially in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, educated middle classes rose and built new ideological platforms. The increased social problems, lack of political liberty, high inflation, and economic inequalities prompted many to move against the ruling family and join the aforementioned new platforms. The established system of ruling became apple discords. Socialists wanted a total change of community.

However, socialism is an ideology that is absolutely in contrast to Islamic theology; it could achieve an incontrovertible place in the history of influential thoughts in the middle east. How does it happen? The answer is simple. When rulers of the region became far away from the justice of Islamic politics

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and started to behave like autocrats, the public of Arabs compelled to depend on the ideology of the outer world and protested against them.

All Arabs have dreamt advent of political freedom after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but that was obstructed in the hands of ruling royal families.

They used their all means to remain on the throne, so all protests were suppressed. But, when powerful opponents gushed forth in mid-century, every ruling system was uprooted. A new one started to grow. Ba'th party of Syria and Nasserism of Egypt were two prominent such movements. Many Arabs influenced and joined in these parties, which had could make some meaningful progressions in society. But later, in the flood of intervention of the outer world, Arab socialism became blurred. Now it remains in Syria only.

The middle east could see the rise and fall of different ideological and rational movements within some past decades. When the Ottoman Empire started to decline in the nineteenth century, several regional empires began to be born. Besides decrease of high conservative supervision of Ottomans gave citizens a chance to adopt liberal ways. New political and economic theories born at the West influenced the Arabs. Some of them even preferred to absorb those theories through making new parties. Among such new political views, Socialism and Communism were prominent. Both of them could move plenty of Arabs to achieve political and social freedom, which was buried under the strictly established reign of the Arab ruling class for centuries.

However, socialism was an existing theory in ancient Greek times; as many scholars argue, it became a vivid theory after the rise of Communism in the West. Karl Marx and Frederic Engels wrote the Communist manifesto in 1848 and paved a new way for politics and economics. As a more liberty giving theory, communism influenced many East and West. Alongside Communism, Socialism also started to grow. As an offshoot of communism, and it included a loose approach to everything according to strict Communist theories, socialism could achieve a place to grow in different countries.

In the land of Arabs, Socialism began to grow after the First World War. It started as a protest against the established reign of the Arab ruling family, in which no citizen had a voice. Many Arabs struggled against those families and wanted

a more liberal political arena. Most of the protesters were acquainted with western politics and way of life. They argued to change the method of Arabian politics through reform in politics, society, independence, and Arab unity. Malcontents were mainly from civil servants, military, University students, and technicians of several companies. Labour unions and unemployed youth facilitated the way of stringent protests. Some politicians used these factors to make new parties that adopted Socialist theory and led the protest ruling family and every sign of colonialism. The Ba'th party of Syria and Nasserism in Egypt are two prominent of them.

The Ba'th party was made by two teachers of Damascus school, Named 'Michael Aflaq' and 'Salahusheen Al Bithar', in 1943. The Constitution of the Ba'th party, which was drafted in 1947 April, included many principles resembling classical Socialism of Europe. Mainly Constitution calls for Arab nationalism, redistribution of land, the Nationalisation of utilities and large industries, sweeping guarantees of wages, working conditions and old-age insurance, free medical care, and free compulsory education. "A national, populist, revolutionary movement which strives to achieve Arab unity, liberty, socialism".¹ This Constitution was not amended but only added a new word, 'Isthiraki' (Socialist), in 1953 after Akram Hawani's small socialist party merged with Ba'th.

There are two important aims of the Ba'th party: making a new educated generation, who will fight for Arab unity, and Arab nationalism. Aflaq argued to get complete freedom and peace, Arabs should be united. For Ba'th, the best way to make the new generation conscious about solutions for social problems is to teach them socialist theory. Only it can lead us to Arab nationalism. So Socialism and Arab Nationalism became inseparable in the Ba'th Party. Even before the Ba'th party acquired the reign of Syria in 1963, it welcomed every sign of Arab nationalism. They supported the rise of Nasserism in Egypt and propaganda of united Syria with Egypt in 1958 (UAR), for example. "The Arab nationalism for Ba'th was not based on the past glory of Arabs, but on the present experience of the Arab nation is the first and greatest value of this nationalism."²

The Ba'th party could grow rapidly, not in Syria only, but Jordan, Iraq, and other Arab countries. The increased power of Ba'th and huge supporting base from military and youngsters gave the strength

for coup d'etat in Syria and Iraq in 1963. However, Iraq was lost to the military junta before as a result of frictions between moderate and extremist Ba'th party members, the theory of Ba'th had deep roots in the soil of Iraq. Aflaq had preferred a way of elite life for the Ba'th party, which guides Arabs to unity rather than a struggling political party that encompasses all the public to make them members. But Salahudheen Al Bithar, co partner of Aflaq preferred the latter. Although there was definite uncertainty about the performing structure of the Ba'th party, Aflaq joined in Bithar's way of thinking at last.

Aflaq made a clear distinction between Ba'th Socialism and classical socialism along with communist socialism. For Aflaq, the classic international socialism of nineteenth-century Europe is not suited to the Arab world. Because that was against nationalism, religion, conservatism and any type of sanctification of the past. The Ba'th Socialism was based on nationalism and couldn't remove religious impetus absolutely. Because a large number of adherents were strictly religious and joined the party as a result of the suppression of ruling autocrats. The Ba'th Socialism distinguished from that of communist socialism. Communism explains the evolution of society on economic terms only, it does not give due weight to individuals, and it does not recognise the right to private property. Those theories are against the principles of Ba'th Socialism. Aflaq did not agree with the class struggle of communism. In his words, there is only a struggle between Arabs and their enemies. Through Aflaq's writings, Ba'th Socialism became distinguished from others.

Almost every socialist party in the Arab world were influenced by Ba'th ideology. Nasserism in Egypt is a classic example of it. Besides, there are some other socialist parties like the National Democratic Party in Iraq, the People Socialist Party in Lebanon, and the Marxist and Islam synthesis party in Algeria. But Ba'th party is the only coherent and oldest socialist party in the world. However, some factions, which happened in 1953, 1959, 1962, 1963, weakened the party for some years, it retained its power immediately thanks to the brilliant moves of party leaders.

The second socialist movement in the Arab world was Nasserism. That was not an output of the revolutionary movement but the result of the upheaval of the desperate public in Egypt. King

Faruk was puppet ruler of Britain and was not able to give Egyptians a better life.

The hopeless citizens started to gather against the king. This occasion was brilliantly exploited by some army officers, led by 'Gamal Abdu Naasar'. He captured the reign by dint of coup d'etat in 1956 June. As the first Arab leader who could oust colonial powers, he became a hero of nationalists.

He had adopted a lot of theories from Ba'th Socialism. However, both had tried to join as one in 1963 (The tripartite agreement) but separated soon. Because of Nasser's autocratic approach on the democratic Ba'th system in which many has voice.³

Nasser had gone farther in socialist ideology than that of the Ba'th party could. That included a great levelling of positions, destruction of privileges, gradual extension of state control, in mid-1961 all banks and insurance companies were nationalised, almost a hundred major industrial and commercial concerns were also seized and nationalised, and maximum individual landholding reduced to 100 acres. The outcome of these moves was almost the entire money producing industry and commerce became in the hand of the state. Power of the state increased to the highest level. Nasser often argued that the way to the goal of social justice, unity, and independence for all Arabs lies in the use of state power. This idea was in contrast to Ba'th ideology, which wanted Arab unity first, then only social justice.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of socialism in the Arab world was due to two reasons. The very first one is an increase of citizens' desperation on an autocratic rule which is guided by Imperial powers. The second is hope promises made by socialist parties. Arab public believed strongly that a new change could heal the wounded region by the cause of long lasted western colonialism and highly conservative Ottoman reign. Although socialism is against Islamic theology, which denies the presence of god and religious rules and regulations, Arabs adopted it only in the way of political and economic solutions. The history of the emergence of Arab socialism in the special context of the mid-twentieth century indicates the desperation and hopelessness of citizens on political wilderness and economic crisis will be a new impetus to make new movements against ruling tycoons. In front of such a flood of

desperate public, their string of belief and religion will be Nothing. Nothing would dam it.

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