

government and the SPLA in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, with the SPLA calling for Mahdi to implement an agreement it had signed in November 1988 with the Democratic Unionist Party, then a coalition partner in Mahdi's government.

On the other hand, Bashir's proposals for ending the civil war are relatively vague. He proposes concepts calling for peace, but in essence practices the opposite. For example, he offered to put the *sharia* laws to a national referendum if no agreement on them was reached. But the problem cannot be solved in this manner because the SPLA's opposition to *sharia* is a democratic demand which should be implemented without maneuvers to circumvent it.

As of yet, Bashir has not received any response from the SPLA to his proposals. But then again, does Bashir really want peace? If so, then why would he call for a tripartite union with Egypt and Libya, fully aware of the fact that such treaties remain a point of contention with the SPLA. Moreover, the general and his council scrapped the tentative peace accord signed on November 16th, which called for the freezing of Sudan's Islamic penal code and the abrogation of defense pacts with Libya and Egypt. The SPLA requests for greater autonomy, and economic and administrative reforms have not been addressed by Bashir at all.

For these reasons, Garang is not convinced that Bashir wants peace or democracy in Sudan. Therefore, Garang turned down an invitation to meet with Sudan's new leaders and dismissed Bashir's proposals, questioning his seriousness about ending the war, and stating that Bashir has secret plans to partition Sudan's northern and southern territories. Garang threatened to overthrow the new regime using military force and a popular uprising, unless it steps down and paves the way for general elections and democracy.

Obviously, there is no common ground between the two sides and Bashir is only aggravating the situation by not according the civil war due priority.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

The other major crisis in Sudan which must be addressed in detail is the growing economic crisis. This crippled economy is suffering from stagnation, inflation, a high rate of unemployment, lack of cash flow and IMF restrictions. The annual inflation rate is an estimated 85 percent, alongside an incredibly high foreign debt. The war in the South alone costs the government one million dollars per day.

The measures being taken by the new junta are only aggravating the situation. For example, the government printed \$125 million dollars worth of local currency at the Bank of England because there is a cash shortage, but this will only cause a devaluation of the Sudanese pound. It also ordered citizens to trade in their foreign currency or face trial by a military court. Then the government imposed a three percent defense tax on the basic salaries of average employees, effective July 1st.

There is also the issue of food shortages which have become so acute that the UN, the ICRC and other organizations have sent relief food, medicines, seeds and so on. But these are temporary solutions which do not remove the need for major structural changes in agriculture, so that some relative form of self-sufficiency can be achieved.

For all intent and purposes, Sudan has been bankrupt for years. Meanwhile, Bashir's initial policies are only worsening the situation. He says he will «control the market and promote development according to a realistic, scientific plan» (*The Middle East*, August 1989). But exactly what that plan is remains vague.

REACTIONS

The second country to recognize Sudan's new regime after Egypt was Saudi Arabia which stated that it was prepared to work on political and economic relations with Sudan. Bashir himself visited Saudi Arabia, after his first visit to Egypt where he spoke with «big brother» Hosni Mubarak. The Saudi government promised him financial support, but even this support will not solve Sudan's deep economic

crisis. Saudi Arabia and Sudan are both Red Sea littoral countries and also have been trying to develop a joint regional security policy.

Many of the reactionary Arab regimes welcomed the coup in Sudan, due to their apprehension of the example of democracy and the threat it could cause in their own countries.

On the international level, two days after the coup, Bashir met with the US ambassador to Khartoum, Norman Anderson. The US, for tactical reasons, did not openly support the coup but rather allowed its agents, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to do that. «The military has arrested a number of cabinet ministers. We regret the military taking action to overthrow Sudan's democratically elected government, and we urge an early return to democracy,» said State Department spokeswoman, Margaret Tutwiler on July 1st (AP, July 3rd). Subsequent developments will most probably indicate that this initial criticism was mainly propagandistic. Herman Cohen, US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, met with Bashir to determine whether the US will give aid to his government. Cohen subsequently called Mahdi's government incompetent.

Sadiq Al Mahdi's government was democratically elected by the Sudanese people in 1986. It is true that his government had its share of shortcomings, but at least there was a parliament, open political work and popular participation. Mahdi inherited many problems from the previous Nimeiri dictatorship, and now Bashir is inheriting those problems, but the ability of Sudan to resolve some of these problems with a democracy stood a much better chance than with the present junta.

With the June 30th coup, the Arab world suffers the loss of a democratic state. Bashir's junta has not produced any substantial policies on the critical issues facing Sudan today. The big losers in this case are the Sudanese masses who have suffered another coup d'etat in their 33 years of independence from Britain. ●