

South Yemen

HITCHED TO A RED STAR



a report from the People's
Democratic Republic of Yemen
by Eric Rouleau (from LE MONDE)

25¢



ADEN -- The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen recently celebrated the opening of the Fifth Congress of the National Liberation Front's Left wing -- the first since President Qahtan as-Shaabi was ousted in a bloodless coup on June 22, 1969. A large, noisy, and over-excited crowd milled around the white rectangular parliamentary building, waiting to greet the delegates.

Salem Ali Rubayyi, chairman of the Presidential Council, a buck-toothed, greying man of 37 with a determined chin surmounted by rather round features, was almost dragged out of the car by the enthusiastic crowd.

The son of poor peasants, he had been in turn farmer, teacher, bookkeeper, and justice of the peace before taking to the countryside in 1963 to wage guerrilla war against the British administration. His people consider him to be the father of the republic's agrarian revolution.

Rubayyi's mother continues to work the soil some 60 miles from Aden. She lives in a mud-brick hovel, and only rarely visits her son. "I don't care for his palace," she told me, referring to the splendid residence which was once the home of the British High Commissioner. Barefoot and sitting on the floor, she pointed proudly to a photograph of her son on the wall. It showed him shaking hands with another man whose name she didn't know -- none other than Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

Professional Revolutionary

Abdul Fattah Ismail, general secretary of the National Liberation Front, got a big hand from the crowd, and a group of young men chanted, "Long live Marxism-Leninism." Ismail has come a long way since he worked as an unskilled hand in British Petroleum's refinery in Aden, dividing his time between reading subversive literature and organizing strikes.

A professional revolutionary since 1962, he was the secret brain behind the urban guerrilla movement which got the better of Britain's most powerful overseas base as well as the British Middle East forces' high command headquarters in Aden. He is 32 but looks like a teenager, timid and fumbling, resembling a bookworm more than a man of action.

A third member of the NLF troika is an altogether different person. Ali Nasser Hassaniya, the Prime Minister, is also 32, tall, solidly built, with an open face and long wavy hair.

All the delegates filed into a cloakroom where they checked their sidearms. Nearly all of the 170 elected delegates are former guerrillas and they make up the republic's most important assembly. Standing up behind wooden desks like children and clapping rhythmically, they greeted the members of the politburo lined up on the stage.

Most were young, between 20 and 30, and for six days they listened earnestly and studiously to endless economic and political analyses before approving the "national democratic" revolution's programme and the National Liberation Front's new statutes.

Meagre education

Many of these men could hardly read or write; most had only grade school education. With their humble, especially poor, peasant backgrounds, they could

not in colonial days accede to an education doled out in dribs and drabs even to children from the so-called good families.

Many are sons of slaves, like Sudai Ali, the present general secretary of the General Labour Confederation, or of serving women, which is the case of Abdullah al-Khamri, Minister of Culture and Information, or of farm workers, like Awad al-Hamad, a provincial governor.

Many of them, by dint of great personal effort, managed to rise to the dignity of village teacher or "intellectual" -- listened to with even more deference since he held in his hands both the instruments of "science" and the weapons of revolution.

All these guerrillas have come up the same well-beaten ideological path. They have all been turned off a society where virtually all the bankers, insurance men, shipowners, merchants, and oil magnates were British, French, and Indian, and where the land belonged to sultans, emirs, sheikhs, and big feudal chieftains.

The often bloody repression which was jointly exercised by the forces of law and order and thugs was in character with the exploitation and crying social inequality. The "traditional" methods of political struggle undertaken by the authorized parties seemed risible to the future guerrillas.

Toward the end of the '50s, when Gamal Abdel Nasser's influence was on the rise, they joined the Arab Nationalist Movement, which at the time followed the Egyptian leader blindly. "However," explained Abdul Fattah Ismail, "we had a vague hunch right from the beginning that the movement was heavily riddled with Arab chauvinism and petit-bourgeois reformism."

A Nasserism tinged with Marxism began to spread among these keen adolescents as they dreamt of a violent revolution to which they were naturally inclined by their long history of tribal revolts and peasant uprisings.

In September 1962, an anti-monarchist coup in North Yemen (now the Arab Republic of Yemen) finally furnished them with the means to put their ideology into practice. They went over to Sanaa, where the Egyptian expeditionary corps dispatched by Nasser welcomed them with open arms. The Rais was anxious to open a second front against the British enemy, so he offered the South Yemeni nationalists both arms and instructors.

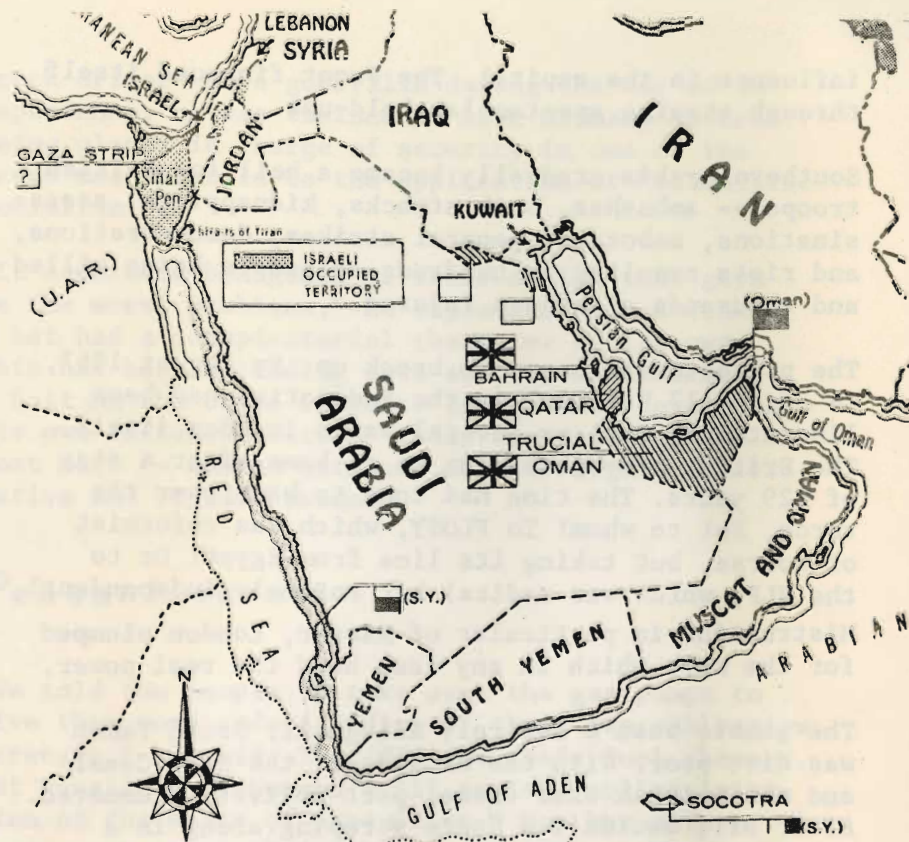
On October 14, 1963 an armed insurrection broke out in the Radfan mountains, spurred on with the battle cry "Victory or death!" Guided by the NLF, which came into being about the same time, the insurrection spread like wildfire into country areas where the Arab Nationalist Movement had already set up a substantial underground structure.

Nasser "corruption"

Nevertheless, relations between the guerrillas and their Egyptian allies rapidly worsened. Nasser's secret organization, the "Mokhabarat," wanted to impose unconditional obedience on their wards. The guerrillas were horrified to discover -- in the words of one of them -- that they were dealing with "corrupt negotiators, plotters, and cynics whose political ignorance measured up to their reactionary instincts."

The Marxist-leaning radicalism of the "national pact" adopted at the first NLF congress in June 1965 alarmed the Arabian Peninsula's representatives of Nasserian politics. So they exerted a variety of pressures to obtain the Front's fusion, in January 1966, with its rival reformist movement, the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOS), as well as the principal leaders of the opposition. But the "holy alliance" didn't last long. Six months later, the NLF militants broke free.

Cairo's immediate reaction was to cut off all supplies and orchestrate a massive campaign to belittle the



NLF; the entire Arab world rejected it. The pro-Soviet socialist camp which regarded Nasser as the high priest of progressive ideas in the Middle East pointedly turned a cold shoulder to the rebels. Almost overnight, the South Yemeni guerrillas found themselves without friends and without resources.

The break with Nasserism and their total isolation incited the guerrillas to explore other methods. "We learnt then," Rubayyi told me, "that we had to rely on ourselves alone." Some of the revolutionaries looked searchingly for answers in the works of Lenin, Mao, Liu Shao-chi. Others took a hint from the Paris Commune.

While a people's administration was installed in the country areas, the NLF began to carry out urban guerrilla operations, especially in Aden, against both the British and FLOS, which had a decisive

influence in the capital. The Front financed itself through staging spectacular hold-ups.

Southern Arabia gradually became a hell for British troops -- ambushes, bomb attacks, kidnappings, assassinations, sabotage, general strikes, demonstrations, and riots resulted in hundreds of people being killed and thousands of others injured.

The protectorate began to break up. By August 1967, 14 of the 17 "states" in the Federation had been liberated as well as several wards in Aden itself. The British Army packed up to go home after a stay of 129 years. The time had come to hand over the torch. But to whom? To FLOSY, which was reformist of course, but taking its line from Egypt? Or to the NLF, which was radical but entirely independent? Mistrustful in particular of Nasser, London plumped for the NLF, which in any case held the real power.

The gamble wasn't entirely illogical. South Yemen was dirt poor. With the closure of the Suez Canal and the British base there, port activity plummeted. After all, wouldn't a State scraping along in a hostile environment and equipped with a more conservative army be much more amenable to reason than a weak minority government condemned to lean heavily on Nasser's Egypt?

It was a well-calculated gamble -- but only in the short term. The "moderate" phase of the republic, which came into being on November 30, 1967, didn't last more than 18 months. The Left wing of the Front seized power on June 22, 1969. That was the beginning of a revolution the like of which had never been seen in the Arab world.

A group of men sat cross-legged, talking in low, urgent voices. A little to one side a man who might have stepped straight out of the pages of a pirate saga of the Arabian Gulf coast followed the intrigue in silence but with knowing nods, manifestly delighted with the weave of the plot. Batam, tall and broad to match, at the turn of 30, was security chief for the Mukalla region. One-time

truck driver and a guerrilla during the war of independence, he was trained in East Germany before being placed in charge of security in one of the areas most hostile to the application of "scientific socialism."

"It's not the bourgeois of their stripe that give me the worst problems," he explained with a wink that had a conspiratorial character of its own. This has been a trading town since time immemorial, a halt on the camel route to India which developed its own lettered elite -- today departed for the most part -- and an attitude that is highly conservative and rigidly Islamic.

Peasant revolt

"We told the people to take over the gas pumps to give them some understanding of their own collective strength," he said. They did get their fuel cheaper. But Mukalla's fishermen still resist "collectivisation of the means of production." Nor has reform made great progress in the agrarian reaches of the Hadramaut hinterland. It is the peasants themselves, "shakled by a godly feudal fear and some false conception of piety," who resist.

So Batam spends the greater part of his time preaching revolt against every form of ownership. "But you are the representative of order in a revolutionary state," I reminded him gently. "Of course," he guffawed. "In a state where a petit-bourgeois ideology remains entrenched, my sole duty is to defend the state if necessary."

It had been a good day for Batam. He had received 500 weapons for the embryonic peasant militia from President Salem Rubayyi, the driving force behind the "revolutionary violence" in the districts. Only the details of the uprising remained to be worked out, and this was the purpose of the meeting we were attending.



Modern cooperative agriculture -- Abyan

The object, I was told, "was to impose the agricultural reforms on the feudal lords." The legislation restricted the maximum land-holding to about 20 acres for arable land and 40 acres for non-cultivable areas. The problem was they did not know the details of the law nor the extent of the lands they were going to confiscate and redistribute. "So what?" they shrugged gaily. "We will make up the rules as we go along, if it means getting rid of exploitation. The land after all should belong to those who work it. We'll also take over the huge state concerns, where a capitalist approach to production obtains."

It is nothing new that the agricultural workers of Foa were applying. On October 8, 1970, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen experienced the first of a long series of peasant uprisings. That day hundreds of impoverished, scythe and pitchfork-waving peasants in the Batis region stormed to arrest the big landowners. They took over their properties and formed a committee to redistribute the land among the community and regrouped the new owners in a service cooperative.

Land taken, not given

There seemed some justification for the outburst. Only the properties of the sultans, emirs, shiekhs, and like "collaborators with the colonial era" had been confiscated, and later improperly divided by frequently corrupt officials, often among the already rich peasants. Even the assumption of power by the NLF Left wing on June 22, 1969, did little to alter the situation.

A new and more radical law was long in coming, and the peasants of the Batis area decided to forge their own justice. There is some speculation as to whether they had been incited by elements within the party. Those who feel that factions within the party were responsible point out that the land seizures occurred in the fief of the state who had returned from Peking some weeks before expressing great interest in the cultural revolution there.

Like his colleagues in power, President Rubayyi is perfectly happy about the way the agrarian reforms are being applied. "Land is taken, not given," he insists. The National Front encourages land takeovers and similar popular revolutionary activity because only revolutionary violence is likely to lead to the final break between land-owner and worker, to open an irreparable breach between the exploiters and the exploited.

The method has had important consequences: peasants, fishermen, and workers have organized militia units today to defend their newly acquired social conquests and the political power that made them possible. In practice the results have not always been as encouraging as one might think. While some peasants were moved to revolt even against their innermost convictions, others - not infrequently the same - went too far. Blood flowed abundantly in certain areas, and it became hard to distinguish the class struggle from sordid vendettas.

Since last summer a Government upset by this excess of "spontaneity" which threatened to alienate the

greater part of the population has decided to take the matter in hand, though the problem is far from a solution, as the activities of the Foa peasants illustrate.

Uprisings are today unleashed by the peasants themselves in places and times of their own choosing, but they are rigorously controlled by the Front. Peasant committees - necessarily elected - have to respect scrupulously the property limits set by law, even if they seem over-generous. "We want to bring about a gradual transformation of the little peasant into an agricultural worker through the spread of cooperatives," President Rubayyi said.

For the time being these bodies, in which membership is obligatory, have a strictly utilitarian function. They provide seed, fertilizer, credits, and take care of sales. Many authorities are dissatisfied with the system, since it fragments the land-holdings and leads to a subsistence economy. At the very best, it engenders a form of rural capitalism without stimulating any marked increase in production, which is the province of the larger mechanized operations.

This is why the authorities are moving towards the establishment of production cooperatives and State farms which, in their view, could meet the country's needs while swelling national savings, an indispensable element in industrialization. At the moment there are 21 production cooperatives and 24 State farms in operation in the country.

Reclaimed desert

The biggest of the State farms - the Lenin estate - has achieved some striking success. Established on a 200-acre tract confiscated from a sultan in 1970, its area has increased six-fold through efforts to make the surrounding desert bloom.

"A beautiful victory," said the director, Mohsen Abu Oteif, pointing out the line of demarcation

between the jessicated, sandy desert and the verdant, luxuriant cultivations stretching as far as they eye could see. "Before the end of the year we will have reclaimed another 1,000 acres," he predicted. And such is the conviction of this one-time teacher drawn to agriculture by love of the soil that one is inclined to believe him.

He does enjoy considerable advantages: bank loans, modern machinery, well-paid and specialized workers and technicians, and an autonomous management system with most of the kinks ironed out. Everything contributed to making the Lenin operation a model project.

Yet in a general way, the agricultural experiment despite its originality and undoubted qualities, is not an unqualified success. Production, already falling off in colonial times, is slipping. Some feel it is too soon to judge. Others believe that the agrarian reform law is far too timid a piece of legislation and place the blame here. They also criticize the land seizures for stirring sentiments of anarchy which they consider far from necessary in a country with a progressive government.

The Head of State does not accept this objection. His own philosophy is summed up in streamers displayed throughout the country: "The peasant uprisings and popular revolt in all sectors are a challenge flung down by the masses to their revolutionary leaders as well as to counterrevolutionaries. They put to the test the capacities of the leaders to satisfy their people's aspirations."

The President issued a symbolic seal of good conduct to Batam, the "subversive" law officer of Mukalla. For him, and his fellow leaders, "a revolution begins to rot when it is taken over by the bureaucrats."

Hard road to socialism

The good old days are over, though they were good only for a small, privileged class. The departure

of thousands of British soldiers and their families from what is now the People's Republic of Yemen, and the massive exodus of bankers, shipping magnates, big businessmen, and top executives emptied restaurants, cabarets, clubs, and beaches of their usual customers.

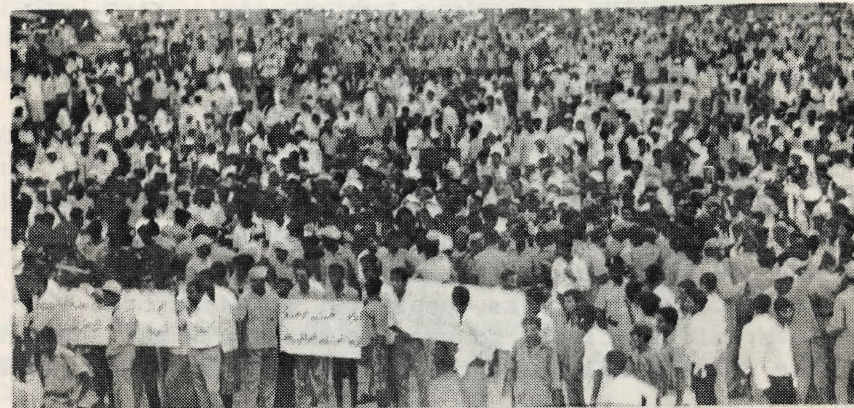
No longer do free-spending businessmen throng the first-class hotels, which are today run down and frequently house austere delegations from Communist countries and representatives of revolutionary movements little given to extravagance. Many of the boarding houses and resthouses have either closed down or are barely managing to keep going.

Aden harbour, once even busier than Marseille, is languishing. Its inormous port building, broad piers, and well-equipped repair docks are nearly deserted. Largely a port for transit trade, Aden has been dying since the Suez Canal was closed in June, 1967. Cargo movements dropped by 75 percent and virtually no passenger ship now calls here. Some shipping lines have diverted their vessels to Djibouti on the African coast or to the new port of Hodeida in the Arab Republic of Yemen (formerly North Yemen).

When it seemed inevitable that the colony would become independent, panic spread among the rich. Capital fled abroad, followed by its holders, frightened away more by the economic than by the political situation. About 80,000 persons - more than a quarter of Aden's population - fled, convinced that the new republic was headed for bankruptcy. Their calculations were based on hard facts: the country's service economy was in its death throes following the dismantling of the British base there and the spectacular drop in port activity. Two-thirds of the national revenue in fact came from the service sector.

Desperately poor

After an unbroken rule of 129 years, the British were leaving behind a desparately poor and undeveloped country. Its agriculture and industry were rudimentary, virtually designed to meet the British Army's needs. Its communications and transport infrastructure



May Day demonstration, 1970 -- Aden

could boast only of a mere 120 miles of roads. Some 95 percent of the population could neither read nor write, and the country's educational establishments amounted to some 200 grade schools and two high schools. Although the people were subject to various endemic diseases, there were in 1966 only 817 hospital beds for a population of 1,500,000.

Everything had to be done again or begun from scratch. But where was the money to come from? The State's coffers had been cleaned out and the revenue barely covered a third of the Government's operating costs. The colonial authorities had boosted expenditures by giving substantial pay increases to soldiers and civil servants.

Then, as soon as the country became independent, Britain cut off subsidies which used to cover budget deficits. The British Government had in fact thought of giving £60 million as compensation to South Yemen, but quickly changed its mind when it realized that the former guerrillas who were in power were for all that tough and uncompromising. They would not hear of possible British technical aid being given to the South Yemen army. As the ensuing economic crisis worsened, throwing an alarming number of

people out of work and even creating conditions of famine, the regime seemed ready to wither away.

Qahtan as-Shaabi, president of the South Yemen Republic since independence in November, 1967, and a relative moderate, held out for 18 months. The extreme Left-wing Government which succeeded him decided to wipe out all vestiges of the past: to eliminate "colonial enterprises," which it accused of sabotage, and their allies, the "commercial bourgeoisie." The new Government planned to build a "productive and national economy" on the ruins of the old "parasitic" system. It was counting on "an alliance with workers, peasants, soldiers, and the lower middle class" to wage "a merciless war against the class enemies in the cities and the countryside."

Since then, the "national and democratic revolution" has been pursued on several fronts. The first targets were naturally enough the centers of power. The civil service, security forces, army, and police were purged, broken up, restructured, and "democratised."

Every unit of the South Yemeni army has its "political adviser" whose job it is to give ideological training to recruits. Once recruits for the armed forces were chosen among the most fanatically conservative tribes, but today they have to be of working-class or peasant backgrounds.

"The very nature of our army has changed," Lieutenant Saleh Ahmed, one of these political commissars, told me. "Its principal task is no longer to fight, but to build, side by side with the rest of the population." Lieutenant Saleh Ahmed himself comes from a family of former slaves.

A few miles out of Aden, in the middle of the flat desert, stands a State farm which was founded by a group of soldiers. There are many like it along the frontier, resembling the "nahal" kibbutzim in Israel. The soldier - farmers in these settlements divide their time among military training, academic instruction, and manual labor.

The recruits devote several hours a day to technical training given by experts sent from the capital, and also to political and ideological education. Their curriculum consists of four subjects - philosophy and political economy, the study of national liberation movements, and the political party of the avant-garde.

"Our boys", Captain Ahmed Saleh Elewa told me, "now know against whom they are fighting. One thing is certain: they will never turn their weapons against workers and peasants."

"Unlike in many other countries," said Premier and Defense Minister Ali Nasser Hassanaya, "our army is immune to that very widespread disease of statement-making."

In truth it is doubtful whether the army would be capable of achieving its ends, if one day it decided to seize power. All over the republic, in cities and in villages, and along the frontiers, there are tens of thousands of armed militiamen, workers, peasants, and fishermen. They have been trained, indoctrinated, and constantly keyed up to be on guard against both the "class enemy" and against "foreign interventionists" (for which should be read the United States, Saudi Arabia, and tribes from the Arab Republic of Yemen to the north).

Apart from the militia units and the "peoples' forces" which still constitute an autonomous paramilitary organization whose members are recruited largely from among the tribal groups, there are the militants of various organizations. Among these are the General Labor Confederation with 45,000 members, youth and women's groups, and of course the all-powerful and all-pervasive National-Front.

The Front, which prefigures the "party of the avant-garde" now building, already has all the characteristics of a rigidly disciplined, monolithic organization run on the principle of "democratic centralism." Months before the fifth congress opened (it was held last March), collective self-examination sessions were held

at every level of the Front at which delegates criticized themselves with unprecedented harshness and rigidity.

Leaders and humble militants had to submit to hours sometimes even days, of personal interrogation which didn't spare their social origins, their life-styles, and their attitudes to the major events of the last ten years. Two militants who were asked to justify behavior which had been judged politically and morally unworthy couldn't take the probing of their comrades, and the climate of inquisition. They killed themselves.

Oddly enough, the attitude of the National Front's leaders to the remaining political groups is much less rigid, even relatively liberal. The Communists and Baathists have a man each in the Government - Abdullah Badib (Minister of Education) and Anis Mohammed Yahia (Minister of Economy). Although their views are far less clear-cut, they coincide with those of the National Front's leaders on fundamental options. Negotiations which have been going on to merge the two parties with the Front, especially the Communist Party, may shortly be crowned with success. The Communists rallied to the struggle against the British right from the start.

At the same time as it forges new instruments of power, the National Front is buckling down to the task of taking control of the economy, something which is just as important.

"Foreign monopolies" were dealt a heavy blow as early as December, 1969 when some 40 businesses, mostly British and French-owned - banks, insurance firms, shippers, chandlers, export-import houses and supply firms - were nationalized. The State took over foreign trade and drafted a three-year development plan in which private capital was allotted only a modest role.

It decreed austerity measures which were incredibly daring for a Government still trying to consolidate itself. Army and civil service pay was slashed as much as 60 percent in some cases. Prompted by economic and egalitarian considerations, the Government proposed

having previously consulted and obtained approval from trade unions and professional organizations - to narrow the salary range to a more modest ratio of 1 to 5 as against the present 1 to 12.

Women's freedom

Slated for proclamation shortly is a number of equally radical laws dealing with the establishment of a social-security system and the emancipation of women, still subject to the restrictive influence of Islamic traditions. The lay nature of the State is underlined by the total absence of any reference to Islam in the new constitution.

The mobilization of the people in various ways, regarded as a sine qua non of the much desired economic revival, has so far produced no tangible results. The economy has yet to be steadied before



Women's Militia -- Aden

it can get moving. Agriculture is in a perilous state largely as a result of the disturbances caused by agrarian reform. The same is true of the small processing industry, which has been badly affected by stagnation.

National enterprises are barely struggling along, deprives as they are of capital and adequate management staffs. Private capital -- even if it is only that of the petty

that of the "petit bourgeoisie" which the state is trying to woo -- is wary of a regime whose excesses it fears. About half the able-bodied population is either wholly, partly, or effectively idle -- a relic of colonial times. The national revenue is dropping. The state budget and the commercial and payments balances are perpetually in deficit. National savings are practically non-existent.

"We must count on nobody but ourselves," say the country's leaders. But they quite naturally keep sneaking ingratiating and trusting glances at friendly countries, at those who fought against and overcame underdevelopment under the banner of the Red Star.

The leaders, National Front activists and the members of the people's militia, make no distinctions regarding the country's various "revolutionary allies." According to them, these countries are there to offer their aid in a spirit of magnanimity to enable the Yemenis to conquer their "external and internal enemies -- imperialism and underdevelopment."

The Chinese are helping to give the country a modern infrastructure by building a 397-mile road which practically links Aden with the eastern limits of the country, providing an asset of major strategic and economic importance. In addition, the Chinese are furnishing financial and technical aid for the development of agriculture and industry as well as public health facilities.

Soviet experts and funds help to build dams, wells,

irrigation canals, conduct a hydrological survey, improve the output of fisheries and factories, and, most important of all, equip and train the armed forces.

The two biggest Communist powers have contributed almost equal amounts in aid: 25 millions from the Soviet Union as against 23 millions from China. The difference is that only a part of the Soviet aid is free, while the Chinese loans are on very attractive terms: interest-free, as compared to the 2.5% of the Soviets, and repayable in 10 or 17 years after a five-year moratorium.

East Germany has distinguished itself from the other popular democracies by furnishing light arms as well as the experts necessary for reorganizing the police and information services and operating them efficiently. In a country haunted by a sense of insecurity and solitude, these services are regarded as vital as the armed forces.

"We haven't a friend within a radius of 1,200 miles," is the common complaint of the average Yemeni. With the exception of Iraq and Algeria, the Arab world is apparently either hostile or indifferent to Yemen. While portraits of Nasser, whose memory is revered, are lavishly displayed, rare are those who consider Nasser's Egypt -- described as "petit bourgeois" by the more politically aware -- to be an ally. The Yemeni leaders have not forgotten that the Rais' representatives abandoned them to their fate at the most critical moment of the war of independence in order to maintain Egyptian support of the rival FLOSY movement.

"The Arab press, like that of the West, ignores us when it isn't attacking us," was the bitter comment of Information Minister Abdullah Khamri. "Many regard us as odd specimens," Prime Minister Ali Nasser told me. "It's not uncommon for worried Arab leaders to ask me directly to reassure them that the South Yemen leaders regularly say their prayers."

International plot

"Everything is happening as if our enemies had given a free hand to Saudi Arabia, centre of orthodox Islamic thinking, to settle the fate of those atheistic communists we seem to be in their eyes," noted Aziz Abdul Wali, Minister without Portfolio attached to the President's office.

"This international plot has nothing to do with religion," added Abdul Fattah Ismail, secretary general of the National Front. "Faisal's bigoted and oppressive Wahabite kingdom, fountainhead of reactionary thought and controlled by the oil monopolies and the United States, has been designated as policeman for the Arabian Peninsula in order to eradicate the centre of national and social liberation which our country symbolizes."

All the leaders assert that the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen represents a greater cause of concern for the "imperialists" than Cuba because of its highly strategic location. With the strait of Bab al Mandeb, it controls one of the two entrances -- the other is the Suez Canal -- to the Red Sea, the traditional maritime route (now temporarily cut as a result of the Canal's closure) from the Far East to the Mediterranean, and used to ship petroleum to Europe.

In addition, the proximity of rich Persian Gulf emirates containing 60% of the world's oil reserves is disquieting to those fearful of revolutionary contagion. This unease is reinforced by the fact that Aden is the self-proclaimed "Hanoi of the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla warfare" raging in neighboring Dhufar, as well as headquarters for various nationalist movements of the peninsula and East Africa (notably Eritrean separatists) and one of the capitals in which members of the Palestinian organizations feel most at home.

In view of all this, no one should be surprised that South Yemen's neighbors offer political asylum to those plotting the regime's overthrow. "We are be-



U.S. munitions captured from Saudi mercenaries attacking the PDRY.

seized on all sides," declared Premier Ali Nasser. "To the west, the Ethiopians and their Israeli allies plot and fortify the islands close to Bab al Mandeb; to the east, British warplanes use the pretext of pursuing the guerrillas in Dhufar to bomb our towns near the border; to the north, counter-revolutionaries from our own country, commanded by dismissed officers, have found refuge with our North Yemeni brothers in Ta'izz, Hodeida, and Sanaa, and are taking part in attacks launched ceaselessly across our northern borders by tribes in the pay of Saudi Arabia."

Socialist aid

The United States, with whom South Yemen broke off diplomatic relations in 1969, is hostile to the country's leaders. Western Europe remains indifferent. Out of necessity and ideological choice, South Yemen has steadily turned to all manner of socialist States for aid.

China apparently was the first to offer assistance. As early as February 1969, at a time when the Left wing of the National Front had not yet come to power, 20 Chinese doctors were already giving free medical care -- including acupuncture -- at the People's Hospital in the heart of the working-class neighborhood of Crater, where 400 to 600 people are treated daily.

The Soviets, who work for the most part with the armed forces and therefore are less visible, nevertheless lose no opportunity to distribute pro-Soviet literature in the barracks with the tacit approval of South Yemen authorities.

Since South Yemen is one of the few countries in the world where the two biggest Communist powers can freely confront each other without the presence of "American imperialism," they have engaged in no-holds-barred ideological war.

The official Chinese news agency distributes handouts violently attacking Soviet "social-imperialism," its Soviet counterpart, Novosti, issues twice monthly denunciations of Maoist economic doctrines, the "militarization" of the Chinese people, and the "chauvinistic and reactionary petit-bourgeois spirit" of Peking.

National Front militants and Government officials read and discuss these conflicting points of view and sometimes opt for one or the other. However, the National Front itself refuses to take sides. As its Secretary General Fattah Ismail puts it, "From the beginning we explained to our Soviet and Chinese friends, who were originally a little distrustful of us, that we were determined to maintain a strict neutrality in a conflict we feel to be prejudicial to the worldwide national liberation movement, the international proletariat, and the socialist camp itself -- whose division could only serve the cause of imperialism."

However, various concurring reports indicate that Peking is losing ground. The Sino-American rapprochement, Peking's support of the anti-Communist regimes in Sudan and Pakistan, the suspension of arms deliveries to the Eritrean resistance movement following the establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia, and the marked slow-down of arms deliveries to the Dhufar guerrillas after Peking's recognition of the arch-conservative Persian Gulf emirates have all surprised or scandalized those who saw in Maoism the "revolutionary alternative" to Soviet Marxism.

Be that as it may, victory will logically go to the power with the ability to furnish the the young republic with the means to control a very grave economic situation and resist the strong military pressures exerted by its neighbors.