

SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL VISIT
TO THE NEAR EAST

9 - 16 March 1974

ANNEXES

I. The first meeting with the leadership of the ASU headed by the First Secretary, Dr M.H. Ganem, took place at the Party's headquarters on 10 March at 7.45 pm and lasted for three hours.

Dr Ganem welcomed the delegation and emphasised the fact that it was headed by Chancellor Bruno Kreisky which indicated the Socialist International's sincere desire to improve its relations with the Arab socialist parties.

He said that the ASU had for years tried to establish contacts with member parties of the Socialist International, but that there had been obstacles, mainly because of differences of opinion concerning the conflict between the Arab countries and Israel. He said that the Arab socialists always regretted that the Socialist International failed to condemn the requisition of Arab land by force and that the organisation never came out clearly against Israel's claims. 'This really was a little shocking to us. We expected you as progressive parties, believing in peace to take a different attitude'. He also reminded the delegation that it was the Leader of the French Socialist Party, Guy Mollet, who as Prime Minister of France, took part in the aggression against Egypt over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

He also criticised the Socialist International's preoccupation with European affairs: 'You are not really internationally-minded enough and that is why the Socialist International at present is not a truly international movement. You must have thought that there were no socialists outside Europe and this is why you did not recognise our socialism!'

He went on to say that the Arab socialists expected the Socialist International to be their natural allies, while the Israel Labour Party conducted a policy which was contrary to the principles of democratic socialism.

However, he also put some blame on the Arab socialists as well: 'Maybe we made a mistake by keeping away from you. This attitude is now considered by us as a wrong policy. Our policy has changed. We are now trying to understand you and cooperate with you even if there are differences between us and the Socialist International as a whole or individual member parties'.

He said that the policy of the ASU was to establish a lasting peace

in the Middle East. The President of the ASU, President Sadat of Egypt, has said since 1971 that he is intending to sign a peace agreement with Israel. 'We had another war because he was not believed'. Dr Ganem said 'our resources were spent on war instead of on social and economic development. We hope that you as socialists will help us to create peace'.

He also referred to the programme for social and economic change within Egypt saying that 'President Sadat since his election is working for real change within our society, in particular for land reform and land reclamation'.

He said that despite the fact that ten thousand million pounds were spent since 1967 for warfare investment in the public sector rose between 1970 and 1974 from £319 million to £526 million, and that the number of organised workers rose from 8.5 million to 9.1 million during that period.

Dr Ganem ended by pointing out that the ASU was not a party in the traditional sense, but a movement which embraced various social classes - workers, soldiers, farmers, holders of national capital and intellectuals. It was 'dramatically and categorically opposed to one class dominating the others'. Our aims is 'an alliance of all the working people'. As an example of the democratic character of the ASU he cited the fact that 50 per cent of the members of the leadership of the ASU and of its representatives in the National Assembly are made up of farmers and workers.

Bruno Kreisky then asked if opponents of the ASU like the Communists can express their views.

Dr Ganem replied that expression of Communist views was not welcomed, but allowed as freedom of expression was upheld in Egypt.

Dr Ganem emphasised that everyone had the right to publish his own newspapers and that civil liberties in Egypt were based on the French model.

Bruno Kreisky replied first by explaining the terms of reference of the Mission. He explained the motives behind the attitude towards the Jews of European socialist parties and recalled the crimes committed against them in Europe, but he said that the attitude of socialist parties towards Israel may not always have been completely objective. He said that European socialist parties in general for a long time believed that the Arab countries refused to recognise Israel as a State. He said there seemed now to be a change of view among leading Arabs.

He then referred to the 'most decisive differences between the ideologies of democratic socialists and communists'. He described the Socialist International as a free association of parties in which each party has the right to make its own national policies. 'No orders are given from the headquarters of the Socialist International, there

exists equality among parties'.

Finally, he called upon the ASU to think about how contacts with the Socialist International could be improved with the objective of contributing towards the peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict and in order to investigate means and ways of encouraging economic cooperation between the Middle East, including Israel, and Europe as a whole.

II. The second meeting with the leadership of the ASU headed by the First Secretary, Dr M.H. Ganem, took place at the Party's headquarters on 11 March at 8.30 pm and lasted for two and a half hours.

Dr Ganem opened the meeting by announcing that he had been authorised by President Sadat to accept the invitation by the Middle East Study Group of the Socialist International to attend their next meeting to present a report. He also expressed the wish that the ASU be invited to future meetings of the Socialist International as observers.

Ron Hayward made a short statement saying: 'Let us start a new page in history; let us not waste our time with former errors'.

Dr Ganem replied that the ASU was ready to open a new book and that they were doing so with the full support of the workers of Egypt with whom they had discussed their future policies towards the Socialist International in full.

Ron Hayward referring to the invitation extended by the Middle East Study Group asked: 'Are you willing to sit down at meetings with the Israel Labour Party present?'.

Dr Ganem replied: 'In principle, yes'.

Bruno Kreisky then referred to the one-party character of the ASU saying that the parties of the Socialist International must realise that a one-party system does not necessarily mean dictatorship. 'It does in the case of communist countries, but not in the case of some countries of the Third World'. 'There are different types of democracy' he said, 'there are even differences between our own systems of democracy'.

Eki Sone then gave a short description of the Asia Pacific Socialist Organisation of the Socialist International and emphasised its regional independence.

Hans-Eberhard Dingels followed with a description of the EEC Socialist Bureau.

Hans Janitschek, at the request of Bruno Kreisky, gave a general description of the policies and programme of the Socialist International emphasising the need for closer cooperation between the Socialist International and the Arab and African socialists.

Dr Ganem at this point said that the ASU was highly interested in cooperation with the Socialist International for the creation of a regional body of the Socialist International in the Afro-Arab region. He referred to a proposal by President Sadat that the Socialist International should open an office in Cairo.

Bruno Kreisky then, in summing up the discussions, said that he found the ASU interested in economic cooperation with Europe and that he was convinced that they were determined to have peace. 'You are interested to build up socialism and that can only be done in peace', he said. He also said that he would tell our Israeli friends that they should also have good relations with you'.

Bruno Kreisky thanked the ASU for their hospitality and described the visit as an exciting experience.

Dr. Ganem in his reply said that the discussions were held in a really honest and frank atmosphere. He repeated the wish of the ASU to build up a lasting peace and to establish new relations based on confidence and mutual assistance with the Socialist International.

III. The meeting with the leadership of the Ba'ath Party of Syria headed by the First Deputy Secretary of the Party, Abdallah Al-Ahmar, took place on 12 March at the Party's headquarters at 7.30 pm and lasted for two hours.

Al-Ahmar opened the session expressing the wish of the Ba'ath Party for good relations with the social democratic parties of Europe and Japan without any conditions. He described the Ba'ath Party as a genuinely socialist party and regretted that no contacts had taken place prior to the visit of the mission of the Socialist International.

Bruno Kreisky said it was the wish of the Socialist International to establish relations with the ASU and other parties outside the Socialist International.

Al-Ahmar replied that cooperation between the parties of the Socialist International and the Arab socialists would be an important factor in bringing about closer cooperation between the Arab states and the countries of western Europe.

He said that his party was willing and happy to study the new reformed statutes of the Socialist International and that there was nothing that would prevent his party from good relations with the Socialist International. 'We would like to have you as comrades and to support us', he said.

Robert Pontillon recalled that the Middle East Study Group of the Socialist International had started its investigations with Egypt, but that Syria should be second as the Ba'ath Party was both progressive and socialist. He said that Francois Mitterrand, First Secretary of the French Socialist Party, would visit Syria in the near future.

In summing up the discussions held earlier and the working session itself, Al-Ahmar said 'the picture we have from each other is clearer now, but other meetings will be required in order to further clarify the various points of view. This meeting will have positive results and it was useful'.