

# Will the British allow Sudan to hold democratic elections?

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have never made a secret of their propensity to use the argument, that a Third World country is a "dictatorship," in order to justify withholding development aid or loans. What happens, then, when governments stigmatized as "dictatorships," move to effect a transition to democratic rule? The answer, quite bluntly, is, nothing. Or rather, that the fraud of IMF propaganda is revealed to be just that.

The case in point is Sudan, which, after six years of military rule, is organizing general elections, for both the National Assembly (parliament), and the Presidency. Rather than rejoice, the international financial oligarchy appears to be consumed with rage. Two signal pieces appeared, in the London *Financial Times* on Feb. 8 and in the London *Economist* on Feb. 3, which spell out the new line. As the *Economist* pontificates, although there will be elections in about 18 African nations this year, there is great skepticism that all this has anything to do with democracy. Why? "The people may have passed the test, but the politicians did not. On the whole they rushed through the door marked winner and slammed it behind them. They used democracy as a route to power, but they did not become democrats." The conclusion drawn, is that "multi-party elections in Africa did not produce democracies."

## London's 'good boys'

Yet, the voice of London's financial elite is quick to add, "There are exceptions." And these exceptions "were not produced by western-style multi-party elections." Among them, for the *Economist*, South Africa ranks first, as it succeeded in reaching political stability, despite an election in 1994 considered to be "flawed." The other "exceptions" are more startling: Ethiopia is praised for its considerable economic growth, which the World Bank forecasts will reach 6% this year. Politically, "it is neither a full democracy . . . nor a conventional autocracy: Ethiopians are far freer than before and there is a clear rule of law. Unusually, Mr. Meles [Zenawi] insists on a political system in which parties can represent only ethnic groups."

The other bright "exception," is Uganda, whose "no-party" democracy is just as heterodox. Political parties are allowed in Uganda, but candidates must stand as individuals. . . . Yet Uganda is more stable and prosperous now than for

25 years. The Americans, traditional upholders of universal multi-party democracy, decided last month to give Mr. Museveni's system the benefit of the doubt."

Echoing the *Economist's* complaint that African democracies have not performed as expected, the *Financial Times* lists the "successes" achieved by some nations in the realm of IMF policy implementation: If Ghana was formerly the World Bank model, "now Uganda has taken over as the star performer." It seems not to matter that "President Yoweri Museveni . . . presides over a de facto one-party state, tolerant of opposition, but allowing no fundamental challenge to his administration."

What, then, to think of countries which are about to hold elections? The *Economist* comments, "Supposedly, there will be elections in the army-ruled Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan; and local ones in Nigeria, as part of its three-year transition to civilian rule. Don't hold your breath."

The gist of London's new line on Africa is: Forget the rhetoric about democracy; we will support those regimes which acquiesce to IMF dictates, and which cooperate, as local puppets, in pursuing our strategic aims, including the destabilization of entire nations. This is the secret to the success stories of Ethiopia and Uganda. This is the reason why not only the British establishment press, but also U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and German President Roman Herzog, have singled out Uganda and Ethiopia as models.

## Putting the squeeze on Sudan

Uganda's dictator Museveni was the marcher lord used by the British to invade Rwanda, and unleash chaos and warfare there and in Burundi, leading to the mass murder of over 1 million human beings. Museveni, who is controlled directly by Baroness Lynda Chalker of the British Overseas Development Office, has since been deployed to provide military, logistical, and political backup for the Sudanese rebel forces in the south.

Joining Uganda in its anti-Sudan crusade has been the Ethiopian government of Meles Zenawi; increasingly, since the British-orchestrated assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak last June in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia has been drumming up hostility against Khartoum. Zenawi's government fabricated charges against Sudan during an Addis Abeba meeting of the conflict resolution commission

of the Organization of African Unity, charges which laid the basis for action in January, at the U.N. Security Council (UNSC), again prompted by Ethiopia.

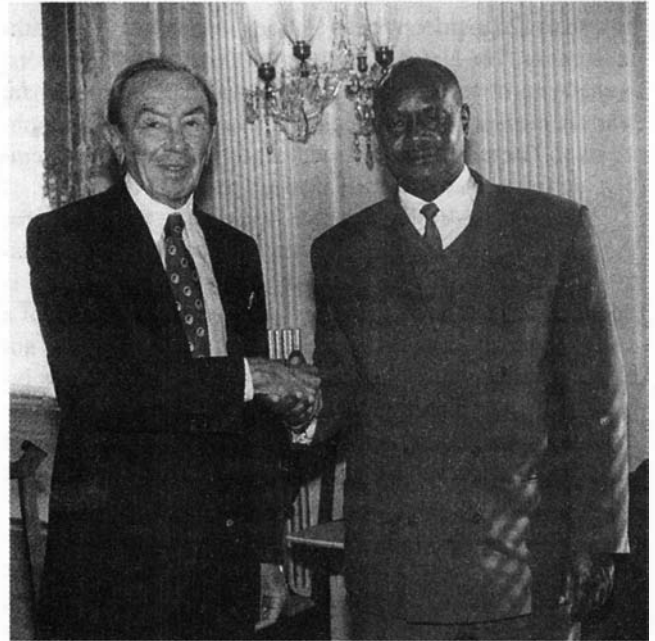
The Security Council's deliberations, together with a U.S. State Department decision to withdraw all diplomatic personnel from Khartoum, signify that Sudan is on the hit list, along with Nigeria, whose government, under Gen. Sani Abacha, has been assailed on grounds of human rights violations, over months.

The pressure on Sudan has increased since the Security Council meeting. It took the U.S. embassy less than a week to pull its staffers out, and send them to an undisclosed location in the region, from which they are to "continue the dialogue" with Khartoum. On Feb. 6, the U.S. denied a visa to the governor of the Bank of Sudan, who was scheduled to attend an IMF meeting in Washington. One day earlier, the Eritrean government (which is as snugly tucked into London's back pocket as is Ethiopia), held a ceremony in the capital city, Asmara, to hand over the building which had formerly housed the Sudanese embassy, to the National Democratic Alliance, a gaggle of Sudanese opposition groups which have been sewn together into a front by British operatives, like Baroness Caroline Cox of Christian Solidarity International. Farouq Abu Isa, spokesman for the NDA in Cairo, made clear that the gesture by the Eritrean government was intended to further the process of stripping Khartoum of diplomatic recognition, which had been begun with the American pullout. "It's an additional recognition of the alliance as the legitimate representative of the Sudanese people. *It implies withdrawal of recognition* from the NIF [National Islamic Front] government in Khartoum," he said. As if on cue, the leader of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army, John Garang, announced that his forces were poised to make a renewed attempt to reconquer Juba, a major city in the south of Sudan.

### **Sudan denounces British role**

The response of the Sudanese government has been two-fold: On the one hand, it has denounced the British in no uncertain terms, for being the instigators of this "imperialist plot"; and, on the other, it has redoubled its commitment to holding the planned elections, on schedule. Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin, who has served as minister of state in the President's office and in the Foreign Ministry, issued a statement in Khartoum, which was picked up in the London-based Arabic press on Feb. 7.

Dr. Ghazi, who is currently the president of the National Congress, the leading body in Sudan's political system, denounced "the plot which was trying to condemn Sudan in the United Nations Security Council." According to press reports, "Dr. Ghazi . . . spoke harshly of Great Britain, the U.S., and Egypt. He spoke of an imperialist mentality, and called on the Sudanese government to stand firm, without making any concessions." He further announced that "the National Congress will lead a domestic and international cam-



*Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni (right) with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Washington, Sept. 25, 1995. Museveni is a dictator backed by the British, who praise him as a "model" of World Bank policy. He is currently providing support for the Sudanese rebel forces.*

paign" against the plot. This Congress, he explained, "represents the political will of the Sudanese people, as it includes representatives of the trade unions, the professions, all social groups, and so forth." Dr. Ghazi was quoted saying, the National Congress would "mobilize the population to reverse the UNSC decision." While assailing the United States for "wanting this ridiculous ploy with Great Britain and Egypt," Dr. Ghazi "described the British as an imperialist state, which had looted Sudan's resources for over 60 years, had created the problem in the south, and had withdrawn from Sudan only after having killed tens of thousands of her sons."

One key point was made by Dr. Ghazi, regarding the timing of the British-led machinations. He charged that the assault was launched "in order to stop the progress being made, as Sudan is reaping the fruits of its oil, its agriculture, and its new political system." Specifically, he said, it "came at a time to undermine the constitutional development of the country, as Presidential and parliamentary elections are about to take place."

### **The coming elections**

In December, Sudanese President Gen. Omar Al-Bashir issued the Thirteenth Constitutional Decree, which announced the elections. In it, the Transitional National Assembly, a body of appointed representatives, was dissolved, to be replaced by the National Assembly. During the first three days of January, the National Congress met, to elect its president,

as well as 125 members to the National Assembly, from within its ranks. The National Congress, of over 4,000 members, is made up of representatives of all walks of life in Sudan, who are elected at a local, regional, state, and, finally, national, level. The remaining 275 members of the National Assembly, are to be elected directly through popular vote.

President Al-Bashir's decree laid out the modalities for the elections. Most striking are the qualifications for candidacy. One can run for the National Assembly, if one "a) is Sudanese; b) has attained twenty-one years of age; c) is of a sound mind; d) reads and writes well (is literate); e) has not been convicted within the last seven years of a crime involving dignity and honesty." As for the Presidency, one may qualify as a candidate who "i) is a Sudanese; ii) has attained forty years of age; iii) is sane; iv) has never been convicted of a crime involving honesty, moral turpitude."

What this boils down to, is an open challenge to the opposition, whether in Sudan or abroad. Former President Gafaar Mohamed Nimeiri, now speaking for the opposition in Cairo, could return and run for office. So could rebel military leader John Garang. So, too, could Sadiq al Mahdi, whose government was removed from power by General Al-Bashir in 1989. Al Mahdi, who lives in Khartoum, is said to be considering whether to run or not. Unlike Garang and Nimeiri, Al Mahdi does have a political base of support. According to one political analyst in Khartoum, "Al Mahdi certainly has his people locally, who can feel the pulse of the population." His estimation was, that even though Al Mahdi enjoyed certain support, he could not be sure of victory. If he were to run for office and lose, that would signal the end of his career. If, however, he were not to seize the opportunity presented by elections, that would raise doubts regarding his seriousness.

More than one political figure close to the government, has expressed the view that the government, too, is accepting a challenge by going for elections which will be "real." The elections which took place at the beginning of January, within the National Congress, were hotly contested. Now, parliamentary and Presidential elections could be just as close.

As the *Economist* and *Financial Times* articles indicate, the London-based financial oligarchy has no intention of allowing such real elections to take place, or, if they do, of letting them be recognized as such. Both articles are sending out the message, that such elections are a farce. The Sudanese have issued invitations to all those international bodies which are routinely called upon, to monitor elections, from the Carter Center in Atlanta, to the European Parliament, the International Parliamentary Union, the Arab League, and the United Nations. Thus far, the Arab League is the only association to have responded; it will send one delegate, a far cry from what is required. The European Parliament, which sent 314 observers to the elections in Algeria in December, which were notoriously rigged, has not responded. Whether former President Jimmy Carter will lead a delegation there or not, as he did in the case of the Palestinian elections, is an open question.

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## Interview: A. Moneim Z. Nahas

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# Sudan prepares first elections since 1955

*Mr. A. Moneim Z. Nahas is a retired deputy chief justice, who now heads the General Elections Authority (GEA) in Sudan. He gave the following interview to Muriel Mirak Weissbach on Jan. 23, 1996.*

**EIR:** Can you tell us about the upcoming elections?

**Nahas:** This is the first time there will be general elections in Sudan, since 1955. Members to the National Assembly and the President will be elected directly by popular vote; 275 National Assembly members will be elected directly through their election districts. The remaining 125 have been elected indirectly, through the National Congress. The National Congress members, who met in the first days of January, are elected by the state congresses, which are elected by the local congresses, so this represented grass-roots assemblies. There is a legislative body in each state, similar to the American system. In Sudan, we have 26 states, in each of which is a state government, and a legislative body. This decentralization is one solution for the south, where there are now 10 states. Last year, the state assemblies were elected indirectly, i.e., through the state congress, and also directly. Now we are in the process of completing the election process, by voting for members of the National Assembly and President.

**EIR:** What is the institution which you lead?

**Nahas:** The GEA is made up of permanent members, appointed by the President. These are people with experience; for example, I was deputy chief justice for five years, another was a member of the judiciary for 35 years. There is a former interior minister, a former general of the Armed Forces, a career politician who was governor of Equatoria for many years, a woman who was assistant minister of education, ministers of local governments, and senior administration officers. The GEA has its own authority, its own budget.

We have just been in a meeting with the representatives of the state government here, who will be supervising elections at the state level. Together with their subcommittees, and administrative officers, they will be arranging the polls and supervising, then counting the votes, and announcing the results. The ballots will carry not only names of candidates, but also symbols, to overcome the problems posed by illiteracy.

In our meeting, we have been setting the timetable for the