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Aan Zijne Excellentie Prof. Dr. L.J.M. BEEL
Minister-President

Plein 1813 no. 4

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GEHEIM

I.C.A.T.U.

The International Confederation of Arab Trades Unions, (I.C.A.T.U.) was formally constituted on 25th March 1956, at an inaugural conference in Damascus attended by delegates from trades unions in Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the Lebanon and Libya. The idea of the formation of such a confederation had first been mooted during the 8th Congress of Syrian Trades Unions, at which Egyptian and Lebanese delegates were also present, in Damascus in May 1955; and the intervening year had been taken up by a number of preparatory meetings and discussions in which Egyptians took an increasingly dominant part.

2. The statutes of I.C.A.T.U. were drawn up by a preparatory committee, convened in Damascus in January 1956, over whose work the Egyptian delegation led, by FATHI KAMAL, had considerable influence. As a result, the Constitution, promulgated by the inaugural Congress, was essentially a political document in the nature of an Arab Nationalist manifesto: although it included, in the most general terms, a number of declarations on purely trades-union matters, it also called for the destruction of "imperialism", recognition of the right of self-determination, and the sharing of natural resources amongst the Arab "community". The resolutions adopted by the Congress were also principally of a political nature, anti-Israeli, and anti-Colonial.

3. The Congress also provided that the headquarters of I.C.A.T.U. were to be in Cairo, and thus endorsed the dominant position of the Egyptians: for although a Syrian, MUHAMMED SUBHI AL KHATIB, had been elected President of the Executive Committee, the posts of Secretary General and Secretary were filled by the Egyptians FATHI KAMAL and MUHAMMED EL OKEILI, both of whom must be regarded, in view of the close control over the labour organisations in Egypt, as acting on behalf of the Nasser government. And there is no doubt that even if the support commanded by I.C.A.T.U. was still more apparent than real, the Egyptians had succeeded both in dictating the political character of the organisation, and in securing control over it.

4. Although organised Communism had not been officially represented at the inaugural conference, the W.F.T.U. were not slow in following up the formation of I.C.A.T.U. In June 1956, Communist trades unionists from Syria and Lebanon were called to Prague, where they were told by W.F.T.U. that the latter approved of the I.C.A.T.U., and that they were particularly interested in the creation of an Afro-Asian Federation of Trades Unions, for which the I.C.A.T.U. statutes called. W.F.T.U. also stated that the affairs of Arab Trades Unions were now to be transferred from the Russian to the Chinese Secretary of W.F.T.U. Probably as a result, it was decided at a meeting of the I.C.A.T.U. Executive Committee in August 1956 that FATHI KAMAL and SUBHI AL KHATIB should head a delegation to Peking in October.

5. Previously the Executive Committee had decided that efforts should be made to win support from the labour movement in Kuwait and elsewhere; and, on the instructions of the Egyptian Government, IMRAN SAHIB, a member of the Executive Committee, and Secretary General of the Egyptian Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union, visited Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain in the summer of 1956 in an attempt to form an Arab Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union under the auspices of I.C.I.T.U. The objectives of this union were to be to undermine Western economic and political influence in the oil-producing areas. In the Autumn of the same year, SILBI SHITTI, a Vice-President of I.C.I.T.U. and Secretary General of the Libyan General Workers Union, was also actively attempting to gain control of the Libyan trades union movement, on the instructions of and with financial support from Cairo. Further evidence of Egyptian hopes of harnessing trades unionists to the Arab nationalist cause was forthcoming when the Executive Committee of I.C.I.T.U. decided, at a meeting in August 1956, on action to be taken in the event of an attack on Egypt: this was to include sabotage of oil-fields and pipelines, and a call for general strike action.

6. In the event, however, I.C.I.T.U. action to enlist Arab trades union support for Egypt at the time of Suez was practically unsuccessful: and in spite of Egyptian claims to the contrary, I.C.I.T.U.'s strike call met with little effective response. As a result, after Suez, I.C.I.T.U. intensified its efforts to establish contacts with other Middle Eastern trades-union movements. To this end, on Egyptian advice, a special "International Section" was set up within the Executive Committee, with an Egyptian Official of the Ministry of Social Affairs as 'International Relations Adviser': and in May 1957 an I.C.I.T.U. conference was convened in Cairo at which delegations from the trades unions of Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, the Sudan, Libya and Algeria were present.

7. The first, and most significant item of business at this meeting was the unanimous agreement to the affiliation to I.C.I.T.U. of the Communist-dominated Sudan Workers Federation of Trade Unions (S.W.F.T.U.), which was represented at the conference by its Secretary General SHEFI MELO AL SHAIKH, closely associated with W.F.T.U. since 1953. The affiliation of the T.U.s of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia was also discussed, and FATHI KILL reported on his efforts in this direction: this question was, however, shelved, probably chiefly because the Maghreb T.U.s were already members of I.C.F.T.U., but it was agreed that I.C.I.T.U. should continue to work towards such an affiliation.

8. It is in fact evident that I.C.I.T.U. was finding increasing difficulty in following the line of "neutrality" between the Western and Communist "bloes". FATHI KILL, during a visit to Warsaw in September 1957, whilst stating that I.C.I.T.U. held a "neutral position" between the I.C.F.T.U. and W.F.T.U., added that the latter's "fraternal attitude" at the time of Suez had been much appreciated by I.C.I.T.U. From late 1957 onwards, W.F.T.U. pressure on I.C.I.T.U. became more intense. Of numerous examples of W.F.T.U./I.C.I.T.U. contact, the following are notable: in October 1957, FATHI KILL and SHEFI MELO AL SHAIKH attended the W.F.T.U. IVth World Trade Union Congress in Leipzig; I.C.I.T.U. delegations attended the May Day celebrations in Peking, Moscow and East Germany, and in August 1958 an I.C.I.T.U. fraternal

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delegation took part in the special session of W.F.T.U.'s Executive Committee in Prague. A culmination of these associations was the establishment in Cairo with Nasser's approval of a joint I.C.A.T.U./W.F.T.U. "International Trade Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and People of Algeria" in September 1958.

9. In these endeavours to exploit I.C.A.T.U., W.F.T.U. can be seen to be implementing with some success its declared policy of "unity of action" - that is to say, of co-operation for joint action on specific issues, as opposed to agreement on a common general policy. This is of course in line with Communist attempts to exploit other Cairo-based Afro-Asian movements. At the same time, and although joint action with W.F.T.U. has led to conflicts within I.C.A.T.U., there has been no significant reduction in the extent to which I.C.A.T.U. is an instrument of the U.A.R. Government.

10. The importance of I.C.A.T.U. to the U.A.R. Government (and to W.F.T.U.), lies in the advantages that would accrue from the creation of a controlled organisation of trades unions in the Middle East, and in Africa, which could be exploited for action, whether by demonstrations, strikes or sabotage, in support of U.A.R. (or Communist) policy. Trades unionism in the area is essentially directed to political, and not to social or economic, ends, and this must increase the likelihood that Arab nationalism, as represented by I.C.A.T.U., may succeed in establishing an effective inter-Arab trades union organisation.

11. There are however a number of obstacles in the way of success on the part of I.C.A.T.U.: these include the following:-

- i) more advanced and better organised trades unions will be reluctant to accept I.C.A.T.U. direction from Cairo.
- ii) in countries where I.C.A.T.U.'s principal support comes from Communist-dominated unions it will not be truly representative of Arab trade unions, and will also be vulnerable through government action against Communism; in the Sudan, for instance, the Communist S.W.F.T.U. was first weakened by the creation of a rival, government-sponsored, trade union federation, and has now been publicly discredited by the prosecution of its Communist leaders.
- iii) the existing associations, particularly in the North African states, between the local T.U.s and the I.C.F.T.U., act as a counter-balance to I.C.A.T.U., W.F.T.U. efforts to gain support in these countries: in Libya, this has resulted in a swing away from I.C.A.T.U.
- iv) governmental action, e.g. in Jordan and Iden, has reduced or prevented opportunities for contact between local trades unions and I.C.A.T.U.

12. It is nevertheless certain that the U.A.R. Government (and W.F.T.U.) will continue and increase their efforts to build up I.C.A.T.U. into an effective political force, which will serve as an instrument of their efforts to exploit Arab nationalism for overt and covert subversive purposes. Likely future action includes:-

- i) the strengthening of contact with existing I.C.A.T.U. affiliates.
- ii) attempts to establish I.C.A.T.U. contact with trades unions in Iraq, the Persian Gulf and Black Africa.
- iii) attempts to establish an effective inter-Arab oil workers' organisation under I.C.A.T.U. auspices.
- iv) attempts to work towards the creation of an Afro-Asian trades union organisation.
- v) attempts to open branch offices of I.C.A.T.U. abroad to serve as focal points for influencing national governments and workers' organisations.
- vi) continued opposition to the I.C.F.T.U. as the agent of western imperialism and Israel.

/Appendix A

APPENDIX 1

I.C.A.T.U. Personalities

1. FATHI KAMAL Egyptian. Secretary General of I.C.A.T.U. In close contact with W.F.T.U., and a frequent visitor to Soviet bloc countries, although not actually known to be a Communist.
2. SUBHI AL KHATIB Syrian. Former President of General Federation of Syrian Trade Unions. Elected President of I.C.A.T.U. in 1956. Is known to have had Communist associations: is now reported to have been disgraced, and to be replaced as President of I.C.A.T.U.
3. MIDHAT KUSA Lebanese. Secretary of the Federation of Syndicates of North Lebanon. President Tailors' Union, Tripoli. Attended I.C.A.T.U. inaugural conference, Damascus, 1956, and elected as Assistant Secretary of I.C.A.T.U.
4. MUHAMMED AL OKEILI Egyptian. General Secretary of the Egyptian Confederation of Labour, and Secretary (Controller) of I.C.A.T.U.
5. SHAFI AHMAD AL SHAIKH Sudanese. Secretary General of the (Communist) Sudan Workers Federation of Trades Unions. An active Communist for many years, and closely associated with W.F.T.U. since 1953. Imprisoned on 18.12.58.
6. SALIM SHITTA Libyan. Secretary-General of Libyan General Workers Union. Attended I.C.A.T.U. inaugural conference, Damascus, 1956, and was appointed a Vice-President. During 1956-57 was active on behalf of the Egyptians in Libya, but is now reported to have fallen out with I.C.A.T.U.
7. ZAIDAN YUNIS Jordanian. Led the Jordanian delegation to the I.C.A.T.U. inaugural conference, Damascus 1956 as Sec. Gen. of United Workers Trades Union of Jordan. Assistant Secretary of I.C.A.T.U.: now resident in Damascus, where he is connected with the emigre "Jordanian Revolutionary Council." No longer really representative of Jordan T.Uns.