

The Sudanese Want Independence

By George Padmore

ARISING out of the treaty negotiations between Great Britain and Egypt, a delegation representing the Umma (People's) party and the Sudan Independence Front, met in Britain in December 1946 and was joined by Sir Sayed Abdel Raham, son of the famous Mahdi. Their purpose in coming to Britain was to put before the British public the case of the Sudanese people for independence.

In any interview, Mr. Abdulla Bey Khalil, general-secretary of Umma, who holds the rank of brigadier-general in the Sudan Defence Force, explained to me very fully the Sudanese claims. When I called upon Mr. Khalil and his colleagues, Mr. Yaagoub Osman, a 35-year-old lawyer and editor of *El Nile*, leading nationalist newspaper in the Sudan, and Mr. Mhmd. Mahgoub, who resigned his judgeship in protest against present events, I found them busily engaged in drafting a manifesto to be presented to the foreign secretary of state, Mr. Ernest Bevin. For Mr. Bevin was the one who discussed the future of the Sudan with the Egyptian prime minister, Sidky Pasha, when he came specially to London in December to try to get the question of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty settled.

"We are here to protest against any attempt to make a settlement at the expense of the Sudanese people," said Mr. Khalil. "It is necessary for the British people to be vigilant in the cause of right and justice for the Sudanese people. Already there is growing distrust and suspicion among large sections of Sudanese because of our exclusion from the talks taking place between the representatives of the British and Egyptian governments."

History of Sudanese Nationalism

"Since most people are unfamiliar with the history of Sudanese nationalism, will you please give me a brief outline of the Umma movement?" I asked Mr. Khalil. "Surely," he replied.

"The Umma party was formed in

Here is a short historical sketch of Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations and the reactions of the Sudanese nationalists to Britain's Labor Government attempt to double-cross them. It is the case of Palestine being repeated in Africa

1945, and now has a membership of over 500,000, drawn from the popular masses, who have rallied to its appeal on a program of 'Sudan for the Sudanese.' The Umma party has drawn to its banner many members even of the more primitive Nilotic tribes of the



YAGOUB OSMAN, representative of the Umma party in London, is the intelligent and progressively-minded editor of the Sudanese daily, *EL-NIL*. This paper, though not an organ of the Umma party, strongly supports the party cause. Mr. Osman was educated at Gordon college, Khartoum, went also to a secondary school in Egypt, and came to England to study law at Leeds university. He is a thoughtful young man much concerned with the political and social future of his country as an independent state.

southern Nile valley. Democratically based, the Party has about ninety regional committees, directed by a general council of sixty elected members. Its supreme body is the Executive Council of fourteen, which carries out the broad policy agreed upon by the General Council. The Party has its own newspaper, entitled *Umma*, and also enjoys the support of another daily, *El Nil*."

"That is a good summary. Now will you please review for me briefly the history of your country in relations to Britain and Egypt?" I requested.

"The Egyptians have always entertained an imperialistic attitude towards our country," declared Mr. Khalil. "It was in 1820 that Mohammed Ali, Turkish ruler of Egypt, acting in Turkish interest, invaded us in order to exploit our natural riches and sell our youth into slavery and bondage. The response to the call of the Islam leaders who formed the pioneers to his invading army paved the way to an easy victory for them. From that time until our liberation by the Mahdi, the Turkish flag flew over the Sudan, and under its shadow flourished one of the most oppressive, inhuman and corrupt regimes in the whole history of mankind.

"But in 1885 we regained our freedom, and for fourteen years we were completely independent, acknowledging no master except our own rulers. These fourteen years of freedom erased any claims based on the six years of misrule that had gone before."

Continuing his recital of the history of the Sudan, Mr. Khalil told how in 1898 the Sudan was invaded for a second time. "But on this occasion, the invading forces were not Turkish troops, but a joint force made up of British and Egyptians. The present existing administrative rights of the two powers in the Sudan are based on this conquest. Neither Britain nor Egypt had any right prior to 1898. For reasons concerned with the entry of



M. A. MAHGOUB is secretary and representative of the Sudan Independence Front in London. Born in 1908, he graduated from the school of engineering, Gordon college, Khartoum, in 1929. Then followed two years of post-graduate work in architecture, on the strength of which Mr. Mahgoub took up the post of architectural foreman of works and draughtsman until December, 1935. During that period he studied literature and contributed to the Arabic press as a free-lance journalist. In 1936 he joined the Khartoum school of law and took his degree in 1938. From 1938 to October 28, 1946, he served as judge, resigning from his judicial position to join the national movement. Mr. Mahgoub has published three books in Arabic: *THE INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT IN THE SUDAN*, *LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE SUDAN*, and *DEATH OF A WORLD*, an autobiography of his generation from 1924 to 1938.

another power, France, into the Sudan, an attempt was made to picture the 'Reconquest' as the suppression of a rebellion in some outlying Egyptian provinces, but this pretension was merely a political maneuver. Lord Cromer was the first to recognize this, when in 1901 he stated in a speech at Khartoum that 'both the Egyptians and the British are strangers. . . . We aim at a true Sudanese parliamentary representation, and it is possible for such to be created.'

"At no time since the second conquest has Great Britain claimed the Sudan as part of the British Empire; neither has Egypt treated our country as though it were a part of the Kingdom of Egypt. On the contrary, the British have consistently rejected the suggestion that the Sudan should be treated in the same way as her dependencies in the colonial empire, and the Egyptian government, on their part, have gone so far as to plead before the Mixed Courts in Egypt that the Sudan government was constitutionally an autonomous government absolutely separate from the Egyptian government. The court upheld this plea and found that by the 1898 agreements a new state was established in

the Sudan district from and independent of Egypt.

"It is clear therefore," Mr. Khalil explained, "that from the beginning of the Condominium Rule, the Sudan has been treated as a separate and detached territory over which the two Condominium Powers separately hold administrative rights not prejudicing the Sudan's sovereignty."

War Record

Referring to the war record of the Sudanese, Mr. Khalil emphasized that Egypt played no part in her own defence. It was Sudanese troops who went north and fought side by side with British and other Dominion forces in inflicting defeat upon the Italians and Rommel's *Afrika Korps*. "Let me quote to you what the Governor-General said to the Sudanese people in his message on Victory Day:

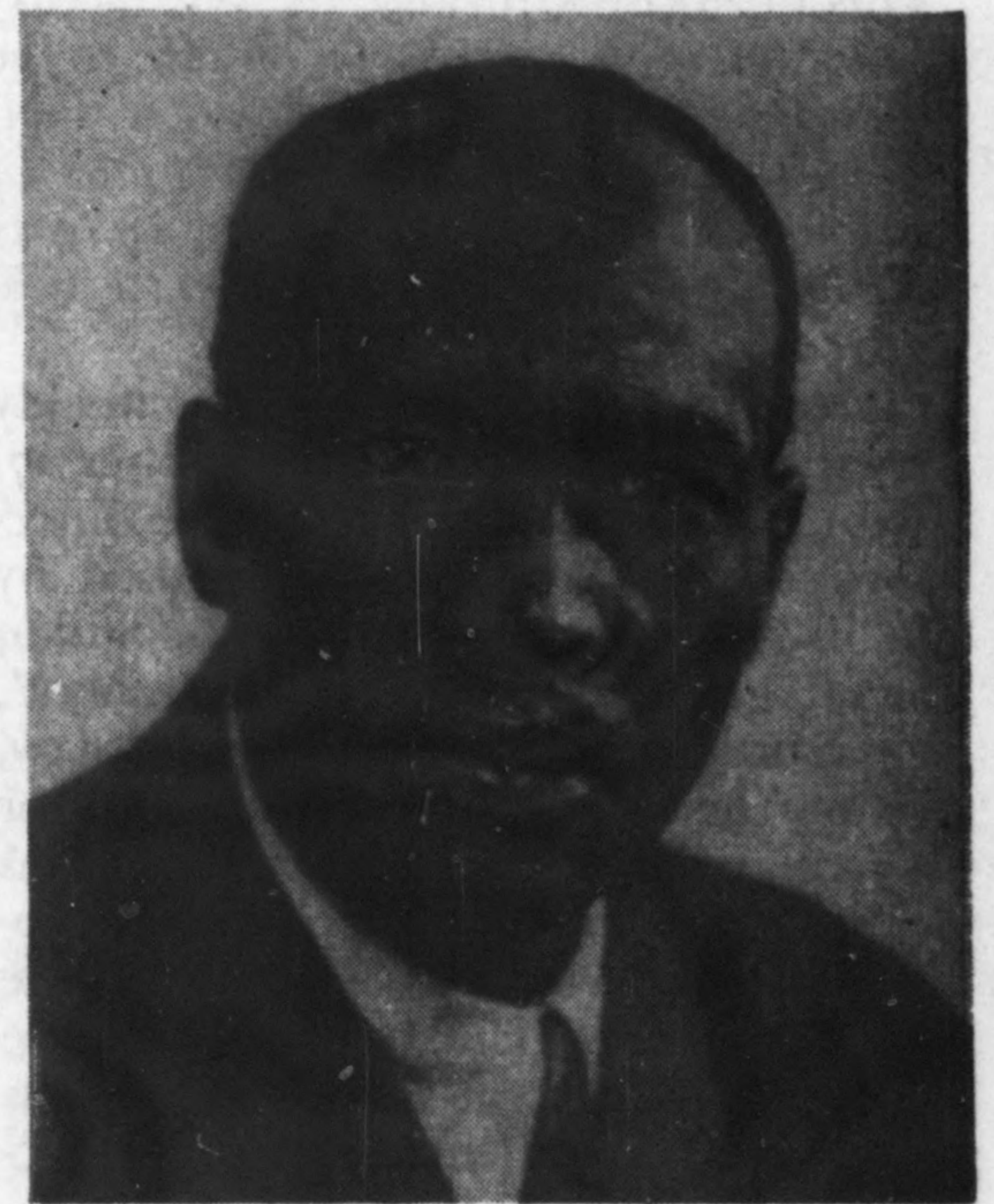
"The Sudan can look back with pride on the part she has played in this war. She has acted throughout with the courage, orderliness and obedience which Sir Stewart Symes called for in 1940. She has never doubted the path to victory. In 1940 her forces stood valiantly, with their British and Indian comrades, in the path of the invader and then pressed forward with them to share in the glorious victories in Abyssinia and in North Africa. Always they have brought honor to the Sudan by their valor and their discipline. At home the Sudan assisted in the vital task of guarding the African lines of communication and gave unswerving support to the military forces who used her soil. Her citizens made many generous contributions to the effort of war. Her cultivators worked with faithful persistence. Her merchants have loyally obeyed the demands made upon them. Her officials have shouldered without complaint new and heavy burdens. Her war-time economy has won praise outside the borders of the Sudan. This is indeed a proud record and let us remember it with full hearts."

British Declaration of No Change

Following the statements which were made in the Egyptian press in connection with the treaty negotiations between Egypt and Britain and the fears expressed by certain British members of Parliament, Mr. Bevin made a declaration in the House of Commons on March 26, 1947, in which he gave assurance that "no change should be made in the status of the Sudan as a result of treaty revision until the Sudan has been consulted through constitutional channels." Despite this announcement, the Sudanese have reason

to suspect that the Labor government may sacrifice them in order to appease the Pashas as a *quid pro quo* for military concessions to the British Empire. The hush-hush atmosphere surrounding the negotiations, from which the Sudanese were excluded, together with the interpretation given by Sidky Pasha to the Protocol signed between himself and Mr. Bevin a few weeks earlier only served to underline Sudanese suspicion and distrust.

The text of the draft Protocol declares that "The policy which the High Contracting Parties undertake to follow in the Sudan (within the framework of the unity between Sudan and Egypt under the common Crown of Egypt) will have for its essential objectives to assure the well-being of the Sudanese, the development of their interests and their active preparation for self-government and consequently the exercise of the right to choose the future status of the Sudan. Until the High Contract-



BRIGADIER ABDULLA BEY KHALIL, secretary-general of the Umma (People's) party, is 54 years old, and a familiar and much-respected figure in the public life of the Sudan. The greater part of his life has been spent in the service of his country, and he was one of the founders of the Umma party in 1945. Mr. Khalil studied at the engineering section of Gordon college and at the military school in Khartoum before joining the Egyptian Army in 1910. He served in the Gallipoli campaign, and when the Egyptian Army was evacuated from the Sudan in 1924, he transferred to the Sudan Defence Force. He was serving as a colonel on the staff of the famous Sudan Camel Corps when war broke out in 1939, and was appointed to the Kaid's headquarters. He retired from the service in 1944, and was appointed a member of the Advisory Council for the northern Sudan, from which he resigned as a protest against the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations over the Sudan. Mr. Khalil is a charming, gentlemanly person, wise and earnest, and he is seeking the best means of securing his people's freedom.

ing Parties can in full common agreement realize this latter objective after consultation with the Sudanese, the Agreement of 1899 will continue and Article 11 of the Treaty of 1936 together with its annex and paragraphs 14 to 16 of the Agreed Minute annexed to the same Treaty will remain in force notwithstanding the first Article of the present Treaty."

It was on the basis of this document that King Farouk announced to the Egyptian Parliament that soon he will be able to declare himself king over the Sudan. And Sidky Pasha's interpretation is that "the Protocol puts an end to the policy adopted hitherto in the Sudan by the British in order to ensure for themselves a part of the sovereignty over it. They used to call the Sudan a 'Condominium,' which implies the existence of partnership. This policy has created a false idea about Egypt's right in the Sudan among representatives of foreign powers and among authorities in international law. This Protocol will cause *the sovereignty of Egypt alone over the Sudan* to be regarded by all foreign powers as an accomplished fact, a fact which may in future have great importance in case any question about the Sudan is submitted to the United Nations."

According to the Egyptian weekly newspaper, *Rose El Yusef* (October 27, 1946), Sidky Pasha says that the objections to the Protocol "are caused by the provision as to preparing the Sudan for self-government. 'Self-government', in accordance with international law, is not the same as 'independence' or 'sovereignty'. He had long discussions with Mr. Bevin in London on this subject. Mr. Bevin was afraid lest the Sudanese should demand independence and, owing to Great Britain's previous undertakings to them, he could not accept tying them with Egypt in an indissoluble tie. Sidky pointed out that it was imaginable that they would one day ask for severance from Egypt. Even if this should take place, the Treaty is concluded only for a period of twenty years, after which each party will resume his liberty of action. Egypt will be ready to settle the question with the Sudan in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter. Mr. Bevin, however, after acknowledging the sovereignty of Egypt, wished to give assurance to the people of the Sudan about their future, so he insisted on the reference to the future status of the country. After a lot of discussion, the Egyptian side agreed on the text in the Protocol, which was approved by Mr. Bevin.

Effect of Protocol

"Sidky then goes on to explain the

legal effect of the Protocol, and concludes that the future policy of the two Governments will be *subject to the principle of Egyptian sovereignty*; and therefore this policy cannot provide for *any arrangements which would be outside the limits of sovereignty or the framework of the unity of the two countries under one Crown. Therefore the right of separation from Egypt is denied, and the Sudanese will not have the right in future to cut the tie of Egyptian sovereignty over them.* Whatever explanation is given to the present Protocol, the sovereignty of Egypt over the Sudan cannot be removed unless by a clear declaration to be issued in [the] future by Egypt; and this could only take place as a result of a revolution in the Sudan; or of a separation by force; or by a voluntary surrender by Egypt. Briefly, by virtue of this Protocol, *the Sudanese will not have the right of separation from Egypt*, and it is not permissible to provide in this Protocol for the possibility of Egyptian surrender. Such a grave alteration could only take place after an official declaration by Egypt, transmitted first to the Sudanese people and afterwards to the United Nations."

While Mr. Bevin has not yet had an opportunity to give his interpretation of the Protocol, the Governor-General of the Sudan, acting on the instructions of the British prime minister, Mr. Attlee, issued a statement on November 7, 1946, which can be taken as an interpretation of the British government's reading of the Protocol. While not denying the claim made by Sidky Pasha that "this Protocol will cause the sovereignty of Egypt alone over the Sudan to be regarded by all foreign powers as an accomplished fact," the statement reaffirms the Foreign Minister's declaration of March 26 that the constitution and powers of the Sudanese government remain unaltered by the recent conversations.

This statement is no doubt intended to appease Sudanese fears and suspicions by assuring them that there would be no change in the status quo. At the same time the statement, by not denying Sidky's assertion of Egypt's titular sovereignty over the Sudan, leaves the door open for the consummation of the present negotiations between Britain and Egypt. If this proves to be the case, all the assurances previously given to the Sudanese that the only object of the British in the Sudan is to prepare them for independence is sheer humbug. For as Sidky has publicly stated, once sovereignty over the Sudan is conceded to the Egyptian Crown, the Sudanese will be able to achieve their independence only by revolutionary means.

Recognizing the untenable position into which they had been maneuvered, the Sudanese delegation in London categorically rejected the draft Protocol and demanded the immediate termination of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, and the restoration of the sovereign rights of the Sudanese people. As a free and independent people, the Sudanese will be quite prepared to enter into treaty relations with Britain, Egypt, Abyssinia, and their other neighbors in the Nile valley, for they realize that in an interdependent world they cannot live in isolation. But they object to being used as pawns in back-room bargaining between a reactionary and graft-ridden feudal class on the one hand, and a so-called Socialist government on the other, in order that Britain's imperial interests in the Middle East may be bolstered up and her life lines to the Indian Empire safeguarded.

British Foreign Office

Behind the whole affair can be discerned the skilful hand of the British Foreign Office and its political representatives in Cairo playing the old traditional game of divide and rule. Such is the cynicism of the British ruling class, who have no permanent friends or permanent enemies, but only permanent interests, that they are willing to sacrifice the very Sudanese who helped them defend their Empire when the Egyptian Pashas were flirting with the Axis Powers.

The Sudan situation as it is now shaping up bears a striking resemblance to the beginning of the Palestinian problem after the First World War, when as the result of the Balfour Declaration, a document as vaguely phrased as the Bevin-Sidky Protocol, led to what we are witnessing today, an undeclared war between the British and the Jews. It would be really tragic if eventually the British Labor Government, in order to impose upon the unwilling Sudanese people the rule of the rotten and corrupt Egyptian regime, will be driven to use British troops against the Sudanese. For one thing is certain. The Sudanese, who in 1885, united solidly to drive out their much-hated Egyptian oppressors, will not tamely suffer the re-imposition of the sovereignty of a class that so shamelessly and ruthlessly exploits the workers and the fellahin of Egypt.

NAACP CONFERENCE

Washington, D. C.

June 24-29