

LIBYA: A COUNTRY IN REVOLUTION

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Deep social changes, with a consequent rise in living standards and a giddy race against time to achieve complete economic development, mark Yamahiria Arab Socialist People's Libya.

Located in the north of the African continent on the Mediterranean Sea between Algeria, Tunis and Egypt, Libya has an area of 1 760 000 square km. and a population of some 2 500 000 inhabitants.

Its history goes so far back that it is said to predate the Pharaohs' civilizations of the Nile River. The Greek historian Herodotus believed the name of the country came from the legendary woman Lubia, chief of one of the tribes in that region.

Mankind's progressive development can be observed in Libya from the time of the ancient Phoenicians, Romans and Greeks to that of the Moslems and the present period, for it is a country filled with world-renowned archaeological treasures.

In many periods it was under foreign control: Romans and Greeks, Turks and Spaniards, the Ottoman Empire — for several centuries — Benito Mussolini's fascist troops; but the Libyan people fought and retained their traditions.

Great Britain, along with other colonialist powers, gave Libya a formal and fictitious independence at the end of World War II, but it only became a reality on September 1, 1969, with the revolution led by Colonel Muammar El Khadafi.



In spite of its rich oil deposits, the country was practically in ruins. The transnational companies exploited the oil with absolute control of all operations including markets and prices. Meanwhile, 80 percent of the population was illiterate and suffered from every conceivable disease.

El Khadafi, President of the Command of the Revolution, said on one occasion that he understood liberty to mean a greater number of houses, factories, hospitals and generally everything related to the people's welfare. And to this end he has directed his efforts.

The Libyan Revolution has devoted special attention to satisfying essential needs and guaranteeing such food products as wheat, flour, rice, sugar, tea, milk and oil at very low prices. It also created the National Council for Agricultural Integration and Development, headed by a minister, for the purpose of modernizing traditional agriculture in order to increase production and achieve self-sufficiency. Investments in this area quadrupled between 1969 and the first nine months of 1974, rising from 16.9 million dinars — one dinar is equivalent to US \$3.50 — to 71.3 million. Formerly nonproductive areas began to be worked with the most modern methods of irrigation and fertilization, and additional stretches of desert are being recovered each day. Plans involving thousands of hectares will be turned over to peasants in the next few months, principally in Wadi Al Ramil (24 000 hectares), Wadi Amait and Alathal (35 000) and in the regions of Jufra, Al Jebe Al Akhdar, Fezzan, Kufrah and Al Sa-reer.

It is a matter of pride for the Libyans to point out that a new factory enters into production every month. Textile, wood, cement and metallurgical industries, among others, have been built in the main cities.

Housing situation

In 1969 the housing shortage was devastating: 150 000 families had

no housing at all, while 70 000 lived in tents in the desert and in the cities.

Housing projects involving an investment of 277.85 million dinars (some \$889 million) were built between 1970 and 1974 to solve the most urgent needs of the cities.

In addition, 108 housing units were built in the rural regions in 1972-73, and 579 more two years later.

These were the first steps, but they were still insufficient. In order to increase construction capacity and create new jobs, prefabrication plants were built in Tripoli and Benghazi, the country's main urban centers, with an annual production of 1300 to 1800 units each.

By 1976, 140 000 new dwellings had been built, most of them three- or four-story apartment buildings which changed the physiognomy of the cities. New districts have been built everywhere, 12-story apartment buildings are going up and other housing projects are still on the drawing board. The state expects to solve the housing problem within the next few years.

Public health situation

With the same speed that it confronted the housing shortage, the Libyan Government has given priority attention to public health.

Endemic diseases devastated the country. Cholera and yellow fever decimated the population. Tubercu-

losis alone affected 101 out of every 10 000 inhabitants in 1969. The number of hospitals and doctors was insufficient to attend to all the sick, the majority of them too poor to pay for medical services and medicines.

In 1969 the country had only 500 doctors and 4500 hospital beds for a population of around two million.

It was necessary to build new hospitals, dental clinics, maternity centers and TB and trachoma treatment centers. In 1974, hospital beds numbered 10 241, and in 1976, 21 000, according to Meftaj Osta Omar, Minister of Public Health, in a report he gave to the National People's Congress in November of that year.

Today Libya is justly proud of its General Hospital in Tripoli, a modern five-story building that was inaugurated in September, 1976. It is the first of a series that will be built throughout the country

Each floor has three sections and an emergency operating room, while the top floor has four large wards. Each room has five beds, considered an ideal number for hospitals of that type. The hospital also has modern X-ray equipment, a cardiology complex and a maxillo-facial surgery department, all of which are available free of charge to the population for the first time in their history.

By law, medical services are a right of all Libyans, and the state

is in charge of running all medical installations.

This year, 16 polyclinics will be opened to give service to 50 000 persons each. The first ones will open in Tripoli, Benghazi and Gharios. They will offer specialized services and will be equipped with laboratories, emergency operating rooms and facilities for temporary hospitalization. Each polyclinic will be open 24 hours a day and will keep complete medical files on all patients.

The government has given special attention to the training of technicians and specialists, who are still sorely needed; because of this deficiency the government has hired a large number of foreign doctors.

Today Libyan doctors are working side by side with doctors from India, Italy, Australia and France, assimilating the most modern medical techniques. Others have been sent abroad to take specialized courses, while hundreds of students are enrolled in the medical schools of Tripoli and Benghazi.

It is unlikely that, given the rate of construction of new medical installations, the government will be able to satisfy the country's needs with Libyan doctors alone; however, the government believes that the most important thing is to give the population medical facilities, regardless of the nationality of the doctors.

Public education situation

When the Revolution triumphed in September, 1969, the country had an illiteracy rate of 90 percent among adults. A few years later the rate was only 45 percent.

The state has drawn up an educational program with the participation of all institutes, the Arab Socialist Union and the women's organizations. There is a project to eliminate illiteracy completely by 1980.

There are evening classes for adults, and, by law, education is a right of all and obligatory through the secondary-school level. Education is also gratis, and the state is in charge of building the schools and distributing free textbooks. The students pay only for their uniforms.

In the 1973-75 period, education investments amounted to 189.29 million dinars (some \$705.7 million). In the same period, the country had 523 218 primary-school students, 95 710 junior-high-school students and 18 446 senior-high-school students.

Several technical and teachers' training schools have also been built, with special attention also given to university education (11 117 students in 1975).

A university was built in Tripoli and another in Benghazi, for 10 000 students. The state has also created institutes for specialized stud-

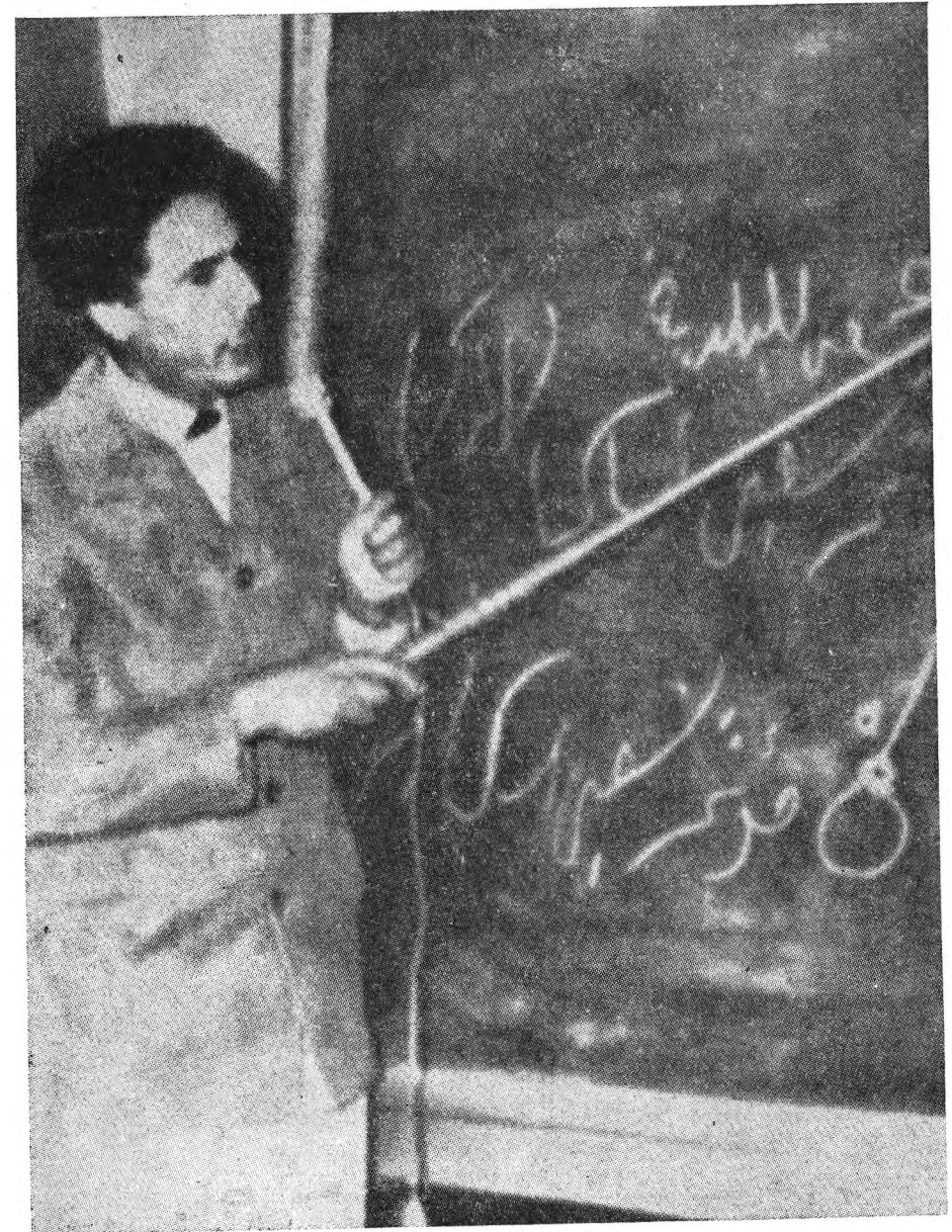
ies in petroleum, the country's main resource. An annual average of 300 students have been sent abroad to study since 1973.

In 1969, only 21 000 children had access to the schools. Seven years later, the school system had an enrollment of 761 000 persons, who are studying to help develop Libya, a country that is working for the future.

Women

The Revolution of September, 1969, opened an important phase in the emancipation of women, deprived of all rights during the colonial period. They now have opportunities for education and work and have become a dynamic force in production.

Customs and traditions still act as fetters on women's full incorporation. Those between the ages of 18 and 35 show a tendency to enter and accept modern life, but older women are not very well prepared to do so, and those over 45 years of age tend to be more conservative and go through the streets in their typical dress, with their bodies completely covered and a huge white cloth over their heads and faces. Urban women decide on marriage, but the custom of the family's choosing the husband is still maintained in rural areas, and men with little education do not completely accept the Libyan woman's new role.





Another characteristic of the Libyan people is their deep religious feeling. They believe in Islam, pray five times a day and regularly attend the numerous mosques that exist throughout the country. To a certain extent, their way of living is closely linked to their religion, which proscribes pork and alcoholic beverages. Not only do they accept this, but they even argue that "drinking is bad for the health" and admit that they never try it.

Solidarity and anti-imperialism

The Revolution proclaimed nationalism and Arab solidarity as its chief slogan; demanded and achieved the withdrawal of British and US troops from the Tobruk, El Adem and Wheelus Field bases; imposed limits on concessions to foreign capital; nation-

alized the main oil companies; and gave the poor peasants the idle land expropriated from foreigners.

The Constitution passed on December 11, 1969, gave the executive power to the Supreme Command of the Revolution, composed of 11 members. The National Assembly of the People's Committee, which met last November, analyzed and discussed plans for development up to 1980.

All sectors of the population are represented on the People's Committee. Its only party, the Arab Socialist Union, is both an instrument of the government and a political institution.

On the international level, Libya is a non-aligned country that has proclaimed its support of national liberation movements and provided sustained assistance to the Palestine Liberation Organization.