

British gnash their teeth, as Sudan conducts first democratic elections

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

Sudan is a country that has become the target of an intensive international campaign, led by the British, aimed at imposing United Nations sanctions to strangle it into submission, even at the cost of igniting regional war. Among the multitude of lies retailed by British intelligence and its outlets, like the Christian Solidarity International of Baroness Caroline Cox, is that the current government is a "military dictatorship." Cox and her cohorts have alleged that the Khartoum government of Gen. Omar Al-Bashir, who took power in a military coup in 1989, harbors terrorists, and is guilty of genocide against parts of the population. In mid-March, Baroness Cox barged into the U.S. Congress, to testify at hearings, that the Sudanese government also engages in slavery.

Nowhere in the ravings of Baroness Cox has there been mention of a fact of immense significance: that the government in question was holding general elections to start the transition to democratic rule, which General Bashir promised he would do, upon taking power. The elections took place March 7-17, and the results were announced on March 22. Two hundred and seventy-five persons were elected to the Parliament, to serve alongside 175 who had been chosen by indirect election through the country's congressional system, in January. In addition, for the first time in Sudanese history, the President was elected by direct, popular vote. General Al-Bashir received a comfortable 75.7% majority.

The mere fact that the elections took place, is in itself a considerable achievement, considering the political as well as logistical obstacles placed in the way. Although the legislation regarding the elections specified that any Sudanese above the age of 40, of sound mind and body, and without a criminal record, could apply for candidacy to the highest office of the land, the leading opposition figure, Sadiq Al-Mahdi, of the Umma party, refused to place his name in the competition. Al-Mahdi, who apparently was not sure of a victory in case he ran, speculated on the possibility that his abstention and call for general boycott, would render the elections futile. Among the 40 candidates for President, other than General Al-Bashir, were four or five nationally known figures, including a former security chief in the government which Sadiq Al-Mahdi led.

A logistical challenge

Logistically, the elections presented an enormous challenge. As Sudan's leading intellectual figure, Dr. Hassan Al-Turabi, explained to *EIR*, the registration of eligible voters involved a massive effort. In previous elections, under the multi-party system that existed before 1989, candidates were responsible for drafting lists of voters, in a procedure which was obviously flawed, as tribal leaders would inflate the numbers of their voters, etc. In the current situation, election officials carried out the first national registration drive, over months, and succeeded in registering 8,110,650 voters. By comparison, during the last parliamentary elections in 1986, there were 5,851,168 registered voters.

Conducting the vote presented further problems. Given the high rates of illiteracy, Dr. Al-Turabi explained, symbols were chosen by lot to identify candidates on the ballot. The symbol which General Al-Bashir received was the electric fan. Since, in many areas of the country, such a device is unknown, many voters would have problems identifying this candidate. As a result, A. Moneim Z. Nahas, the head of the general elections authority, announced that the election officials have decided in the future to use photographs and names of the candidates.

Another problem was created by the physical and social characteristics of the country. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, with 1 million square miles, has a population of 26 million. Many are nomads, constantly on the move, in search of fresh water for their herds. To make it possible for these citizens to register and then to vote, the election apparatus had to go to them. Thus squads consisting of three police, one security person, and two election officials were deployed out in high trucks, the only vehicles capable of traversing certain desert areas, in search of voters.

Despite the opposition's call for a boycott especially of the Presidential race, the turnout was high by any standards. In 1986, during parliamentary elections under a multi-party system, 3,949,937 of the 5,851,168 registered voters actually cast their vote. This time, of the 8,110,650 registered voters, 5,525,082 went to the polls. In 1986, the votes cast for the two parties which are today the pillars of the opposition,

the Umma and the Unionists, totalled 2,853,355 votes. In comparison, the votes cast for General Al-Bashir were 4,181,748—75.7% of the votes cast, representing 52% of all registered voters.

As for the parliamentary elections, ten persons who had served as ministers in the pre-election government, were elected. Four of them, the ministers of finance and of agriculture, the first vice president, and the minister of presidential affairs, ran unopposed, whereas the others, ministers of transport, social planning, information, internal affairs, foreign affairs, and justice, defeated other candidates. Two state ministers who ran, were not reelected.

Several opposition figures who ran for parliament, won, among them Dr. Majoul Khalif; Al Hadi Bushra, former national security adviser during Al-Mahdi's government; and Abdul Faddah Hadjudj and Ali Mohammed Al Hassan, both prominent businessmen.

Foreign observers confirm results

Among the few press references to the election before the fact, the London *Economist* and *Financial Times* had stated in February, that the elections would be a "farce," unworthy of any attention. The British also intervened directly to sabotage the elections. The Sudanese election authorities had extended invitations to all international bodies, to send delegations to monitor the vote. Among these bodies, was the European Parliament, which routinely organizes such missions. This time, a British member of the EP succeeded in preventing the body from forming a delegation. Nonetheless, other groups did send monitors to Sudan: the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab League, the Schiller Institute, the South African deputy chief of justice, the Italian Parliament, and others. Over 90 press were present.

The most important report issued by any of the monitors came from the OAU, which had a team there from March 4 until the completion of the vote. As noted in its Official Statement issued on March 20, the OAU mission "traveled extensively throughout the country" observing procedures in "Khartoum, Omdurman and surrounding constituencies; Juba; Terekeka; Malakal; El-Fashir and surrounding areas including . . . localities in the Gezira state and Port Sudan in the Red Sea State. In total the team visited six states and more than 60 polling stations."

The OAU observers met with candidates and voters, as well as members of the government. Furthermore, as the statement specifies, "Noting that the opposition parties decided not to take part in the elections, the mission also met with influential leaders opposed to the electoral process, like Mr. Sadiq Al-Mahdi, the leader of the banned Umma party." They also met "representatives of the international community" based there, or visiting for the elections.

The OAU mission "arrived in the country after the regis-

tration of candidates had been completed." The mission took note of complaints of some candidates regarding the "registration process and the short time that was available to them for campaigns. Another difficulty noted was that no elections took place in the areas (11 constituencies out of 275) where civil war continues."

That said, the OAU gives the following evaluation: "The election in the Sudan was clearly much more than just another routine opportunity for a people to exercise its democratic right to elect its representatives. This election is a historic occasion, the first direct Presidential election in Sudan, and the first time the voters in the newly demarcated states have the opportunity to select their representatives to the new National Assembly.

"As a first, the election process experienced various technical difficulties. In spite of the shortcomings, those Sudanese who decided to vote had an opportunity to exercise their vote. With the experience gained in this election, the difficulties can be easily rectified in the future, and the OAU would submit a report to the government of Sudan with its observations in this regard. The election was marked by the absence of any violence in those areas where elections took place."

The OAU in its statement stresses that the mission was "able to move freely wherever it wished. The government facilitated the OAU mission in every way possible and the mission would like to thank those who assisted the OAU for their highly professional conduct and willingness to help the mission with its numerous requests."

In a separate statement, the Arab League declared the elections to be a "significant constitutional move forward." Even the British and American diplomats on the scene were forced, according to reports, to acknowledge that the elections had been fair and honest.

CNN: lies and slander

CNN, true to its record of lies and distortion, reported on the evaluations given by the delegates from the U.K., among them several persons of Pakistani origin. Two of the group told CNN, that they thought, despite obvious logistical difficulties, that the elections had been free and fair. CNN broadcast a clip from the interview, followed by the anchorman's remark, that while it was clear, that the Pakistani-born delegates would express solidarity because of their Muslim religion, the Englishman "must have been paid by the Sudanese government" to say what he said.

Particularly if considered in the regional context, the elections constitute a decisive victory. Contrary to the Egyptian elections late last year, before which most of the Muslim Brotherhood candidates were jailed, and not one opposition figure was elected, the Sudanese race was open to all. Unlike the Algerian Presidential elections, which featured four candidates hand-picked by the President, and excluded the main opposition force, the Sudanese elections had opposition figures take part and win.