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Communists, Islamists, Ba'athists and Sectarians: The Political Parties in 1964 and 1985

Middle Eastern analysts have argued that in the second half of the twentieth century, political parties identifying with a pluralist democratic system were not significant actors on the regional political scene.¹ Similarly, Africanist literature for the most part treats multi-party politics as a serious phenomenon only after the great wave of liberalization in the 1990s.² Therefore, it is unsurprising, that a number, though not all, of the Sudanese participants and observers of the 1964 and 1985 uprisings have sought to downplay the role of the political parties.³ Nevertheless, a number of factors should be taken into consideration before dismissing the role played by the parties in Sudan. First of all, the very fact that the two uprisings did succeed in returning genuine multi-party democracy to the country, albeit for relatively brief periods, ensured that none of the Sudanese parties spent as long a period in political occultation as their counterparts elsewhere in the region. Moreover, the two military regimes' experimentation with periods of 'liberalized autocracy' in which they co-opted different parties (or factions of parties) at different times also enabled these same parties to continue exercising influence.

The political parties that participated in the uprisings of both 1964 and 1985 shared a number of common features – first of all, they mainly traced their origins back to the late colonial period. Secondly, they all operated out of Khartoum and relied principally on a northern Sudanese constituency. However, a distinction is usually made between the modern ideological parties established by the educated elite of the University of Khartoum (Gordon College before independence), particularly the Sudan Communist Party and Muslim Brotherhood, and the so-called 'traditional' parties that were sponsored by the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya religious orders.

The 'traditional' parties included the *Umma* Party, which was established in 1945 by Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, the Imam of the *Ansar* religious movement. The *Ansar* movement itself dates back to the 1880s, when it was founded by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, the grandfather of Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, to aid his war against the Turco-Egyptian colonizers of Sudan. Although the Mahdist *Ansar* were defeated by the British in 1898, Sayyid Abd al-Rahman developed an intimate relationship with the colonial administration and was able to rebuild the economic and political power of the *Ansar* movement, particularly through his patronage of various

cotton farming schemes on the White and Blue Niles. He used this power-base to campaign for Sudanese independence in the 1940s and 1950s. The Khatmiyya Sufi order, on account of its close commercial relationship with Egypt, sponsored rival political parties that supported unity between Egypt and Sudan. In 1944, Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani granted his support to the Ashiqqa' ('blood brothers') party, which had been formed by young graduates in the previous year to advocate for unity with Egypt. This party had morphed into the National Unionist Party (NUP) by the time of the 1953 elections, and its leader Isma'il al-Azhari became Sudan's first prime minister after having abandoned the principle of amalgamation with the country's northern neighbour. In 1957, a rift within the party led to a splinter movement forming the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which drew the support of the majority of the Khatmiyya. The party was still split at the time of the October Revolution of 1964, but the two rival groups amalgamated themselves into the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in 1967.

These parties consistently outperformed the more 'ideological' parties at the polls during elections in Sudan's periods of multi-party parliamentary democracy between 1953–8, 1964–9 and 1986–9, reflecting the influential presence of the *Ansar* and the Khatmiyya in the rural areas of northern, eastern, western and central Sudan. However, they found it much harder to obtain the support of Sudan's educated elites, who tended to identify with the ideological movements emanating from the wider Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century. Sudanese students who had completed educations in Egypt brought back with them the ideals of the Egyptian communists and the Muslim Brotherhood, although the local ideological movements that began to emerge as a result in the 1940s usually had a specifically Sudanese outlook. The Islamic Liberation Movement, which was established by Babikir Karrar in 1948, became the most dominant faction among the various Sudanese groupings influenced by Egyptian political Islam. Karrar clashed with individuals such as Ali Talaballah who believed that the Sudanese movement should incorporate itself into the Egyptian parent organization.⁴ In spite of the desires of the Sudanese Islamists to be not too closely identified with the Egyptian movement, in 1955 they established an 'Executive Bureau' to represent the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) in Sudan, which would elect a 'general supervisor' (*muraqib al-aam*).⁵ This 'executive bureau' would sponsor a number of political parties – the ILM between 1955 and 1964, the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) between 1964 and 1985 and the National Islamic Front (NIF) between 1985 and 1989. Confusingly, these parties are usually referred to by non-Islamists as the 'Muslim Brotherhood', although there were a number of other factions, such as Babikir Karrar's Islamic Socialist Party (formed in 1964) and Sadiq Abdullah's Muslim Brotherhood, that also identified with the original movement. Further terminological confusion followed Hasan al-Turabi's decision to rename the Muslim Brotherhood organization the 'Islamic Movement' following the 1964 Revolution to emphasize the uniqueness of the Sudanese Islamist experience⁶ – many of the movement's opponents continued to use the 'Brotherhood' label. The Sudan Communist Party emerged in a fashion similar to that of the various Islamist parties, being established by Sudanese students in Cairo as a branch of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1944, and then emerging as a movement in its own right in 1946 when it founded the Sudanese Movement

for National Liberation.⁷ This party was outlawed by the British colonial government, the Sudanese parliamentary regime that followed it and Abboud's military regime.⁸ As such, it already had a long history of underground political activity by the time of the October Revolution.

Just as was the case in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the various political parties made a variety of highly contested claims regarding their participation in the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. Representatives of these parties have frequently attempted to claim that their political opponents had either failed to contribute to the civilian insurrections, or actively opposed them. When specific parties maintained that their rivals had 'opposed' the uprisings, what this often really meant was that they opposed the vision of the Revolution that they had tried to create during the transitional periods (see Chapters 6 and 7). Meanwhile, political 'neutrals' who were not members of these parties have tended to insist that the role of the political parties was irrelevant to the outcome of the Revolution, and to highlight the role of the professional elites, or the 'Sudanese people' in general. A number of politicians in their dotage such as Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd and Hasan al-Turabi now downplay the role of their own parties – although the latter perhaps has his own motives for doing so.

A number of the accusations that specific parties 'opposed' either the 1964 or 1985 uprisings highlight the relationship of these parties with the state in 1964 and 1985. Both the SCP in 1964 and ICF in 1985 were accused of having been 'in cahoots' with the defunct regimes following their overthrows. While it will be seen that the ICF had a closer, if not necessarily a more harmonious, relationship with Nimeiri in 1985 than the SCP did with Abboud in 1964, we must beware of establishing binary models of 'collaboration' or 'opposition'. As Sami Zubaida has observed, the state in the Middle East is not so much a homogeneous entity as a 'political field' in which various social and political factions compete for influence.⁹ Nimeiri's state was particularly porous in this regard. All the major northern political groups – the Umma, DUP, ICF, SCP, Ba'athists and Nasserists – either actively identified with it or drew support from it at some point. Most parties oscillated between seeking absorption within the state or actively seeking to overthrow it, which was the cause of much internal factionalism within these same parties.

Hasan al-Turabi, the *Ikhwan* and campus mobilization

Debates over the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1964 tend to focus on the actions of Hasan al-Turabi, which, as illustrated in Chapter 1, were genuinely significant. A number of sympathetic sources insist that al-Turabi was enacting the calculated strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood's executive bureau, and highlight the agency of other individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the early stages of the Revolution. Other accounts – including (at times) al-Turabi's own – contend that he was acting as a solitary professional and not as a member of any political organization. For instance, Eisa points to the fact that during the famous seminar of 10 September when al-Turabi delivered his famous address, he did so as an expert on constitutional law recently returned from the Sorbonne, and not as a member of the Muslim

Brotherhood, which was already represented by Uthman Khalid Medawi.¹⁰ Al-Turabi himself claimed in 2011 'I witnessed October, but the organization to which I belong did not entrust me to do anything.'¹¹ This was a markedly different position to that which he advanced as leader of the NIF in the late 1980s, when he attributed to the Islamists the greatest contribution to the success of the Revolution.¹²

Theorists who posit that it is a charismatic individual rather than a rational political framework that determines the activity of Islamist social movements¹³ might accept al-Turabi's assertion that his actions during the Revolution were spontaneous and autonomous. Nevertheless, this claim needs to be examined in light of the history of his own relationship with the Brotherhood. Although he had been a leading party member before his postgraduate studies and had headed the *Ikhwan's* political office at the University of Khartoum before his graduation, his PhD at the Sorbonne – which was completed only 2 months before the Revolution – had taken him out of the limelight.¹⁴ Thus, it was not until the subsequent transitional period that al-Turabi catapulted himself into the political arena with the formation of the Islamic Charter Front. This represented a political split with the old Islamic Liberation Movement headed by Babikir Karrar, which reformed itself as the Islamic Socialist Party following the October Revolution.¹⁵ Throughout the rest of the 1960s, al-Turabi was the principal architect of the efforts to engage the Brotherhood (now renamed as the Islamic Movement) more directly in the political arena, which led him into conflict with 'educationalists' who eschewed such an approach.¹⁶ This is perhaps why he viewed the Revolution from such an individual perspective. His subsequent political career perhaps exploited the kudos he received for his role in the Revolution. He himself admits that up until October 1964 'I never thought I would leave my academic career'.¹⁷

Given that al-Turabi would spend the following decades endeavouring to guide and reshape the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in accordance with his own philosophy, it is not unsurprising that he attributes more to his role as an individual rather than a party member at this time. He insists that during al-Qurayshi's funeral march on 22 October, he approached police who were planning to break up the demonstration and warned them off such an action, observing that Europeans were in the crowd and stating 'if you kill them do you think your government will enjoy this?'¹⁸ Sympathetic accounts also place a heavy emphasis on his role in addressing the crowds following the prayers over al-Qurayshi's body in the Midan Abd al-Muni'im. Shamouq recalls that al-Turabi responded to the crowds' chants for revenge and the removal of the military dictatorship by picking up a microphone and declaring in what Shamouq describes as a 'voice close to a blazing roar' that 'the lecturers' board will lead the struggle and rapid decisions will be taken so that we avenge the martyr against the traitors'.¹⁹ Al-Turabi argues that he was speaking purely in his role as a lecturer at this point,²⁰ although according to Shamouq, the two figures who followed him in addressing the crowds were also Muslim Brothers, the KUSU President Rabie Hasan Ahmad and student warden Hasan Umar.²¹

While al-Turabi and his acolytes have made it a political practice to aggrandize his reputation, it should be recognized that his role in the October Revolution is well acknowledged by neutrals and even political opponents. Senior Umma Party man Abd al-Hamid Fadl, a student leader during the events of October 1964, recalls

that al-Turabi 'has about 70 per cent in the Revolution' and that during this period 'the people admired him' (*nas mu'ajjibiin bihu*).²² 'The steam of the Revolution was injected by Dr al-Turabi, I must be honest', recalls former leftist Ghazi Suleiman, a member of KUSU at the time of October, '...we all admired him'.²³ Al-Turabi, alongside Ali Muhammad Khair, was one of the first lecturers to reach the university after the shooting occurred and help in ferrying wounded students to the hospital.²⁴ It appears that the students raised al-Turabi on their shoulders during the demonstration in Abd al-Muni'im Square.²⁵

SCP member Fathi Fadl – who was a part of the KUSU executive committee in October 1964 – admits that in his speech in the Midan Abd al-Muni'im, al-Turabi 'made a very courageous statement challenging everything', although, voicing a claim made by a number of al-Turabi's left-wing critics, he argues that he subsequently called for the students to disperse. Neither al-Turabi nor any of his supporters have responded convincingly to this criticism.²⁶ Indeed, one might read his declaration to the crowd (quoted by Shamouq) that 'you will find us [i.e. the lecturer's board] more eager than you to avenge the blood of the martyr'²⁷ as an indication that al-Turabi was still keen to keep the anti-regime protest within the university, fearing that mobilization of the urban population at large might lead to a left-wing takeover of the Revolution. If this is the case, ironically, his fears were not shared by his fellow Muslim Brother, the university warden Hasan Umar. A number of Islamist and non-Islamist sources, including Fathi Fadl, acknowledge that he was the one who provoked the subsequent protests by the crowds by grabbing the microphone from al-Turabi and declaring 'the November gang must fall'.²⁸ This itself suggests that because of the spontaneity of the Revolution, and probably also the divisions within the Brotherhood at the time, Sudan's Islamists were not acting with one voice. While al-Turabi's actions implied a more cautious strategy, Umar's exhibited a radical outlook.

However ambiguous his political status was during the Revolution, al-Turabi was nevertheless pursuing the broad interests of Sudan's Islamists. His secularist opponents have claimed that, far from acting as a neutral professional, he consciously switched the professionals' meeting place from the Lecturers' Club to the Doctors' Union headquarters on 26 October so as to confuse the SCP. Moreover, they maintain that he used the opportunity to increase Muslim Brotherhood representation in the Front by appointing, among others, Abd al-Rahim Hamdi as head of a (rapidly contrived) 'Finance ministry inspectors' union'.²⁹ Al-Turabi's participation in the team sent by the UNF to negotiate with Abboud further illustrates the ambiguity of his role. Sadiq al-Mahdi, who joined the delegation on behalf of the Umma Party, claims that al-Turabi was representing the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁰ Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, in whose house a crucial meeting of the Professional Front was held on 27 December, also insists that 'Hasan al-Turabi was supposed to be representing our group the professionals, but here he was playing the role of the Muslim Brotherhood'.³¹ This represents a key example of how members of the political parties captured the professional movement during the Revolution.

It is more than possible that al-Turabi may have downplayed the extent to which his actions during the Revolution were a product of party policy. El-Affendi, in a thoroughly researched, if somewhat sympathetic, book based on numerous interviews

with members of the Islamic Movement, claims that al-Turabi's famous speech on 10 September was a direct result of decisions made within the Muslim Brotherhood's sixth *shura* [consultative] council during June 1964 to mobilize dissent against the regime.³² He also maintains that the *Ikhwan* had been pursuing a large scale anti-regime pamphleteering campaign since July 1964, and that it was the Executive Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood which took a tactical decision to step up its rhetoric at the next seminar held at the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch), in which Muhammad Salih Umar and Ali Abdullah Yaqub represented the *Ikhwanis*.³³ He further represents the decision of the *Ikhwani* members of KUSU to press for the organization of further seminars as being in line with this overall policy.³⁴ The agency of the Brotherhood was implicitly acknowledged by its critics at the time, such as Ahmad Ali Baggadi, who following the debates held at the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch accused Muhammad Salih Umar of exploiting the southern issue for political purposes.³⁵

This would seem to suggest that the Brotherhood had a more active role in provoking the October Revolution than al-Turabi now acknowledges. Although the November Regime's battle against the SCP has received more attention because of the global political situation at the time and it is true that Abboud's government arrested far more communists than it did *Ikhwanis*, the Brotherhood had nevertheless been active in its opposition to the Abboud Regime from an early stage. In 1959, Rashid al-Tahir, the leader of the *Ikhwan*, was arrested by the government for sponsoring the attempted coup that had led to a number of young officers being hanged in 1959.³⁶ As seen in Chapter 1, the Brotherhood had campaigned throughout Abboud's tenure against what they perceived to be the sexual immorality of senior junta members. In 1962, al-Turabi utilized a period of extended study leave in Khartoum to propose a strategy of backing resistance to the regime through support of the Front of Opposition Parties.³⁷ However, in spite of its opposition to the regime, the Muslim Brotherhood does not appear to have been seen as a particularly prominent player at the time. It was not invited to join the FOP when it was originally formed in 1960, which appeared to reflect the other opposition parties' refusal to take it seriously.³⁸ The movement itself had little presence outside Khartoum University.³⁹ It did not seem likely that it would be responsible for initiating any successful anti-regime agitation – unless, of course, the epicentre of the movement was Khartoum University, as was the case on 21 October 1964.

The part played by other prominent Muslim Brotherhood lecturers at the university, and al-Turabi's coordination with them, to some extent belies his claim that he was acting purely as an individual professional. Sympathetic accounts claim that the two Muslim Brotherhood lecturers at the university who became involved in demanding a protest by the university to the government immediately after the shooting of al-Qurayshi were Muhammad Salih Umar and Abd al-Rahim Hamdi.⁴⁰ Al-Turabi has had political splits with both these figures since, and it is thus unsurprising that he has not been quick to acknowledge their role.⁴¹ Muhammad Salih Umar was a lecturer who had already spoken in the 10 September seminar, while al-Hamdi was an economics expert who would later go on to become the pioneer of Islamic banking in Sudan. Muhammad Salih Umar collaborated particularly closely with al-Turabi in the early days of the Revolution, helping him to negotiate the course of al-Qurayshi's funeral

procession on 22 October with the police.⁴² Turabi himself admits, upon being pressed, that 'to some extent me and Muhammad Salih Umar were co-ordinating'.⁴³

The fact that so many *Ikhwani* lecturers were involved in the protest at the university enabled them to formulate on the spot political strategies that would suit their movement. According to Shamouq, al-Turabi made a particularly significant political decision on the night of 21 October, which he discussed with three other Muslim Brother lecturers present at Khartoum hospital – Hamdi, Umar and Ahmad al-Tijani Salih. This was his decision to contact the leaders of the other outlawed political parties. Shamouq claims that this occurred after the four had decided to reject a proposal made by the SCP through Uthman Medawi that only the graduate political forces, in other words the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists, should lead the Revolution.⁴⁴ Rabie Hasan Ahmad offers a very similar version of this account, arguing that the Muslim Brothers present at the hospital on the night of 21 October took the decision to contact the other parties for fear that the communists would take over the Revolution.⁴⁵ It seems that al-Turabi pursued a similar strategy throughout this decisive period of the Revolution. Abu Eissa, a former secretary of the Professional Front, now suggests that it was al-Turabi who bore the greatest responsibility for the decision to merge the Professional Front – which represented the graduate political forces and came increasingly to be influenced by the SCP as the Revolution progressed – with the representatives of the political parties to form the United National Front in the week following the University Incident.⁴⁶

Such policies would have made good political sense at the time for Muslim Brotherhood politicians, since their presence among the educated elite, while far from negligible, was not quite as strong as that of the SCP. Moreover, they shared considerably more ideological ground with the 'traditional forces', the Umma and NUP, than their leftist rivals did. It would have fitted in with the political strategy proposed by al-Turabi at a Muslim Brotherhood assembly in 1962, whereby the *Ikhwan* should see itself as a kind of 'intellectual pressure group', acting, in el-Affendi's words, 'through all parties and on all of them'.⁴⁷ The effectiveness of this policy would later be illustrated by the alliance that the Brotherhood would form with the Umma and the NUP during the 1964–5 interim period.⁴⁸

It is important to bear in mind that the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in effecting anti-regime action was largely restricted to mobilization within the university and professional headquarters. Although the *Ikhwanis* were, in general, less firmly established than the SCP within the educated elite at large, they were dependent on the graduate sectors for what influence they did have. It is worth noting that while Shamouq's broadly pro-*Ikhwani* account of the Revolution focuses a great deal on events on the Khartoum campus, it offers very little detail about the unfolding of the Revolution after al-Qurayshi's funeral procession on 22 October. Before 1979, no radical Islamist movement had successfully organized a popular revolution. Al-Turabi laments the fact that at this time the SCP had more understanding of how to organize revolutions, not from experience in Sudan but through lessons drawn from Russia.⁴⁹ The Brotherhood had no such reference point. Al-Turabi distances himself and the *Ikhwan* from the 'To the palace and to victory' march, attributing its inspiration mainly to Babikir Awadallah.⁵⁰ This would suggest that the Brotherhood had little interest in

radicalizing the Revolution through popular mobilization and that its focus was on the manipulation of elite politics.

The members of the Islamic Liberation Movement who were most visible in the midst of the protests following 22 October were those who would split with al-Turabi and form a separate Islamic Socialist Party after the Revolution. One co-founder of the party, al-Mirghani al-Nasri, was one of the most active members of the Bar Association at the time and some former Islamic Socialists now claim (although with little evidence) that it was he who proposed the general strike.⁵¹ The other, Babikir Karrar, thrust himself into the thick of events during the government press conference of 24 October, responding to the minister of interior's announcement that the protests could be dealt with by the usual police methods by declaring 'this is a popular revolution demanding freedom and democracy and it will be hard to crush it'.⁵² Again, this serves as a reminder that the Brotherhood was split between radical and more conservative factions at the time of the Revolution.

It is difficult to deny that the political strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood did have a significant impact on the manner in which the October Revolution unfolded. It cannot be said that the movement planned the Revolution in precise detail – as seen in Chapter 1, the actual series of events that gave birth to it were far from predictable. However, it seems likely that it had consciously stepped up its campaign against the regime in the months preceding the Revolution. The actions of Muhammad Salih Umar and Hasan al-Turabi, if they were not influenced directly by the policy of the Executive Bureau, were taken with the interests of their party in mind, and were not simply those of individual professionals. In like fashion, it will be seen in Chapter 4 that Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in KUSU were, at least to some extent, guided by the interests and policy of their party in the lead-up to the famous seminar of 21 October.

A revolution of the people, or the *petit bourgeois*? The SCP in 1964

There is a tendency for scholars working in the wider field of Middle Eastern studies to assume a direct causal link between the growing strength of the SCP, which vied with the Brotherhood for leadership of the 'modern forces', and the outbreak of the October Revolution. For instance, Ismael, observing that SCP party membership grew from 750 in 1958 to between 3,000 and 10,000 in 1965, claims that 'In the summer of 1964, the SCP led preparations for a general strike, concentrating on securing the support of the workers, peasants, students and professionals'.⁵³ Nevertheless, the role of the SCP during the October Revolution remains shrouded in controversy.

The party's critics, in particular its political opponents on the religious right, have charged it with being surprised by, and initially unsympathetic to, the popular insurrection.⁵⁴ Hamad contends that the SCP felt threatened by the predominance of the Muslim Brotherhood in KUSU and the emergence of the Professional Front as a challenge to its influence among the unions.⁵⁵ He further argues that the SCP had moved closer to the regime on account of Abboud's decision to forge closer ties with

Brezhnev earlier in the year, and had illustrated this proximity with their decision to participate in the elections for the Central Council and local councils.⁵⁶ This criticism is perhaps slightly over-egged; the Umma Party politician Muhammad Mahgub, while critical of the SCP decision to participate in the Central Council elections, admits that they 'maintained that they should participate for tactical reasons as the elections gave them a good political platform' and many other non-SCP figures acknowledge their motives in this regard.⁵⁷ The same argument is made by a number of former SCP politicians, who contend that election rallies in 1963 provided them with the opportunity to criticize the regime in public in a manner that would not have been possible had they not accepted the process.⁵⁸ The SCP was not allied with Abboud's regime in the manner that the ICF would be allied with Nimeiri in 1977–85. While the May Regime appointed Islamist ministers and pursued Islamist policies in this period, between 1963 and 1964 Abboud's regime neither granted SCP politicians portfolios nor implemented a communist political programme.

In 1981, the ex-communist Ahmad Sulayman, while critical of the SCP decision to participate in the Central Council elections, admitted that Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub had justified it as part of a strategy of 'bringing down the system from within', and that the SCP chairman had referenced Lenin's tactic of joining the Russian *Duma* in 1907.⁵⁹ The party's participation in the Central Council was not, therefore, a comprehensive endorsement of the November Regime – they were, perhaps, 'best enemies'. Sulayman also claims that one faction within the SCP, led by Mu'awiya Ibrahim and himself, opposed the Central Committee's decision.⁶⁰ However, such claims should be regarded with some suspicion given Sulayman's own conflict with and departure from the SCP in 1970. Farouk Abu Eissa – who also seceded with Sulayman in 1970 – denies that there was any such conflict in 1963.⁶¹

The SCP faced many of the charges of having been 'surprised by' or even opposed to, the popular uprising, soon after its success. It therefore produced its own history of events, entitled *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* (*The People's Revolution*), to rebut claims that it had entered the Revolution opportunistically and only when it had become clear that the regime could not survive. First of all, the book reproduced the text of a circular issued by the general secretariat of the SCP to its branch organizations dated 17 August 1964 criticizing the regime's economic policy and arguing that Sudan had become a debtor state, so as to demonstrate that the party remained opposed to the regime. It also reprinted the text of an SCP pamphlet from 22 October 1964, addressed to the 'masses of the working classes' (*jamahir al-tabaqat al-'aamila*), condemning al-Qurayshi's shooting, and encouraging the workers, farmers, students and graduates to do away with the regime.⁶² However, what is noticeable is that *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*, in spite of its considerable length, makes little reference to the seminar of 21 October, implicitly conceding the fact that the SCP did little to provoke the event that provided the ultimate spark for the October Revolution. Since this seminar was organized on the initiative of a student union that was (albeit narrowly) dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing at the university (see Chapter 4), it is unsurprising that *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* devotes little time to it. Instead, 450 of its 500 pages focus on the various struggles of the SCP and its affiliated trade unions against the regime *before* October.

Given that the party had only a limited involvement in the decisive seminar, communist sources tend to argue that it was the SCP that prepared the country for the Revolution over a period of long-term struggle, and that the clash at the university on 21 October was simply the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.⁶³ Ali Kinein contends that although the communists had been calling for a political strike since 1961, they never established a fixed hour for this to occur, since this 'only happens in military coups'.⁶⁴ Indeed, the fact that the original call for a political strike was issued by the political office of the Sudan Communist Party through its underground media organ *al-Shiyu'i* on 28 August 1961 (later reproduced in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*) does seem to vindicate this argument. The political office declared in this pamphlet that it would be the working class (*al-tabaqa al-'aamila*), the farmers, the students and the 'national bourgeoisie' (*al-bourgeoisiiyya al-wataniyya*), who would generate the strike.⁶⁵ Specifically, it announced that '[t]he party sees that it is by engaging in constant daily activity among these forces that it is possible to mobilize for a general political strike which if it were to happen would paralyse the current regime completely'.⁶⁶ The article did, indeed, give no set date for the execution of the political strike. Instead, it asked rhetorically, 'Is it possible to fix a specific day for [the execution of] the general strike in the whole country?'⁶⁷ The answer was 'This of course we cannot do now. Once more the importance of organization is prominent – it is not possible to fix a specific day for the movement without establishing revolutionary organizations which lead it and mobilize for it and it is probable that there will not be any specification [of the date] until after these organizations were established...organizational and political mobilization for the general strike will determine what it is necessary to do at the appropriate moment'.⁶⁸

However, it seems that the SCP recognized at this time that the party was too weakly established to lead this revolutionary struggle alone. It would claim in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* that it approached the other opposition parties on two occasions, both immediately after the initial call for a general strike in 1961 and again in January 1962, after the release of the opposition politicians from Juba, but that these parties turned down its proposals.⁶⁹ A meeting of the Central Committee on 6 January 1963 acknowledged that the SCP could not instigate change acting solo. The first point made in the summary of the meeting – again reproduced in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* – was that 'The Sudan Communist Party is unable to change this regime by itself'.⁷⁰ It is worth remembering that while the SCP was regarded as an extremely important, if clandestine, actor in the Sudanese political arena at the time, the actual party membership was still very limited and its prestige was based mainly on its general influence over the student movement and the workers' and professionals' unions.⁷¹

Thus, while the SCP may have been the first party to adopt the slogan of the 'political strike', they foresaw a long period of preparation and were highly wary of taking any form of premature action. In October 1963, the central secretariat responded negatively to the efforts of 'extreme leftists' of the Blue Nile Province party leadership, which under Yusuf Abd al-Majid had seceded from the main party, to mobilize a regional 'general political strike'.⁷² The Blue Nile Province leadership had asserted that the province had reached 'the point of revolutionary outbreak' and that on this basis 'it is our central and immediate responsibility to unleash the strike battle which has been planned on a

popular level everywhere in the province.⁷³ The SCP leadership published its response to this action in an edition of *al-Shiyu'i* dated 14 October 1963:

There are left wing statements being made regarding a general political strike in all the publications in the province. The leadership of the province considers that a general political strike is something that is to be carried out instantaneously and directly ... the general political strike cannot happen in one province only without the other provinces going along with it, and in the first place it is not possible for one province to decide in an isolated manner that the circumstances have become ripe for it.⁷⁴

However, the SCP insisted in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* that the death of al-Qurayshi on 21 October did, indeed, provide the 'spark' that it had been hoping for. It argued that 'it is clear to us that the opening of fire at the university and the death of the first martyr Ahmad al-Qurayshi would not have led to the outbreak of a revolution had it not been for the fact that the revolutionary crisis had matured and had become completely widespread.'⁷⁵ This was in itself a result of the 'accumulation of the struggles of the revolutionary classes.'⁷⁶ Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub would claim in 1965 that since August 1964, the party had felt that the country was 'approaching a change.'⁷⁷ However, neither account discussed the role that the SCP 'revolutionary committees' or other party branches played in provoking the events of 21 October, or attempted to explain how the events leading up to al-Qurayshi's death at the seminar were in any way a result of the SCP's call for a general political strike. This again represents an implicit concession that the SCP did little to bring about the incident at the university. This point will be further illustrated in the next chapter.

While they may not have initiated the Revolution in a direct sense, the communists do not seem to have been any slower than the other political forces in responding to it. As mentioned above, Shamouq claims that the SCP sent a message via Uthman Medawi to Khartoum University's Muslim Brother lecturers at the hospital on the night of 21 October, requesting that the *Ikhwan* refrain from encouraging the traditional political parties to participate in the Revolution and thus allow themselves and the SCP, as the two parties with most leverage over the 'modern forces', to take the leading role.⁷⁸ Although it might seem strange that the SCP should approach the Brotherhood in this way, it is worth considering that elements within the *Ikhwan* were influenced by socialist thought at the time and this move would have fitted in with the party's political strategy, since it had in the later years of Abboud's regime maintained a policy of avoiding alliances with the established parties and, instead, mobilizing support from among the workers, farmers, students and professionals.⁷⁹ Although the Brotherhood was the SCP's strongest competitor for influence among the 'modern forces', the SCP would have dominated any revolutionary front that incorporated these two parties alone. Even though it appears that this advance was rebuffed by al-Turabi and his fellow *Ikhwani* lecturers, Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub did participate in the funeral procession on 22 October.⁸⁰

If the Revolution is viewed as a whole – rather than through the lens of its catalytic event, the University Incident – then the SCP comes more noticeably into the foreground. As further protests erupted, the role of the communists gradually eclipsed

that of the Brotherhood, which was at its strongest in the University of Khartoum itself. Warburg argues that the communists reached the apex of their influence after the declaration of the political strike by Abdin Isma'il of the pro-communist Bar Association on 24 October, using their sway over the unions to generalize the dissent.⁸¹ Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, while not particularly sympathetic to the SCP, acknowledges that it played a major role in facilitating the general strike and mobilizing propaganda in support of the Professional Front.⁸² Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub would claim in 1965 that the SCP inspired the decision to declare a general strike after a party delegation met the chief lawyers Abdin Isma'il and Farouk Abu Eissa and told them 'that the path is prepared for it and that the party is prepared to make it succeed'.⁸³ Farouk Abu Eissa states that it was Abd al-Khaliq who drove him to the meeting at the Bar Association headquarters immediately following the funeral procession of 22 October, although he reports that he 'disappeared' after dropping him off, which would suggest that he recognized the importance of leaving the anti-regime mobilization to the professionals.⁸⁴

There has, nevertheless, been something of a tendency among various observers to look to the political status of the party and exaggerate its significance as a consequence. British embassy sources also attributed to it a substantial role in mobilizing the crowds, blaming 'communist organizers' for marshalling the repeated surges towards the Republican Palace that provoked the army's fateful burst of fire on 28 October.⁸⁵ External observers often blame local unrest on easily identifiable political actors, and this risks denying the spontaneity with which members of the public took to the streets. It is quite possible that the unions would have followed the call for a general strike without direct instigation by the communists, as would be the case in 1985. Although most sources accept that the SCP played a significant role in generalizing the strike, it is also believed by some that the general strike was initially proposed not by a communist, but by the Ba'athist lawyer Shawgi Mallasi on 22 October.⁸⁶ It was the two judges, Babikir Awadallah and Abd al-Majid Imam, who were most visible during the 'Towards the Palace' march of 28 October – at which point the most active communists, including Ahmad Sulayman and Farouk Abu Eissa, were engaged in negotiations either with the parties or the military.⁸⁷

Senior SCP figures have themselves – albeit rather inconsistently – attempted to downplay their role in the Revolution, partly because of disillusionment with its failings. In 1967, the SCP distanced itself from the claim that it had spearheaded the Revolution when the party secretariat lamented following its fourth annual conference of 1967 that it had been led by the 'petit bourgeoisie'.⁸⁸ Mahjub Sharif, who is renowned for his composition of popular songs concerning the Revolution, admits 'Although I am a communist now no-one can say we were leading. I cannot say that there were not Muslim Brothers, they were two groups within the whole people'.⁸⁹ Even Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, who replaced Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub as the leader of the Sudan Communist Party in 1971, observed shortly before his death in 2012 that 'we do not claim that we made October ... but we were a part in it'.⁹⁰

One reason that the SCP leadership now downplays its contribution to the Revolution might be the fact that it was seen by some that it was the 'secessionists' – that is, those who chose to leave the party and side with Nimeiri following his rift

with the SCP in 1970 – who were at the forefront of the anti-regime mobilization in 1964.⁹¹ In particular, this group included the three most influential communists in the Bar Association – Ahmad Sulayman, Farouk Abu Eissa and Abdin Isma'il. Although the last of these three was not a full member of the party, all of them shared close social and professional links, played a crucial part as professionals in organizing dissent against Abboud and would abandon the SCP and side with Nimeiri in 1970.⁹² Ahmad Sulayman himself was in prison at the time the Revolution broke out, for having protested along with Abu Eissa against the judiciary's decision to try a number of young SCP members.⁹³ It is perhaps because these secessionists were so significant that the October Revolution is celebrated in a somewhat more lukewarm fashion by the party today than it was in 1964.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood might have helped to shape the immediate events that brought about the Revolution, the SCP probably provided it with its broader context. While the party's decision to advocate a general strike in 1961 did not directly inspire what occurred in October 1964, the fact that it had been promoting the idea of revolutionary action among its affiliates in the labour and professional movement ensured that – though it may not have directly provoked the civilian uprising – it was able to react to it and mobilize its supporters against the regime with some degree of rapidity. This said, the SCP did not have a monopoly on anti-government mobilization in 1964. Men affiliated to Arab nationalist parties also played a significant role in promoting civil disobedience in 1964.

Arab nationalists and the October Revolution

While communism and Arab nationalism may have represented divergent political trends in the rest of the Middle East, in Sudan, the role of the various Ba'athist and Arab nationalist groups to some extent complemented that of the SCP. In a country where parties controlled by 'sectarian' religious movements wielded a major influence, these parties' shared secularism and self-perception as 'vanguard' organizations created a common ground, particularly in the context of professional mobilization.

The first Arab nationalist organization to be established in Sudan was the 'Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party' founded by Shawgi Mallasi in the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch) in 1957. This was quickly followed by a variety of other organizations in the various secondary schools in northern Sudan, and an 'Arab Socialist Front' in the University of Khartoum in 1961.⁹⁴ These organizations were politically very active, and organized demonstrations following the downfall of the United Arab Republic in 1961 and the Ba'ath Party coup in Iraq in 1963 that would lead to clashes with the police and the arrest of a number of their cadres.⁹⁵ However, they were still weakly established among the student body in general and the events of 1961 and 1963 led to severe divisions between the Ba'athist and Nasserist factions.⁹⁶

The Arab nationalists' contribution to the October Revolution, while not a decisive one, outweighed their relatively insignificant position within the country at large. It was a member of the Arab Socialist Front, Abdullah Abd al-Rahman, who organized the very first debate on the southern question at the University of Khartoum in

1964, which aroused the interest of a great number of southerners and students and witnessed 'lively discussion'.⁹⁷ Lawmen affiliated to the Arab nationalist movement were also at the forefront of the campaign for civil disobedience, particularly the judge Babikir Awadallah and Shawgi Mallasi, the original founder of the Ba'ath at the University of Khartoum.⁹⁸ These individuals, in collaboration with their more left-wing colleagues, appear to have played the leading role in organizing the lawyers' and judges' protest, which led to Awadallah's imprisonment on 25 October.⁹⁹ While the Arab nationalists represented the only major northern political movement to be left out of the negotiations with Abboud, al-Turabi argues that it was for precisely this reason that Awadallah, who had recently been released from jail, whipped up the protests that eventually led to the 'Towards the Palace and to Victory' march.¹⁰⁰ It is worth bearing in mind that Babikir Awadallah had, since 22 October, been among those most keen to keep the leadership of the Revolution in the hands of the professional unions, which could probably be explained by the fact that the Arab nationalist ideology had little support outside of this branch of the 'modern forces'.¹⁰¹ In this sense, his contributions were simultaneously the most elitist and the most radical.

The neglected role of the 'traditional parties'

The standard claim of Marxist historians is that the October Revolution was 'opposed by traditional parties linked to the main religious groups, Mahdiyya and Khatmiyya'.¹⁰² The 'traditional forces', comprising the Umma, PDP and NUP, have frequently been accused of exploiting an urban revolution manufactured by political forces more sophisticated than themselves by utilizing the patrimonial, commercial and sectarian ties that connected them to their massive rural support bases to seize power when 'one man one vote' elections occurred.¹⁰³ While there is an element of truth to this, it seems that these parties reacted just as swiftly to the revolution in Khartoum as the SCP did. As seen above, Shamouq argues that it was al-Turabi and his fellow Muslim Brother lecturers who played the key role in bringing senior Umma and NUP figures such as al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and Isma'il al-Azhari to the hospital.¹⁰⁴ However, Sadiq al-Mahdi denied this in an interview given in 2011,¹⁰⁵ although it is worth noting that this is possibly because his political relationship with al-Turabi has declined enormously since 1964, at which point both thinkers had come recently to be related by marriage. This said, news of the shooting spread through Khartoum with such rapidity that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's claim that he went on his own initiative is believable. One senior Umma Party figure would recall that after al-Sadiq's visit to the hospital on the early morning of 22 October, he sent memos to senior party members calling them to a meeting at the Imam al-Hadi's house at 6 in the morning, when the Umma policy towards the unfolding political scenario was outlined.¹⁰⁶

Both al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Hadi al-Mahdi – the then Imam of the *Ansar* – participated in al-Qurayshi's funeral procession. Their presence helped to persuade al-Qurayshi's *Ansari* family, who had previously been wavering over sanctioning political exploitation of their son's death, to permit the funeral procession.¹⁰⁷ Al-Sadiq played a particularly significant symbolic role during the events at the Midan Abd al-Muni'im when he led the prayers over al-Qurayshi's corpse, an honour he appears

to have been encouraged to take by al-Turabi – which would again indicate the desire of the latter to strengthen the role of the ‘traditional’ forces in the Revolution.¹⁰⁸ The Imam al-Hadi then wrote a memorandum demanding that the military ‘return to the barracks.’ This memorandum actually preceded the lawyers’ and judges’ memorandum demanding an investigation into al-Qurayshi’s shooting, which was not sent to the palace till 24 October – although it cannot be said to have had the same impact in terms of promoting civil disobedience.¹⁰⁹

Given that so many senior figures in the regime hailed from Khatmiyya backgrounds and Abboud had the support of the PDP, it is perhaps unsurprising that among the ‘traditional’ political forces, the Umma was more visible than the two parties that had historic links to the Khatmiyya. This is not to say that these two parties did not participate at all. Representatives of the PDP, NUP and Khatmiyya order turned up to attend the funeral demonstration, including Isma’il al-Azhari, Muhammad ‘Uthman al-Mirghani, and Mirghani Hamza, and Shamouq recalls that Mirghani Hamza was the first to send a telegram of complaint to Abboud.¹¹⁰ Mallasi claims that it was an NUP politician, Bashir al-Tayyib, who helped mobilize the crowds against the regime at the Midan Abd al-Muni’im by climbing atop the lorry bearing al-Qurayshi’s corpse and declaring ‘go to hell Abboud, go to hell you soldiers.’¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the prominence of the Umma – which would represent the most powerful force in Sudanese politics in the years following the Revolution – in contrast to a divided unionist movement, was signified by the choice of the Mahdi’s *gubba* (tomb) as a meeting place for the political parties, including the SCP, PDP and NUP. It was also a youthful Sadiq al-Mahdi who, after the meeting with the professional bodies at the *gubba* on 27 October, seized a pen and paper and started drafting a national charter in preparation for meeting Abboud.¹¹² The PDP, having been the only political party close to the regime in the period before October 1964, made a less significant contribution to the Revolution than the other parties, and neither the patron of the Khatmiyya order, Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, nor his son Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani attended the meeting that led to the formation of the UNE.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the fact that one PDP representative did attend the meeting at the *gubba*, following Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani’s statement on 23 October condemning al-Qurayshi’s killing and calling for a return to democracy,¹¹⁴ also appears to have been a crucial factor in persuading Abboud to give in to the demonstrations – the president was shocked that the only political force that had consistently supported him throughout his term had now abandoned him.¹¹⁵

Another reason that the agency of the Umma, DUP and NUP should not be understated is that there was no absolute divide between the ‘traditional parties’ and the ‘modern forces’ as represented by the professional movement. Given the mass electoral bases that these parties enjoyed in the rural areas of Sudan, politically mobile professionals often found that these parties were a useful vehicle to further their own ideological agendas and careers. Mubarak Zarroug and Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, who were both prominent in the Bar Association during the October Revolution, were members of the NUP and Umma Party, respectively. Umma Party members who participated in the Professional Front included Sharif al-Tuhami, Uthman Jadallah and Sara al-Fadil, the latter of whom attended the famous judges’ demonstration.¹¹⁶ In the aftermath of the Revolution, professionals affiliated with the nascent Ba’athist

and Arab nationalist organizations joined either the PDP or the NUP so as to further their political cause. The Ba'athist Shawgi Mallasi agreed to join the political office of the PDP alongside a number of Nasserist lawyers after reading the party's manifesto and realizing that it was 'in effect, a summary of the thoughts of the immortal leader Abd al-Nasir and the Ba'ath Party', while his comrades Sa'id Hammour and Badr al-Din Mudathir joined the NUP.¹¹⁷ It should be acknowledged in this context that the Khatmiyya sponsors of the NUP and then, later, the PDP were 'relatively urbanized and secularized'¹¹⁸ in contrast to their *Ansar* counterparts.

Thus it would be misleading to claim that the Umma, NUP and PDP were too 'traditional' to have contributed significantly to a 'modern' revolution. Admittedly, the fact that the Revolution was a spontaneous urban event made it difficult for these parties to mobilize their rural partisans as effectively as the Muslim Brotherhood and communists could their urban adherents within the 'modern forces'. When Umma politicians attended al-Qurayshi's funeral procession on 22 October, they were surrounded by tens of *Ansar*,¹¹⁹ and Thompson estimates that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi had been able to mobilize 1,000 of the *Ansar* youth (*shabab al-Ansar*) in Omdurman by 25 October.¹²⁰ However, these were still limited numbers compared with the many thousands that the Umma were able to mobilize during other less spontaneous political events in the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout late October 1964, Sadiq al-Mahdi was keen to advocate a 'long battle' against the regime that would slowly incorporate the protesters in the regions, where the Umma was far more heavily represented. This in itself was indicative of the extent to which the 'traditional' parties had failed to anticipate what would transpire.¹²¹ They were overtaken by events. As seen in Chapter 1, the NUP politician Muhammad Jabara Awad attempted to acquire rural support for the Revolution by bringing armed Beja in by train from the spiritual home of the Khatmiyya order, Kassala, but they arrived too late to influence events significantly. This is why the Umma Party in particular was more influential during the transitional period and early years of the subsequent parliamentary regime, when there was more time available to it to bring in its supporters from the countryside. However, it must be acknowledged that since there was no rigid divide between the 'traditional parties' and the 'modern forces', Umma, NUP and PDP politicians wielded significant clout in Khartoum throughout the Revolution.

It would, therefore, be misleading to downplay the contribution of any of the major parties to the October Revolution. Since Abboud's regime was, almost by definition, opposed to the political parties, each of them had an interest in overthrowing it. While Nimeiri's regime was more proficient than Abboud's at playing the various parties off against each other, by the time of his downfall he too had managed to bring about the opposition of a great number of the political parties.

The parties' uncoordinated opposition to the May Regime

Representatives of the political parties have tended to argue that the 1985 *Intifada* was the product of a series of 'cumulative struggles' against the May Regime. However, while it is true that the parties had been endeavouring to overthrow the regime since its

very inception, they rarely did so as part of a united front, and many of them suffered from serious internal factionalism throughout their period in the non-democratic wilderness. The first serious confrontation with the regime was conducted by al-Hadi al-Mahdi's wing of the Umma in 1970, without serious support from the other banned parties or even Sadiq al-Mahdi's branch of the same party, which had run against al-Hadi's in the 1968 elections. The SCP stood alone in backing Hashim al-Atta's 1971 coup attempt.

After these events, a somewhat more cohesive opposition coalition, the National Front, was constituted by the 'religious' parties – Hussein al-Hindi's DUP, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's Umma and al-Turabi's ICF. It was this umbrella group that helped to provoke the Sha'aban uprising of 1973 and supported the two failed military takeover attempts of 1975 and 1976. While the National Front did incorporate major factions of the two northern political parties wielding mass support, the section of the Umma that participated was dominated by the personality of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. Even within this front there was considerable tension between al-Turabi and al-Mahdi.¹²² Meanwhile, al-Hindi – who was himself identified with the Hindiyya *sufi* Tariqa – did not receive the backing of the Khatmiyya patron Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani, who remained close to the regime throughout the Nimeiri period.¹²³ The emergence of the Free Officers effectively divided the DUP, since like the party, the army movement identified with Nasser's Egypt, and a number of the military radicals came from pro-Khatmiyya, pro-DUP families. For instance, Mamoun Awad Abu Zeid, one of the officers who instigated the coup, was the son of the senior DUP politician Awad Abu Zeid.¹²⁴

The National Front disintegrated in 1977 after Nimeiri succeeded in coaxing al-Turabi and al-Mahdi into his embrace. Although al-Mahdi would soon break with the president again, the 1977 reconciliation left al-Hindi struggling to find partners. In July 1979, he formed the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' (*tajammu' al-sha'ab al-sudani*), along with the Sudanese branch of the Arab Ba'ath Party, various southern political groupings and a branch of the Umma constituted by al-Hadi al-Mahdi's son Wali al-Din.¹²⁵ However, the SCP did not join and criticized al-Hindi for failing to form a broader front. This was, nevertheless, the only effective party-based opposition grouping in the period leading up to the 1985 *Intifada*, which was able to publish its own newspaper, *al-Destour*.

Nimeiri's ideologically non-prejudicial crackdowns of 1983 and 1984 raised hopes among party activists that the common experience of imprisonment would encourage the opposition to form a broader coalition, and attempts to do so were made by representatives of all political groupings, including the independents as represented by Amin Makki Madani.¹²⁶ However, these efforts were consistently thwarted by the divisions within the two main parties, the DUP and Umma.¹²⁷ The 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' itself was weakened by al-Hindi's death in 1982 and was sidelined to an extent during the *Intifada* itself. One Ba'athist politician now claims that in later 1984 or 1985, there was an attempt by Umar Abd al-Ati and Amin Makki Madani to form an alternative, an implicitly more conservative party coalition, by contacting Sayyid Ahmad Hussein of the DUP and Muhammad Ibrahim Khalil of the Umma.¹²⁸ Though no such alternative to the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' emerged, these actions may have informed the later tactics of the National Alliance. When the professional

unions initially formed the National Alliance with the political parties via Amin Makki Madani in early April 1985, they contacted the SCP, Sadiq al-Mahdi's branch of the Umma, and Ibrahim Hamad and Sayyid Ahmad Hussein of the DUP. None of them had been involved in the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People'.¹²⁹

Thus it can be seen that while a number of political parties were in active opposition to Nimeiri's regime in the lead-up to the April *Intifada*, they did not pursue a particularly well coordinated or coherent political strategy. Parties, or at least factions within parties, still tended to act in accordance with their own agendas – none more so than the al-Sadiq al-Mahdi wing of the Umma Party.

The forgotten resurgence of the 'sectarians' in 1985

It is often claimed that the 'traditional parties' had 'no role' in the April *Intifada*.¹³⁰ As is the case with 1964, this to some extent reflects the anti-'sectarian' prejudice of a number of those among the 'modern forces' who have written about the uprising and influenced Western commentators, as well as their resentment of these parties' domination of the political arena in the subsequent period of parliamentary democracy. However, the fact that the Workers' Trade Unions Alliance, the major labour opposition grouping, was dominated by the Umma and the DUP throughout the Nimeiri period, indicates that these parties were at the time not yet as antiquated as the 'progressives' might suggest.¹³¹

As was the case in 1964, the 'Unionists' were somewhat less active than the Umma in their opposition to the regime, largely because of divisions caused by the identification of senior Khatmiyya with the military regime. After Hussein al-Hindi's death in 1982 weakened the DUP oppositionists, the fight was largely kept alive by the then relatively junior Ali Mahmoud Hassanain, who coordinated with fellow DUP men who held leading positions in the workers' opposition, such as Hasan al-Tayyib and Hasan Mustafa.¹³² However, the relative isolation of Hassanain's group is evidenced by the fact that after the *Intifada*, it was forced to form a splinter faction, naming itself after the old NUP, in protest against the DUP leadership's refusal to expel individuals such as Ahmad al-Sayyid Hamid who had participated in Nimeiri's regime.¹³³ Nevertheless, before 1985 there was a secret DUP youth organization, which participated in elections in the various student unions. Members of this organization have emphasized their contribution to the crucial demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March,¹³⁴ but while they represented a part of the coalition that dominated the student union at the time, its president was an Umma man, Muhammad Ahmad Salame. Nevertheless, it seems that the youth of the party were more committed to the anti-regime movement than the party mainstream, hinting at the generational tensions within Sudanese society at large.

The role of the Umma Party during the 1985 *Intifada* was probably more prominent than it was in 1964, for a number of reasons. First, the fact that the uprising was widely anticipated gave the party the opportunity to articulate a semi-coherent political strategy. Secondly, as will be seen in the next chapter, the ICF had effectively relinquished its hegemony over the student unions after the discontent

that the party's alliance with Nimeiri had provoked among the educated youth, and al-Sadiq's followers were to some extent able to fill the gap it had left among the more socially conservative students. Thirdly, the Umma Party had more support in western Sudan than any other party, and western Sudan was particularly visible on the national political stage at the time because of the complicated political situation brought about by the Darfur famine. Fourthly, there were a far greater number of Umma supporters from rural Sudan in the capital than was the case in 1964, both because of the recent famine migration and because of the general rural-urban drift in the past two decades.

As seen above, the reason that the Umma Party's participation in the 1964 Revolution was comparatively minor was the limited presence of the *Ansar* in Khartoum. By 1985, the situation was somewhat different. The most noticeable aspect of Umma's contribution to the *Intifada* was the role played by the *Ansar* student movement in Omdurman Islamic University, the institution that provided the spark for the *Intifada* on 26 April. The president of its student union at the time was an Umma man, Muhammad Ahmad Salame, who led a coalition that also included the DUP and 'independents'.¹³⁵ The *Ansar* had a heavy presence in Omdurman Islamic University, partially because of the socially conservative traditions of the university itself, where more secular political organizations such as the Ba'athists and SCP could make relatively little impact.¹³⁶ Abd al-Rasul Nur, who participated in the National Front in the 1970s as an Umma student in Khartoum University, admitted after the *Intifada* that the Umma Party had taken longer than the other parties to make its presence felt in Khartoum student politics, a fact he blamed on the British colonial tactic of isolating the western region of Sudan from the urban riverain centre. However, he claimed that the *Ansar* student movement had begun to take shape in 1965 and contributed significantly to the Libyan-sponsored takeover attempt of 1976 as well as the 1985 *Intifada*.¹³⁷

The extent to which the Umma leadership coordinated the student demonstrations at Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March 1985 is debatable. Al-Mahdi's intelligence chief Abd al-Rahman Farah asserted after the *Intifada* that the 26 March demonstration was planned in the house of a senior member of the party, Umar Nur al-Da'im,¹³⁸ although *Ansar* student leaders contend that they provided the initiative.¹³⁹ University lecturers state that it was a direct communication between senior Umma official Bakri Aadil and the students of Omdurman Islamic University that led to the famous demonstration, and that Umar Nur al-Da'im himself attended it in person.¹⁴⁰ Farah also claims that the party leadership met at around this time and discussed the possibility of having armed party members engaged in battle with the regime. However, he also maintains that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi decreed at this meeting that the Umma Party should not try and lead the struggle alone, and should, instead, endeavour to encourage the army, which was a more national institution, to do so.¹⁴¹ Al-Mahdi himself asserts that he contacted Tawfiq al-Khalil in the army leadership before 5 April to persuade him to support the *Intifada*.¹⁴²

If this is true, it would explain why al-Sadiq al-Mahdi did not speak openly in support of the *Intifada* until 5 April, 10 days after its outbreak. Although we are reliant on Farah's account, it is logical enough that the party would have pursued such

a strategy. As observed previously, the *Ansar* had not fared well in clashes with Nimeiri's security forces. Moreover, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi feared either assassination or judicial murder. Following the *Intifada*, he would claim that Nimeiri had tried to assassinate him twice in 1975 and 1980, and had been planning in 1985 to have him tried and executed in a manner similar to Mahmud Muhammad Taha on the basis that he too had spoken out against the September Laws.¹⁴³ In fact, he has recently acknowledged that the reason that he did not engage in any open verbal confrontation with the regime after his release from prison in December 1984 was that he knew Nimeiri had released him from prison deliberately, just as he had Mahmud Muhammad Taha, so that he might make the kind of public declaration that would serve as the justification for an apostasy trial.¹⁴⁴ It was presumably for these reasons that, when he was contacted by the leaders of the National Alliance through Amin Makki Madani on 2 April, the day before the famous mass demonstration on 3 April, he told them that he would not attend for 'security reasons'. However, he did send a draft charter, promising that the *Ansar* would attend the protests, and arrange that Umar Nur al-Da'im and Salah Abd al-Salam would act as liaisons between the Umma Party and the National Alliance in the coming days.¹⁴⁵

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi waited until 5 April, when it was already clear that the regime had little support left, to declare his opposition to it publicly – although the fact that 5 April was a Friday was important, since it gave him the opportunity to broadcast his condemnation of Nimeiri to the largest possible audience during the weekly *khutba* sermon at his mosque in Omdurman. Nevertheless, even after this declaration, he went into hiding immediately, moving from secret location to secret location in Khartoum and delegating a committee formed from the Umma leadership to respond to events as they unfolded.¹⁴⁶ The other likely factor in the decision to hold back Umma participation would have been al-Sadiq's knowledge that the party was, given its large support base in rural Sudan, far more likely to win out in a democratic rather than a military confrontation – as it ultimately did in the 1986 elections. It seems that he thus waited for the various forces that had toppled the previous military regime in 1964 – the unions, pro-democracy groups in the army and the urban public at large – to achieve the same feat and then brought the Umma and its supporters in to play just as the regime was about to expire.

When al-Mahdi did declare war on the government on 5 April, it demonstrated his capacity to mobilize the support of the western Sudanese in Omdurman who had been marginalized by Nimeiri's unsympathetic stance on the Darfur famine. The Umma Party student organization had already been working to garner sympathy among the Darfuris in Omdurman displaced by famine, offering assistance in refugee camps at Abu Zeid and Mawalih.¹⁴⁷ 'The students were greatly influenced by the refugees from Kordofan and Darfur', recalls the *Ansar* student leader Isma'il Adam Ali, who hails from Kordofan himself. Ali notes the frustration that students at Omdurman Islamic University felt when instead of promising support for the starvation-hit regions, Nimeiri's speech of 25 March downplayed the extent of the famine.¹⁴⁸ The president's arrogant declaration was, for him, the main cause of the 26 March demonstration.

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's criticisms of the September Laws would have gained him particular support among the displaced western Sudanese groups in Omdurman, a

number of which had resorted to theft as a survival strategy, since the regime had applied its 'Islamic' punishments with particular vigour against them.¹⁴⁹ Al-Mahdi had railed against the new legislation from the moment of its promulgation, arguing in front of hundreds of thousands of *Ansari* followers in 1983 that Islamic punishments could be applied only in the context of a just social and economic order.¹⁵⁰ His two sermons at the Wad Nubawi mosque on 5 April condemned the regime for having applied nothing Islamic since its declaration of *shari'a* in 1983 other than 'flogging and amputations and crucifixion'.¹⁵¹ Even university-educated western Sudanese tend to remember this as a time during which there was a great deal of admiration for al-Mahdi, which would later vanish as a result of his policies in the third democratic period.¹⁵² Following the sermon, there was a large demonstration in the Sharia al-Hijra in Omdurman.¹⁵³

Given its central involvement in the events at Omdurman Islamic University, the Umma Party can probably be labelled as one of the 'initiators' of the *Intifada*. This said, the somewhat furtive behaviour of the party following the outbreak of the initial protests and its decision to wait for the army and professional movement to take action illustrated the limits of what Sadiq al-Mahdi's 'civil jihad' could achieve. Nevertheless, the sheer visibility of the Umma's contribution to the April *Intifada* belies the assumption that the 'traditional' forces failed to contribute to the civil protests. This was in marked distinction to the comparatively limited participation of the two principal 'modern forces', the ICF and SCP, in the anti-regime mobilization.

The *Intifada* and the waning influence of Sudanese communism

Western and regional analysts of the April *Intifada* were quick to observe the apparently negligible role played by the SCP leadership, and the fact that the party did not even appear to have a particularly significant role in organizing the demonstrations on the street.¹⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, this fact was seized upon by right-wing critics of the party. Islamists who participated in the *Intifada* have been keen to downplay the role of the communists, arguing that they thought that the 'time was not right'.¹⁵⁵ However, less unsympathetic sources also tend to acknowledge this, arguing that the blows inflicted upon the movement by Nimeiri since 1971 had weakened its organization to the extent that it could never hope to achieve the same level of influence as it had possessed after the October Revolution. Adlan Hardallo, the head of the Khartoum University Teacher's Union during the *Intifada*, recalls that in 1985:

they were shattered, they were suffering ... they thought that the time has not come ... we had a gathering of the union ... in that time I called for toppling the regime ... the next morning my friends who were communists were so angry, why did you do that, and before that ... they said let us organize ourselves better, but they never thought the regime would go as quickly as that.¹⁵⁶

The weak response of the SCP to the protests appears to have been acknowledged by the party itself. A fortnight after the *Intifada*, it issued a document blaming its inability

to contribute significantly to the civilian protests on the State Security Organization's domination of the workers' organizations.¹⁵⁷ SCP members – influenced to some extent by introspection brought on by Umar al-Bashir's successful pro-Islamist coup in 1989 – would later admit that at the time of the *Intifada*, 'the party was weakly established among the working classes, the students, the farmers, the unions and among the working classes in general, as a result of the traces of the July 1971 blow'.¹⁵⁸ The only union they controlled was the electricity workers' union, and this did little to coordinate with the Union Alliance.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, as seen above, their allies in the Bar Association had all abandoned them to side with Nimeiri in 1970. The party also asserted that it had been severely weakened by a series of campaigns launched against it by the supposed alliance of the ICF, SSO and CIA between 1978 and 1980.¹⁶⁰ It had also withdrawn from the newly formed Free Officer Organization within the military in 1977 for fear of a repeat of the crisis of 1971.¹⁶¹ The party was further crippled by defections induced by the changing intellectual and political climate. In the early 1980s, a number of leftist intellectuals left the SCP to join the ICF.¹⁶²

This is not to say that the SCP did not support the *Intifada*. On 30 March, its Central Committee issued a statement praising the actions of the students who had led the demonstrations of 26 and 27 March and calling for an end to the May Regime. The pamphlet responded to attempts by the regime to blame the rioting on the ICF by observing that the slogans adopted by the demonstrators were the same slogans that were being chanted at the time when the ICF was in the government. These included 'down, down USA' and 'lan yahkumna al-Bank al-Dawli'.¹⁶³ The fact that these slogans expressed a considerable degree of economic discontent does not demonstrate that the civil protests were directly inspired by the SCP. As seen above, Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, the leader of the SCP at the time, admits that the SCP 'did not make' April. He argues 'you can go back to the Union Alliance and Khartoum lecturers and lawyers and judges and others to know how the *Intifada* was prepared and who participated in it'.¹⁶⁴ One might conclude, therefore, that while socialist ideals had a strong residual influence among the educated elite and urban public in general, the SCP itself had been too severely undermined by its scourging at the hands of Nimeiri's security forces to marshal this rebellious sentiment in any positive direction.

The apogee of Sudanese Ba'athism

While the Sudanese Ba'athists, alongside other adherents of the Arab nationalist cause, have tended to occupy third rank behind the communist and Islamic movements among the political parties vying for supremacy over Sudan's educated classes, their role in the 1985 *Intifada* was possibly more significant than either of these. They had not been tainted by association with Nimeiri's regime, like the ICF; nor had they been brought low by conflict with it as had the SCP. It is easy to overlook the role of the Ba'athists at this time, since they had reached the apex of their influence by 1985 but receded from the Sudanese political arena following their failed military coup of 1990, which brought about the annihilation of their military wing.

The Sudanese Ba'ath Party was only a very small organization at the beginning of the May Regime, but its credibility among the opposition rose as the other branch of the Arab nationalist movement, the Nasserists, became associated with the regime through a number of Free Officers and figures such as Babikir Awadallah.¹⁶⁵ Nimeiri himself had helped it to expand by sending study missions to Iraq and Syria.¹⁶⁶ The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 was particularly significant because Sudan's support for Ba'athist Iraq led to increased contact between the two countries, particularly in the military context, which allowed the Ba'athist cell in the army to flourish.¹⁶⁷ At the same time that this conflict enabled the Sudanese Ba'ath to thrive off Nimeiri's alliance with Saddam, it provided the context for the party's demonization of the dictator's alliance with the ICF, since they interpreted al-Turabi as Sudan's very own Khumayni.¹⁶⁸ In this sense, the Sudanese Ba'ath was drawing succour from the regime, and simultaneously becoming its intimate enemy.

Resentment of Nimeiri's relationship with the ICF may have been one of the reasons that the party's resistance to his declaration of a state of emergency in 1984 was so pronounced. Al-Hussein claims that in April 1984 the leaders of the Ba'ath Party decided to declare a state of 'total mobilization' within the party, which would last until the success of the *Intifada* a year later.¹⁶⁹ It seems that this 'mobilization' did pose a serious challenge to the regime. SSO agents Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz recall that in this period, the Ba'ath Party daubed walls and spread copies of their underground newspaper, *al-Hadaf*, with greater efficiency than the SCP – a fact they attribute to the financial resources provided to the movement by Saddam.¹⁷⁰ The Ba'athist cells in Sudan were able to escape the attentions of the SSO with a relative degree of success, having been well trained in counter-surveillance by their political supervisors in Iraq.¹⁷¹

The Ba'ath Party's relative financial and political prosperity at this time, in addition to its alliance with the DUP, enabled it to plant roots in the professional and labour movement. Ba'athists who were active in the Doctors' Union included Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah, Khalid Sha'a al-Din and Dr Da'ud al-Din. These men helped to issue pamphlets in the name of the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' branch of the 'Doctors' Alliance' during the famous strike of 1984, explaining its objectives.¹⁷² The Alliance of the Sudanese People also offered the Ba'athists the chance to develop their cadres in the labour movement alongside the DUP, with whom it established the Trade Union Alliance.¹⁷³ The four Ba'athists who were famously tried by the regime for membership of the party between October 1984 and February 1985 (see below) included a builder, a student, a technician in the ministry of construction and a pharmacist.¹⁷⁴

It was Nimeiri's decision to try these four Ba'athists that gave the party particular public prominence. The self-styled *Imam* of Sudan intended that the court, which was headed by the ICF-affiliated judge al-Mukashifi al-Kabbashi, should demonstrate that Ba'athist principles were un-Islamic. Unfortunately for Nimeiri, the Ba'athists received a great deal of support from the professional movement and the trial gave the party the opportunity to mobilize support from among the unions in which they had the strongest presence.¹⁷⁵ A number of prominent Ba'athists were members of the Bar Association, including their leader, Taysir Mudathir, and others such as Kamal Jizouli,

Sadiq Shami, Sa'id Hammour, Ishaq Shaddad and Abu Jibba.¹⁷⁶ Since his declaration of the September Laws, the president had been determined to use trials to garner popular support for the regime, and this particular event was no exception, being attended by 1,000 members of the public. Al-Kabbashi himself upped the stakes by announcing new charges against the accused on 31 January, claiming that the Ba'athists had defamed Islam by writing in their pamphlets 'Islam is appropriate as religion and not as state', and that Ba'athism was anti-Islamic on the grounds that it was a racist ideology. The defendants were consequently charged with apostasy from Islam, which if proved would merit the death penalty.¹⁷⁷ Thus the trial became an intellectual battleground in which the legitimacy of the regime and the version of political Islam it had begun to espouse were challenged.

This confrontation between Arabism and Islamism provides an obvious historical example to challenge the glib but all too frequently made generalization that successive ruling elites in Sudan have pursued an 'Arab-Islamic' agenda. More importantly, it gave the Sudanese Ba'athists an opportunity to launch a critique of the regime's interpretation of Islam within the court and internationalize opposition to Nimeiri.¹⁷⁸ The Ba'athists and their allies in the Bar Association brought experts on Arab nationalist thought from Jordan, Egypt and Algeria to Khartoum to defend Ba'athist ideology against the charges that had been brought against it.¹⁷⁹ Eventually the court was forced to withdraw the extra charges and limit itself to prosecuting the Ba'athists for membership of a banned political organization, which resulted in two of the accused being sentenced to terms of imprisonment and the others being heavily fined.¹⁸⁰ According to al-Hussein, this was because both Nimeiri and the SSO were so afraid that the court was turning into a propaganda opportunity for the Ba'ath Party that the dictator ordered al-Kabbashi to remove the extra charges.¹⁸¹ Following the *Intifada*, the Bar Association would celebrate exposing Nimeiri's ignorance of the relationship between Arab nationalism and Islam.¹⁸² The Ba'ath Party thus played a significant role in exposing the frailties of the Nimeiri system, and demonstrated that Arab nationalism could still offer a potent ideological challenge to the regime, particularly in the regional context. Furthermore, these events illustrated just how effective collaboration between parties and professional unions could be.

Arguably, the Ba'athists' declaration of war against the regime was timed too early. When the April uprising broke out, a great number of its cadres had already been imprisoned by the regime, including its leading student activists at the University of Cairo.¹⁸³ They were in this regard less favourably positioned than the Umma, which had been out of the spotlight since the release of its leaders in 1984. Al-Hussein admits that the Ba'athist movement had little presence in Omdurman Islamic University, where the street demonstrations first began.¹⁸⁴ However, the Ba'athists do claim that their organization in the Doctors' Union helped to instigate the doctors' strike, pointing to the fact that one of the two men who proposed and helped to arrange the decisive meeting of 27 April was Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah.¹⁸⁵ The Ba'athists participated during the uprising itself by continuing their campaign of anti-regime pamphleteering and wall daubs, and mobilizing their cadres within the student movement in the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch, and University of Khartoum and Technical Institute to participate in the demonstrations against the regime.¹⁸⁶

In some respects, the successful participation of the Ba'athists in the April *Intifada* represented the twilight of the era in which Arab nationalism was mobilized as a revolutionary ideology. Since Nasserism was discredited by the defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war with Israel, Ba'athism and Arab nationalism had come to be more closely associated with corrupt and autocratic regimes in countries such as Syria and Iraq. It was somewhat ironic that the Sudanese Ba'ath Party, which was funded and supported by these regimes, should be at the forefront of civil protests against a non-democratic regime in Sudan. The main reason it was able to capture this particular role was that, while in countries like Egypt and Syria, Islamism had emerged as the dominant anti-government ideology, in Sudan the most powerful Islamist faction – Hasan al-Turabi's ICF – had opted to side with the regime. This pattern of events contrasted strongly with developments elsewhere in the Middle East. Observing the intricate nexus of political relationships between the government and the secular and 'Islamic' parties thus helps us to understand just why the April *Intifada* was such a unique event at the time.

ICF isolation and the ambiguous role of political Islam in 1985

Any analysis of the role of the Islamic Movement in the 1985 *Intifada* faces the problem of opinions on the matter being severely polarized. This is because the Sudanese political environment in the immediate wake of the *Intifada* was defined by the conflict between the Islamic Movement's new political manifestation, the National Islamic Front (NIF), and an alliance of the other major opposition parties. While most of the parties involved have tended to overemphasize their own part in the protests, the debates over the contribution of the ICF are particularly acrimonious. The historian is frequently confronted with narratives that either heavily exaggerate the role of the ICF during the *Intifada* or deny it completely.

What we can establish is that the May Regime, in spite of implementing *shari'a* in line with the political objectives of the Islamic Movement, broke with it decisively on 9 March 1985. On this day, 3 weeks before the *Intifada*, Nimeiri dispatched SSO agents to detain the entire ICF leadership. As seen in the previous chapter, it was believed by some that this move had been encouraged by George Bush senior on a recent visit to Sudan, and was also a result of Nimeiri's fears that the Islamic Movement was seeking to oust him.¹⁸⁷ The Islamists themselves tend to attribute the decision to Bush, although this is perhaps convenient since it enabled the party to represent itself as a victim of American imperialism.¹⁸⁸

While Islamist sources are invariably quick to claim that Nimeiri's break with the ICF was the decisive act that led to the *Intifada*,¹⁸⁹ the movement's opponents tend to stress that the fact that the president had arrested all its major leaders made it impossible for it to participate in the civilian protest movement in any significant way.¹⁹⁰ However, Muslim Brother accounts observe that not all of those wanted by Nimeiri and the SSO were actually caught; apparently, Ali Uthman Taha, Ibrahim

Sanussi, Ali al-Haj, Mahdi Ibrahim, Uthman Abd al-Wahhab, Su'ad al-Fatih and Amin Banani, all evaded capture.¹⁹¹ Both Taha and el-Affendi claim that news of the imminent arrests was leaked to the ICF.¹⁹² This makes sense, since the ICF had penetrated the SSO with a degree of effectiveness in the years leading up to 1985.¹⁹³ Former SSO agents Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz admit that at the time the detention orders were issued, the SSO did not possess up-to-date lists of the active members of the ICF, and acknowledge that as a result, a number of important members of the organization evaded capture.¹⁹⁴

Amin Banani claims that after the ICF split with Nimeiri, 'All our political weight was on the side of the opposition, without any previous arrangement'.¹⁹⁵ Kamal Umar insists that it was precisely because 8 years of collaboration with the May Regime had enabled the Islamists to understand the inner workings of its security apparatus that those who evaded arrest were able to continue acting under the radar and mobilize the population against the government.¹⁹⁶ Mahbub Abd Salam maintains that the demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University was heavily attended by students from the Islamic Way and brought Islamists 'from every part of Khartoum' onto the street, but fails to account for the fact that the union executive committee that led the demonstration was in the hands of an anti-ICF coalition.¹⁹⁷

Even if we acknowledge their presence on the streets, it is difficult to believe that the ICF acted in perfect unison with the opposition, given that opposition pamphlets were busy attacking the September Laws, which had been endorsed by the ICF, as a distortion of *shari'a*. The ICF had been effectively isolated from all the other major opposition parties since its reconciliation with Nimeiri in 1977. In the initial student demonstrations of 26 and 27 March, in which the ICF appear not to have participated, there were shouts of 'no to the peddlars of religion', and Faisal Islamic Bank, which was well known for its association with the Islamic Movement, was vandalized.¹⁹⁸ Even senior ICF sources acknowledged that the party's relationship with the rest of the opposition movement at the time of the *Intifada* was strained. Ali Uthman Taha claimed 2 years after the *Intifada* that a member of the Engineers' Union had invited the party to participate in the anti-regime movement, but that the ICF had responded that they would participate only if the SCP did not.¹⁹⁹ Another reason the ICF was not in a position to forge a relationship with the National Alliance was that it had a very weak relationship with the unions at the time, as a result of the fact that it had refused to support their demands for higher pay during the series of strikes that had preceded the uprising.²⁰⁰

Thus, the role of the ICF in coordinating opposition to the regime was probably relatively insignificant. This has now, in effect, been acknowledged by a number of senior Islamists. Yasin Umar Imam argues that the reason the ICF was somewhat withdrawn from the public demonstrations was because senior figures within the movement could not decide whether to support a civil movement against the regime or launch a military takeover using the ICF's cadres in the army.²⁰¹ Al-Turabi himself states that the majority of the cadres who had not been imprisoned lay low for fear that Umar al-Tayyib was planning to take extreme measures against the Islamists he did imprison.²⁰² Recalling the Islamic Movement's role in the *Intifada*, he observes that Nimeiri 'lost his support after he arrested us'.²⁰³ In other words, what mattered most

was not the Islamic Movement's active contribution to the *Intifada*, but the fact that it did not defend the May Regime as it had been doing previously.

Nevertheless, the fact that the ICF had a limited participation in the civil protests of 1985 should not lead us to exclude political Islam in general as a source of motivation for oppositionists. As seen in Chapter 2, a number of the political parties that challenged the introduction of the September Laws were forced to adopt the language used by Islamist movements to counter the challenge posed by the Islamization of the legislation.²⁰⁴ Moreover, many *Ikhwanis* or ex-*Ikhwanis* who had not joined al-Turabi's party when it was formed in 1964 stood with the *Intifada*. For instance, Sadiq Abdullah's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood joined the National Alliance soon after it was formed.²⁰⁵ Salah Misbah, who garnered popular attention in 1984 when he was sentenced by an 'instantaneous justice court' for publicly denouncing the September Laws during a meeting held by Nimeiri at the Armed Forces Mosque, was a member of the Islamic Socialist Party.²⁰⁶ Jizouli Dafa'allah, Mirghani al-Nasri and Hussein Abu Salih, who as will be seen in the next chapter were prominent professional leaders, were all involved in the Muslim Brotherhood student wing at the time of the ILM, the former two as leaders. This reminds us that the *Intifada* did not simply represent a conflict between the secular political forces and a religious state.

The Islamists who stood with the *Intifada* represented a wide spectrum of ideologies, and thus did not constitute a homogenous movement. One of the most interesting cases is that of Abdullah Zakariyya. Although this former ILM man had joined the Islamic Socialist Party when it was formed in 1964, by the time of the *Intifada* he had left this party, having embraced the principle of 'Islamic anarchism', which he attributes to the influence of his time spent as a master's student in London in the 1960s.²⁰⁷ It was this philosophy that he purportedly used to influence the Libyan Revolution as an exile there in the 1970s as the co-author of Gaddafi's Green Book. He tried to spread this philosophy in Sudan in the period immediately before the *Intifada*, infiltrating Libyan-backed Sudanese 'Revolutionary Committees' into Khartoum to foment dissent against Nimeiri.²⁰⁸ Zakariyya brought more agents into Khartoum during the *Intifada* itself, and he claims that a large number of those released from Kober in its immediate aftermath were accountable to him.²⁰⁹ Thus the Islamists who stood with the *Intifada* included ultraconservatives, quasi-socialists, independents and anarchists.

Just as the SCP's emasculation at the hands of the government did not prevent socialist ideals from influencing the educated elite that drove the *Intifada*, the association of the ICF with the regime and its policies did not prevent other Islamist professionals who had been a part of the original Sudanese *Ikhwan* from participating in the anti-regime struggle. This leads us to challenge models that identify civil protest in Sudan as either exclusively 'secular' or 'religious', or those that associate it with specific political factions.

Conclusion

A closer investigation of the events of 1964 and 1985 gives the lie to the assumption that it was the political left and, specifically, the SCP that dominated the uprisings.

The SCP did not exercise a dominant influence at the University of Khartoum, the institution that acted as the cradle of the October Revolution. Therefore, while claims made by opponents of the SCP that it actively opposed the October Revolution are difficult to justify, it cannot be said that the party instigated the civilian insurrection. It certainly threw a great deal of weight behind the uprising when it broke out, but by this stage, it represented just one party among a wide array of political and social groups pushing the Revolution along. Admittedly, it was a heavyweight force in 1964, but it was less so in 1985, when it was still struggling to recover from the repeated aggressions of Nimeiri and his security agencies. As will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, leftists in both the army and the professionals' unions who sympathized in a general way with SCP ideology did emerge as major protagonists in 1985 – but with little direct inspiration from the party itself. The one secular political party that helped to mobilize dissent in 1985 was the Ba'ath Party. Because of its direct links to Ba'athist Iraq, the party was a well-funded and well-trained organization at the time, enabling it to force Nimeiri to back down during his attempted show-trial of February 1985.

The more socially conservative parties that based their legitimacy on some form or another of political Islam – whether the more historically rooted forms of Islam espoused by the Khatmiyya order and Mahdist *Ansar*, or the newer and more radical forms established by the Muslim Brotherhood and the political parties it spawned – participated to varying degrees in the mobilization of popular dissent during both uprisings. However, in spite of the role of *Ikhwani* students in the KUSU executive in 1964, we cannot state confidently that any of these parties created the October Revolution. Nevertheless, like the SCP, each of them played an important part in supporting it when it did break out. Moreover, the critical significance of Hasan al-Turabi's activities during this period is acknowledged by many parties. Although al-Turabi was a university lecturer and not a politician during the October Revolution, it seems likely that he coordinated his activities with colleagues in the Muslim Brotherhood more than his own somewhat self-aggrandizing accounts of the past suggest. Meanwhile, it would also be unfair to uphold the claim that the 'traditional parties', the PDP, NUP and Umma, played no significant role in the revolution and simply reaped the rewards after democratic elections were held. The presence of Sadiq al-Mahdi and other *Ansar* leaders at Khartoum hospital on the night of 21/22 October helped convince al-Qurayshi's *Ansari* family to support the demonstrations, while the presence of the Khatmiyya at the *Gubba* may have motivated Abboud's decision to step down.

While in 1964 the various political forces cooperated with each other at least until the regime had been removed, in 1985 there was more evident division, since the ICF decision to support the May Regime almost until its final hour had isolated it from the other political forces. Just as the SCP was accused in 1964 of opposing the uprising in its initial stages, the ICF was attacked in 1985 for declining to support the *Intifada*. These claims are somewhat harder to refute, especially since they are now acknowledged by a number of figures within the Islamic Movement itself. However, what can be said is that, given the considerable economic and political weight of the ICF at the time, the fact that it did not defend the regime or oppose the various demonstrating parties was significant in itself. Among the 'traditional' religious parties, the Umma in particular

played a far more active role in supporting the anti-regime movement. While the DUP was more divided than the Umma at the time of the uprising, the partnership of one faction with the Sudanese Ba'ath Party in the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' indicated that the 'modern/secular' and 'traditional/religious' forces within Sudanese politics could forge common agendas. It might even be claimed that the Umma Party helped instigate the 1985 uprising through its domination of the Omdurman Islamic University students' union. However, the fact that it did not deploy its *Ansar* supporters *en masse* during the early stages of the uprising illustrated that Sadiq al-Mahdi knew that he needed to work alongside other important groups within urban Sudanese society for the popular revolt against Nimeiri to succeed.

Senior professionals have tended to claim that the major political parties failed to react as quickly as they did to the uprisings, but such arguments overlook the symbiotic nature of the ties that bound the party and professional elites. Both uprisings demonstrated just how effective coordination between professionals and party politicians could be. The SCP's brandishing of the general strike slogan in 1961 can at the very least be said to have provided the background for the Professional Front's successful mobilization of civil disobedience 3 years later; lawmen affiliated to Arab nationalist parties were involved in the declaration of civil disobedience; Hasan al-Turabi inspired the KUSU students in his role as a university lecturer; and in 1985, the Bar Association and Ba'ath Party collaborated to thwart Nimeiri's *muhakama al-fikra*. The inter-linkage between the parties and student unions also proved vital, particularly at the University of Khartoum in 1964 and Omdurman Islamic University in 1985. However, it is worth observing that in 1985 neither of the two major parties that were perceived to exercise hegemony over the educated elite, the SCP or the ICF, contributed noticeably towards the mobilization of the dissent. The parties could manipulate professionals or student politics, but they did not control it. Thus, it is certainly worth analysing the various institutions associated with the 'modern forces' as actors in their own right.