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The 1985–6 Transitional Period and the Tenacity of Political Islam

Just as ‘progressive’ Sudanese intellectuals in 1964 claimed that the October Revolution had been aborted by the ‘traditional’ forces spearheaded by the Umma Party, so in 1985 the leftists and liberals of the National Alliance would accuse Hasan al-Turabi’s National Islamic Front (NIF) – a revamped version of the ICF – of conspiring to undermine the achievements of the April *Intifada*. The army leadership, which temporarily seized executive power with the formation of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) on 9 April, is frequently accused of having collaborated with the NIF to prevent it from achieving its goals. It is often claimed that the NIF controlled the interim government by remote control through ‘satellites’ such as Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl in the TMC, and Jizouli Dafa’allah, Hussein Abu Salih and Umar Abd al-Ati in the interim cabinet. The problem with such claims is that they tend to downplay the institutional agendas of the military leadership and identify ‘Islamists’ as a single category, thus denying the capacity of the non-Turabist Islamists – who also joined the Alliance and then the transitional government – to identify with ideals such as democracy and liberalism. It will be seen below that the divisions between the secularists and anti-secularists within the Alliance played a significant role in preventing it from achieving its goals, although these divisions revealed a far more complex set of relationships than is supposed by those who assert that Siwar al-Dahab and Jizouli Dafa’allah were mere ‘satellites’ of the NIF.

Divisions within the National Alliance

The differences within the pro-democracy movement were more immediately visible in 1985 than had been the case in 1964. Since Nimeiri’s downfall had been relatively predictable, it did not have the same unifying effect that the October Revolution did. Moreover, as Woodward observes, the fact that the same political groups that participated in 1985 had also witnessed 1964 meant that they came prepared to act in different ways.¹ They had learnt from the crises that followed the first uprising and pursued strategies based on an anticipation of the recurrence of similar conflicts. There were disputes between the army and the unions, the unions and the parties, the secularists and the Islamists and between Alliance members of individual political convictions.

The first divergence that emerged was within the National Alliance, between the parties and the professional unions. Some professionals had not wanted to contact the parties at all – Jizouli Dafa'allah, who was in prison at the time Amin Makki Madani took the decision to invite the parties into the Alliance, maintains that if he had been free at that stage he would have opposed the decision.² The professional unions had learnt during 1964–5 that a swift return to electoral democracy would cause their influence to disappear rapidly. Meanwhile, the leaderships of the traditional parties remained confident of their ability to manipulate the rural vote, and balanced the need to focus on rebuilding their organization within Sudan against the fear that a government composed of the 'modern forces' would use a lengthy period of transition to alter Sudan's legal, governmental and electoral framework so as to favour urban, educated groups.

These disputes came to the fore at the first serious meeting between the parties and the professional unions on 5 April, before the May Regime had even departed. Reportedly, this meeting was a heated one and broke up without a date being set to reconvene and with a large number of problems unresolved.³ One of the most vociferously contested issues was that of the length of the transitional period. Representatives of the professional unions demanded that it be 5 years, insisting that this was necessary to remove all the negative manifestations of the old regime and 'create the basis for a liberal and united Sudan'.⁴ Party representatives objected to this and haggled until the union representatives agreed to reduce the number to 3 years.⁵ As in 1964, therefore, the internal contradictions of the pro-democracy coalition were evident. Having brought about the downfall of Nimeiri's dictatorial regime and facilitated the return of democracy, the 'modern forces' sought to delay its onset for as long as possible.

Meanwhile, the union representatives proposed a tripartite system of governance incorporating a cabinet, a 'council of the unions' (*majlis al-niqabi*), and a five-man sovereignty council incorporating one union representative, three members of the major northern political parties (without the ICF/NIF), and one southerner. Meanwhile, 60 per cent of the cabinet would be appointed by the professional and trade union leaderships and 40 per cent by the parties, while the reverse would apply for the *majlis al-niqabi*.⁶ It appears that this was also rejected by the party representatives.

Siwar al-Dahab's declaration on 6 April thrust the military into the midst of the party-professional conflict, weakening the position of the professionals. After his speech was broadcast, the professional leaders discovered to their frustration that the representatives of the DUP and the Umma had neglected their previously arranged meeting with them so as to visit the army leadership and give their blessing to what the military had done!⁷ The commander-in-chief's intervention put the professionals under pressure to make decisions before they had the chance to forge proper links with the labour unions.⁸ An attempt by Muhammad al-Amin al-Tom to arrange a meeting between the professional and labour unions at this point was thwarted by the appearance of union leaders affiliated with the SSU.⁹ Moreover, the army put the unions under pressure to end the general strike immediately, sending Colonel Abd al-Aziz al-Amin to remind the Alliance leaders of the deteriorating economic situation and dispatching units to the headquarters of the electricity board to demand cancellation of the blackout.¹⁰ At the same time, labour and professional activists attempted to mobilize the public to prevent any further intervention. On 8 April the professional

unions, led by the cashiers, launched a demonstration joined by student and workers' bodies demanding that the army surrender power, and chanting slogans like 'there is no substitute for the government of the people'.¹¹

It is important to understand, therefore, that the conflict between the government and the civilian demonstrators did not end with the army takeover of 6 April. As seen in Chapter 4, the leaderships of the labour unions did not officially enter the *Intifada* until shortly after Siwar al-Dahab's declaration that the army was 'siding with the people', and their entry gave the demonstrations a new impetus. Leftists claim that these demonstrations, which had the support of the Free Officer Organization, were what forced the regime to dismantle the SSO and arrest all the leading figures in the former regime, who had up to this point been allowed to walk in the streets unmolested.¹² It was also the urban crowds who broke down the gates of Kober prison with a lorry and released all the political prisoners from the May period.¹³ The army leadership had initially given no orders for these men, a great number of whom were leftists and Ba'athists, to be released.¹⁴ Although it later acknowledged their freedom when it had been brought about *de facto*, critics of the army have even maintained that Fadlallah Burma Nasir, one of the regional commanders, attempted to intervene and prevent some of the political prisoners from being released.¹⁵ This indicates that there was an 'uprising within an uprising' between 6 and 8 April, in which the more left-wing political forces pressured the army leadership to take a radical position. However, the problem for these left-wing groups within the National Alliance was that the relative spontaneity of the uprising had prevented them from gaining sufficient time to coordinate fully with the Free Officer movement in the army and to establish a coherent political programme.¹⁶ The takeover of the army leadership on 6 April had thus come at precisely the wrong time for these groups.

It seems that the attitude of the army leadership towards the unions was unsympathetic from the outset. 'Right from the beginning they [the union leaders] were not happy', declares Siwar al-Dahab, 'they thought we should go we should go back to the barracks, in fact at that time they tried to go on demonstrating, we threatened them that if they don't calm down we are going to face them with harsh and tough measures'.¹⁷ Alliance leaders allege that the military intimidated them directly in meetings held before the cancellation of the general strike.¹⁸ At the same time, the army's insistence that the strike be terminated appears to have been one of many issues exposing divisions among the unions themselves. Eventually, the less radical faction prevailed and it was called off.¹⁹ The emergence of the military also thwarted the professionals' plans to demand a longer transitional period, and the party representatives were thus able to impose a one-year arrangement on the unions; this was agreed upon at a meeting between the Alliance and TMC on 9 April.²⁰ Siwar al-Dahab's swift announcement of the military takeover thus significantly undermined the position of the urban radicals.

It was the divisions within the Alliance leadership that provided the context for the soldiers displacing them as interim leaders. After the abandonment of the general strike, the various factions within the Alliance held another meeting on 9 April; in this they found themselves still unable to reach an agreement on governing arrangements for the transitional period.²¹ These divisions appear to have been ideological in nature. While most of the professionals' leaders within the Alliance did not possess open political affiliations, they did hold either strongly leftist or pro-Islamist convictions.

Adlan Hardallo and Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad fell within the former category, and Jizouli Dafa'allah, Mirghani al-Nasri and Umar Abd al-Ati in the latter.²² It was the debate over the status of *shari'a* law that provoked Jizouli Dafa'allah to storm out of the 9 April meeting, threatening to resign his position in the Alliance.²³ Alliance members recall that it was in this heated session that they were surprised by the news of the army leadership's decision to establish a Transitional Military Council and take over the government.²⁴ This illustrates the manner in which the inability of the Alliance leaders to forge a common position left them vulnerable to an impatient and untrusting military.

The decision to establish the TMC was taken without any consultation with the civilians.²⁵ Siwar al-Dahab is now quite unapologetic about his failure to inform the Alliance of its formation in advance, insisting that it was 'a military body and they don't have any say in composing that council'.²⁶ However, what is unclear is whether the military was exploiting divisions within the Alliance as a result of its own desire to seize power, or simply reacting to the failures of the Alliance to decide on an effective system of governance. Haydar Taha claims that during the first meeting between the Alliance leaders and the TMC following the removal of Nimeiri, Mirghani al-Nasri demanded that the army surrender power to the Alliance. Siwar al-Dahab reportedly asked him, 'are you ready?', which apparently prompted al-Nasri to turn around, scrutinize his delegation, and then, having observed that they were all very young, report 'no we are not ready'.²⁷ This story may well have been embellished, exaggerated, or even fabricated outright, but it does reflect the more widespread concerns at the time concerning the potential effectiveness of the Alliance as a governing body. Umar al-Digeir, who was present at the meeting, provides a similar account, asserting that Siwar al-Dahab offered to surrender power to the National Alliance immediately but that not even a single member of its delegation responded to his invitation.²⁸

The decision to form the TMC was quickly accepted by the DUP, the Umma Party, and Sadiq Abdullah's wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, but resented by the less conservative factions within the Alliance.²⁹ Although anger at the decision of the army leadership to take power unilaterally united the professionals in the Alliance, it did so only temporarily. While they were furious at the TMC, they still could not agree with the parties on the nature of any substitute for it.³⁰ The debate over the selection of the interim prime minister also revealed the weak position of the radical faction among the professionals. Both the individuals proposed by the Alliance for the post of prime minister, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Mirghani al-Nasri, were known for their pro-Islamist convictions and were reported to have the backing of the Umma and the DUP.³¹ This probably signalled the acceptance by the leftists within the Alliance of their inability to influence the military leadership. While a number of the members of the Khartoum University Teachers' Union mooted the left-leaning Adlan Hardallo as a candidate for the post of prime minister, Hardallo himself declined to accept the nomination. He claims to have felt that after the formation of the TMC, things were not going as the Alliance wanted and that he would have been powerless to change the policies of the military, although the fact that he had been labelled a communist meant that he would most likely have been rejected for the post in any case.³²

Nevertheless, a lengthy series of debates emerged within the Alliance as to whether Jizouli Dafa'allah or Mirghani al-Nasri was the fitter candidate for the position.³³

It appears that Mahgub Uthman, the Sudan Communist Party representative, objected to Mirghani al-Nasri's candidature on account of the latter being a member of the Islamic Socialist Party.³⁴ However, this also appears to have been very much a clash of personal attitudes between their respective supporters, and Jizouli Dafa'allah was eventually selected.³⁵ Frustrated by his rejection, Mirghani al-Nasri refused to play any further role in the transitional government. Personal competition, apart from ideological conflict, thus made its own contribution to undermining the Alliance.

The selection of the fifteen cabinet members also provoked conflict. Admittedly, this process was not as contentious as it could have been had the political parties not decided to refrain from participation in the transitional government and focus on rebuilding their infrastructural strength after 16 years without multi-party elections. Alliance members agreed that while no candidate would be permitted to have any open political affiliation, both the parties and the unions would have a say in nominating individual members.³⁶ A motion by leftist members of the Alliance that unions and professional associations should be allowed directly to nominate their own representatives for the ministries was narrowly defeated.³⁷ The decision-makers within the Alliance felt that the fact that there was a considerably greater number of both parties and unions than had existed in 1964 made their direct representation in the transitional cabinet impractical.³⁸

Nevertheless, it appears that a few of the ministers did possess close links to the political parties, specifically the religious parties. The health minister and member of the Doctors' Union Hussein Abu Salih ran successfully for parliament towards the end of the interim period on behalf of the DUP.³⁹ According to *Africa Confidential*, he had also been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood as a student.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, education minister Bashir Haj al-Tom was allegedly a member of Sadiq Abdullah's Muslim Brotherhood party, a splinter group within the wider Islamic movement.⁴¹ Leftist sources also allege that the foreign minister, Ibrahim Taha Ayoub, was 'an extreme Islamist'.⁴² Again, these appointments seem to have been a source of friction for leftists within the National Alliance. Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad declared, in vain, his opposition to the list of ministerial nominations presented to, and eventually accepted by, the TMC.⁴³ This reminds us that, in spite of the refusal of the ICF to participate in the Alliance, the professional movement forming the interim regime still incorporated a large number of non-Turabist Islamists. This category was probably over-represented in the interim cabinet because of the TMC's anti-Ba'athist and anti-leftist stance. The only transitional ministers other than the prime minister who had participated in the *Intifada* were those who had been in contact with the more conservative branches of the Umma and DUP – Amin Makki Madani and (according to some accounts) Umar Abd al-Ati.⁴⁴

Islamist links to the TMC and cabinet

The fact that the transitional cabinet incorporated so many individuals tending towards political Islam led secularists within the Alliance to insist that they were collaborators of al-Turabi. Such arguments reflect a wider discourse suggesting that – as in 1964 – the *Intifada* was stolen by the religious-political right. Claims were made during and

after the transitional period by individuals on both the political left and the political right that al-Turabi's NIF were manipulating or even directly controlling the leaders of the TMC and cabinet. Such claims have easily elided with the proposition that Siwar al-Dahab's regime was 'May 2', since the NIF – although it was formed from the core of the old ICF – also incorporated a number of members of Nimeiri's political and security establishment who were seeking new allies after the downfall of the regime.⁴⁵ Adlan Hardallo maintained in 1987, and still does maintain, that Siwar al-Dahab, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Taj al-Din Fadl were 'members of the Muslim Brotherhood'.⁴⁶ Such men have thus become scapegoats for the failure of the transitional period and the slide towards Umar al-Bashir's pro-NIF coup in 1989. Al-Turabi himself claimed at the time that these three men, in addition to Hussein Abu Salih, were all Islamists and ensured that the NIF view was being represented in the cabinet.⁴⁷

The truth is somewhat more nuanced. For instance, Jizouli Dafa'allah himself maintains 'I am an Islamist not belonging to a party ... we have the same sort of aspirations, but if he [al-Turabi] means by Islamist that I belong to his party, he is wrong. But al-Turabi was a friend, and we still keep good contact'.⁴⁸ This reminds us of the tenacity of the social links binding together the professional elite, just as much as the similar ideological proclivities of the two men. It is true that Jizouli Dafa'allah *had* been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, joining it during his secondary education at Hantoub. He had also succeeded al-Turabi as the leader of the Brotherhood's political office at the University of Khartoum between 1957 and 1959.⁴⁹ However, in 1964, just as al-Turabi was changing the course of the Islamic Movement with the formation of the Islamic Charter Front, Jizouli Dafa'allah renounced his political ties and left the organization.⁵⁰ Explaining this, he observes: 'I think I was too independent for an organization'.⁵¹ Thus, while he was an Islamist, he had never joined any party led by al-Turabi or espousing a Turabist ideology. Moreover, he continued to participate in the Alliance at a time when it was shunning any links with the NIF. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind that at the time he was leading the doctors' strike in 1984, the ICF managed to isolate itself from the unions because of its refusal to support their demands for increased pay.⁵²

It could also be argued that the military and Alliance leaderships selected Jizouli Dafa'allah not just for his ideological background, but also for his experience. Having been secretary of the Professional Front in Rufa'a during the October Revolution, he possessed the kind of familiarity with the political environment that other Alliance members lacked.⁵³ Part of the reason that he became a prime ministerial nominee was that the leading professional activists had decided on 6 April that the presidency of the Union Alliance should be awarded to the Doctors' Union, given the critical role that it had played in combating Nimeiri's regime during its 1984 strike.⁵⁴ In this sense, Jizouli Dafa'allah was simply in the right place at the right time. One former Alliance member now insists that they would never have allowed this to happen had they known about his personal political history and about the fact that he would oppose outright cancellation of the September Laws – indeed, it seems that his background in the Muslim Brotherhood was not widely known at the time. Given their resentment of his actions as transitional prime minister, it is unsurprising that a number of former Alliance members have tried to downplay his role as chairman of the Doctors' Union

in the period leading up to the *Intifada*. Claims have been made that he was chosen as head of the Doctors' Union only because the regime would have been unwilling to negotiate with a more radical figure, that he and Hussein Abu Salih attended the various meetings of the Union Alliance and listened but never spoke, and that these same two opposed the initial decision to declare an open strike during the famous meeting of the Doctors' Union on 27 March 1985.⁵⁵ It is difficult to know the extent to which these charges are exaggerated, but what cannot be denied is that Jizouli Dafa'allah (unlike his predecessor in 1964) did ultimately oversee the two strikes and was arrested for his role on both occasions.⁵⁶ In this sense at least, he had earned himself sufficiently robust credentials to be considered for the role of prime minister, and cannot be regarded simply as an ICF 'plant'. To do so would be to deny the capacity of non-Turabist Islamists such as the interim prime minister to engage in civil action and support democratic transition.

Jizouli Dafa'allah was certainly not a member of the ICF or NIF, and was no power-seeking stooge – he did not obtain any further political positions after stepping down as transitional prime minister at the end of the interim period; nor was he a 'compromise candidate' like Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa in 1964. His Islamist convictions may have been of an individualistic nature, but they made him a good choice for military leaders vehemently opposed to secularist or leftist influences in the government. Former NIF man Mahjub Irwa's description of his attitude towards the party as 'neutral plus' is probably close to the truth.⁵⁷ As will be demonstrated below, he did not actively encourage pro-NIF policies, but his cabinet opposed secularist and leftist measures more openly than they did Islamist ones.

The relationship of TMC leaders Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl with the NIF, as revealed in the previous chapter, was probably one of sympathy, or at least one of shared outlook, rather than the product of direct manipulation. As soon as the army leadership took power on 6 April, they sent a plane to free al-Turabi from imprisonment in al-Ubayyid.⁵⁸ The next day, as the Alliance leaders were meeting the generals at the army headquarters, the newly formed NIF staged a demonstration outside it supporting the military takeover and demanding an end to the general strike.⁵⁹ Sudanese academics and members of the Alliance who have criticized the NIF-military relationship claim that al-Turabi's new party sent representatives to meet the TMC on 10 April, the day after it was formed. They maintain that they arrived before members of the Alliance parties, who were shocked when they reached the general headquarters and realized that the NIF were already there.⁶⁰ Notes on the 10 April meeting compiled by the National Alliance record that Ali Uthman Taha and Uthman Medawi of the NIF entered the discussions at 10:45 and began to remark that neither the unions nor the 'traditional parties' had any right to engage in political activity.⁶¹ This brazen contempt for the Alliance gave an early warning of the NIF's lack of respect for the democratic process and can be seen as prefiguring their involvement in Umar al-Bashir's coup 4 years later.

Siwar al-Dahab denies having given the NIF favourable treatment, observing: 'I never ended up in a situation where this confronted me and we treated them as other parties.'⁶² However, as will be demonstrated below, the TMC pursued agendas that were broadly compatible with the aims of the NIF. El-Affendi admitted in 1989 that

'It is not yet clear what role Ikhwan played in the coup of 6 April, but they could not have asked for a more favourable arrangement'.⁶³ As seen in Chapter 5, Ali Uthman Taha's message probably reached Siwar al-Dahab too late to influence his decision to announce a military takeover, but it is clear that the ICF/NIF did consider him a favourable candidate for the role of president.

While the TMC and NIF had relatively similar ideological proclivities, the soldiers probably did not favour Hasan al-Turabi's party any more than the other non-secular parties. This is evident from the political make-up of the five commission appointed by the TMC to draw up an interim constitution. Its members were Mirghani al-Nasri of the Islamic Socialist Party, Farouk Bireir of the Umma, Mamoun Sinada and Suleiman Dahab of the DUP and only one NIF representative, Hafiz al-Shaikh.⁶⁴ The Islamist parties within the 'modern forces' were favoured more than their secularist rivals, and therefore, the largely pro-Khatmi TMC gave more representation to the DUP than any other party. The conservative outlook of the constitution they established, which omitted a number of the more liberal aspects of the 1985 National Charter,⁶⁵ reflected the conservative views of these parties. This further illustrates the extent to which the tendency of analysts to assume that Sudanese post-colonial political life was defined by a Manichaean duel between the Muslim Brotherhood and SCP had led them to neglect the role of the 'sectarian' parties during the political transitions.

The transitional government's rift with the unions

With a number of Islamist 'fellow travellers' in both the cabinet and the TMC, it was not surprising that many of the unions, particularly those closely aligned with the political left, became disenchanted. These bodies used the 'Union Alliance' (*al-tajammu' al-niqabi*) as a voice of protest against the policies of the interim regime. With quasi-Islamist union leaders from the National Alliance such as Umar Abd al-Ati, Jizouli Dafa'llah and Hussein Abu Salih having joined the cabinet, it was the left-leaning Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad – appointed secretary of the Union Alliance on 6 April – who acted as its spokesman. This body immediately became an object of the wrath of the military Islamists. In a meeting between Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad and TMC member Ibrahim Yusuf Awad on 9 April, Umar al-Bashir appeared and interjected that the Union Alliance were 'a bunch of Communists' and that the army could deal with them in one night if they so chose! Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad protested to Uthman Abdallah, the head of the TMC's political committee, but his objections did not lead to any actions being taken against al-Bashir.⁶⁶

The Union Alliance, along with the various bodies it incorporated, was highly outspoken during the transitional period. On 2 May 1985, the doctors of Khartoum hospital, who had played a critical part during the *Intifada*, issued a statement insisting that the TMC should cancel the State of Emergency, form a parliament led by professional representatives, transfer power in the regions from military governors to civilian bodies, cancel the 1983 September Laws and dismiss ministers who had not been appointed with the agreement of the unions and the parties. A number of these demands would be reiterated by the Union Alliance a month later.⁶⁷ However, the TMC did not appear even to have considered any of them as a basis for negotiation.

Other unions insisted that bosses associated with the May Regime – the ‘mini-Nimeiri in every workplace’ – be cleansed. On 10 May, the Bank Employees’ Union launched a protest in Khartoum, calling for senior bankers to be held to account for corruption and economic malpractice.⁶⁸ This demonstration was broken up by the police, and the governor of Khartoum responded 3 days later with a complete ban on protest rallies in the capital.⁶⁹ This was soon transgressed by the Auditors’ Union, which marched in protest against the TMC’s refusal to dismiss the auditor general, another Nimeiri relic. Members of the Auditors’ Union issued a collective statement threatening to resign *en masse*.⁷⁰ The crisis led to a lengthy negotiation between the TMC and the Auditors’ Union, which was supported by the Union Alliance, but it failed to secure a resolution.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the Union Alliance continued to demand that the government sack senior bank managers who had acquired their positions under Nimeiri, and that the finance minister Awad Abd al-Majid, who was refusing to reverse Nimeiri’s policy of cooperation with the IMF, should resign.⁷² Although similar protests were being launched by branches of the Union Alliance in the provinces,⁷³ they achieved little and, as will be seen below, the interim regime failed to confront corruption in the state bureaucracy.

What particularly infuriated the unions was that while the transitional government was retaining bosses and public servants whom they considered responsible for the injustices of the Nimeiri system, it was refusing to return to their jobs union activists dismissed on account of their opposition to the May Regime. Although a committee was established at the attorney-general’s office to handle the return of these men, it achieved limited results. On 5 September, a body representing the dismissed workers camped outside the cabinet building in protest against the sluggishness of the government in dealing with the issue.⁷⁴ At this stage, the press reported that 251 workers at the education ministry were still waiting to get their jobs back and that thirty-six doctors were yet to have their cases dealt with by the ministry of health.⁷⁵ In March 1986, the finance minister mollified the protesters somewhat by agreeing to pay out 4 million Sudanese pounds to the dismissed employees.⁷⁶ However, it seems that hardly any of them were able to return to their jobs. Leftists and trade unionists tend to attribute this to the government perception that these men were communists or, at the very least, communist sympathizers.⁷⁷ Again, this reflected the defensive approach of the TMC – it was anti-communist and anti-Ba’athist, before anything else.

The transitional regime also displayed its antipathy towards the unions through its rejection of plans for electoral representation of workers’ and professional bodies. On 15 December 1985, the SCP proposed that 110 out of 390 seats in the new parliament should be allotted to the ‘modern forces’, including 53 seats for workers’ representatives and 15 for the professionals.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the National Alliance – with the exception of the DUP, which flatly rejected the proposal for representation of the ‘modern forces’ – recommended allocating 45 seats out of a total of 225 to union representatives, including 19 for workers’ unions.⁷⁹ After the independent electoral commission was unable to resolve the dispute, a joint TMC-cabinet committee rejected the plans of the SCP and the Alliance and instead elected to return to the old policy of establishing seats specifically for graduates, increasing the number to 28.⁸⁰ At first glance, this measure might be considered a sop to the SCP, which in 1965 had secured the majority of its electoral victories in the graduate districts. However, as we have seen, in the 1970s the

Islamic Movement had replaced the SCP as the dominant force in the universities, though not the labour movement. The decision to limit representation of the 'modern forces' to graduates has therefore been taken as evidence of the interim government's sympathy with the NIF.⁸¹ This is somewhat vindicated by the fact that the NIF did win in all but three of the 28 graduate districts in the 1986 elections.⁸² However, Jizouli Dafa'llah has responded to claims that this illustrated his pandering to the NIF by observing both that the graduate seats were already established by precedent and that he as a professional himself had actually been in favour of greater representation for the 'modern forces', but was outvoted in a joint TMC-cabinet meeting.⁸³

TMC policy towards the various unions revealed the conservative outlook of the transitional regime. It further demonstrated the extent to which its policy corresponded with that of the Islamic Movement, which had shown scant sympathy for union demands in the later years of the May Regime. At face value, Siwar al-Dahab's takeover might be identified as what Africanists have termed – albeit rather sceptically – a 'guardian coup', whereby the military intervenes to remove a corrupt political order and then upholds its promise to return to the barracks.⁸⁴ However, The TMC's internal takeover might also be compared to the 'veto-type coup' identified by commentators on Latin America whereby the military intervenes to prevent the intelligentsia and skilled workers from obtaining economic and political representation. Such coups herald the decline of a populist and inclusive system of politics, such as that espoused by the early Nimeiri regime, that is held to have become economically unsustainable.⁸⁵ While Siwar al-Dahab's 'coup', if it is understood in this way, only lasted for 1 year, it successfully prevented these classes from obtaining extra representation and set the scene for the more conservative parties to dominate the third democracy. The failure of the unions to press home their demands also leads us to question just how much of a victory the April *Intifada* was for the 'modern forces'. The protests of the unions also exposed the divisions among former allies in the National Alliance. When the Engineers' Union, one of the six unions to sign the National Charter, went on strike in January 1986, Umar Abd al-Ati, the man who had read out the declaration of the *Intifada*, publicly condemned the action in his role as transitional attorney-general.⁸⁶ The Alliance, it seemed, was no longer much of an alliance at all.

The second civil war and government-Alliance relations

The failure of the transitional regime to reach an accommodation with John Garang's SPLA rebels in southern Sudan represented another blow to the leftists, secularists and liberals within the Alliance, for these individuals had risked much by attempting to reach out to them. On 11 April, the National Alliance issued a statement praising Garang's role in the anti-Nimeiri struggle and encouraging him to come to Khartoum and 'join in the popular movement'.⁸⁷ In early May the Union Alliance publicly criticized attempts by the TMC to undertake diplomatic manoeuvres against the rebel bases in Ethiopia, insisting that Garang and his movement represented 'an important faction among this people' and pressing for a democratic solution to the conflict in the south.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, it seems that both the SCP and Sudanese Ba'ath Party hoped that

by bringing the SPLA to Khartoum they would be able to outvote the religious-political parties at the forthcoming elections.⁸⁹ The SPLA was still very much dependent upon the patronage of Marxist Ethiopia at this stage, and its initial manifesto in 1983 had incorporated a great deal of socialist language.⁹⁰ This would, in theory, have offered the potential for common ground to be forged with the SCP.

Unfortunately for the northern Sudanese left, Garang felt unable to play along. He referred to the new transitional regime as 'May 2' and refused to negotiate with it.⁹¹ Northern Sudanese politicians of all ideological shades, including Taj al-Din Fadl, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, have expressed frustration at what they perceived to be the rebel leader's short-sightedness in describing the new situation in this manner.⁹² Nugd recalled soon before his death that he visited Garang in Addis Ababa during the interim period and tried to inform him of his mistake, arguing 'a change has happened my brother, parties have been legalized, political prisoners have been released and papers have begun to appear'.⁹³

There was at the time, and has been since, much speculation concerning Garang's reluctance to enter the embrace of the Alliance. In June 1985, representatives of the Arab Socialist Nasserist party announced that they had met him in Addis Ababa but that he had declared himself unwilling to participate in the electoral process as this would simply allow Sudan's right-wing parties, which still maintained massive support bases in the rural areas of the north, to return to power.⁹⁴ Thus Garang clearly had less faith than the SCP in the combined electoral capabilities of the Sudanese left. Jizouli Dafa'allah argues that 'I think at that time John Garang thought he could rule the whole of Sudan, and the *Intifada* interrupted his plans for that'.⁹⁵ In another sense, the *Intifada* provided Garang with a number of military opportunities. His decision not to come to Khartoum did enable him to score a considerable number of victories and capture a great number of army garrisons in the south at a time when the army leadership was distracted by its role in the TMC.⁹⁶

Was Garang's lack of faith in the TMC justified? The army leadership had made efforts to come to terms with the SPLA. Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl insist that they attempted to reach the SPLA chief via his office in London and through a number of relatives and members of his batch in the army,⁹⁷ although Garang would later claim that he had heard nothing until he received letters from Uthman Abdullah and Jizouli Dafa'allah in the third week of June.⁹⁸ On 19 April, the TMC made a conciliatory statement acknowledging that 'wrongs had been committed against the south and against southerners', and issued 'decree number 14', which revoked Nimeiri's controversial presidential order of 1983 dividing the south into three regions and pledging to use the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement as a framework for negotiations.⁹⁹ It declared an immediate ceasefire in the south on 28 April, offered amnesty to southern rebels still carrying arms against the government and invited international aid organizations to help deal with the famine in the south.¹⁰⁰ Garang later claimed in a letter to Jizouli Dafa'allah that this ceasefire was merely a tactical ploy designed to buy time to prepare for an offensive in Mongalla that did indeed take place in July, although Jizouli Dafa'allah responded that this incident was simply a response to SPLA incursions.¹⁰¹ The TMC also exerted efforts to persuade Abel Alier, the architect of the Addis Ababa agreement, to take up a ministerial position, but he refused, and

less prominent men took up the three posts allocated to southerners.¹⁰² None of these individuals were awarded portfolios as significant as that granted to Clement Mboro in 1964, which again highlighted the more conservative nature of the interim regime.

Moreover, Siwar al-Dahab had – maybe unintentionally – undermined his ‘dovish’ credentials through his decision to abrogate the 1973 constitution on 6 April. Although this was done on the pretext of removing the legal grounding for Nimeiri’s authoritarianism, he was, in effect, also abrogating the terms of the Addis Ababa agreement, written into the 1973 constitution.¹⁰³ Garang publicly condemned him for this decision. Moreover, the interim government provoked further anger in the south by insisting that until a political solution was reached, the system of three regions would, although revoked in principle, remain *de facto* and that these regions would be placed under military rule.¹⁰⁴ Southern politicians accused the NIF of being behind the policy of keeping the south divided, accusing them of attempting to make it a ‘tribal empire’.¹⁰⁵ However, the TMC decision to maintain the re-division on a temporary basis probably represented its natural conservatism and reluctance to alter the *status quo*, more than any direct manipulation by the NIF.

While TMC policy towards the south was not dictated by the NIF right from the beginning, the intensification of the fighting later in the year certainly brought them closer together. As the war in the south re-ignited, the military cooled towards Garang and the leftists who had extolled his virtues. Throughout late 1985, articles appeared in the armed forces magazine, *al-Quwwat al-Musallaha*, condemning the National Alliance’s sympathetic position towards Garang.¹⁰⁶ In November 1985, an interviewer asked Uthman Abdullah: ‘Is it true that the army is siding with a certain party against the National Alliance?’ Uthman Abdullah, the most proficient ideological chameleon of the April uprising, now answered the question with an unusual directness, telling the interviewer that she should ‘call things by their names’, openly acknowledging the army’s pro-NIF sympathy and contempt for the Alliance. ‘When the Alliance, or some elements within it, were doubting the path [taken by] the armed forces and its good intentions and were making a hero out of Garang’, argued Uthman Abdullah, ‘the morale of the fighters began to decline ... but when the Islamic Movement decided to arrange a demonstration in support of the armed forces they began to feel that they were fighting for the right cause’.¹⁰⁷ This was a reference to the ‘defence of the faith and the homeland’ demonstrations of 21 September 1985, which were planned by the NIF with the assistance of its burgeoning media empire.¹⁰⁸ In a veiled reference to some of the leftists and liberals in the Alliance, Uthman Abdullah asked ‘for whose benefit are some of the political forces inciting people against their armed forces?’¹⁰⁹ Given that Uthman Abdullah was no doctrinaire Islamist, was reported by *Africa Confidential* 2 months earlier to have been the biggest ‘dove’ in the TMC,¹¹⁰ and had in the past been amenable to the leftist Free Officer Organization in the army, this stinging attack revealed the extent to which the Alliance’s failure to bring in Garang to Khartoum had polarized the political arena.

Garang did eventually meet the National Alliance at the negotiating table, at Koka Dam in Ethiopia between 20 and 24 March 1986. The Alliance delegation, which incorporated almost every political party in Sudan other than the DUP and NIF, made some progress and the meetings resulted in the ‘Koka Dam Declaration’.

This declaration proposed that a constitutional convention attended by government and party representatives should be held in June 1986 to discuss 'the *Basic Problems of Sudan* and not the so-called problem of southern Sudan'.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the September Laws would be repealed, the State of Emergency revoked and an interim constitution adopted that would incorporate the principles of regional self-government laid out in the old Addis Ababa agreement.¹¹² Unfortunately, the fact that the DUP and NIF – in the event, two of the three major vote grabbers in the 1986 elections – did not attend made the agreement 'a dead letter'.¹¹³ The planned convention was never held.

For Sudan's leftists, the failure of Garang to enter negotiations with the transitional government represented a lost opportunity to prevent the slide towards Islamist hegemony and, ultimately, the 1989 coup.¹¹⁴ The SCP's Amira al-Jizouli describes it as the 'number one reason' the *Intifada* failed to achieve its goals.¹¹⁵ However, the missed opportunity also illustrated the general weakness of the northern Sudanese left at the time, seen through its inability to pressure the TMC into offering terms more favourable to the rebel leader. Nevertheless, the fact that northern Sudanese leftists have tended to express their exasperation at Garang himself more than the TMC perhaps reveals their belief that it was the SPLA leader's own ambition, and his desire to exploit the distraction of the army leadership to achieve his military goals in the south, that led to his obstinacy. At the same time, Garang may have felt that a return to the system of Khartoum-centred liberal democracy might have served the southern rebels as badly in the 1980s as it had in the 1960s, when the northern Sudanese left was more politically potent.

Vacillations over *shari'a*

Another issue that exposed the ideological fissures within the National Alliance and the transitional regime was the debate over the September Laws promulgated by Nimeiri in 1983 so as to give a veneer of Islamic legitimacy to his increasingly unstable rule. Almost every faction within the Sudanese political arena agreed that the deposed dictator had used these laws to pursue his own ends and that they could not remain in their existing form. However, beyond this there was little agreement. Some argued that the laws should be abolished outright and replaced with secular equivalents based on the codes promulgated in the early Nimeiri period, others that they should be abolished and replaced with versions considered by them to conform more closely with *shari'a* and yet others that they should be retained with only individual articles modified. The fact that a number of Alliance members wished to return to the legal situation obtaining in the first decade of the May Regime period reminds us that many of them identified more with the technocratic secularism of the early Nimeiri period than the mass religious politics of the second democracy. However, given that the interim president, prime minister and attorney-general were all men who possessed varying degrees of sympathy with Islamism, it is not surprising that the last of these three policy options was followed. Siwar al-Dahab declared at a press conference on 15 April that 'Islamic Law', by which he meant the September Laws, would remain, although individual laws might be modified.¹¹⁶

The decision not to abolish the September Laws reflected the ideological proclivities of those who led the transitional regime. As we have seen, Siwar al-Dahab had declared even before the army takeover that 'leftist demonstrations' would not persuade him to cancel *shari'a*,¹¹⁷ while Jizouli Dafa'allah had stormed out of a National Alliance meeting after the Alliance's leftists and secularists demanded that *shari'a* be removed outright.¹¹⁸ When the September Laws were initially promulgated in 1983, he had written to Nimeiri on behalf of the Doctors' Union expressing his support for them¹¹⁹ – although it should be borne in mind that the worst excesses occurred as a result of the State of Emergency, which was Nimeiri's response to the strike he led. The leaders of the interim government also represented their decision as the only practical option available to them, observing that it was unreasonable for an unelected government to set the tone on such a key issue and that politicians with more of a popular mandate could determine the issue after the 1986 vote.¹²⁰ Predictably, time constraints were also offered as an excuse after the event.¹²¹ While the issue remained unresolved, the more controversial aspects of the law were 'frozen'; for instance, the chief prosecutor directed the courts that drinkers brought before them should not be tried.¹²² This was, thus, one of many issues illustrating the transitional regime's wariness regarding embracing the principle of 'revolutionary legitimacy'.

The issue of *shari'a* revealed further divisions between the National Alliance and the government, and within the government itself. On 7 November, the Alliance issued a statement advising the government to replace the September Laws with their pre-1983 equivalents but maintain the provisions forbidding the consumption of alcohol by Muslims.¹²³ This represented a compromise between the Alliance's leftists and secularists on one hand, and on the other, the views of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, who, although bitterly critical of the September Laws, wished to persevere with some semblance of *shari'a*. However, the DUP failed to support the statement, which, considering that the NIF were not part of the Alliance anyway meant that two of the three major northern religious parties refused to back the proposals.¹²⁴ This situation continued after the 1986 elections, when the DUP and NIF blocked further proposals for replacing the September Laws.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, although Umar Abd al-Ati as attorney-general was unwilling to revoke the September Laws, he was prepared to compromise with their critics. Al-'Ati also falls within the 'non-party Islamist' category, although he is really an Islamist only in believing that the law should be grounded in *shari'a*. He has never joined a political party because, he says, 'I don't like politics'.¹²⁶ However, he admitted to being friendly with his former law tutor Hasan al-Turabi,¹²⁷ something for which leftists within the Alliance have criticized him.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, his Islamist convictions are of a comparatively liberal type and, although he was critical of the leftists in the Alliance, he can in no way be construed as an NIF 'satellite' within the government. When Asma Mahmud Taha appealed to the High Court for her father's trial to be declared void, al-Ati declared that it had been a violation of law and justice which he had no wish to defend.¹²⁹

Abd al-Ati's position on the September Laws reflected his streak of moderate Islamic thought. In March 1986, he distributed a series of proposed replacements to the Chief Justice and Chairman of the Bar Association; they maintained the use of

hadd amputation penalties but placed significant legal obstacles in the way of their implementation: they stipulated that amputation penalties should only be applied in cases of theft when property worth 1,300 Sudanese Pounds was stolen, whereas under the September Laws, the figure had been 100. This would have prevented such punishments being applied in cases of poverty crime, which was what had caused such outrage when the September Laws were initially promulgated. Moreover, amputation penalties could not be applied until they had been confirmed by three judges from the appeal court. Abd al-Ati also reduced the number of offences for which flogging could be inflicted, and removed 'intention to commit fornication' (*shuru' fi al-zina*) as an offence.¹³⁰ It was a considerably more liberal draft than that which Hasan al-Turabi would propose when he became attorney-general in the third democratic era.¹³¹ Al-Ati's position also corresponded with that taken by the Bar Association, which was still headed by the co-founder of the Islamic Socialist Front, Mirghani al-Nasri. The union proposed that the ban on alcohol consumption should be maintained, although only for Muslims, and that the 1983 criminal codes should not be abandoned but 'reformed through civilized, progressive proposals ... in harmony with Islamic *shari'a*'.¹³² Thus al-Ati's proposals reflected the general desire of large sections of the northern Sudanese professional elite for some form of *shari'a* to be applied, more than they did the NIF controlling the new government by 'remote control'. Nevertheless, they further illustrated the inability of the secularists within the Alliance to influence government policy.

Performing the *Intifada* in the courtroom

The leftists and secularist radicals in the Alliance had lost out to the conservatives over a number of issues: IMF policy, the September Laws, relations with the south and the formation of the transitional government. However, the series of political trials that occurred throughout the transitional period offered these factions an opportunity to take out their frustration on representatives of the regime they had overthrown. If there was one issue that led the transitional government to follow a policy of revolutionary legitimacy, it was these trials. By coming down hard on those who had participated in 'May 1', they offered it an opportunity to demonstrate that it was far more than just 'May 2'.

The process of transitional justice fell victim to numerous initial setbacks. The failure to appoint an attorney-general for over 2 months delayed the start of the trials.¹³³ Then, the early judicial work was disrupted when Abd al-Wahhab Bob, the man charged with heading the committee investigating the May coup, was removed by the Chief Justice for abusing his position by agreeing to defend Umar al-Tayyib!¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the trials of the top SSU apparatchiks were highly effective. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the fact that the general strike brought all air travel to a halt made it hard for Nimeiri's lieutenants to escape. While the president was already outside Sudan and his media advisor Muhammad Sulaiman's subsequently vindicated lack of faith in the May Regime's survival capacity led him to catch the last flight out of the country before the general strike, the majority of his strongmen appear to have believed until the last

minute that he might return.¹³⁵ Bahieddin Idris did not, but he was unable to make it to the airport quickly enough to catch the last flight from Khartoum.¹³⁶

Second, and most controversially, the transitional regime chose not to repeal Nimeiri's odious State Security Law, which naturally attracted the criticism of leftists and liberals.¹³⁷ However, Umar Abd al-Ati was quick to observe that maintaining the law was essential if the authoritarians of the May era were to be brought to justice, insisting that cancelling it would lead to the premature release of partisans of the Nimeiri regime still under investigation.¹³⁸ The prosecution lawyers – although a number were former oppositionists who identified with critics of the transitional regime's perseverance with the State Security Law in other contexts – had no qualms about fighting the old regime with its own weapons. When the former SSO chief Umar al-Tayyib objected to the fact that his court had been formed under the aegis of the old State Security Law, the prosecution team responded that for 8 years Umar al-Tayyib 'had not known anything else!'¹³⁹ The utilization of Nimeiri's State Security Law illustrated the inevitable difficulties that faced oppositionists trying to uproot authoritarian systems at this time – as Charles Tripp has observed, resistance 'becomes too beholden to the logic of the power that it tried to displace.'¹⁴⁰

Another important reason for the success of the trials was that the prosecution teams were able to access substantial amounts of credible evidence from eye witnesses and both visual and written documentation. While the TMC's decision to leave the cabinet alone for 2 days after 6 April did give them the opportunity to burn a number of important documents or smuggle them out of Sudan, Alliance sympathizers were able to gain access to a number of files before this occurred.¹⁴¹ Al-Ati recalls that one of the Free Officers, Haydar Musharraf, managed to arrest Bahieddin Idris' secretary who was attempting to smuggle his papers out of his office and into her house, and then surrendered them to him when he became attorney-general.¹⁴² The fact that Musharraf held onto these files for 2 months indicates that the Free Officer Organization did not trust the military leadership, which had conducted a number of the initial investigations before the appointment of al-Ati, to pursue cases against their former colleagues from the defunct regime with sufficient zeal. The civilian prosecutors did not lack enthusiasm. When Idris came to trial, he was presented with over thirty-seven documents exposing his involvement in corrupt economic activity during the period that he was working at the palace.¹⁴³ Security reports from Gedaref were presented at the 'Fallasha' trial, in addition to an American documentary on 'Operation Moses' and another film compiled by the investigation team based on interviews with a number of witnesses from eastern Sudan who had directly observed the smuggling of the Fallasha.¹⁴⁴ In the trial of the plotters of the May coup, the prosecution team brought a list of seventy-six witnesses, which incorporated a wide cross-section of the Sudanese political, military and cultural elite, including party leaders such as al-Mahdi and al-Turabi, the singer Muhammad al-Wardi, TMC members and former Free Officers who had personally witnessed the scheming that led to the takeover.¹⁴⁵

Fourth, the trials generated extra impact by being broadcast directly to the public, which illustrated the self-confidence of the prosecuting authorities. The trial of the 1969 *putschists* turned into a public debate on the merits of democracy.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Umar al-Tayyib's hearing saw the former vice-president branded a traitor to the

nation on account of his collaboration with Israel.¹⁴⁷ During Zubeir Rajab's trial, a long list of his corruptly obtained properties and possessions was published in the newspapers.¹⁴⁸ The trials thus acted as a public theatre in which the ideals associated with the *Intifada* – nationalism, democracy and justice – were performed.

In many respects, a spectacular performance was all that was achieved. By directing great energy to the accomplishment of a few high-profile political prosecutions, the interim government effectively abdicated responsibility for rooting out the more general forms of corruption and abuse of power that had been embedded in the Nimeiri system. In the majority of cases involving minor corruption, and some cases of major corruption, it was agreed that the defendants would arrange a financial settlement with the Sudanese state and thus avoid conviction.¹⁴⁹ Abd al-Ati justifies this policy by arguing that it was the only reasonable option, given the restrictions on time and resources then prevailing.¹⁵⁰ The limited achievements of the transitional courts are acknowledged, and defended by Jizouli Dafa'allah. 'Not many were tried, I don't think more should have been tried', he admits, adding that '... in the context of a dictatorial regime, many people do things that they are not wholly responsible for.'¹⁵¹

The main 'fall guys' of the public trials were the leftist, pan-Arabist, and secularist officers and officials of the SSU old guard – Umar al-Tayyib, Mamoun Awad Abu Zaid, Khalid Hassan Abbas, Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir and Bahieddin Idris. As seen in Chapter 2, a number of these individuals had been targeted indirectly by the ICF through the 'instantaneous justice courts' in 1984. At the same time, a number of the senior SSU figures who escaped conviction joined the NIF soon after its establishment in 1985.¹⁵² Meanwhile, none of the Islamists associated with Nimeiri after his migration to the right in 1977 were severely punished, probably because of the relative sympathy felt by the transitional regime for the NIF. Adlan Hardallo attributes Abd al-Ati's refusal to prosecute al-Turabi to his close friendship with the latter, as does al-Turabi himself!¹⁵³ However, the charges the enemies of the NIF chief attempted to bring against him were certainly not as severe as those faced by others – they consisted of allegations that he had impeded the course of justice when a case was raised against an SSO officer, and that he had given legal sanction to Bahieddin Idris' decision to reverse the Sudanese boycott on Coca-Cola.¹⁵⁴ Few sins could be laid directly at the door of al-Turabi; after all, he was not responsible for the *final* draft of the September Laws.

The transitional authorities took only limited action against the designers of the September Laws, Awad al-Jeed and Naya Abu Gurun, both of whom had links to the Islamic Movement, but were not members of the ICF. Both of them spent a significant time in prison during the interim period, but after this no further action was taken against either man.¹⁵⁵ A criminal case was brought against al-Mukashifi al-Kabbashi for his involvement in the application of the much condemned legislation, but the Court of Appeal cancelled it on the grounds that his position as Chief Justice gave him immunity.¹⁵⁶ Again, this illustrated the transitional authorities' wariness of appearing to be against any form of *shari'a*, even the highly arbitrary and controversial form applied by Nimeiri.

The failure of the prosecuting authorities to clamp down on the ICF and its affiliates for the policies enacted during its alliance with Nimeiri perhaps illustrated the fear they had of provoking the sleeping giant that was the NIF, but they did not reflect any

doctrinaire pro-Islamic Movement policies. The majority of the prosecuting lawyers had Ba'athist or communist links, and Abd al-Ati recalls that he chose them because they were 'good lawyers'.¹⁵⁷ The fact that the trials were open and transparent and achieved convictions based on a significant amount of credible evidence marks them out as one of the most significant achievements of the interim period – although the judiciary's reliance on Nimeiri's State Security Law to indict his former lieutenants indicated that even this achievement was forcing the *Intifada* to negotiate compromises with its own values. Moreover, the failure of the transitional authorities to tackle all but the most substantial abuses of political power demonstrated just how much the decision to limit the interim period to 1 year had impeded the efforts of the National Alliance to extirpate corruption.

The dissolution of the SSO: A job half done?

Although the dissolution of Nimeiri's State Security Organization represented a serious attempt by the forces of the *Intifada* to eradicate the legacy of political violence created by the May Regime, the move was somewhat illusory. Alongside the abrogation of the 1973 constitution and indictment of the former president's top officials, it appeared to represent one of the most radical decisions taken by the new government. However, there is a complex debate concerning the real reasons for the action taken against the SSO, and it has been interpreted at different times as a victory for either the political left or the political right. Initially, it was perceived to be a response to popular pressure exerted by the same civil protesters who had propelled the *Intifada* forward. Siwar al-Dahab did not take any actions against the SSO on 6 April, and only intervened 2 days later when violent clashes broke out between its operatives and demonstrators attempting to occupy its headquarters and demanding revenge for its crimes.¹⁵⁸ Taj al-Din Fadl and Uthman Abdullah admit that the military leadership decided to occupy the SSO headquarters to prevent bloody clashes between security agents and demonstrators as well as the potential exposure of the SSO archives, thus implicitly endorsing the view that the army was forced, somewhat unwillingly, into dissolving it by popular pressure.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the political parties opposing Nimeiri's regime appear to have derived significant benefit from its downfall. After the dissolution, members of these parties visited ex-operatives in prison, extracting from them the names of party officials who had collaborated with the SSO and the May Regime, which were then published in the party newspapers.¹⁶⁰

However, an alternative interpretation contends that the dissolution of the SSO was not a victory for the leftists or the political forces that had driven the uprising, but part of a wider 'intelligence battle' being waged by the ICF/NIF and its allies in the military. There have been claims, denied by Fadlallah Burma Nasir as the chief Umma representative within the military at the time, that Sadiq al-Mahdi's party gained access to the intelligence records through al-Hadi Bushra, who was in charge of the committee tasked with dissolving the SSO.¹⁶¹ However, most sources focus on the role of the Islamists. The Free Officer Abd al-Aziz Khalid asserts that the dissolution of the SSO was engineered by Islamist officers within the army so

that the Islamic Movement could rebuild a new security apparatus from the ashes of the SSO.¹⁶² He and others have claimed that Taj al-Din Fadl, whose enmities against the institution and debatable links to the ICF/NIF have already been documented, played a part in the decision to dissolve it.¹⁶³ Others maintain that Umar al-Bashir, whose links to the ICF military cell were less contentious, was highly involved in the events surrounding the organization's collapse. Hashim Abu Rannat, a senior security operative, recalls that while he was in prison, he was interviewed by al-Bashir, who had been appointed by the interim government as one of the army representatives on a panel charged with investigating the SSO.¹⁶⁴ Al-Bashir requested that he hand over the organization's records, so that 'the Ba'athists and communist parties do not get their hands on them.'¹⁶⁵ Abu Rannat informed Bashir that the records were available only on microfilm, and gave him the names of the few people who knew how to access it.¹⁶⁶ Al-Bashir's intervention seems to have played a crucial role in determining the future of Sudan's main intelligence agency. According to Bayoumi, 99 per cent of the intelligence documentation that had been produced by the May Regime was, thus, kept by the army.¹⁶⁷ Meanwhile, it seems that the senior members of the interim cabinet were denied this information, as were the lawyers who served on the investigation committees.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, it appears that the crucial battles that occurred in the wake of the *Intifada* for control over Sudan's political intelligence were won by the Islamic Movement and its military allies. Being denied access to such a crucial body of intelligence would have significantly hampered the efforts of the Alliance leaders to reform the Sudanese state, and, of course, the SSO itself.

SSO officers were put on trial, but other than Umar al-Tayyib himself, few were convicted. The most successful prosecution was brought about by the Sudanese Ba'ath Party, which managed to have seven operatives sentenced to 5 years in prison for the torture of Bashir Hamad prior to the show-trial of early 1985 – although the court reprieved Aazim Kabbashi, the reputed chief of the SSO's notorious torture unit.¹⁶⁹ It seems that many other victims did not come forward because of the lack of financial resources for a trial.¹⁷⁰ It was in any case difficult for the military tribunals to trace some of the SSO's most ruthless operatives, as Umar al-Tayyib refused to reveal the identities of his most well concealed officers.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, the political parties themselves had only a limited commitment to prosecuting former intelligence officers, which might, after all, harm potential relationships with the security apparatus.¹⁷² In the wake of the *Intifada*, they would all launch drives to hire ex-SSO men for their private security organizations.¹⁷³ Even the interim prime minister began to reconsider the merits of the initial campaign against Nimeiri's former security apparatus. When Jizouli Dafa'allah handed over power to Sadiq al-Mahdi in 1986, he reportedly apologized to him twice, once for dissolving the SSO and again for not creating a replacement organization.¹⁷⁴ 'A lot of trained people were in that organization,' he remembers, 'and we needed its services.'¹⁷⁵ Both Abbas Madani and Siwar al-Dahab now express a similar regret.¹⁷⁶

Nothing displayed the essential conservatism of the transitional government more clearly than the fact that its leaders came to regret their most radical act. It is unclear as to whether their decision to dissolve the SSO and seize its archives in its place was taken as a result of NIF influences or NIF pressure within the military and the government. However, the Islamist cells within the military clearly did play a significant role in the

process of dismantling the SSO, and the NIF did benefit from the process in that it was able to both infiltrate the security organization that took the place of the SSO after the interim period and recruit a number of former SSO agents into its own private security apparatus.¹⁷⁷ In this respect, the downfall of the SSO represented not so much a victory for liberalism and democracy as another significant link in the chain of events enabling the Islamic Movement to slowly and inexorably extend its grip over the key centres of power within the country.

Conclusion

The distinctions that can be made between the events of 1964 and 1985 are in some respects only very fine, and yet highly significant. In 1985, the ideological parties exercised a less formal influence within the Alliance than they had in the Professional Front in 1964, given the weakness of the SCP and the rift between the ICF and the professional unions. However, in practice, the National Alliance became fractured along ideological lines at an even earlier stage than the Professional Front. This was due to the prominence of *shari'a* as an issue within the Sudanese political arena at the time, and this issue brought the secularists and the Islamists within the Alliance into conflict right from the beginning.

The length of the two transitional periods – a whole year in 1985–6 as compared with only 6 months in 1964–5 – represents another obvious point of contrast. However, what was probably more significant was that during both transitions, the more socially conservative parties knew that their extensive rural support networks would enable them to succeed in democratic elections. This, in turn, made it possible for them to ensure that the interim period was sufficiently limited to prevent the 'modern forces' and the leftists, in particular, from achieving their goals. Neither transition, for instance, offered sufficient time for the leftists who had been arbitrarily dismissed under the military regime to be returned to their jobs. Admittedly, the trials of the former regime leaders achieved more emphatic results in 1985 than they had in 1964. However, both interim governments limited themselves to targeting senior regime elements and eschewed launching more rigorous attempts to challenge the corruption and abuse of power that had become prevalent under the military dictatorships. The transitional government conducted even less cleansing within the civil service in 1985 than in 1964.

The other obvious distinction between 1964 and 1985 was that, following the April *Intifada*, the military exercised a much more direct and significant role in the interim period. Was Siwar al-Dahab's government 'May 2'? Since 'May 1' had evolved into an eclectic mix of technocrats, moderate socialists, Arab nationalists, Islamists and pro-Americans towards the end of Nimeiri's period, this is a hard question to answer. Arguably, the interim government continued a trend towards political Islam, begun by Nimeiri in the late 1970s, in that a number of leading individuals within the new regime were Islamist sympathizers and it cancelled the secular constitution of 1973 while leaving the September Laws intact. With the head of the armed forces becoming president, the military aspect of the May Regime persisted. However, Siwar al-Dahab

lacked Nimeiri's controlling and ambitious personality, and had secured his position more through the force of circumstance than the desire to dominate. When he made arbitrary decisions, he usually made them in response to perceived threats from the Ba'athists, SCP or SPLA. Moreover, it is worth remembering that those members of the Alliance who criticized the interim regime's refusal to return to the strict application of the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972, and the secular constitution and legal codes of 1973, were in their own way harking back to an earlier stage of 'May 1' rather than the parliamentary democracy of the 1960s.

Is it fair to say that Siwar al-Dahab aborted the *Intifada*? It is difficult to answer this question, since it is difficult to provide an internally coherent definition of what precisely the *Intifada* represented. Advocates of one man, one vote democracy and advocates of liberal and progressive governance often found themselves on opposite sides of the divides within the Alliance. If we identify the *Intifada* with a loose coalition of leftists, secularists and liberals who were demanding the outright cancellation of *shari'a* law, a lengthy transitional period and an expansion of the role of the unions in the government, then the answer is yes. Nevertheless, Siwar al-Dahab did not stand in the way of the re-emergence of party politics or a free press. Moreover, the transitional government stuck rigidly to its promise to arrange free and fair elections. As we have seen, even the SCP leader Ibrahim Nigd acknowledged that a change had happened in this regard. By focusing so explicitly on the elections, the interim regime relieved itself of the responsibility for tackling other dominant issues within the existing political environment, which it insisted would be best dealt with by a democratically elected government.

However, there were some matters that led the new government to exercise revolutionary authority. Apart from unilaterally abrogating the 1973 constitution, it also chose to dissolve the SSO and successfully tried a number of the figureheads of the May Regime. Nevertheless, those who lost out in this process also happened to be those who entered into conflict with the army and the ICF in the later years of the Nimeiri Regime. Even the more radical acts of the transitional period were less a result of revolutionary transformation than a continuation of the trend towards political Islam witnessed at the end of the former era. Nevertheless, the TMC was not simply a pliable tool of the NIF; rather, its policies reflected the conservative and defensive outlook of the military leadership, even though their interests did at times overlap with those of al-Turabi's party. This convergence did not become fully apparent until half way through the interim period, when the failure of the Alliance to bring John Garang to Khartoum and the intensification of fighting in the south strained the relationship between the military leadership and the liberals within the Alliance.

The other major difference is that while popular leftist ideologies had a general intellectual prevalence and influenced the outlook of the transitional cabinet in the 1960s, in 1985 the dogmas associated with political Islam were more significant. This was revealed by the decision of the transitional regime not to suspend *shari'a* and its establishment of an electoral system favouring the NIF and other religious parties of the Islamic north. Nevertheless, the interim regime was not a puppet of Hasan al-Turabi and the NIF. Men such as Jizouli Dafa'allah and Umar Abd al-Ati – who employed Ba'athist and communist lawyers to try Nimeiri's henchmen – espoused relatively

liberal forms of political Islam and identified with NIF ideology only in their belief that there should be a significant role for Islam in public life. To understand them only as puppets of the TMC and NIF who helped abort the *Intifada* would be to assume that political secularists had a monopoly on the *Intifada*, and to deny the capacity of these men to forge independent positions by trying to integrate their religious outlooks with the liberal and democratic ideals of the *Intifada*.