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FOKELC (By A) NARA Date 3/27/84

FROM : USLO, Khartoum

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

REF : Khartoum 116 dated December 5, 1953

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SUBJECT: Partial Resolution of Gezira Tenants' Demands

Demands made by the Gezira tenants for replacement of the existing Tenants Association and for increased payments from the Sudan Gezira Board have been met in part in a series of compromises with the Sudan Gezira Board Settlements so far reached have been aided by the mediation of party and non-party Sudanese groups. The Sudan Government has agreed to release to the tenants LE 4.00 per feddan of cotton from Gezira reserve funds. It has also agreed to re-elections to the Gezira Tenants' Association in view of the incumbent members' lack of support, while the Gezira tenants have withdrawn their demand for recognition of a newly-formed organization without open elections. Issues still to be resolved include the manner in which the coming elections will be held, and the role and powers of the Tenants' Association in the future. Evidence indicates that local Communists are still providing behind-the-scenes leadership for the tenants' movement.

Demand for Additional Payments

The demand for additional payments to the tenants from the Gezira Board (i.e. a partial releasing of reserve funds in addition to normal distribution of income from the 1952-53 cotton crop) has been outstanding for some time. Although payments to the tenants during the past crop year were at the same (satisfactory) level as existed before the outbreak of the Korean war (Khartoum 116) the habit of increased expenditure which was brought on by record cotton prices in the years following the outbreak of the Korean war caused the tenants to accumulate debts which they then could not meet from this year's cotton returns. The new and extra-legal organization of Gezira tenants formed in the latter part of last year by El Amin Mohammed EL AMIN raised this as a major demand. On December 6, 1953, the Acting Financial Secretary and Director of the Sudan Gezira Board, Mr. John CARMICHAEL, agreed with representatives of the Tenants' Association that they should be granted LE 4.00 per feddan of cotton from Gezira Board reserves, and that the appreciation from the 1952-53 cotton crop should be paid in two installments rather than in the traditional three.

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By A. NARA Date 3/27/54Demand for Recognition of New Tenants' Organization

The new organization of tenants led by El Amin further demanded that their group be recognized in preference to the existing Gezira Tenants' Association. On December 19, 1953 the Governor of Blue Nile Province announced he had advised the Gezira tenants that since the existing Tenants' Association no longer enjoyed the confidence of the tenants, the Government was prepared to ask its Council members to resign at the end of April, 1954, at which time new elections could be held. El Amin's group objected to this proposal on a number of grounds, among which were their own demands for immediate recognition as representatives of the tenants, and their objection to the limited powers of the Tenants' Association.

Refusing a compromise arranged by a local conciliation committee whereby the incumbent Council of the Tenants' Association would resign immediately and new elections would be held, El Amin's group declared a boycott of the Sudan Gezira Board, to last from December 24 to January 2. The boycott consisted in ignoring the instructions of the Board and abstaining from participation in village councils, while however, maintaining cultivation on the Gezira Scheme. It was further decided by the El Amin group that the tenants should come to Khartoum and form a peaceful demonstration to present their demands to the Governor General.

On December 27, a group of tenants estimated at between eight and twenty-five thousand assembled in Khartoum and prepared to march to the Palace. The Governor of Khartoum refused permission for the demonstration and issued a warning to the demonstrators that if they persisted in their demonstration, force would be used to stop it. However, it was indicated that the Acting Civil Secretary and the Acting Financial Secretary would be prepared to meet and discuss the points at issue with the representatives of the tenants. Sayed SIDDIK, President of the Umma Party made a personal appeal for compromise to the demonstrators, and moderation finally prevailed. The demonstration was called off by its leaders, and they themselves accepted the invitation to confer with the representatives of the Sudan Government. At the subsequent series of conferences the tenants receded from their demand that their association be recognized as the only valid one, and agreed that new elections should be held for tenants' representatives. The Sudan Government offered immediate elections instead of elections to be held in April as previously proposed. Their position was made easier by the mediation of the Sudanese committee in the Gezira Scheme which had succeeded in persuading the incumbent members of the Tenants Association Council to resign their positions immediately.

The Sudan Government and the tenants have agreed that the manner of elections is a matter to be resolved locally, and there the issue now stands. The Governor-General will also send a formal reply to the demands presented by the tenants.

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Comment:

1. The Sudan Government has publicly stated, and evidence indicates, that local Communists are behind the organized unrest among the cultivators. Among the recent tactics which suggest such association were the charge that British textile firms have been victimizing the Gezira tenants by underpaying them, and the technique of introducing women into the proposed demonstration so that the police would hesitate about using force.
2. Political parties and the local press have generally refrained from taking sides in the dispute, (although Sayed Siddik has recently stated that he will support the tenants) and have urged moderation. There seems to be a general recognition in Khartoum of the seriousness of an interruption of cultivation on the Gezira Scheme since the country's economy as a whole is inordinately dependent upon sale of Gezira cotton, and it is unlikely that public opinion will tolerate any interruption of production. Since any further outbreaks will henceforth be referred to a Sudanese cabinet, against whom the charge of "imperialism" cannot be levied, it is probable that the existing unrest will tend to die down.

Joseph Sweeney

Joseph Sweeney,
United States Liaison Officer.

Source: Press Reports

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