

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

**THE OLD REGIME** was tottering dangerously, but it was not easy to overthrow. A revolution is not something which can be improvised at a month's notice. Yet we had to act, for no secret society can keep a grip on its members during a long period of enervating inactivity. Too many setbacks and too long a delay will make the strongest elements fade away. We were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. The hour was not yet ripe for action, but we could not risk waiting much longer.

Gamal Abdul Nasser is not the man to be led astray by dreams, and he keeps a firm check on his impulses. In a given situation, he never tackles a problem without first examining all the circumstances. He never takes a step without a thorough knowledge of the ground he must cover. In the darkest hour, when his cause seems doomed to failure, he redoubles his efforts. At a time when the future of a nation was at stake, circumspection was of the utmost importance. And Gamal, faithful to his

theory of gradual infiltration, refused to rush things. There is only one way to guard against the dangers of improvised action, and that is to know exactly what one wants. The choice was between revolution and a revolt.

Gamal instituted a revolutionary administrative system, which he divided into five sections: economic affairs, combat personnel, security, terrorism, and propaganda.

Each one of these cogs had a precise function in the revolutionary machine. The efficiency of the system was proved by the fact that it enabled us to move smoothly forward to the *coup d'etat* of July 23rd, 1952.

To be honest, the names given to these sections were rather ambitious. "Economic affairs," for example, might suggest that the purpose of this section was to study economic problems, or to map out the financial policy which would be applied after the *coup d'etat*.

In fact, this committee was formed to watch over the humble necessities of life. One of its functions was to

pay allowances to the dependants of those of our soldiers who were unable to fulfill their family responsibilities because of their patriotic dedication to our cause. This section was in charge of the Society's treasury, the financing of secret networks, and the purchase of arms and equipment.

Each of us contributed to the funds by paying in the equivalent of two months' salary, in the form of a loan. We all did this with good will—or rather, all save myself. As I was a married man with a family, and had no resources other than my modest captain's pay, I was not in a position to make any contribution. I was granted a special dispensation by the committee of the section. The committee had the right to requisition any sums required for the purchase of armaments. Thus, when General Aziz EL Masri sold the harvest of mangoes from his orchard, the committee requisitioned the proceeds.

The funds which were collected enabled us to establish a small clandestine factory for the manufacture of revolvers and Molotov cocktails. For these we needed a huge quantity of bottles, and we managed to obtain

**some tens of thousands from a wholesaler in the rue Clot-Bey. Soon the factory became a real arsenal.**

**The purpose of the Combat Personnel committee was to recruit members from the various branches of the Army. The committee supervised the formation of combat groups from the Army, and also of Para-military groups among civilians. Recruits were subjected to a rigorous examination before being assigned to an appropriate cell. In each cell, an officer from each branch of the Army maintained liaison between the section and the unit in which he served. A group of twenty cells constituted a section.**

**The committee of Combat Personnel kept track of the numbers of recruits and deserters, and kept the leaders of the Society informed as to our strength. Only Gamal Abdul Nasser and Abdul Hakim Amer, however, knew the exact number and the names of all our members.**

**Finally, this committee also supervised the training of certain picked personnel, the best of whom were selected for the Security Committee.**

**Among our adherents outside the Army were the Young Nationalists, led by Abdul Aziz Aly, one of the heroes of the Revolution of 1919. He placed his secret shock troops at our disposal, and his active collaboration was of great value to us.**

**Admission to the Security Committee was a reward for loyal service. As its name suggests, this committee supervised recruits, making sure of the orthodoxy of their revolutionary beliefs. It also enforced strict observation of the Society's rules. Another of its functions was the frequent changing of passwords and meeting places. It was responsible for law and order, and controlled admission or expulsion. The terms of admission were extremely strict. Any infringement of discipline was immediately punished, the penalties ranging from a simple warning to total expulsion from the Society. The committee's powers were wide, but it was not authorized**

to make any important decision without the sanction of the Supreme Committee, which was both the executive authority and the brains of the movement.

Our Terrorist Section was largely theoretical. Terrorism has long been used as a political instrument, and the history of revolutions, particularly in the nineteenth century in Europe and elsewhere, abounds in examples of celebrated political assassinations and crimes. Acts of this sort—spectacular gestures designed to capture the imagination of the masses—were contrary to our principles. We did not believe in the isolated gesture, the action of a lone man, and we were determined to avoid the excesses of political fanaticism, which we ourselves had witnessed.

The glorification of violence is fatal to the hot blooded people of the East, because it unleashes their most animal instincts: the result is a series of hideous crimes committed in the name of an ideal. In Egypt we saw the depths of degeneration to which it dragged the Muslim Brotherhood.

**It is quite easy to satisfy youth's thirst for romance, and to harness its enthusiasm to a cause, without encouraging violence. In his essay on "The Philosophy of the Revolution," Gamal Abdul Nasser relates that when he was a very young man he took part in an attempt to assassinate a politician who was guilty of treason. He describes how he was haunted by remorse all that night, and how peace only came when he read on the following morning that the man had not been touched by the bullets.**

**This does not mean that there were no terrorists at this time. There were terrorists in the Army. Captain Moustapha Kamel Sedky, an ex-officer of the Intelligence Department, had formed a terrorist group of twenty-three officers and senior noncommissioned officers, which was extremely active.**

**The assassination of Lieutenant-General Ibrahim Atallah was the signal for a series of political crimes in Egypt. It was followed by the murder of Amin Osman**

**Pasha, a die-hard Anglophile and ex-Finance Minister of Nahas Pasha's Wafd government. The murder, which created a sensation at the time, was intended as a warning to Egyptian quislings. The conspirators had sworn to keep silence, no matter what happened. One of them, Hussein Tewfik, was captured and tortured. He confessed, not through cowardice, but in order to save a woman's name. He denounced the terrorist group, and revealed their meeting places and the names of all the members known to him. I was not surprised to learn that my name had been mentioned, although I had never been connected in any way with the organization. I was arrested, and spent two and half of the most terrible years of my life in prison. Finally, however, my innocence was proved, and I was released.**

**We disapproved of these assassinations, not because we felt the slightest sympathy for the victims, who were of little importance, but because we did not wish to associate ourselves in any way with a group which was more concerned with personal glory than anything else.**



**Our Society was responsible for one "outrage," which provoked laughter rather than tears. One Friday, Nahas Pasha had gone to the A1 Rifai mosque. Having completed his devotions, he was preparing to enter his car when a young Coastguard lieutenant, named Abou Chabana, threw a shoe at him. Missing the Prime Minister, it struck Abdul Hamid Abdul Hakk, the Wakf (trust administration) minister, in the face. Everybody stampeded, under the impression that the somewhat unusual missile was a bomb. The most ridiculous part of the story is that the young practical joker was court-martialled, by order of General Hamid Seif EL Nasr. Naturally he was found guilty of a crime he had never thought of committing: assassinating Nashas Pasha with a shoe! This is the only political crime on our conscience.**

**Finally, the Committee of Propaganda was very important. Propaganda is one of the most potent weapons of our time. It was not possible for us to spread propaganda by means of the press, radio or broadside, as we had to operate in secrecy. We had to rely on word of mouth.**

**As our power increased, we were able to come more and more into the open, and soon almost everybody in the Army knew of our intentions. As the movement was a military one, the public was not so well informed as the Army. To remedy this, we decided that each of us must go out into the streets, into cafes, trams and mosques, to meet people and to talk politics. Only in this way could we arouse the resentment of the people against the British and their puppets.**

**In 1940 we exploited the surrender of France and the isolation of England to drive another nail into the imperialist coffin. We used the incident at Mersa Matruh, and the British *coup* of February 4th, to provoke popular feeling in favor of revolution.**

**There was no need to stuff people's heads with lies and nonsense. The facts spoke for themselves. If we erred in any way, it was not by excess of demagoguery: we told the people that they must have their rights, but also that they must fulfill their duties. We did not claim to be**

able to work miracles. We did not promise that the Revolution would give every Egyptian a car, a refrigerator and a weekend cottage in the country.

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