

## **EIR**SpecialReport

# **A new agro-industrial Egypt encircles the ancient Nile Valley**

by Criton Zoakos

The two weeks *EIR* Middle East Editor Thierry Lalevée and I spent in Egypt last December were not time enough to learn everything about that ancient land. Our investigations, however, enabled us to identify the single central issue around which political and social struggles revolve at this time, the potential for social conflict that this issue conceals, and the way to defuse such a potential.

Egypt is a nation of 43 million people, growing by an increment of more than 1.5 million per year. This population inhabits only 4 percent of the nation's total area of a million square kilometers. Ninety-six percent of those one million square kilometers has been arid desert throughout Egypt's long history. The country's fast-growing population is concentrated in the Nile River's Old Valley and the Delta. Three years ago, the annual growth in demand for food was double the rate of growth of food availability, suggesting an explosive demographic crisis ahead.

Within this general picture, one discovers the existence of two Egypts, the old and the new. Very few foreigners are aware of New Egypt's existence, yet it is one of the most heartening, forward-looking revolutionary developments which emerged out of the otherwise disappointing decade of the 1970s. This new Egypt is not to be found in the congested, squalid streets of old Cairo or old Alexandria, nor in the villages and fields of the Old Valley where fellah families eke out a meager existence cultivating their tiny, half-acre-sized family plots. The New Egypt is out in the desert, where human technology has staked its claims and is rapidly converting the forbidding lunar landscape into vast stretches of green farmland, blossoming orchards, and beautiful, spacious modern cities.

Land reclamation projects at this time are creating new farmlands at a rate of 150,000 acres per year. Between 1952, the year of Nasser's revolution and 1979, Egypt had reclaimed 920,000 acres of farmland from the desert. The current government plan will have reclaimed a further 650,000 acres by 1985 and from that year on, reclamation activities will accelerate to meet the objective of doubling the nation's total arable land by the year 2000. During the same period, energy production is scheduled to increase from the current 22 gigawatts to 100 gigawatts, 40 percent of which will be supplied by nuclear plants.



Thierry Lalevee/NSIPS

*Eng. Gamal El-Din Kalied (standing, second from r.), Criton Zoakos (third from l.), and agricultural workers examine the first turnip crop at a land reclamation project in the Eastern Desert.*

Meanwhile, great new cities are in varying degrees of completion in locations where vast stretches of yellow-sand desert used to be. New location names are beginning to fill the latest editions of Egyptian maps: Sadat City, Nasser City, Heliopolis, 10th of Ramadan City, El Amria City, El Obour City, and 6th of October City. It is estimated that by the year 2000, these new cities will accommodate over 20 million inhabitants.

It is striking to imagine that within 17 years, there will be a new Egypt where the desert used to be, whose urban part will be greater than all presently existing urban settlements and whose agricultural part will be equal in size to the traditional agricultural territory of historical Egypt, put under the plow by means of the most advanced technologies available.

So far, the entire work of building the New Egypt rests on the shoulders of a tiny minority of hard-working enthusiasts who pose a striking exception to the spirit of inertia and medievalism which still grips the vast majority of Old Egypt's population. During our short visit we were happily startled by the forward outlook of these friends, their indomitable technological optimism, their faith in human abilities, and their compassion for those of their countrymen who are still bitter opponents of New Egypt's projects.

### **The opposition**

This traditionalist-based opposition is not inconsiderable. On the side of the opposition the hope is nourished, rather systematically, that the Old and the New Egypt will inevitably clash in some bloody, violent fashion.

On the other side, the government and the tiny grouping

of engineers and scientists who are inspired by the government's commitment to build a new nation, there is a drive to continue the construction and land-reclamation drive at a pace rapid enough to keep one step ahead of the danger of a possible social conflict. The underlying hope is that the New Egypt will have been completed, built, and populated, before the suspicious, resistant, traditionalist Old Egypt can exploit its temporary advantage in relative size and defeat the political forces currently in command of the nation-building drive.

To the visitor, two conclusions became self-evident.

First, the potential for internal political strife is both unnecessary and stupid from the standpoint of the nation's own interest. The "left" and "Muslim" opposition's arguments against the government's national construction program are either poorly informed or are based on bad faith. The evident shortcomings of the government's programs are the result, ultimately, not of the government's intentions, but the result of the prevailing genocidal conditions in the international credit markets, imposed by the IMF, the World Bank, and the major international creditors.

What has been inadequately addressed by both the government and its opponents, is what ought to be the Egyptian nation's unique role in the community of nations, what Egypt's national identity ought to be, not for itself, but for other nations. Because of that nation's past role in founding the Non-Aligned movement, it still possesses great reserves of political and diplomatic good will among the developing nations. This good will can be transformed into a tangible political asset if Egypt mobilizes its national resources on behalf of a struggle to create a New World Economic Order, to put an end to the financial dictatorship of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the major Eurodollar banks which are now using the instrument of indebtedness to reimpose colonial relations throughout the developing sector.

Such a national purpose, can bring the majority of the well-meaning portion of the opposition into a political alliance with the pro-development-oriented factions of the Egyptian government and defuse the potential for social crisis.

The visitor's second self-evident conclusion is related to the practical limitation of Egypt's present development program. If the land reclamation program is brought to successful conclusion by the year 2000, the entire supply of Egypt's fresh water will be used up, leaving no room for future growth. From that point onward, Egypt must look toward the African continent as a whole for its future fresh-water supply. Eventually, most of the Western Desert can be cultivated if Africa's entire drainage system is reorganized to, for example, make rational use of the much wasted waters of the Congo River Basin, much of which can eventually be channeled into the still-existing ancient, dried riverbeds of the Nile cutting through long stretches of the Western Desert.

But such an approach again requires of Egypt that it adopt for itself a leading political and diplomatic role in the world struggle against Malthusianism and for high-technology-based development.