

A PREMATURE ATTEMPT AT LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN IRAQI POLITICS (1930 – 1937)*

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During the early 1930s a liberal left-wing group named “al-Ahālī” came to being. Their members first made their views public in January 1932. They proposed sweeping social reforms, but hoped to perform their plans by parliamentary methods, without having to resort to violent means. They did not call for a class struggle, and recognized the value of the institutions of the family and religion and supported patriotism (al-waṭānīya) against nationalism (al-qawmīya). The leading members of this association established the Baghdad Club, a cultural centre where the members treated different themes and drew into debate people from widely varying background. There were differences of opinion between them as to whether or not a political party should be established. Originally they saw their main task as general cultural work to combat illiteracy. However, in 1934 – 1935 the group became more radical and was joined by some communists. It also established contacts with some of the older politicians who favoured reforms, such as Hikmat Sulaymān, who had been much impressed by the work of Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. By October 1936, full agreement had been reached between those, who prepared the military coup. With the overthrow of the government, the first short-lived coalition supported by the liberal and left-centre forces in Iraq was installed.

Key words: the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, opposition to the treaty, strengthening of liberal and leftist ideas, patriotism vs. nationalism, the army and politics

New ideas were permeating Iraq during the 1930s, influencing Iraq’s educated class. These ideas were drawn from two different sources: firstly, the rising dictatorships of Europe in the interwar period; and secondly, democratic socialism. The **first source** was drawn from the rising dictatorships of Europe in the interwar period. As educated Iraqis travelled through Germany and Italy

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or read of these countries' spectacular economic and social advances, they began to identify progress and efficiency with authoritarian governments and social mobilization. A totalitarian regime seemed to offer a more effective means of unifying fragmented countries and modernizing backward societies than did constitutional democracy and the free enterprise system and promised more rapid development, political unity, and greater social discipline.¹ The European dictatorships to make an impact on Iraq the most were those of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The Iraqis watched reduction of parliament to an advisory body, the restructuring of the economic system of the country, and reformation of the educational system along militaristic lines. However, the authoritarian regime that exerted the most powerful influence on Iraqis was modern Turkey. As an Islamic country with a background of similar traditions and problems, Turkey offered a more attainable example than European regimes.² Although Turkey's secularization found few advocates among older Iraqis, the use of the state to encourage the development of industry, agriculture, and education did have wide appeal. Above all, Mustafa Kemal's shrewd handling of parliament and its fractious politicians seemed – particularly to the military – to set an example worth following.³ The **second source** was democratic socialism. Iraqis were inspired more by the British labour movement than by the example of the Soviet Union. The need for social rather than mere political reform, an appreciation of the economic basis of power, and dissatisfaction with the policy of the ruling oligarchy of politicians and landowners were keenly felt by the younger generation of Iraqis, who were the first to receive a Western-style education.⁴ This line emphasized social justice, a more equitable distribution of political power, and genuine economic reform rather than increased authoritarianism.

The nucleus of a leftist grouping was formed in the 1920s, when a number of Iraqi students studying at the American university of Beirut set up an Iraqi cultural society, but this soon faded away. In the early 1930s, when these young reformers returned to Baghdad, they began to coalesce in a loosely knit

¹ MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 69.

² AŞ-ŞABBĀGH, Şalāhaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-ʿaqīd ar-ruḡn Şalāhaddīn aş-Şabbāgh. Fursān al-ʿurūba fī al-ʿIrāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Şalāhaddīn aş-Şabbāgh. *The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq*], p. 119.

³ BARRĀK, Fāḍil. *Dawr al-Jaysh al-ʿirāqī fī ḥukūmat ad-difāʿ al-waṭanī, wa al-ḥarb maʿa Brīṭāniyā ʿām 1941*. [The Role of Iraqi Army in the Government of Patriotic Defence and in the War with Britain in the Year 1941], p. 82. (Defence of the Fatherland?)

⁴ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers*, p. 301; MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 70.

organisation. However, these young men were greatly divided among themselves and therefore were weak and politically impotent. They had no common background, social or cultural, and were thus divided into various groupings. There were, in the first place, those who had received their higher education abroad; and, in the second place, those who had received their higher education at home, mainly graduates of Baghdad Law College.⁵ With the end of the Mandate this handful of enthusiastic young men who opposed the British occupation of Iraq and the Zionist plans in Palestine were imbued with liberal ideas, but no clear ideology or program, began to organise protest demonstrations.

Outstanding among them were Ḥusayn Jamīl, °Abdalqādir Ismā'īl, Yūnis as-Sab°āwī, Fā'iq as-Sāmarrā'ī, °Azīz Sharīf, Jamīl °Abdalwahhāb and Khalīl Kanna. Although these young men were not eager to form a party organisation, members of opposition political parties could be found from time to time in their group. However, the opposition parties were able to take advantage of this group especially during the protests against the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930. Due to those activities some members of the group were arrested.⁶

In Iraq in the autumn of 1930 Prime Minister Nūrī as-Sa'īd held a strictly controlled election and on 16 November the Iraqi parliament ratified the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that promised Iraq's nomination for League membership in 1932 and retained a close Anglo-Iraqi alliance.⁷ It provided for mutual help in wartime, required close consultation on foreign affairs and permitted the British to lease two air bases to be guarded by the Iraqis at Britain's expense. Iraq's military forces were to receive aid, equipment and training from Britain and in return British forces were to enjoy Iraqi assistance and access to all Iraqi facilities including railways, ports, and airports in time of war. The RAF was to remain at the two Iraqi air bases al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu°ayba.⁸ Any foreign advisors and experts needed by Iraq were to be British and the conditions of those in service were to remain unaffected. The high commissioner was to be replaced by an ambassador, who would take precedence over other ambassadors. This treaty formed the basis of Iraq's relations with Great Britain after Iraq's independence in 1932.

⁵ KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 69.

⁶ KANNA, Khalīl. *Al-°Irāq. Amsuhu wa ghaduhu. [Iraq. Its Past and its Future]*, p. 52.

⁷ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Al-°Irāq fī dawray al-iḥtīlāl wa al-intidāb. [Iraq in the Two Periods of Occupation and Mandate]*. Vol. II., p. 211; AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Al-°Irāq fī zill al-mu°āhadāt. [Iraq in the Shadow of Treaties]*, pp. 229 – 232.

⁸ Article 5 of the Treaty. In HUREWITZ, J.C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. Volume II. A Documentary Record, 1914 – 1956*, p. 179.

The treaty placed all responsibility for internal order in Iraq on the king and made Iraq responsible for its own defence, in theory giving the Iraqi government control over the last part of the state structure still in British hands. However, in return, Iraq agreed to give Great Britain the use of all the facilities in its power in the event of war, including the right to move British troops through Iraq if necessary. In addition, the Iraqi army's equipment and military advisers would be supplied by Great Britain and the RAF would keep two major bases on Iraqi soil, one at al-Ḥābbanīya near Baghdad and the other at ash-Shu'ayba near Baṣra. The treaty itself was to remain in force for twenty-five years from the date of Iraq's entry into the League of Nations, but could be renegotiated after twenty years.⁹ However, the bulk of the Iraqi population remained dissatisfied realising that the treaty means only a veiled form of British guardianship.¹⁰

In 1930, when Nūrī as-Sa'īd concluded the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, his domination of Parliament ensured the ratification of this controversial agreement and a regrouping of parties immediately followed. Nūrī as-Sa'īd formed the *°Ahd Party* (reviving the pre-war *°Ahd*), whose aim was to carry into effect the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 and to bring the mandate to an end.¹¹ However, the main weakness of the official institutions was their narrow scope. They only reached the upper elements of the urban strata, scarcely affecting the rural areas and the lower urban classes. The new opposition managed at least for a time to reach deeper into the social structure and unite urban and rural elements, *shī'ī* and *sunni*, and even incorporating some of the urban lower class. It mainly drew on an appeal to broad pan-Arab sentiments and emphasised Iraq's Arab identity.¹² Although this movement did not survive intact past the mid-1930s, it foreshadowed some of the groupings that would shape events later in the decade.

The treaty was regarded by rival politicians as unsatisfactory for the realisation of the national aspirations of Iraq. Seeking to give their opposition some formal expression, Yāsīn al-Ḥāshimī, the leader of the *People's Party* (Ḥizb ash-sha'ib), and other leading politicians outside the government formed a new opposition

⁹ Article 11 of the Treaty. In HUREWITZ, J.C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, p. 180.

¹⁰ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern Political History of Iraq]. Vol. III., p. 87.

¹¹ AN-NUṢAYRĪ, °Abdarrazzāq Aḥmad. *Nūrī as-Sa'īd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-°irāqīya ḥattā ām 1932*. [Nūrī as-Sa'īd and his Role in Iraqi Politics until 1932], pp. 222 – 223; AL-°UMARĪ, Khayrī. *Ḥikāyāt siyāsīya fī tārīkh al-°Irāq al-ḥadīth*. [Political Stories in Modern Iraqi History]. Vol. I., p. 139.

¹² AL-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. *Al-°Irāq bayna °ahdayni. Yāsīn al-Ḥāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī*. [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Ḥāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], pp. 58 – 59.

party called the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* (Ḥizb al-ikhā' al-waṭanī) in November 1930.¹³ A week later, this party sought and succeeded in establishing an alliance with the *Iraqi Patriotic Party*. The two parties signed a common manifesto which they called the “Brotherhood Document” (Wathīqat at-ta'ākhī), declaring (1) that the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 is absolute and oppressive and should be revised (2) that Parliament does not represent the people and should be dissolved and (3) that any government replacing the existing one must work towards achieving the above aims.¹⁴ Moreover, through Ja'far Abū at-Timman the new party enjoyed close relations with the *Renaissance Party* (Ḥizb an-nahḍa), which was more explicitly based on the *shī'ī* community and its concerns with its links to the *shī'ī* tribal shaykhs of the mid-Euphrates. Like former parties, these new parties also aimed at achieving the independence of Iraq, and the only differences among them were on the means as to how to achieve this goal.¹⁵

The reformed *Iraqi Patriotic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī al-ʿIrāqī) under its leader Ja'far Abū at-Timman returned to the political scene in 1928, but took on more than a purely nationalist colouring.¹⁶ This followed from the social character of the support which it attracted: the handicraft workers and petty tradesmen. The party showed great sensitivity for the conditions and grievances of these sections of people, even while giving priority to the national struggle. The party played an initiatory role in the founding in 1929 of the *Artisans' Association* (Jamī'iyat aṣḥāb aṣ-ṣanā'ī'c),¹⁷ a trade union founded partly in response to the effects of the economic recession in Iraq. Its members included employees of the railway workshops of Baghdad, but largely comprised of artisans and small traders who were now the targets of new taxation proposals. Until the hard times of the world crisis, municipal development and public services had been expanding, but afterwards the *Artisans' Association*, began its campaign against the government in the streets of Baghdad and in the provinces. The *Artisans' Association* under Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Qazzāz, which

¹³ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAYDĪ, Ja'far ʿAbbās. Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir. [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 71.

¹⁴ AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. (7th edition). Vol. 3. Baghdad: Dār ash-shu'ūn ath-thaqāfīya al-ʿamma, 1988, p. 99.

¹⁵ For a brief account of political parties see GROBBA, Fritz. Irak. Berlin, Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1941, pp. 40 – 47.

¹⁶ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. Ja'far Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945. [Ja'far Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq], pp. 249 – 252.

¹⁷ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. Ja'far Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, p. 311.

had close links with the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party*, played an increasingly prominent role in criticism of Nūrī as-Saʿīd's government.¹⁸

In March 1931 a Municipal Fees Law (Qānūn rusūm al-baladīyāt) was passed, fixing rates of taxes to be levied in trades and crafts three times higher than previously caused an angry response.¹⁹ The imposition of a monthly tax on traders and crafts sparked off a fourteen-day widespread strike of artisans and lower-middle-class workers in Baghdad in July, which was also used to flay the government of Nūrī as-Saʿīd for its acceptance of the unequal Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.²⁰ During the summer of 1931 the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* had close links with Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Qazzāz. Although the alliance was short-lived, it illustrated the emerging social and political forces in the country.²¹ The government took steps to meet the complaints about the Municipal Fees Law, removing one very potent cause of grievance. In addition, the security forces had been deployed in strength throughout the towns, detaining a number of the organisers, which left people in no doubt about the cost of further defiance. The opposition became increasingly demoralised and Nūrī as-Saʿīd emerged triumphant, confident in the continuing support of the king, the court faction and the British.²²

The strike was the first large-scale rebellion of the lower classes against pressing social ills – the Depression, poor distribution of wages and income and above all, new taxes. The Depression had taken its toll among the urban working class and unemployment had reached serious proportions, especially among railroad workers. Many railroad workers who still had jobs had been placed on half pay.²³ Clashes with the police followed as the strike spread to the towns of the mid-Euphrates – including al-Ḥilla, al-Kūfa, Karbalā' and an-Najaf – as well as to the tribes and even to Baṣra. The workers demanded nullification of the municipal taxes and unemployment compensation. The *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* leaders asked for the resignation of the cabinet and an election to replace

¹⁸ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 296 – 297.

¹⁹ AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 146 – 147; Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], p. 306.

²⁰ An-NUṢAYRĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq Aḥmad. *Nūrī as-Saʿīd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-ʿirāqīya*. [Nūrī as-Saʿīd and his Role in Iraqi Politics until 1932], p. 276.

²¹ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 308 – 309.

²² An-NUṢAYRĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq Aḥmad. *Nūrī as-Saʿīd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-ʿirāqīya*, p. 311.

²³ Cit. in MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 52.

it.²⁴ Nūrī as-Saʿīd quelled the strike, did not resign, and on the contrary his political influence increased. The general strike and the public demonstrations in Baghdad, with the more traditional outbreaks of unrest and sabotage in the tribal regions of the mid-Euphrates, had alarmed many Iraqis and as a result many rallied to the support of the government. Nūrī as-Saʿīd won the upper hand: he successfully separated the component parts of the disintegrating opposition coalition and ensured that the main thrust of Iraqi politics during the following year was the achievement of independence in 1932.

The Iraqi economy during the 1920s was predominantly agricultural in nature with dates and grain representing the major exports. Hit by the consequences of the world depression in trade, Iraq's economy was in a precarious situation. Therefore the economic predicament of the country in the early 1930s was more of a preoccupation for the leading political forces.²⁵ The land and revenue policies pursued under the mandate resulted from the difficulties confronting the government in ruling over a country where its authority did not derive from any firm basis of consent. As far as the treasury was concerned, the land revenue policy resulted in the gradual decline of receipts from agriculture. The government was forced to look for other sources of income and found firstly custom duties and then oil revenues.²⁶

Oil had been discovered in large quantities near Kirkūk in 1927, but would not be exported until 1934. The Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) was eager to renegotiate the 1925 agreement in order to open up a much larger area of northern Iraq for its exclusive exploration.²⁷ As an inducement, the IPC held out the prospect of substantial advances in the present against future royalties. Given the financial crisis facing the Iraqi government, this was a powerful draw. In March 1931 an agreement was signed, granting the IPC an exclusive concession over the whole of north-eastern Iraq as well as tax exemptions in exchange for annual payments of substantial sums in gold until exports began, some of which would later be recovered from royalty payments.²⁸ So dramatic was the effect of this that from 1931 to 1932 oil revenues constituted nearly 20 per cent of government revenues, having contributed virtually nothing in the

²⁴ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 3, pp. 149 – 151; Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 311 – 313.

²⁵ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 68.

²⁶ SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, pp. 252 – 253.

²⁷ SULAYMĀN, Ḥikmat Sāmī. *Naft al-ʿIrāq. Dirāsa iqtisādīya siyāsīya*. [The Oil of Iraq. A Political Economic Study], p. 138.

²⁸ LONGRIGG, S.H. *Oil in the Middle East. Its Discovery and Development*, p. 79.

previous year. Furthermore, the timely arrival of this income easily wiped out the threatened government budget deficit of that year.²⁹

In 1931 another kind of solidarity was beginning to emerge in Baghdad, represented by the group of intellectuals and professionals disgruntled with the situation. These men came from a variety of backgrounds, but they were all of the younger generation (in their mid-twenties in 1932) and all were critical of the cliques and factions which had risen to prominence in the Iraqi state. They deprecated the way in which the ruling elites manipulated elections to their advantage, relied upon informal networks to cement an “establishment” which successfully excluded most other aspirants to power and used their state offices to entrench their positions as major landowners in Iraqi society.³⁰ They formed a circle which felt keenly that political power had for long been in the hands of a small set of elderly men who had deliberately prevented them from playing their part in the political life of their country.

The ideas they wanted to air were new in Iraq, but owners of the newspapers were not ready to publish them. So ʿAbdalqādir Ismāʿīl, a Marxist who eventually became a leader of the *Iraqi Communist Party*, got in touch with his relative ʿAbdalfattāh Ibrāhīm, who had become a socialist as a result of his reading on the Soviet Union while a graduate student at Columbia University.³¹ The two approached Muḥammad Ḥadīd a member of a wealthy and conservative Moṣul family and who was a graduate of the London School of Economics and Political Science and was much impressed by its outspoken socialist tendencies, and Khalīl Kanna, an attorney and decided to publish a newspaper. On 2 July 1931 they sent an application to the Ministry of Interior and within six months they got the needed permission. So on 2 January 1932 there appeared the first issue of the group’s organ “al-Ahālī” (The Countrymen).³² This newspaper at once figured as the most prominent daily paper in the country because the members of the group co-operated actively in the editing of the paper and contributed articles which had a wide influence in Baghdad.³³

²⁹ SHWADRAN, B. *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 247; SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, p. 198.

³⁰ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, pp. 84 – 85.

³¹ LAQUEUR, W.Z. *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, p. 178; KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 70.

³² The newspaper had often been subjected to censorship or complete closure by the government. In TARBUSH, Mohammad. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 130.

³³ AL-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzīm. *Al-ʿIrāq bayna ʿahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī*. [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], p. 71.

In the formative phase, the young men of the group, shrewd and ambitious though they were, failed to appreciate the benefit of co-operation owing mainly to distrust and lack of intimate contact. But the need for a rapprochement among them was keenly felt and, therefore, they spontaneously organised a small group, which came to be known as the *Association of Countrymen* (Jamā'at al-Ahālī) or the *Ahālī group*, after the name of its daily paper.³⁴ At the outset the group advocated the principles of the French Revolution, with democracy as the ideal form of government. They spread a form of popular reformism. "The good of the people above every other good" formed from the outset the rallying cry of the new group. By the "people" they meant the great majority whose good demand an anxious sense of interest in raising the standard of living, creating a sound political and economic order, and turning to best advantage the country's intellectual talents and material resources. The group was but an instrument toward the hoped-for renaissance, and was to serve as a school for the people.³⁵

The *Ahālī group* saw in particular that many of Iraq's financial difficulties and profound social and economic problems could be laid at the door of its principal landowners. In 1932, their influence had ensured that the Land Settlement Law incorporated none of Dowson's recommendations concerning short stale leases and the distribution of lands to small peasant farmers. Instead, it became the chief instrument for the government to bestow and to confirm ownership rights on individuals most of whom were already powerful and well connected.³⁶ In 1933, the dominant influence of the landowners was again apparent in the Law Governing the Rights and Duties of the Cultivators. This gave landowners wide powers over their tenants, holding the latter responsible for crop failures, making them vulnerable to eviction at short notice on the one hand, and tying them to the land until all their debts to the landowner were discharged on the other. Given the condition of peasant indebtedness in certain areas, this caused many to flee the land for a life of destitution in the hut slums around Baghdad.³⁷

In these circumstances, it was not surprising that trenchant social criticism of the status quo should have emerged. At the time the two leading persons of the

³⁴ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, °Abdarrazzāq. Ja°far Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya fī al-°Irāq, 1908 – 1945. [Ja°far Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], pp. 359 – 361.

³⁵ BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers, p. 301.

³⁶ LONGRIGG, S.H. Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History, 1968, p. 214.

³⁷ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 85.

group were °Abdalfattāh Ibrāhīm, a Marxist, and Muḥammad Ḥadīd, who was more of a social democrat by inclination. The *Ahālī group*'s adoption of the vague term *ash-sha'biya* (literally, "populism") allowed it to disguise significant differences among its members.³⁸ Some advocated collectivisation, others held out for land reform within a strengthened parliamentary system, whilst others believed the prime task should be moral renewal.

The founding of the *Baghdad Club* in late 1933 encouraged debate and drew in people from widely varying backgrounds.³⁹ Some were associated with Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Qazzāz's *Workers' Federation of Iraq* (Ittiḥād al-°ummāl fī al-°Irāq) which organised a strike at the British-owned electric power company in Baghdad on 5 December 1933.⁴⁰ The strike was suppressed by the government as a result, but many of those generally sympathetic to the idea of organised labour gravitated to the circles of the *Ahālī group*. Equally drawn to the group was Ja'far Abū at-Timman, whose own party was disintegrating. Sympathetic to the idea of social reform, he was also attracted by the emphasis the group placed on patriotism (waṭanīya – suggesting specifically Iraqi loyalties) over nationalism (qawmīya – suggesting loyalty to the ideal of an Arab nation).⁴¹ Many former members of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* also saw in the group a sympathetic audience for their own criticisms of the *status quo*. However, from the ranks of the *Iraqi Patriotic Party* emerged men who furnished leadership to three basic oppositional currents. First the tradition-conscious pan-Arab reformism of the *Muthannā Club* (Nādī al-Muthannā) and the *Independence Party*; secondly, the left wing *Ahālī group*, the *Association of*

³⁸ In 1934 the ideas of the group, collectively labelled *ash-sha'biya* (populism) – a term employed to avoid charges of communism – were formally and coherently articulated in a two-volume work by °Abdalfattāh Ibrāhīm, a member of the group who had become a left-wing socialist while studying at Columbia University, USA. Although his ideas were Marxist, he emphasised the welfare of all people without distinctions between classes and made no overt attack on the hallowed institutions of family and Islam. In KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 70.

³⁹ ḤADĪD, Muḥammad. *Mudhakkirātī. Aṣ-Ṣirā' min ajli ad-dīmuqrāṭīya fī al-°Irāq*. [My Memoires. *The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq*], p. 118.

⁴⁰ On 11 May 1932 came to fusion of the *Artisans' Association* and the *Association of mechanical workers* (Jamī'at °ummāl al-mīkanīk) and the new trade union organisation was established, called *Workers' Federation of Iraq*. In AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, HUMAYDĪ Ja'far °Abbās. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq al-mu'āṣir* [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 80.

⁴¹ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, °Abdarrazzāq. *Ja'far Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-°Irāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Ja'far Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], pp. 371 – 373. Al-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. *Al-°Irāq bayna °ahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī* [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], p. 71.

People's Reform (Jamī'iyat al-iṣlāḥ ash-sha'cībī)⁴² and the *Patriotic Democratic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāqī) and thirdly, the revolutionary current which found expression in communist groupings like the *Association Against Imperialism* (Jamī'ya dīdda-l-isti'c mār).⁴³

In 1934 the *Ahālī* group had undergone a change. Under the influence of °Abdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad Ḥadīd, the group adopted socialism as its course. °Abdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm although he belonged to an old Moṣul family, reputed for its wealth and conservatism, he brought back with him to Iraq a doctrine which shocked most of his fellow countrymen. And it was for this very reason that the group preferred to call its ideology *ash-sha'cībīya* (populism) rather than to have it labelled as socialism. They proposed sweeping social reforms, but hoped to carry out their plans through parliamentary methods, without having to resort to violent revolution.⁴⁴ °Abdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm, with the aid of his *Ahālī* friends, edited two little volumes in which the ideas and ideals of the group were expounded. The first volume, though the larger, was introductory to the second, since it dealt with the history of political thought from the Greeks down to the Russian Revolution, while the second volume outlined the doctrine itself.⁴⁵

The doctrine of *ash-sha'cībīya*, seeking “welfare for all the people” without distinction between individuals and classes on the bases of wealth, birth, or religion, advocated sweeping social reforms in Iraq. It laid the main stress on the people as a whole rather than on the individual, but advocated in the meantime protection of the essential human rights, such as liberty, equality of opportunity, and freedom from tyranny. But the State, it was added, must pay proper attention to the health and education of the individual as well as recognising his right to work. It followed accordingly that the *sha'cībīya* comprised the principles of both democracy and socialism, since it recognised the parliamentary system of government based on functional representation. In contrast to Marxist socialism, it did not admit the existence of a class struggle in society, or the revolutionary procedure in social change. It also recognised patriotism as an article of faith, but repudiated nationalism, since the latter had

⁴² Al-°AKKĀM, °Abdalmīr Ḥadī. Tārīkh Ḥizb al-istiqlāl al-°irāqī 1946 – 1958. [History of the Iraqi Independence Party, 1946 – 1958], p. 14.

⁴³ BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, p. 297.

⁴⁴ LAQUEUR, W.Z. Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East, p. 177.

⁴⁵ KHADDURI, Majid. Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958, p. 70.

often led to imperialism and the domination in society of one class, while the former merely inspired the individual with loyalty to his country.⁴⁶

In the circumstances the group decided to use more practical means of widening its appeal to Iraqi society. The term *ash-sha^cbīya* was dropped and the more radical ideas were abandoned for the time being. It was possible accordingly to increase the membership of the group by recruiting a few of the more liberal of the older politicians. In 1934 the *Ahālī group* succeeded in attracting the best-known reformer, Kāmil al-Chādirchī, who was before his resignation a member of the executive committee of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party*.⁴⁷ Kāmil al-Chādirchī, who left the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* when Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī came into power in 1933, had found that party uncongenial to his rather more liberal ideas.⁴⁸ In one of his early articles written when he was a *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* member, he had published a stimulating discussion on sovereignty and democracy in which he advocated the necessary participation of the general public in the government.⁴⁹ His ideas were rather too progressive for the party and it was therefore natural for Kāmil al-Chādirchī to revolt against it and join the *Ahālī group*.

The *Ahālī group* did not feel that the time had come to organise a political party; instead, it decided to organise a social circle for the propagation of *ash-sha^cbīya*. Hence the **Baghdad Club** which was opened for all educated young men who wanted to join in its social activities. In spite of the fact that the club was sabotaged by the nationalists, the ideas of *ash-sha^cbīya* attracted more and more young men and stirred up lively discussion. The club, however, was closed within a few months as a result of the indirect opposition of the government. Indeed, the ideas of *ash-sha^cbīya* did not make much headway, owing in the main to the opposition of the elder politicians and to the counter-propaganda of the nationalists, who violently declared, was none other than communism called by a different name. It was therefore contrary to the national traditions of the Arabs and aimed at weakening the teachings of Islam.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See *Muʿāla^cāt fī ash-Sha^cbīya*. (Reflections on Populism), Ahālī Series no. 3 (Baghdad: Ahālī Press, 1935). Cit. in KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Al-CHĀDIRCHĪ, Kāmil. *Mudhakkirāt Kāmil al-Chādirchī wa tārīkh al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī*. [Memoirs of al-Chādirchī and History of the Patriotic Democratic Party], pp. 23 – 24.

⁴⁸ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], p. 379.

⁴⁹ Al-CHĀDIRCHĪ, Kāmil. *Mudhakkirāt Kāmil al-Chādirchī wa tārīkh al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 71.

By 1935 the *Ahālī* group had attracted several older and respected politicians, especially those who were anti-British. Chief among them were Muḥammad Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman, a *shīʿī* who joined the group soon after his split with the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* leaders and Ḥikmat Sulaymān, who was in contact with them prior to the formation of Yāsīn al-Hāshimī’s cabinet.⁵¹ With the addition of these politicians, the emphasis of the group shifted from intellectual matters to achieving political power. The members of the group directed their attention to ideas of social reform. As reformers, they endeavoured to work for the accomplishment of their ideas in a constitutional manner within the state system. They believed in religion, traditions and the re-distribution of wealth.⁵² In March 1935, an executive committee was formed, and the doctrine of *ash-shaʿbīya* was replaced by a more generalised demand for reform, designed to appeal to a broader base. However, the *Ahālī* group did not become a political party; it continued to work through individuals, and therein lay its weakness. Lacking structure and organisation, and with no grass-roots support as yet, it was prone to exploitation.

In March 1935 King Gāzī appointed as Prime Minister Yāsīn al-Hāshimī,⁵³ an Ottoman-educated army officer who had fought with the Turks in World War I, although he had been an early adherent of Arab nationalism and a member of *al-ʿAhd*. Unlike Nūrī as-Saʿīd, however, the new prime minister had not been a supporter of Fayṣal and the British. A strong yet realistic politician, he had earlier led opposition to the treaty and the British connection, yet had also participated in cabinets during the 1920s. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī’s leadership of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party*, his organisation of the opposition coalition of 1930, and his role in helping to mobilise the 1931 strike had brought him to the first rank of politicians.⁵⁴ Although at this time the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* formed the dominant group in the cabinet, in many respects their government was a revival of the coalition cabinet of 1933. As in 1933, cabinet members were drawn almost exclusively from among the strongest and most experienced of the inner circle of Arab *sunni* nationalists that Fayṣal had originally brought to power. The cabinet’s policies epitomised the outlook of this group.

⁵¹ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, pp. 337 – 339.

⁵² BATĀTU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Baʿthists and Free Officers, p. 297.

⁵³ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. Vol. 4, pp. 80 – 81.

⁵⁴ Al-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. Al-ʿIrāq bayna ʿahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], pp. 55 – 56; MARR, P. The Modern History of Iraq, p. 65.

In forming his cabinet, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī made a tactical error that was later to prove fatal: he excluded Ḥikmat Sulaymān, who had taken so much of the initiative in organising the conspiracy. Ḥikmat Sulaymān had asked for the key post of minister of interior, but he had recently become a marginal member of the *Ahālī group*, a left-wing reformist association, and the premier feared that his appointment would cause the way to public office for left-wing intellectuals and radical reformers. So Yāsīn al-Hāshimī appointed Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī to the post instead.⁵⁵ Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, a relative of Iraq's first prime minister, was a lawyer, an energetic politician, and a strong supporter of the Arab nationalist cause. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī's choice clearly showed that he preferred to rely, like previous governments, on the support of tribal leaders and a pan-Arab nationalist policy, rather than venture into any social reform.⁵⁶

At the outset the Yāsīn al-Hāshimī – Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī administration was strongly supported by the army officers, and it was due only to military support that Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī were able to silence their political opponents by ruthlessly putting down the tribal-inspired uprisings of the Middle Euphrates.⁵⁷ When, however, a few ringleaders among the army officers secretly went over to the opposition, the cabinet's position became completely hopeless, yet it had no realisation of the gravity of the situation. It was this *Ahālī*-army honeymoon that set the opposition in motion and translated secret opposition into open rebellion. The work of the two groups was of far-reaching consequence and therefore deserves closer examination.⁵⁸ The coming of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party* into power in March 1935 definitely inspired the *Ahālī group* to reorganise itself and to work more actively towards achieving power. An executive committee was set up, composed of Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman, Ḥikmat Sulaymān, Kāmil al-Chādirchī, Muḥammad Ḥadīd, and ʿAbdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm.⁵⁹ The committee established personal contacts with other elder politicians and especially with members of other non-political societies.

⁵⁵ HADĪD, Muḥammad. *Mudhakkirātī. Aṣ-Ṣirāʿ min ajli ad-dīmuqrāṭīya fī al-ʿIrāq* [My Memoires. The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq], pp. 139 – 140; AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 4, p. 82.

⁵⁶ AL-QAYSI, Sāmī ʿAbdalḥafīz. *Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-ʿirāqīya bayna ʿamay 1922 – 1936*. [Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and his Role in Iraqi Politics between the Years 1922 – 1936]. Vol. I. Basra: 1975, p. 456.

⁵⁷ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, HUMAYDĪ, Jaʿfar ʿAbbās. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir* [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 102.

⁵⁸ KHADDURI, Majīd. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 69.

⁵⁹ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], p. 403.

Hikmat Sulaymān and the *Ahālī group* were not the only ones disturbed by the success of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party*.⁶⁰ Members of the previous government and their tribal supporters were furious. Worse, the *shīʿa* took the opportunity to set forth even more stringent demands. In a fascinating document entitled *Mīthāq ash-shaʿb* (The People's Pact), submitted to the government in March 1935, the *shīʿa* indicated the full range of their grievances – religious, social, economic, and political. They demanded more religion in the school curriculum; equal representation in the chamber, the cabinets, and the civil service; a direct one-stage election; *shīʿī* judges in *shīʿī* areas; and the curtailment of the salaries and pensions of (Baghdad) officials, whose ranks were “continually increasing beyond the capacity of the country”.⁶¹ Although the cabinet promised reforms for the future and held a new election to the chamber (enlarged to 108 seats to give the *shīʿī* shaykhs of the south greater representation), these steps were not sufficient to prevent a resurgence of tribal rebellions. Unlike previous disturbances, the revolts of 1935 and 1936 were firmly put down, finally establishing the predominance of the central government over the tribes of the south.⁶²

Two widely different movements of opposition to the cabinet were gathering momentum, but rebellion against the established government was only possible when the two movements, divergent in ideals and aspirations as they were, joined hands in order to put an end to the alleged tyranny and corruption of the Yāsīn al-Hāshimī – Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī regime.⁶³ The two movements were the offshoot of entirely different ideologies and worked independently of each other. The first, best known as the *Ahālī group*, advocated socialism and democracy while the other, mainly made up of army officers, professed nationalism and sought the eventual establishment of a military dictatorship. The *Ahālī group* had a long way to go before it could claim support from the masses, though its leaders often spoke in the interests of the poor and the wretched. The army officers had won higher prestige and were supported by almost all national organisations.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ ABŪ ṬABĪKH, Muḥsin. *Al-mabādiʿ wa ar-rijāl*. [The Principles and the Men], p. 51.

⁶¹ The text of the pact in AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 4, pp. 92 – 94.

⁶² AL-MUFTĪ, Hāzim. *Al-ʿIrāq bayna ʿahdayni*. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī. [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], pp. 78 – 80; MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 66.

⁶³ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], pp. 414 – 415.

⁶⁴ KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 69.

Under the influence of Kāmil al-Chādirchī, Ja^cfar abū at-Timman and Ḥikmat Sulaymān were also won over and enhanced the prestige and power of the *Ahālī group*. Ja^cfar abū at-Timman, the former leader of the *Iraqi Patriotic Party*, was known for his sincerity and straightforwardness; he was a respected national figure and a professed believer in democratic institutions.⁶⁵ But Ja^cfar abū at-Timman had been disillusioned through his past association with various nationalist politicians, and therefore tended towards the left. His accession to the *Ahālī group* was accordingly greatly appreciated, and he became its leader. Ḥikmat Sulaymān, was also a former member of the *Patriotic Brotherhood Party*, but his quarrel with the Yāsīn al-Hāshimī – Rashīd ʿAlī al-Kaylānī group brought him also to the *Ahālī group*.⁶⁶ At this juncture some of the members suggested the transformation of the *Ahālī group* into a political party, recognised by the Government, and called for a straightforward opposition to the existing regime through legal channels. Ḥikmat Sulaymān and Ja^cfar abū at-Timman were opposed to the idea, preferring to gather strength through personal contacts with government officials and army officers. ʿAbdalfattāh Ibrāhīm, who advocated the formation of a political party, expressed his disapproval and thus, side-stepping power in the approaching hour of victory, withdrew from the group for which he had worked so assiduously.⁶⁷

It was soon realised that the cabinet could not be overthrown save by a military rebellion, and that such a plot could not be arranged before the army's loyalty to the Government was alienated. The *Ahālī group*, indeed, had already begun to establish secret contacts with a few army officers. Ḥikmat Sulaymān emerged as the hero of the plot and it was entirely due to his efforts that General Bakr Ṣidqī, officer commanding the Second Division, was won for the group. The actual steps leading up to the Bakr Ṣidqī coup were kept completely secret and the members of the *Ahālī group* were not consulted until the very last stage. Shortly before the planned coup started and when all appeared to be ready in the army, Ḥikmat Sulaymān brought the news of the plan to the *Ahālī group* and appealed for support.⁶⁸ He pointed out that the army's decision gave the opportune moment for the group to carry out its reforms, and that failure to

⁶⁵ AL-CHĀDIRCHĪ, Kāmil. *Mudhakkirāt Kāmil al-Chādirchī wa tārīkh al Hizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī*. [Memoirs of al-Chādirchī and History of the Patriotic Democratic Party], p. 29.

⁶⁶ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAYDĪ, Ja^cfar ʿAbbās. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāshir* [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 98.

⁶⁷ KHADDURĪ, Majīd. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 73.

⁶⁸ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Ja^cfar Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945*. [Ja^cfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945], pp. 424 – 426.

accept its offer would not stop it from action. He assured them that the army would withdraw after the overthrow of the government.⁶⁹

The group at first evidently hesitated before committing themselves to a military coup and a few refused. However, the matter was discussed very thoroughly and there were fears that the movement would be entirely run by the army officers and that there would be a danger of an eventual establishment of a military dictatorship. Hikmat Sulaymān tried to persuade his fellow members that after the fall of the present government the army would withdraw leaving the administration to the new cabinet. Most of them were finally convinced that the army did not intend to intervene in politics and that the group would have an unprecedented opportunity to put their ideas into practice.⁷⁰ When he pointed out that he was asked to have the text of the proclamation and the letter to the king drawn up by the *Ahālī group*, they finally decided to join the conspiracy. Later on, some of the leading members of the group tried to justify their unusual decision.⁷¹

The rebellious troops under Lieutenant General Bakr Ṣidqī entered Baghdad at 5,30 p.m. on 29 October 1936 and already half an hour later the king issued a decree naming Hikmat Sulaymān, a member of the *Ahālī group*, prime minister of Iraq. His cabinet took on other (mostly Shīʿī) members of the group: Jaʿfar abū at-Timman at finance, Kāmil al-Chādirchī at works and communications, Ṣāliḥ Jabr at Justice and Yūsuf ʿIzzaddīn Ibrāhīm at education.⁷² The *Ahālī group* agreed with the communists and other minorities on organising demonstrations supporting the coup and the new cabinet. They set up a common committee named *Committee for progressive popular reform* (Lajnat al-iṣlāḥ at-taqaddumī ash-shaʿbī) and called for a public meeting on 3 November 1936, where they presented the following demands: 1) general amnesty for political prisoners; 2) strengthening of the army; 3) permit the prohibited trade unions and newspapers; 4) uniting all the popular movements in Arab countries; 5) emancipation of all citizens.⁷³ Initially, the reformers appeared to be strong as Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman made a speech condemning despotism, promising an end

⁶⁹ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, p. 88.

⁷⁰ AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. (7th edition). Vol. 4. Baghdad, Dār ash-shuʿūn ath-thaqāfiya al-ʿamma 1988, pp. 207 – 208.

⁷¹ JAMĪL, Ḥusayn. Al-ḥayāt an-niyābiya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1925 – 1946. [The Parliamentary Life in Iraq], pp. 253 – 258.

⁷² AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. Vol. 4, p. 230.

⁷³ AL-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. Al-ʿIrāq bayna ʿahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], pp. 101 – 102.

to the suppression of liberty, and advocating reforms in the educational system and the distribution of state lands.⁷⁴

The members of the *Ahālī group* assumed that the role of the coup leader would end with the fall of the previous government and the army would retreat to their barracks leaving the politics to the civilians. Enthusiasm of having four cabinet ministers deprived them of cold reasoning: the majority desired to transform the group into a political party and take forward their own programme. Therefore they approached the prime minister and submitted their proposal. The prime minister, after consultations with Bakr Ṣidqī, recommended the creation of an association named *Popular Reform League* (Jam'iyat al-iṣlāḥ ash-sha'abī) which would promote the program of the *Ahālī group*, but without their membership. The new association was set up on 15 November 1936.⁷⁵ In order to get rid of a legislative body which was created by the overthrown regime, the coup government decided to call a general election, and to have elected a parliament more favourable to the new regime. The general election which was to be held on 10 December 1936 was not completed until 20 February 1937.⁷⁶

Bakr Ṣidqī and Ḥikmat Sulaymān had begun to exercise dictatorial methods and had pursued an entirely different line from the *Ahālī group*. Many political and public personalities had to flee from the country to save their lives and many of those who remained were murdered by unknown assassins. A number of Arab dailies commented the situation in Iraq. *Al-Ahrām* in Cairo forecasted that the Arab element in Iraq would not bow to the dictatorship, particularly when it is represented by non-Arabs. Armed Arab tribes would not welcome with open arms the overthrow of Yāsīn al-Hāshimī's Arab government by hands of non-Arabs (Bakr Ṣidqī and Ḥikmat Sulaymān). The Damascene *al-Qabas* stated that the new dictatorship in Baghdad promotes provincialism (al-iqlīmīya) which is in contradiction with Arab aspirations and the idea of panarabism. The Cairo daily *ash-Shabāb* even claimed that Britain played a decisive role in the Iraqi coup and obvious is also the hand of Iran because of its interest in Shaṭṭ al-'Arab. The coup is even a presage of civil war as it could stir a rebellion of the Arabs against the coup leader, a Kurd who is forwarding a narrow provincialism.⁷⁷

Members of the *Ahālī group* were extremely frustrated by the political development in the country. Their social reform plan was not implemented and

⁷⁴ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, 'Abdarrazzāq. Ja'far Abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya fī al-'Irāq, p. 452.

⁷⁵ Al-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. Al-'Irāq bayna 'ahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī, pp. 103 – 104.

⁷⁶ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-'irāqīya. Vol. 4, p. 251.

⁷⁷ Al-MUFTĪ, Ḥāzim. Al-'Irāq bayna 'ahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], p. 112.

they witnessed strengthening of Bakr Ṣidqī's military dictatorship. Due to this development the representatives of the group in the cabinet tendered on 19 June 1937 their resignation to the prime minister.⁷⁸ New minister of interior Muṣṭafā al-ʿUmarī was appointed to discredit the *Popular Reform League* and for that purpose he prepared an accusation that the League promotes communist ideas and spreads hatred among people. Based on this accusation the League was suspended on 10 August 1937 and its most prominent representative ʿAbdalqādir Ismāʿīl was deprived of Iraqi citizenship and forced to leave the country. Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and Kāmil al-Chādirchī also found themselves in a deadlock situation, hence the first left for Iran and the other to Cyprus. Hopes to set up an alternative left wing government showed as unrealistic: they were premature and therefore destined for failure.

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