The Role of Egyptian Peasants in the 1919 Revolution

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To study this subject the following considerations will have to be taken into account.

Firstly: in an underdeveloped country like Egypt the peasant class is the oldest social class in comparison with the working class or the intelligentsia or even the bourgeoisie with its various levels. These latter classes were formed during the XIXc., whereas the peasants have been there for centuries. This means that the peasants are the most original Egyptians. They are a class with customs, traditions and a distinctive life-style and qualities accumulated through generations. Hence, no true revolutionary movement can arise in Egypt without peasant participation. This also means that Egyptian peasants have more influence in Egyptian life than other classes, not only because of their large numbers but also because of their traditions which are rooted in the consciousness of Egyptian society. Consequently any revolutionary movement in Egypt which does not enjoy peasant participation lacks strength and genuineness. It is on account of this that we can describe the Orabi Movement (1881-1882) and the 1919 revolution as genuine because peasants participated in them, whereas we cannot describe the Nationalist Party's movement, which occured between the Orabi Revolution and the 1919 revolution, as such.

This latter movement was initiated by the intelligentsia in cooperation with the workers.

Secondly: In spite of the above mentioned fact, it can be noticed that the peasants are always late in joining any revolution. This may be due to the slow pattern of rural life.

Thirdly: The researcher meets with difficulty in trying to formulate a fixed definition of peasants, particularly those who own land. If it is proper to define peasants, this definition can only be effected according to two standards: the size of ownership and the type of use made of the
land. Where there is no need for work by others and the owner with his family work alone on their land, which can only happen on smallholdings, we find the pure peasantry. Egyptian sources are agreed in defining smallholdings as pieces of land the area of which is less than five feddans.

Owners of this type of holding can be considered peasants if they are able to exploit it alone, if they have no other land and if they have no other source of work except agriculture. However, within this group we can distinguish between agricultural laborers and smallholders. In this way the peasant class can be defined as the social group which has no other work but agriculture and which does not need the efforts of others. In this, holders and non-holders are the same. According to Ya'Kub Artin,1 Mohamed Ali distributed land to peasants in 1813 by giving an area of between 3 and 5 feddans to each family. Yet, at the end of Ismail's rule there were peasants owning less than 1/24 of a feddan. The discrepancy in distribution of land in every village became apparent. Now, what were the reasons that led to a continual impoverishment of the peasants?

The most important of these can be summarized as follows:
1. Legislation since the appearance of the First Regulations (1846) was not in the favor of small peasants.
2. The establishment of big ownerships on title lands (lands of big farms on which taxes were only lately imposed in 1854) was done at the expense of peasant lands. It is not true that the big farms were on un-reclaimed lands. They were on the cultivated lands of the peasants. The Orabi Memoirs prove this. He says: "Even those who were given lands of the Abeadien (big farm) soon exchanged them for lands from the cultivated areas. This happened under Said, who issued two orders, in 1854 and 1855, allowing owners of low productivity big farms to exchange them for cultivated lands abandoned by peasants.2 Thus the rise of big ownerships on title lands both of Gafaleks of Abadiech was and completed at the expense of peasant ownership.

The system of taxation
3. It is probable that the system of taxation was the decisive factor in

1 Ya'kub Artin, Rules Regulating Egyptian Lands. Bulaq, Cairo 1889, pp 173-4.
2 Documents House, Mahfeza 42. Daftar 185, Mehia Turki 172.
impoverishing Egyptian peasants. This process can be explained in the following terms: the increasing taxes under Mohamed Ali and the means forced on the peasants resulted in whole villages being unable to pay taxes.

To face this difficulty, Mohammed Ali founded a new system known as Trusteeship in 1840. According to this system high officials and officers were compelled to pay the current and overdue taxes owed by insolvent villages in return for a part of the lands of these villages for them to cultivate. Peasants were to work on these lands as laborers to be paid either daily or by being given part of the crop. The law stipulated that the lands should be gradually returned to the peasants when they were capable of cultivating them and paying all due taxes. But by 1844 an area 1,205,599 feddans had become a trust of Mohammed Ali and his family and his high ranking officials and officers. The trusteeship lands were not returned to their owners. Ya'Kub Artin fails to explain this, though he emphasized that these lands were converted to private ownership. This fact is stressed by the decision of Consultant House of Representatives in 1866 which abolished the system of trusteeships, saying that "the trustees have possession of the requisitioned land according to the Regulations". Land ownership records kept at the National Archives indicate that the larger part of trusteeship lands was converted to the private ownership of trustees. Thus when the trusteeship system was abolished in Ismail's reign, a great part of the taxed lands was owned by the trustees.

4. The increased taxes and their consequences led to the peasants losing their lands in the period between the end of Mohammed Ali's rule and the end of Ismail's. In this period taxes increased greatly, and under Ismail, additional taxes were enforced. It is unnecessary to list all these taxes but it is enough to mention that Ismail El Mofatesh, the minister of finance of the Khedive Ismail, used to be proud of himself because he collected 15 million pounds of tax money in one year.

3 Rivlin, The Economy and Administration in Egypt in the early Nineteenth Century, (translated into Arabic), Cairo, 1967. p. 97

4 Egyptian Actualities, December 31, 1866.

5 National Archives, Ownership Records of Araba Al Madfuna Girga District, 1269 (A.M)

The weight of taxation was further doubled by an extremely strange system which came into force with Mohammed Ali. Under this system the peasants of a village were jointly responsible for paying the taxes due. The whole village was also responsible for the taxes of neighboring villages. This system laid the door open to injustice by village chiefs and local authorities and their manipulation of the peasants' affairs. In addition to this system, which was kept in use up to the beginning of Said's rule, there was a discrimination in taxation between peasants and big-owners. From the very first moment, the owners of Abeadieh and Gafaleks were exempted from taxes until Said, when a small tax was imposed on them. On the other hand we find some peasants continuing to pay taxes on lands destroyed by the Nile or needed for public works.

Under these circumstances tax methods were very cruel and brutal. Abdallah al Nadim, the writer who supported the Orabi Revolution, points out this dramatic fact: "The methods of levying taxes were enough to set people trembling. They were based on humiliation, insults and bodily harm. When the ma'amur came to a village to supervise the collection he called for its inhabitants one by one. Those who paid did not escape a few lashes to satisfy the ma'amurs thirst for torture. Those who were unable to pay were thrown to the ground by a soldier and whipped severely. If they escaped death they were put in jail".

There were two factors which contributed to injuring the peasants to the extent that they abandoned their lands. In addition to the increase of taxes and the corvées, two new factors emerged:

1. The appearance of a market economy and the predominance of cash dealings. This led to the collection of taxes in money. These changes took place at the end of Ismail's rule and they enabled the peasants to borrow from foreign moneylenders, especially Greeks, against the security of their lands. These foreigners penetrated the Egyptian countryside, backed by the Capitulations and the authority of Mixed Courts. At the first sight this may seem on the side of the peasant and, in fact, they were welcomed. But the case soon proved otherwise: Mixed Courts stipulated that those who gave loans to the peasants had the right to take the peasant's land if the borrower failed to pay back the loan at maturity.

2. The other factor was the boom resulting from the American Civil War. The price of cotton rose and therefore farmers began to grow more cotton, borrowing from the Greek moneylenders for this. As soon as the war ended, cotton prices suddenly fell and the moneylenders hastened to foreclose their mortgages. Thus a large area of the culti-
vated lands was lost to the hands of foreigners, mainly Greek money-
lenders.\(^7\)

This fact was clearly and dramatically depicted by Blunt who was a
friend of Egypt and the Orabi Revolution. About the last years of
Ismail’s rule he says, “the peasants were in a state of great distress
during this first year of the three formidable last years of Ismail’s rule. The
well-known Ismail Seddih El-Mofatish was at the height of his power
and authority. The foreigners who held the debts were pressing for and
claiming the payment of installments while the farmer was on the verge
of starvation. In those days of crisis, one rarely saw a farmer in the
fields who had a turban on his head or a shirt on his body.

On market days women flocked into the towns, coming from their
villages in order to sell their clothes or gold ornaments to Greek usur-
ers so that the peasants might pay taxes to the tax collectors, who used
to come into the villages with whips in their hands.”\(^8\)

The situation became worse when in the fall of 1877 the Nile flood
was lower than usual. As a result, the crops of 1878 were far below the
expected. Egypt was on the eve of a famine. In his book entitled *The
History of Egypt before and after the Occupation*\(^9\), Theodore Razesh-
tein most dramatically describes the conditions of farmers in 1879, as
also did Albert Farman, the U.S.A. Consul at that time.\(^10\) The articles
written by Abdallah Al-Nadim in *Al Taif*\(^11\) during 1882 contained
many incidents of Ismail’s rule. One of these articles recounts that a
woman was whipped to death because she refused to reveal where her
husband kept his money; he owed the Government 45 piastres.

Such was the background of the Orabi Revolution. In connection
with this L. Baer, in his *Social Studies in Modern Egypt*\(^12\) mentions

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8 Blunt, *The Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt* (translated
into Arabic) Cairo, 1927, pp. 238.
9 Translated in Cairo in 1927, p. 238.
10 *The Betrayal of Egypt*, (translated into Arabic), 1964, p. 238.
11 Se-Taik, Ahmed Abdel Rehim *Egypt and the Egyptian Question (1878-
1882)*, Cairo 1965, p. 83.
that in 1874 the farmers staged an armed resistance movement in the area between Sohag and Girga against the collectors. Considerable groups left their villages for the hills and formed armed bands that engaged in various activities including warfare against tax collectors.

The farmer element was, therefore, effective and prominent in the Orabi Revolution and assumed many forms of helping:

1. Donations by farmers. At that time the State Treasury was quite empty after the English financial controller took all the funds available in the Treasury and fled to the British fleet just a few days before the war. These donations were given by farmers or small landowners, the Omdehsand, the Sheikhs of the villages.\textsuperscript{13}

Included in such donations are the crops which the farmers obtained by attacking the lands of rich people, such as happened in Gharbieh and Kalubieh.\textsuperscript{14}

2. A serious social change came into existence when the farmers took the land by force and distributed it among themselves, as in Minieh Behera and Assiut.

3. In some regions the farmers rose against the Greek moneylenders, especially at Benha.

4. Farmers volunteered for the ranks of the Orabi Army. They armed themselves and gathered along the shores of Manzala lake.\textsuperscript{15}

Generally speaking, it can be said that the Egyptian farmers saw in the Orabi Revolution an opportunity to free themselves from injustice under which they had labored for so many generations. Their participation in the Revolution took the form of a popular movement in the countryside where big landowners dominated. The social phase of this movement was clear in the fact that the farmers tried to take the land for themselves since they felt that it was their own: they were its real lord. However, it is still true that although the farmers' role in the revolution was strongly felt, Orabi failed to invest their movement. Had he acted otherwise, the result of the Revolution might have been quite different. We shall see a similar gross failure on the part of the 1919 Revolutionary leaders and even among the leaders of the 1952 Revolution.

\textsuperscript{13} Documents House, "The Orabi Revolution Papers", Mahfeza 1-4.

\textsuperscript{14} Documents House, "The Arabic Revolution Papers", Mahfeza 1-4.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, Mahfeza 8.
The countryside under the British occupation and protection (1882-1919)

A widespread misunderstanding among most historians is the belief that the British Occupation was friendly to farmers, who wore the blue Galabiehs. Such was the allegation of Cromer, the first British Commissioner of the occupation. In his book entitled *Modern Egypt* Cromer put forth this false statement which most English officials in Egypt propagated. The reason for this misunderstanding, perhaps, was that the occupation authorities tried to attract the Egyptian farmers by decreasing taxes, eliminating the corrupt Turkish officials, making fari in the distribution of irrigation water and abolishing corvée (corvée was abolished in 1882 and taxes reformed in 1894). However, these arrangements did not radically affect the problems of the farmers, because the most serious problem of Egyptian peasants was misdistribution of land ownership.

The British occupation period saw the increase of foreign landholdings as a result of the peasants' inability to pay their debts to foreign usurers. There are many instances of this. It is enough, however, to cite only one. In the Mudiria of Assiut alone, in the period from 1885 to 1895, there were 126 cases of selling small peasants' lands because of overdue taxes. These lands went to the big owners.16

In the period between 1893 and 1903, the number of seizures of peasants' lands on account of overdue taxes reached 23,154 on an area of 190,638 feddans against a sum of E.E. 295,886. In 26,400 cases the land was actually sold, the area totalling 53,880 feddans, most of which was in Gharbieh and Sharkieh.17

At the same time the number of landless peasants reached more than a million.18 Land banks did not offer any help to alleviate the peasants' burden (neither the Land Bank, which is the oldest bank to be established in Egypt, nor the Egyptian Agricultural Bank, founded in 1902 to lend to farmers and to protect their ownership).

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16 National Archives. “A research of the Sale of the Lands and Palmtrees of the Assiut Madrich in the year 1885”, Filinigna 1620. Turkish Department.


A new phenomenon appeared during this period: the emergence of a new class of middlemen benefitting from agriculture. These accumulated fortunes at the expense of the farmlands and they included farm labor contractors and other middlemen who controlled the market of agricultural labor.

The peasants' position during the First World War

1. During the First World War new burdens were put on the Egyptian peasants as the price of cotton dropped from 20 rials before the war to about 10 rials.

2. Credit banks stopped lending money, whereas land banks pressed demands for the recovery of their loans.

3. The Government pressed for collection of taxes and ordered the tax collectors and European governors to take the collection of Government dues very seriously. All these factors forced many peasants to sell their cotton at the lowest prices. The government also compelled most peasants to sell any ornaments, jewelry, cattle and poultry to pay the rest of the dues.

4. An increase in prices of basic commodities accompanied the decrease in cotton prices. There were, however, some prominent features in the persecution of peasants represented by the recruitment of Egyptian peasants to work for the British authorities during the war, in Egyptian Labourers' Corps. Egyptian folklore records this in a sad song with the famous opening lines "My Country, O My Country, the authority took my son... O my dearest I want to return home".

Similar expressions were current among peasants in particular to show the injustice to which the Egyptian peasants were subjected by being forced to participate in the war through the E.L.C.

This compulsion is considered to be the main reason behind the peasants' great participation in the 1919 Revolution. There are a number of points to be made about the peasants joining the British Army. Of these:

I. The Egyptian peasants joining the British army did not do so as volunteers, as is often stated. There were all kinds of compulsion and coercion.

II. The Egyptian Administration's policy of intervening to capture peasants and send them away to the laborers' corps was, in its turn, a voluntary action on the part of Egyptian Officials, as British writers pictured it. It is a black spot in the history of British domination in
Egypt, that corvée has become an official policy directed to hundreds of thousands of Egyptians.

III. The claim of voluntary participation, which British documents attempted to circulate, is due to the British Authorities' attempt to reconcile what the British commander said on November 7, 1914 ("Britain will not ask Egyptian people to give any aid in the current war") and their actual practices in Egypt during the war. The most prominent of these practices was to recruit peasants in the service of the British military effort. British documents indicate that the number of Egyptian laborers working with the British army gradually increased as the theatres of operation widened. (Iraq, France, Salonica, Rhodes and Palestine). This number reached 24,700 laborers in 1917 and in 1918 it reached 320,714. The British Authorities called this 'recruitment of peasants' in official press.

What is to be regretted is that many village heads and other officials used their powers to settle personal scores between them and certain village families, or to attain personal ends. 19

An example of these officials was Ibrahim Pasha Malim who was Moudir of Girga during the year 1916 and the first half of 1917. 20

There were also many others. Government officials used to enter villages and wait for the peasants to return at sunset. Then they would treat them like animals, choosing the fittest for service. If anyone rejected this "compulsory volunteering" he would be whipped until he accepted. In this way even children of 14 and old men of 70 were taken by force.

The Egyptian laborers worked under very severe conditions, particularly in Gallipoli and Palestine. British documents estimate their number at 500,000 peasants, whereas Arab historians put them at more than a million (1,170,000).

In addition to recruiting the peasants in laborers' corps, the military authorities resorted to confiscating agricultural crops, animals and cattle. They took these commodities at the lowest prices, far below market. Every district was ordered to deliver a certain amount of cereals to the army at these low prices. Sometimes the farmers were asked

19 Al-Ahram, July 23, 1972. The Corvée of Egyptian Workers by the British Authorities During the first World War, Dr. Yunan Labib Rizq.

20 National Archives, The Service Record of Ibrahim Malim Pacha, the Madir of Behira, No. 28293, Rach 64.
to give more than they had. This was the background of the 1919 Revolution. Historians used to place the start of this Revolution on November 13th, when Salad Zaghlul and his two colleagues went to the British High Commissioner Reynold Wingate, to discuss with him Egypt's independence. This is a false start because the 1919 Revolution had already started before that.

The 1919 revolution and the peasant

In a letter sent by the British High Commissioner to the British Foreign Ministry on September 15, 1918, we find clear indications that several incidents had occurred in the moudriehs during May of the same year. There were many casualties as a result of the peasants' resistance to the orders of the local authorities. This resistance, however, did not change into widespread disturbances, but it indicated what could happen in 1919. In fact, the march of events in 1919 gave the Revolution its violent aspect and introduced the republican and social dimensions. No sooner had a demonstration taken place in Cairo than the Egyptian countryside boiled over with a revolutionary movement which was based on 1) the disruption of communications, and 2) the taking over of police stations and grain stores.

On March 14, 1919 the peasants in Menoufieh attacked the police station at Menauf where a number of peasants, gathered by the authorities to join the ELC, were still held. These peasants were released by the outraged masses and the station was burned down. 21

The next day the Revolution reached dangerous dimensions when there were organized attacks on means of communication in all regions. 22

The Upper Egypt modiriehs started these attacks in the period from the 13th to the 15th and from the 17th to the 18th of March.

21 50 years Since the 1919 Revolution, Shetham's Report to Curzon 25 March, p. 221

22 For more details see:
2. Mohamed Sabry, The Egyptian Revolution (in French)
3. Valentine Chiral, The Egyptian Problem.
4. Abdel Azim Ramadan, The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Egypt, from 1919 to 1952.
5. 50 years since the 1919 Revolution
They were followed in a no less violent way by the Gharbieh, Menoufieh, and Dakahlieh.

In Lower Egypt the Revolution took the same form as in Upper Egypt, that is, disruption of communications to Cairo and the districts, and the taking over of police stations. There were republican tendencies in Zifta which was completely under the control of the revolutionary masses and a revolutionary committee was formed. It declared Zifta independent, lowered the flag and raised a nationalist flag. In Minia, the revolutionary committee did the same and declared a republic.

There is controversy about this historical phenomenon. In its final evaluation it is a revolutionary event but its revolutionary nature is limited. The revolutionary aspect is seen in the declaration of independence, whereas the limited aspect is represented by the setting up of a government to safeguard land ownership in Zifta, if not in the whole Madria. The most important and glaring event in the present revolution is the battle which took place between revolutionaries and British soldiers at Al-Emdan in the Garbia modirieh. This village soon fell, while at Atai Al-Baroud British soldiers surrounded the revolutionaries.

The revolutionary masses attacked the property of Ibrahim Halim Pacha, the Madier of Behira at Damanhur. It is a fact that the Turkish flag was raised in some villages. There were clashes between peasants and Greek shop owners. Kafir Al-Sheikh was one place where violent battles took place. The fighting between the British and the peasants was heaviest in the Delta. On the other hand, the peasants at Bulag Al-Dakrour Badrshein, Hamamdia and Beni Suif attacked railway stations on March 15th.

British documents indicate that heavy fighting took place in the Wasteh district. Wasteh was one of the districts that witnessed the most violent battles in Upper Egypt, which raged between Wasteh itself and the city of Beni Swif. However, the most bloody incident in the revolution happened in the Assiut Modirieh and in particular at Dairot and Deri Mawass. The train attacked by peasants in that area was full of British officers and men, a large number of whom were killed. These districts only fell when the British authorities sent military reinforcements from Cairo down the Nile to Assiut. Yet violent clashes occurred between these reinforcements and the peasants at Dairot and Assiut. One of the revolutionary hot spots in Upper Egypt was the village of Shalosh, where a battle took place between the Nile-born reinforcements and the revolutionaries. Documents point out another attack south of the Nizaly Ganoub station where fighting occurred between the peasants and the British forces travelling on the Nile. The Gizen
modirieh was the scene of many outrages. Battles took place at Karf Al-Showam, Imbaba district. British airplanes flew over the villages of Ayat and Matania and bombed the villagers.

Egyptians still remember the British storming on March 25, of the two villages of Azizeia and Badsheim where they pillaged and set fire to the houses. The same happened at Nazlat Al-Shobak on March 30, and at Sharkia, particularly at the village of Shabanat. Zagazig district witnessed similar incidents. Again, the same acts were repeated in three other villages at the town of Etai Al-Baroud, (there are many details to be found in “Two years after the 1919 Revolution”, published by the Cairo daily newspaper Al-Ahram, and based on British documents.)

We must draw the conclusion that the violent reaction on the part of the British authorities in their crushing of the peasant movement concealed the fear of these authorities of the probability that the movement might change from a national liberation revolution to a social revolution. This fear was shared by the bourgeoisie, the big landowners and even the Wafd leadership.

In fact, the apprehensions of British authorities were justified: for British documents indicate that in some modiriehs the peasants revolted against big landowners and pillaged large farms. Such incidents occurred at Kafr Al-Sheikh and in Assiut. Those who deny the social dimension of the peasants' revolt in 1919 are gravely mistaken. The elements of social unrest and friction between peasants and big landowners had existed since the Orabi Revolution and continued during the occupation. There are proofs to this in Dr. Ali Barakat’s Ph.D. thesis dealing with “The development of landownership in Egypt and its influence on political life”. Fikry Abaza mentions an episode in his book (The Laughing and the Crying) concerning the 1919 revolution which indicates this social dimension. He recalls that he and some other educated people belonging to the bourgeoisie tried to stop peasants who were attempting to take over the property of Mohammed Mahmud Pacha in Assiut. Mr. Abaza says that “the angry masses tried to burn Mohammed Soliman’s palace in Assiut. When some people tried to stop them saying that his son was one of those exiled to Malta, one of the attackers replied, ‘Did Mahmud Pacha distribute loans to the hungry? We want food’.”

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This social dimension led some writers such as Valentine Chirol in his book *The Egyptian Problem* to think that it was due to the influence of the Soviet revolution in 1917. In fact, this claim is totally unfounded. The 1919 revolution in Egypt was far from being influenced by the Soviet revolution for several reasons, most important of which are the following: One: The geographic distance between Egypt and the Soviet Union. The Egyptian revolution is not like that of Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, which is near enough to the Soviet Union to be financed and supplied with weapons. Neither is it like the revolution in Iraq in the twenties which was supplied by the Soviet Consul in Karmen Shah in Iran. Egypt was far from the Soviet Union, which did not at the time have a naval force in the Mediterranean.

Two: The Egyptian leadership belonged to middle and big landowners. It is true that the peasants’ move to seize lands has resulted in dividing the Egyptian bourgeois leadership into two parts: the liberal Constitutionalist group which represents big landowners left the Wafd while the remaining leadership retained medium landowners under the command of Sa’ad Zaglul. Strangely enough, when the same man came to power in 1924, he immediately got himself into a quarrel with the Communist party which was based in Alexandria. As a result of this clash the Communist party was dealt with and its leaders fled or were brought to trial. Evidence for this attitude is to be found also in an episode recorded by Mr. Ali Selim, Sa'ad Zaglul’s secretary. He says that he heard that a commintern delegation visited Sa’ad Zaglugl during his exile in Malta to establish cordial relations between him and the commintern. Sa’ad Zaglul, however, categorically rejected this saying that it was not good for Egyptian society to tum to communism.24

There is no doubt that the Wafd leadership drew its strength in all conflicts from 1919 and after from the peasant masses. But it is also certain that it never forwarded the idea of land distribution. Consequently the program of the nationalist movement was incapable of exploiting the strength of Egyptian peasants fully. It can be said that Egyptian peasants, in the period from 1919 to 1952, were depended upon to support uprisings but were not allowed, even by the nationalist leadership, to organize themselves politically or professionally in a way to enable any leadership during that period to use them against antinationalist

24 Al-Echnin (Monday) Newspaper, August 23, 1948, Ali Selim was the head of Sa’ad Zaglul’s personal secretarial body.
forces whether Egyptian or foreign. This is the most prominent error of Egyptian revolutions. The Orabi Revolution committed this error to a certain extent, so did the Mostapha Kamel movement but to a worse degree. The 1919 revolution also committed it. It can be said that although the 1952 revolution distributed lands to peasants, no action was taken by earlier revolutions to invest the peasantry, it refused to organize the masses of Egyptian peasants so as to use them against its external or internal enemies. These masses remained to a large extent idle and were spectators without participation in the country’s affairs.

Even when the Egyptian army attacked Barlif in 1973, peasants in the villages around were not organized or armed to participate, even as rear lines, in this battle. This largely explains the ease of the Israeli penetration into the West Arm of the Red Sea extending from the south of Ismailia through Deversoir to the outskirts of Suez. I visited this area immediately after the war and came to the conclusion that had the various villages in the area been armed, however modestly, they would have stopped or at least delayed this penetration.

In conclusion, it can be said that in the important Egyptian revolutions, particularly those of 1882 and 1919, the peasants played a fundamental role, though more the role of spectators than of participants. Nevertheless, they actually joined in the revolution’s events. This is due to the nature of the leadership of Egyptian revolutions, including that of 1919.

In view of this it is not strange to find Sa’ad Zaglul saying in his memoirs that he was surprised when he was in Malta, to hear of the Egyptian peasant movement. Mohamed Farid expresses the same surprise in his unpublished memoirs.

The surprise of these two leaders reveals the type of mentality which refuses to believe in, or totally rejects, the Egyptian peasants’ potential for revolutionary action.

The conclusion which the present writer wished to stress is that in an undeveloped country like Egypt, depending principally on agriculture and where the percentage of peasants in the population reaches about 90%, no genuine revolution can be successful unless it takes into consideration the capacity of peasants for revolutionary action if their abilities are organized and accepted as such.