

Gets Second Wind

After 12 Years, Nasser Reduces Arbitrary Power

By Patrick Seale

© 1964, The London Observer.

CAIRO — For 12 years now Republican Egypt has celebrated the anniversary of its revolution with growing flourish and solemnity.

This week the tone of the celebrations was undeniably steadier and more sober. It was as if the Egyptian revolution, after a decade of breathless struggle and improvisation, had suddenly found its second wind.

The change has been striking over the past six months. At home, the provisional constitution and the National Assembly have started a cautious move away from the arbitrary exercise of power. In Arab affairs a more realistic formula for Egypt's rela-

News Analysis

tions with her neighbours has emerged over the last few weeks.

Avoiding the trap of union or merger which experience with Syria showed to be intolerably burdensome, Egypt has now signed "co-ordination treaties" with Iraq and Yemen which provide only for alignment of policies without loss of sovereignty.

In relations with Russia, China and America, President Nasser continues to display his usual skill. He has turned the tightrope of non-alignment into a highway. He has moved into such a position of prominence in the non-aligned and Afro-Asian

worlds that no one great power can afford to allow him to become wholly dependent on any other.

But there are flaws in this success story. At home new institutions are as yet little more than a facade, and the process of political liberalization has been so cautious as to be almost imperceptible. Egypt continues to live under security laws virtually indistinguishable from the martial law which was suspended with a fanfare on March 23.

On the following day—two days before the first session of the National Assembly—a new decree was quietly issued: Law 119 of 1964 empowering the President to arrest any person detained at any time between 1962 and 1964 or who had fallen under

sequestration or been affected by socialist laws.

The shadow of this legislation and of the powerful state security apparatus built up over the past decade falls across all

political activity. It is in real danger of killing in the egg the Arab Socialist Union—Nasser's latest and most ambitious attempt at creating a nation-wide party organization.