

# Rebels Against Slavery

A. VASILYEV

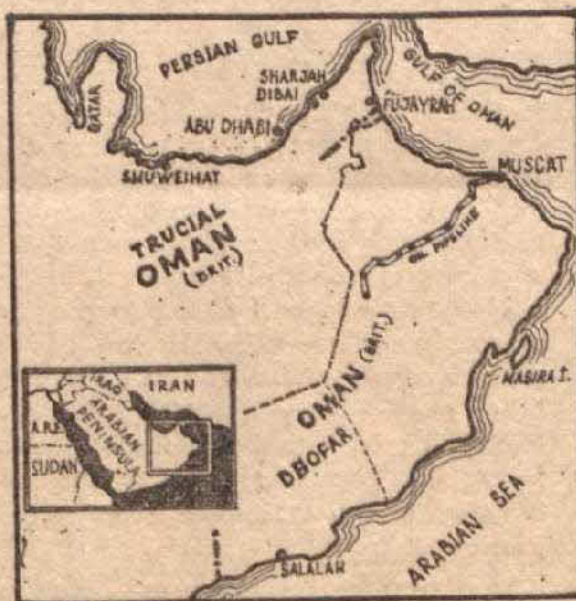
Another is to vilify the efforts of the progressive forces and discredit the realistic policy of the West German leaders who advocate normalization of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union and other European socialist countries, and to frustrate the ratification of the treaties signed by the Federal Republic with the U.S.S.R. and Poland.

It is not by chance that the *piece de résistance* of the "grey general" memoirs, according to *Die Welt*, is the "revelation" about the fate of Martin Bormann, chief of the Nazi party chancellery, who became the Führer's right-hand man in the final period of Nazi rule. Many Western newspapers and magazines reported that after the defeat of the Nazis Bormann fled to Latin America, underwent a plastic operation to alter his appearance, and was hiding there to this day. Gehlen, however, alleges that Bormann was a "Soviet spy" (!), that he "fled to the Russians and died in the U.S.S.R." By this provocative fabrication, Gehlen and those who guided his pen are trying to reinforce the revanchist legend about the "stab in the back" (meaning that the Nazi generals lost the war not as a result of the Soviet Army's crushing blows, but because of the traitors in Hitler's headquarters). Moreover, they are trying to draw a transparent parallel with our time: today, too, you see, there are people in Bonn who are "bartering away the interests of the nation."

Such, in our view, are the main reasons why Gehlen's memoirs have appeared.

At the very end of the war Gehlen was promoted, out of turn, to the rank of lieutenant general by Hitler for organizing espionage against the Soviet Union. Later on, in reward for his energetic subversive activities against socialist countries, American intelligence presented him with a villa in the Bavarian townlet of Belg. It is rumored that some time ago the West German admirers of the "grey general" among the big industrial and financial tycoons made him a present of a yacht. This time, too, no doubt his latest service in adding fuel to the dimming fires of the cold war will earn the veteran anti-Communist another reward.

V. Chernyavsky



TWO years ago I was one of a group of Soviet journalists who were the first to visit the liberated zones of Dhofar, the southwestern province of the British-ruled sultanate of Oman. Now I have again had the opportunity to visit Dhofar. What changes have there been? Would I meet any of my old friends? How was the armed struggle of the patriots in the mountains of Dhofar progressing? Following the guerilla paths over the sun-scorched mountains and through deserts and forests, I sought the answers to these questions. We slept in caves and dugouts, listened to the doleful songs of the men at the campfires, visited training centres of the People's Liberation Army and open-air schools, villages burnt to the ground and fishing hamlets.

From Southern Yemen to Qatar, on the coast of the Arabian Peninsula stretch the last possessions of the British crown in the Arab East—the shield of the British oil empire on the Persian Gulf. The biggest of these possessions is the sultanate of Oman, with the seven sheikhdoms of so-called Trucial Oman to its north. In these British possessions in Arabia practically the most archaic system on the globe—feudal despotism—is preserved to this day.

"The military bases, foreign policy, the army, the banks, oil, investments,

Alexei Vasilyev is a *Pravda* foreign affairs commentator.

foreign trade—all are in British hands," the Paris bourgeois *Monde* writes of the "sovereign" sultanate of Oman. "Rather than the modest building in the centre of the capital which houses the Council of Ministers and the other ministries, the real centre of power appears to be the headquarters of the Sultan's armed forces.... More than 180 British officers command the armed forces of Oman, train them, lead them into battle against the revolutionary guerillas of the province of Dhofar and perform many other functions. As in most underdeveloped countries, the army is the sole organized force and its non-military role is enormous." Let me add that in this army, whose maintenance costs approximately £20 million annually, there are hardly any Omani soldiers; it consists mainly of mercenaries.

Dhofar is considered just about the most backward area of the sultanate. In its wooded mountains and its arid deserts the prefeudal tribal system still prevails. In a few coastal towns feudalism is highly coloured with slavery. There the word "slave" has tangible, real meaning, not merely a symbolic one. In Salalah, the administrative centre of Dhofar, and on the coast thousands of people are owned by others, can be bought and sold like cattle.

The young men of Dhofar illegally—to leave the country was formally forbidden—emigrated to the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf, where labour power was wanted. There a new world opened up to them; they learned of such unfamiliar concepts as "national liberation," "progress," "socialism." And they came to realize the need for struggle against the colonialists. In 1964 there took place in one of the Arab countries the constituent conference of the Dhofar Liberation Front at which a programme of armed struggle was adopted.

On the eve of the planned revolt soldiers raided homes in Salalah and other towns where Front leaders were sheltering. British counter-intelligence had got wind of the planned uprising and forestalled it.



### SAID ALI RETURNS TO THE FIGHTING RANKS

One of the men the General Leadership of the Front sent to Salalah to prepare for the uprising was Said Ali.

Just by looking at him—big-boned, sturdily-built, with an intelligent and kind face—I would never have thought he was a man who had gone through physical and mental hell. His iron will and unusually strong constitution helped him to survive.

I met him at an anti-aircraft post covering a caravan road. The broad green crown of a fig tree protected us from the searing sun. A few camels and a flock of goats huddled in the shade. Men free of duty at the heavy machine-guns hidden in trenches lay resting in a prickly thicket nearby. The landscape bore a resemblance in some way to that of the Crimea.

"I was seized in the home of relatives," Said recalled. "There was a provocateur in the organization. They began at once to question me under torture. For six years I knew nothing about the fate of my comrades."

Said was locked up in the horrible medieval Kut-Galal prison at Muscat. To land there was to be as good as dead. The gaolers mistreat prisoners as the fancy takes them, each to the best of his ingenuity. Some they leave without light for years, into the cells of others they throw snakes or hungry rats. It fell to Said to be put into a concrete cell: five men to five square metres. On summer days the walls heated up, probably to 60-70°C—and the prisoners were given no water. Six years... No letters, no newspapers, no news from outside except for that brought by fresh prisoners, no book but the Koran, which Said learned by heart so that he could have entered into a dispute with any theologian.

All the same, he learned one day that a real war was being fought in Dhofar against the colonialists and their hirelings, and his heart leapt with joy: his comrades had not given up, they were battling.

The British had not succeeded in destroying the whole Front organization. On June 9, 1965, simultaneous attacks on the British military camps at Lubh, Rezzok and Girzaz signalled the beginning of armed struggle in the mountains of Dhofar. Gradually the forces of the rebels grew, their arms improved. Regular units were formed and these later merged to form the People's

Liberation Army. The strategic situation changed: instead of British protectorates to the west of Dhofar there appeared in 1967 the friendly state of Southern Yemen.

In September 1968 the Liberation Front held a second conference in Wadi Hamrin, deep in the liberated areas, at which it adopted a programme designating its aims as being to force the British to withdraw their troops from all the protectorates, to put an end to the reactionary power of the sultans and sheikhs, abolish tribal divisions, introduce fundamental social, economic and cultural reforms, and abolish the exploitation of man by man. Hoping to spread the struggle to all the British possessions in Arabia and to unite with other revolutionary groupings, the delegates decided to name their organization the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Zone of the Persian Gulf.

The third conference was held in mid-June of this year in the Western zone. It set the task of intensifying efforts to unite all the principal patriotic groups in the British protectorates, to expand the scale of the struggle against the colonialists and multiply the numerical strength of the guerilla forces. Formation of a vanguard revolutionary party within the framework of the Popular Front was put on the order of the day.

The armed struggle in the mountains of Dhofar is a constant worry to London. The strategic interests and the astronomical profits of the British oil companies are

at stake. The revolutionary movement in Dhofar quickened ferment in all the British possessions and accelerated the disintegration of feudal regimes—the traditional pillar of the British colonialists. In Oman there was growing resentment at the despotism of the half-mad Sultan Said bin Taimur, who encouraged the slave trade, forbade his subjects to wear trousers or eyeglasses, to listen to the radio or fly in a plane, and stubbornly continued to levy domestic duties. The Sultan, London decided, had to be removed.

The Sultan's hour had come, the *Economist* wrote on July 18 last year. Five days later some two dozen armed men broke into his palace in Salalah and demanded his abdication. With a few devoted slaves the Sultan fought his assailants off and tried to escape through a maze of secret passageways. The details of his capture have never been revealed but it is definitely known that it took the intervention of the British chief of his personal bodyguard, Colonel Turnhill, to make the gravely wounded Sultan sign his abdication. A few hours later he was flown out of the country on a British plane. The director of the all-powerful American-owned Petroleum Development (Oman), which exploits the sultanate's rich oil fields, hailed this as an "historic" event.

The feudal-bourgeois opposition welcomed the news of the coup with joy. But progressive Omanis see that the army remains, as ever, the only power in the country and that the British refuse



Books are the constant companions of these two young National Liberation Army fighters. It is only in the liberated areas that the Dhofar youth have been given the opportunity to study



even to hear of its "Omanization" in the foreseeable future. As before, British counter-intelligence continues to run rampant. To this day Oman has not the personnel to set up its own administration.

The authorities, hoping to pacify the discontented with half-measures, amnestied political prisoners. Those who had survived were released. Only a few individuals, broken by their years of imprisonment, retired from the struggle. The majority made their way through Southern Yemen to Dhofar and joined up with their comrades.

The prison gates opened for Said too. He met his wife and learned that three of his daughters had died while he was in prison. He hid his grief away in a corner of his heart and returned to the struggle.

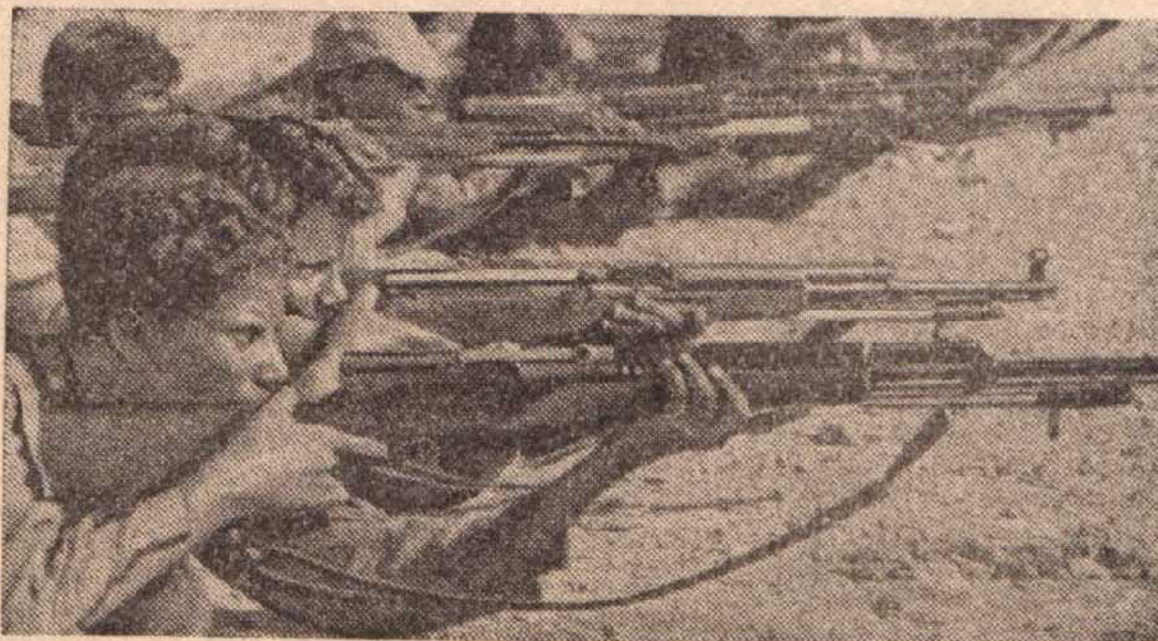
### THE SCIENCE OF HATRED

The anti-aircraft post overlooks a valley where there used to be a PLF training camp. Now all that remains of the camp is a few torn tents, bomb craters, trenches, earth scorched by phosphorous bombs. The camp was evacuated in good time and the British bombed only a model of it left as a bait for their planes, and were met with the fire of heavy machine-guns. Anti-aircraft defence in the liberated zones of Dhofar was new to me. In the last two years air raids had assumed a scale unprecedented in these parts. Barely did a day go by without Strikemasters roaring overhead, it was a rare camping place where we saw no bomb holes, bomb fragments or signs of fire.

The enemy planes are met with machine-gun fire. My Dhofar friends brought me authentic proof of the success of their anti-aircraft defence—the fragments of planes the British never reported as shot down.

In Dhofar, as in other countries where the people have taken up arms in defence of their freedom, the barbarity of the colonialists does not quench the flames of rebellion; on the contrary, it fans hatred. Thousands of young people are pouring into the ranks of the People's Liberation Army, which has made the mountains impregnable to the enemy. Hundreds are undergoing military training in camps.

...The sun blazes mercilessly, even in the shade the temperature is little short of 40°C. The sharp commands of instruc-



Dhofar patriots in training

Photo by author

tors. The parched lips of the trainees—boys and girls both, for here all are equal and carry an equal burden. A leap, a feinting movement, a thrust with gun butt or bayonet. A lesson in bayonet warfare is in progress. Another command. The trainees throw themselves on the ground, take aim at an invisible enemy, fire. Nearby another group is studying the structure of the machine gun.

The lesson is over, the young cadets whoop and race for the nearest water hole—a miserable puddle from which goats and camels and cows drink. We also put our lips to the warm water.

In the course of a few months the trainees learn the art of warfare. The illiterate are taught to read and write and all go through a course of political training.

One evening the commander of the camp invited me to attend a political class. His pupils sat on the ground in a circle under the stars of the velvety Arabian sky. Only the glowing tips of their cigarettes were visible. When anyone wanted to light a cigarette he covered his head with a jacket or cape.

"In the name of the revolution, in the name of those who died for the revolution," the commander began. He spoke of women's role in society, of their exploitation, of the fact that in feudal society they were semi-slaves. Only in countries where there is no exploitation of man by man, he explained, were women fully emancipated.

A discussion began. Each signalled his desire to speak by snapping his fingers. What passionate faith in their

new ideals rang in their words, with what ardent interest these sons and daughters of beggars, shepherds, fishermen, slaves, discussed this and other problems.

The attention the PLF leadership centres on the position of women has a practical purpose. In the mountains women are in the majority; the young men go off to work from time to time.

Even during my first visit to the liberated zones I observed that Arab translations of Lenin's works were eagerly read, that all took a lively interest in Marxism-Leninism. (It is to be regretted that the teachings of Marxism-Leninism sometimes reach the PLF activists at second hand, in distorted versions.) In Dhofar people address each other with the proud word "comrade." To make the nascent bourgeoisie as well as the feudal lords wary of the Popular Front, the colonialists have pinned the label "Communist" to it. This is an old trick of theirs. But the very fact that the ideas of Marxism-Leninism play a part in moulding revolutionary thought in this remote, backward corner of Arabia is a sign of the times. Men who yearn for the true liberation of their country cannot but give consideration to the socialist path.

This will be a hard, very hard path for Dhofar and the whole of Oman. The young revolutionaries have to overcome not only brutal colonialism but savage medievalism, backwardness and tribal divisions.

The Popular Front has trained bold and devoted revolutionary soldiers, well-disciplined, prepared to sacrifice their lives to achieve their goal. "The

Chinese?



free of liberty grows faster when it is watered with the blood of fighting men"—I heard this saying repeatedly in Dhofar and there it did not seem a pose or a sign of extremism.

One of my old friends, a member of the executive committee of the General Leadership who had accompanied me in my former travels, I found in Aden. He had been wounded and undergone treatment there. When we met he was about to return to his post again. A second friend I found in a training camp, much thinner and half-starved. He had just come back from a battle zone and joked about how uncomfortable it was to make tea under enemy fire. When I inquired about my third friend the men within hearing bowed their heads. One rummaged in his sack and handed me a leaflet containing a portrait of my friend and the information that he had fallen in heroic battle. The prestige of the commanders and commissars is very high. They take upon themselves the hardest jobs, the biggest burdens.

In a cave which served as a transfer base for caravans a wounded young soldier, hardly more than an adolescent, met a friend of his. In line with the custom followed even by strangers, they pressed their cheeks to each other three times and smacked their lips as though kissing. Then they sat down and the new arrival told his friend about the fighting near Salalah.

"The other day we attacked a British military post, showered the barracks with grenades," he related.

"Oh, I'm afraid I'll never be able to hurl grenades again, my shoulder's hurt," moaned the wounded youth.

No British mercenary, fighting in a strange land just for money, can compare with these soldiers. To shoot innocent people and lounge around in camps—that's all right, but to go poking around those damned mountains—no, sirree.

The mountains of Dhofar have been completely cleared of the British and their mercenaries. The General Leadership of the PLF has now divided Dhofar into four military and political zones—the Western, the Ho Chi Minh, the Red Line and the Eastern. In each its own territorial formation operates. The most densely populated are the Red Line zone (central) and the Eastern. And there the bitterest battles are being

fought. The men steal down to the coast from the mountains, under cover of night make their way to Salalah which is surrounded by several rows of barbed wire, attack the airfield and posts within the city, mine the roads to hamper the movement of military cars—there are no others in Dhofar.

### SWEET WATER

Campfires burn in the ravine, their smoke wreathing the treetops. This is the kitchen of the Western zone base. Full pots of rice. The rice is served on huge aluminium trays. In other pots is a sharp sauce of tomatoes and goat fat; on holidays it also contains pieces of meat. For "dessert" there is very strong, very sweet tea. When we are on the march we drink the tea first and then eat the rice. This order astonished me at first but after a while I realized that, like other local customs, this one was dictated by the experience of generations: a man is fired after a long trek, to cook rice takes time, the simplest thing is tea—it refreshes one and restores the water and salt balance.

In the mountains of Arabia one comes to appreciate the value of water. All the people from round about gather at the rare water holes or wells. One sees remarkable facial types there—mixtures of Arab, Indian and African blood. Brown-skinned, sometimes black. The middle-aged peasant who has just come up with a few camels is bearded and long-haired; he looks like the Christ of Ivanov's painting. Now there has come with a flock of goats an elderly peasant woman with a big ring in her nose—sign of the married woman. Her blue gown trails on the ground in back and is caught up high in front. A girl of rare beauty, clad from head to foot in black, has filled a wineskin with water with the aid of a tin can labeled "British Petroleum," has balanced it on her shoulder and started back for her mountain village—a climb, probably, of five kilometres. I once tried lifting a full wineskin—it seemed to weigh a ton.

Thirst was our usual companion in all our wanderings about the liberated zones of Dhofar. Not once did we feel we had quenched it, no matter how many mugs of tea we drank.

In one narrow valley we came upon men rolling heavy rocks. They were

building a dam to catch rainwater in the wet season. At another place we were shown a big well containing lovely pure water that even seemed cool. Two years ago, on this spot, I had seen a small crack in the rocks from which water was collected in a small tin can. Recently People's Liberation Army engineers blasted the rock and built this well.

Did the Popular Front only build wells, its popularity would be guaranteed, but it does more. Above one coastal village there is quite a big natural spring whose waters flow into a swamp seething with poisonous snakes. A few months ago a model farm was started beside this spring. It is managed by a PLF activist, an agronomist by profession, who dropped his career and went into the mountains to help his comrades. A team of fifteen men cleared and ploughed up the land, built the first ditches, cemented the pools, mounted the first pump. Peasants from the neighbouring cave-villages have already been drawn to the farm. Never was anything like it known in Dhofar before. There a farm of this kind is an attempt to leap centuries.

When we left the village we heard explosions in the distance. Men of the People's Liberation Army, aided by local inhabitants, were building the first motor road across the mountains, and this again was an attempt to catch up with the 20th century at one bound.

In the irrepressible will of the people of this small country to create a society worthy of our time there is an explosive revolutionary power which sets the colonialists and their feudal myrmidons trembling.

The sun set behind the mountain ridge and the oppressive heat was dispelled. We turned on our transistor and a hoarse voice rent the nocturnal silence. We had caught the radio station the British had recently opened in Salalah. At first we could not make out the hysterical outcries but then we gathered that Salalah was fulminating against the Popular Front. And I thought to myself that things must be going very badly for the British troops and their mercenaries if they were giving way to such hysterics.

The voice in Salalah rose to a screech. The calm faces of the PLA men, lit up from time to time by the cigarettes they puffed at, wore a mocking smile.

Dhofar—Moscow