

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

The Al Khalifa Doctrine: No Country Should Accept the Deportees!

Despots Are Always Undiplomatic

Bahrain's Foreign Minister visited London last month, he knew he was swimming against the tide. The world was unanimous in rejecting his logic of not allowing other countries to offer refuge to the Bahraini deportees. Why did his government deport them in the first place? Was the common question by sensible people stunned by the events. The British Foreign Secretary was embarrassed by the whole affair. The Bahraini demand was not appropriate, neither diplomatically, nor legally. The demands of the Bahraini people are just and local. The rejection by the Al Khalifa government of the people's demands for the restoration of the Constitution is neither logical nor constitutional. It was not surprising then that Mr. Douglas Hurd referred the asylum applications to the proper authorities. After all, he represents a government whose democratic heritage and strong adherence to the rule of her own as well as the international laws have given Britain a leading role in world politics. Thus for a small country like Bahrain to blackmail Britain by threatening diplomatic and commercial retribution was a sign of depression and diplomatic affray.

Behind all this lies an indisputable fact; the continuation of the popular uprising in Bahrain is causing enormous embarrassment to the Al Khalifa government. There are protests on daily basis in various parts of the country. Two months after it erupted following the arrest of Sheikh Ali Salman, the uprising is proving hard to be repressed. The government has, so far, failed to contain the popular anger. It has adopted policies that are unlikely to lead to a lasting settlement between the government and the people. The use of live ammunition against unarmed civilians calling for the rule of the Constitution could not be condoned by any government. So far, at least seven people are known to have been killed in the last few weeks. Five of them, Hani Abbas Khamis, Hani Ahmad Al Wasti, Abdul Qader Al Fatlawi, Mohammad Redha Mansoor Ahmed (Al-Hejji) and Hussain Ali Al Safi, were killed by bullets fired by riot police. Hussain Qambar was killed under torture after nails of his fingers and toes were pulled out. Mirza Ali Abdul Redha died as a result of beating by the riot police. There are tens of injured people either in hospitals or at homes. In addition, there are more than 1000 people in detention in various prisons and camps. One of these camps lies at a short distance from Balaj Al Jaza'er, the private beach of the Amir in the south of the country.

Foreign diplomats have been sceptic about the Al Khalifa's handling of the situation. There has been no voice of support to their action either from local organisations or foreign gov-

ernments. The minister of information, Tareq Al Mo'ayyad, has been active in the process of forcing some local clubs to publish advertisements in local press supporting the actions of the government against the people. However, these adverts are known to be officially sanctioned and paid for, and are done against the will of the organisations in question. There is a total rejection of the governmental policies against the uprising, and the government has failed to get the approval for her policies even from the ministers. The Amir has ruled the country by decree for the last twenty years, i.e., since the suspension of the Constitution in 1975. Emergency laws are in force and the State Security Law is the tool by which people are rounded up randomly. Children of ages between 12 and 18 are known to be in detention centres and are subjected to the most abusive treatment in the country's history.

The Al Khalifa government is trying to show a brave face in its crackdown against the people. But the people are now more determined than ever to get their legitimate rights contained in the Constitution regardless of the terror being adopted by the government. The British officer, whose name has recently surfaced in several British and international newspapers, is responsible for the shoot-to-kill policy being adopted against peaceful demonstrators. Although he is in his seventies, he still commands a large team of British officers and local torturers, which is responsible for the countless human rights abuses against the people of Bahrain. For example, Ahmad Zayed, Mariam Al Nedhem, both in their eighties, and Mohammad Ali A'araj, 70, of Duraz, were either hit by bullets or beaten up by riot police and are now confined to their beds. Mr. Mohsin Al Fatlawi and one of his sons were beaten up severely while burying his son, Abdul Qader, who had been killed on 12th January.

This heavy-handed treatment of the people could not be condoned by any sensible person. In fact, none of the allies of the Bahraini government, apart from Saudi Arabia, did express support to the policies of the Al Khalifa. Diplomatic contacts with several governments have re-assured the opposition that the Al Khalifa government has embarrassed her own allies by the repressive policies on one hand, and her refusal to abide by the Constitution of the country. The opposition, on the other hand, has commanded a great admiration from governments in many countries for its perseverance, commitment to the rule of law, peaceful means, and logical demands. Whilst the government attempted, foolishly to play down the extent of the people's disenchantment and the volume of

the uprising, the opposition did not exaggerate the facts. Independent observers have admired the restrained figures often given by the opposition sources of the number of deaths, injuries, detentions and exiles. Those figures have often been corroborated by diplomatic sources.

The surprising has demonstrated the dangers befalling the people in the absence of the rule of the Constitution. The twenty year-experience with the unconstitutional regime has made the people more resolute in their demands for the restoration of the Constitution. In those two decades, the Al Khalifa family has usurped its powers and caused enormous suffering to the people of Bahrain. Thousands were exiled in the eighties, tens were killed under torture and hundreds were imprisoned for long periods. Tens of thousands have been unemployed in a country of a tiny population of not more than 600,000. These facts, which are corroborated by international reports and investigations, have made it impossible for the people to accept a return to the same situation that has prevailed prior to the uprising. If the Al Khalifa had treated the people fairly after the suspension of the Constitution, there would have been less enthusiasm for the Constitution. But the bitter experience has enforced the demands for a return to a more civilised way of government. The events of the last two months have demonstrated the need for international pressure to bear on the Al Khalifa family to accept the verdict of the people on the style of leadership it has offered to the people. A return to the Constitution seems to be the only plausible way forward towards more stable and prosperous society in Bahrain.

Persecution of Activists

Saeed Al-Asbool, an engineering manager at the Ministry of Works, Electricity and Water, was sacked from his post in November after refusing a demand by the Intelligence department to remove his name from the list of people sponsoring the petition calling for the restoration of the parliament and the constitution. A group of lawyers volunteered to defend him. On 1 February, the second session was heard, in which the Ministry of Works submitted its justification for sacking Mr. Al-Asbool. The court was adjourned till 10 March. Mr Al-Asbool managed to win a position in Aluminimum Bahrain. The Intelligence department intervened and prevented his employment.

Mr. Abdulla Al-Zayani, a lawyer, was arrested in early January for 8 days accused of campaigning for the pro-democracy petition. He was severely tortured before his release.

Chronology of Pro-Democracy Uprising

The Al Khalifa Revenge Their Failures by Killing More Citizens and Deporting Opposition Leaders

The situation in Bahrain worsened as a result of the iron-fist policy being implemented by the government. More people were killed bringing the total number of people known to have been killed to seven. They were: Hani Abbas Khamis, 25 years old from Sanabis and Hani Ahmed Al-Wasti, 23 years old from Jidhafs (both killed on 17 December), Haji Mirza Ali Abdul Reda, 65 years old from Qadam (died at home on 20 December after receiving severe police beating on the chest by batons), Hussain Qamber, 18 years old from Madinat Isa, died under torture on 4 January, Abdul Qader Al-Fatlawi, 25 years old from Duraz (killed on 12 January), Mohammed Redah Mansoor Ahmed, 30 years old, from Bani Jamra (died on 26 January after lying in coma caused by a bullet rested in his brain on 12 January), and Husain Ali Al-Safi, 21 years old from Sitra (killed on 26 January). The body of Al-Safi was found the next morning with bullet wounds all over his body.

After keeping quiet for so long, the information minister started speaking to international media. His statement was embarrassing the regime, and in order to recover, leading member of Al Khalifa commissioned Othman Al-Umar of Asharq Al-Awsat to interview them. All statements were contradicting each other and, luckily, the enemies of pro-democracy were stupid enough to expose themselves with falsified news that were being reported and documented differently by international news organisations. Chronology of events is summarised below:

* Mr. Hussein Qambar, 18 years old, died under torture on 4 January. The police encircled the grave yard at Al-Hooraa, and forcibly buried the body in front of his family who were threatened of grave consequences if they called for public gathering to mourn their son.

* The lull in demonstrations was interrupted at 1.45 pm, on 6 January. A group of men and women gathered on the main Budaya Highway, between al Qadam and al Muqshaa villages (in front of the US Ambassador residence) raising placards written in Arabic and English calling for the return of parliament and constitution as well as release of political prisoners. Posters carrying the photos of martyrs were also raised. At 2.35 pm, anti-riot police arrived at the scene. Without any prior warning, the police hailed the demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets. The area was encircled for more than 48 hours with door to door arrests. On 7 January, mass demonstrations took to the streets of Duraz. The usual response from police was the use of bullets that explode in the body causing a hundred glass-type particles to spread in the victim.

* On 9 January, pro democracy demonstrators clashed with police in Bilad-al-Qadeem. The main highway (Sheikh Salman Road) was sealed-off. The demonstrators were showered with a white chemical powder that causes skin and eye irritation. On 10 January, the security forces arrested Sheikh Adel Al-Shu'ala. The latter led the prayers at the Grand Al Sadeq Mosque in Duraz. (He was later deported to Syria).

* At 6.30 pm, on 12 January, the biggest protest in the history of Bahrain erupted. At first, Sanabis, Jidhafs, Aali, Sitra and Duraz went out at roughly the same time. Then, most villages in the north west, in the west and in Sitra went out in mass demonstrations. Riot police deployed live ammunition and many forms of poisonous gas and powder that cause vomiting and collapse of affected individuals. In Duraz, Abdul Qader Al-Fatlawi, 25 years old was killed by police. The next day witnessed a major confrontation between the people of Duraz and police. The latter wanted to bury Mr. Al-Fatlawi and prevent mourning gatherings. The clashes resulted in many injuries including people aged over 70. In Bani Jamra, police fired on demonstrators. A bullet penetrated the head of Mohammed Redha Mansoor Ahmed (31 years old and father of three children). He went in coma and died on 26 January.

* In the mean time, the government continued its policy of refusing entry to citizen returning from abroad. For example: Hamid Hassan Al-Madeh, his wife and seven children, Hani al Bannay, Fuad Mubarak, Ibrahim Ali Al Setri, Ibrahim Al Sanadi, Mahmood Al Ghoreifi and Moneer Abdul Rasool, were refused entry and deported to Dubai and Lebanon. Protest and demonstrations continued in most area between 12 and 15 January.

* On 15 January, the leader of the uprising, Sheikh Ali Salman was forcibly exiled to Dubai. With him were two other leaders: Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Sayed Haider Al-Setri. The latter were arrested in the morning and deported with Sheikh Ali Salman on the same plane. All three were given tickets bound to Damascus. The decision was seemingly taken in rush and since there was no direct plane to Damascus that day, they were deported to Dubai (with a route bound to Damascus). The three leaders changed route and arrived in London on 17 January. In his first comment to BBC Arabic Service, Sheikh Ali Salman stated that "in whatever country I am, I shall respect its laws". However he confirmed "the determination of the Bahraini opposition to call upon the government of Bahrain to respect the legal agreement which it had signed with the people" referring to the 1973 constitution. Following his deportation, huge demonstrations were reported in Sanabis, Jidhafs and Daih call for his return together with other deported leaders.

* On 18 January, a fourth opposition leader was forcibly deported to Syria. Sheikh Adel Al Shua'la was arrested on 10 January and stayed in jail until his deportation. On 19 January, demonstrations flared up in Duraz, Sanabis and Sitra protesting against the deportation of the four leaders. A spokesman for the ministry of interior was quoted by Asharq Al Awsat (19 January) putting the number of detainees at 400. The actual number is three times as much. Prisoners were held in concentration camps in Mahmeyyat Al-Areen and Belaj Al-Jazayer.

* On 23 January, the Bahrain Foreign Minister announced that he was starting a tour to Paris and London to counter the opposition activities. He declared that his London visit

would concentrate on requesting the British Foreign Office to intervene and refuse Sheikh Ali Salman and other two leaders political asylum in Britain. On 24 January, the official daily "Akhbar Al-Khaleej" published an editorial with full anger at those who do not declare their denunciation of the pro democracy movement. This was a message to local businessmen and dignitaries who refused to publish any condemnation.

* On 24 January, the three leaders, Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Sayed Haider Al-Setri, sent a letter to the Bahrain Embassy in London requesting a meeting with the visiting Foreign Minister. The Embassy failed to answer the letter and follow-up phone calls. Also on this day, Sheikh Mohammed Ali Hussain was forcibly deported to Iran on board a ship. Two other people were also deported: Ali Mohammed (a member of the Sunni community) and Mohammed Nasser.

* On 26 January, a day before the scheduled meeting between the Bahrain and British Foreign Ministers, the Bahraini Opposition staged a press conference in the Jubilee Room of the British House of Commons. The press conference was attended by all major news organisations, and Sheikh Ali Salman outlined the approach and demands of the opposition.

* In the press conference it was announced that eighteen British MPs submitted motions No. 457 and 458 to the House of Commons. Motion No. 457 stated "that this House deplores the emergency visit to London by the Foreign Minister of the Bahrain Royal dictatorship Shaikh Mohammed al-Khalifa, who has demanded a meeting with the Foreign Secretary of Her Majesty's Government to demand the deportation of Bahraini opposition leaders Sheikh Ali-Salman, Sheikh Hamza al-Deiri and Sayed Haider al-Setri, who were illegally expelled by the dictatorships on 15th January, following weeks of rioting in Bahrain in which demonstrators have been shot dead by the British Mercenary led security apparatus, SIS, which, together with Saudi Arabian forces have been employed by the dictatorship to crush demands for human rights and democracy; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to stand up to the dictators of Bahrain and inform them that Britain will determine its own decisions on the political asylum to those fleeing persecution in their own countries in accordance with the United Kingdom's international obligations and its tradition of safe haven for victims of dictatorships". Motion No 458 concentrated on condemning Ian Henderson who presides over the security apparatus.

* On the same day, 26 January, demonstration broke out in many parts of Bahrain. In sanabis, Abo Saibaa, Daih, Bilad-al-Qadeem and Sitra, live ammunition was used against the demonstrators. A 21 years old youth, Husain Ali Al-Safi was shot dead. The body was found the next morning with bullets penetrating his body in many places.

* The British Foreign Minister informed his Bahrain counterpart that political asylum is dealt with independently by the Home Office

Saudi Intervention Sets-Off Alarms in the Gulf

Saudi Forces Participate in Suppressing Pro-Democracy Demonstrations

Saudi National Guards (SNG) played a significant role in the violent suppression of pro democracy demonstrations in Bahrain. Demonstrators describe SNG personnel as "ruthless" black uniformed and carried on black Armoured Fighting Vehicles. They hardly talk, and often over-react to any situation. Journalists estimate up to 4,000 or two brigades were sent across the Causeway that links Bahrain islands to mainland Saudi Arabia.

Some Western diplomats tried to play down this violation of Bahrain international territories by claiming that SNGs were despatched during the GCC conference which coincided with the start of the uprising. However press reports and eyewitnesses stressed that the largest of the Saudi contingency crossed the Causeway well after the GCC summit. Indeed many road blocks especially in Manama, Bilad Al Qadeem, Duraz and Sanabis were manned by Saudis.

The SNG is a 40,000 strong force under the command of crown prince Abdulla Bin Abdul Aziz who is the Heir Apparent and First Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom. It has armoured brigades and drawn mainly from Bedoon tribes and mercenaries from Baluchestan and other Pakistani provinces. It acts as a militia for internal security and to counter the influence of the army which is under the command of prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Defence and Aviation Minister.

Saudi direct intervention in quelling the pro democracy uprising in Bahrain raises a number of questions, the most vexing of which is: how independent are the political decisions of Al Khalifa ruling family? For it seems that the Saudi grip on Bahrain is now more than just

a regional security interdependence.

Already Saudi Arabia enjoys a massive influence on Bahraini affairs. In 1982, Bahrain finally succumbed to Saudi intimidation and surrendered Abou Sa'fah off-shore oil-rich area. It is twice the size of Bahrain and dotted by small islands the most known of these are Greater Bahrain and Lesser Bahrain. Until 1982, these two beautiful islands were holiday resorts for Bahrainis and expatriates living in Bahrain. Most importantly, however, is that Abou Sa'fah is very rich in oil and natural gas. The Saudi government "promised" to help Bahrain economically, by allowing it to sell part of the oil in the area, but this was not part of the legal documents. Since then, Bahrain's share of oil revenue from Abou Sa'fah oil fields has increase from 50% to 72%. Thus in 1993 Bahrain was selling 72,000 barrel per day (bpd), bringing an annual revenue of BD184m (\$520m). Meanwhile the annual revenue from the mainland Bahraini oil fields in Jebel Dukhan and from the refinery was BD 163m (\$460m.) Oil and gas revenue represents 64% of government income that year, which means that Saudi Arabia directly controls 34% of the total revenue of Bahraini government. This economic stranglehold gives Riyadh a powerful position to dictates its policy on Bahrain.

The fact of the matter is that the whole of Abou Sa'fah has always belonged to Bahrain, even before the Kingdom had existed some 60 years ago. In 1954 Saudi Arabia threatened to stop supply of crude oil to Bahrain refinery if Abou Sa'fah was not handed over. The British government then resisted Saudi pressure and Saudis resumed the pumping of crude oil after

a three day stoppage.

In 1982, the situation was different. Bahrain government was weak and frightened, the Iran-Iraq war was turning against the Iraqis, and internal opposition was vocal. Manama needed closer Saudi ties, and beside giving away Abou Sa'fah, it signed a Security Agreement allowing the Saudi government greater say in Bahrain's internal matters. It is in the context of this agreement, which Kuwait, Oman and Qatar have all refused to sign similar ones, that the Saudi Interior Minister Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, traveled to Bahrain at the height of the Uprising. With Naif came the two SNG brigades.

Bahraini opposition groups of all persuasions are very concerned at what they regard as gross violation of their country's independence and integrity. On the other hand, Saudi opposition see their government's participation in quelling the Bahraini pro democracy uprising as a warning to them too. Many fear the failure of Bahraini opposition to force the government to reinstate democratic rule, will be a set back to their ambitions to improve human rights situation and public participation in Saudi Arabia. The balance of power between tribal autocratic regimes and democratic movements in the Gulf will be determined by the outcome of events in Bahrain.

All else apart, however, Bahrain government will face a formidable task if it tried to regain any sort of independent position in its dealing with the country's internal affairs. Already its economic options are greatly influenced by Riyadh. Even in the field of propaganda, Al Khalifa family had to lean heavily on the Saudi international media empire, hence the awkward coverage by Ashraq Al-Awast. Saudi Arabia seems to have assumed that Bahrain is one of its provinces!

Henderson: A Symbol of Hate and Embarrassment

Ian Henderson is a symbol of hate in Bahrain and an embarrassment in London. The Times of 25 January wrote: "Lord Avebury, a leading human rights campaigner, is to propose amending a long-standing law preventing British citizens from enlisting in foreign armies so that British passport holders would also be forbidden to serve in foreign security forces. His move follows a letter he wrote to Douglas Hogg, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, expressing concern at the employment by the Bahrain Government of Ian Henderson, a British citizen who holds a senior position in the country's security apparatus. Lord Avebury said that the three Bahraini Shia dissidents, who recently applied for political asylum in Britain, had told him that some people in Bahrain thought that Mr. Henderson's role meant that Britain supported the Bahrain Government."

"The presence of a British citizen in the top levels of another state's security forces makes it seem as though we officially support their methods of dealing with dissent" he said.

Lord Avebury intends to consult legal experts in the House of Lords to see how the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act can be broadened to include serving in foreign security services. In

a letter to Douglas Hurd, Lord Avebury also asked the Foreign Secretary not to give in to pressure by Sheikh Muhammed al-Khalifa, the Foreign Minister, who arrives on Friday to discuss the three dissidents' request for asylum. He asked Mr Hurd to point out to Sheikh al-Khalifa that, according to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Bahrain was in breach of its obligations under international law by expelling its own citizens. A decision on the three will be taken by the Home Office".

The Guardian of 30 January wrote "The recent unrest in Bahrain has unexpectedly focused attention on a handful of British citizens who wield enormous influence behind the thrones of the ruling sheikhs in the Gulf... At last December's demonstrations for democracy in Bahrain, a hate figure mentioned frequently in popular slogans was the chief adviser on security matters, Ian Henderson. For the past three decades, Mr Henderson has been a taboo subject. Now the opposition movement wants the former colonial to be asked to leave the island... In Bahrain, he created the Special Branch and is said to have played a key role in framing internment laws which allow the security forces to detain

suspects for three years.

The Notices of Motions published by the British House of Commons on 25 January, circulated Motion No. 458 signed by 17 British MPs entitled "British Mercenaries in Bahrain". The Motion stated: That this House expresses grave concern at the continuing savage repression against the demonstrators for democracy in Bahrain; is shocked at the presence of British hired mercenaries in the ranks of the security apparatus, SIS, of the Bahrain Royal dictatorship; in particular deplores the role of Mr Ian Henderson, the chief of the SIS and a British citizen who has presided over a service which has killed at least nine people under torture, illegally deported more than 1,000 Bahrainis, warned hundreds more not to return to the country and which has, since the most recent democratic upheaval last November, shot dead six demonstrators and arrested without charge, 1,500 more and now deported three leading opposition figures to London via Dubai; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to dissociate itself from the actions of British mercenaries in Bahrain, to demand respect for basic human rights in Bahrain and to support those struggling for the restoration of the constitution in Bahrain, the establishment of representative government there and an end to the massacre of democrats there."

Bert Mapp: Bahrain Lacks Freedom of Speech

Forcible Deportation Can't Stop Political Change in Bahrain

The British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, interviewed by the BBC Radio 4 on 27 December 1994, spoke about the prestige Britain had achieved abroad through its military superiority and institutions. He was determined to maintain that influence in the Middle East. At that time, Bahrain had experienced over a number of demonstrations countered by security forces directed by the British Ian Henderson. At least seven deaths, many injuries and hundreds of arrests were reported. In January 1995, three Shia clerics including Sheikh Ali Salman were forcibly deported. They came to London on 17 January 1995.

Forcible expulsion of dissident Arabs from their homeland is a time-honoured custom in Bahrain. In the past, Bombay was a safe haven or open prison for malcontents till India's independence. Expulsion began in Bahrain soon after Sheikh Ahmed (the conqueror!) became the first ruler in 1783. For example in 1843, when Muhammed and his uncle Abdulla were joint rulers, Muhammed expelled his uncle who died in Bushihr. During years of warring within the Khalifa family, the British authorities expelled various members to Bombay or Kuwait. In 1938, several people, including Mr. Sa'ad Al-Shamlan were deported to Bombay after quelling a pro-democracy movement. Then, in 1956, needing distant, secure accommodation, the Bahrain authorities found a novel, even bizarre, alternative - St. Helena. This was the time of Suez, when Abdul Rahman Al Baker, a minor merchant and magazine editor, organised protest demonstrations in Bahrain. It led to rioting and the intervention of British troops, and Al Baker together with Abdul Aziz Al-Shamlan (whose father had been deported to Bombay) and Abd Ali Al-Ulaiwat were detained for allegedly plotting to assassinate the ruler, Sheikh Salman (father of the present Amir), and his advisor Sir Charles Belegarve.

The men, who refused to plead, were tried and convicted by members of the ruler's family. Al Baker and the other two were sentenced to 14 years on St. Helena. After serving five years and making three appeals, they were released by the British authorities and compensated for wrongful detention. It transpired that they had been handed over to a British warship captain for transportation two hours before arrival for this (a British Order in Council) had been promulgated.

Since Bahrain became an independent country, by the authority of the United Nations in 1970, the government has systematically deported its opponents. They may be allowed to return to their homeland and families after years and after accepting humiliating conditions; others fear they may never go home.

Today, expulsion is the government's alternative to prison. Trials for political dissents are frequently dispensed with. The state security law permits imprisonment of three years (renewable) without trial. I know a Bahraini journalist who was charged for writing about modern slavery, the importation of Filipino housemaids, but when the case was dismissed he was arrested on unspecified evidence and

jailed administratively for five years.

According to Amnesty International, torture is practised, but this the government denies. When George Brown MP visited Bahrain's expenal isle, Jedda, to inspect the habitat of two of 1956 uprising, he declared it superior to some non-custodial parts of the Middle East. He never saw, as I did, prisoners kept in leg irons in the Manama (Qala'a) prison.

The government never tires of proclaiming that Bahrain is "liberal and relaxed, and almost crime free" It is true that alcohol is freely available and places of entertainment abound. However, liberal and relaxed are relative terms. One would not recognise the informer in a club. There are taboos. Discussing politics is perilous, a subject avoided even in private. What the country lacks, wrestled over for decades, is free speech and democracy.

"If only Bahrain had been a colony rather than a protectorate of the British, we would have taught them the arts of democratic government", so mused Sir Bernard Burrows, British political resident in the Gulf in the 1950s. In fact at that time, when Britain was freeing its colonies, British Foreign Office officials went some way with Abdul Rahman Al Baker, Bahrain's first professional politician, in his aims of introducing trade unions, elections for public bodies and equal opportunities for Sunni and Shia. But Charles Belegarve, the ruler's right hand man for 30 years, mocked educational standards and argued Bahrain was unfit for democracy. In his time, the ruler was "wise" and the aspirant for public office was "illiterate". These terms are still widely used in one for the other.

Strange to relate, in 1926, the year Belegarve arrived in Bahrain as adviser, a register of electors was compiled (of persons paying house tax) and the ballot box used to elect councillors for Manama municipality, which had been founded in 1919. A Muharraq council was formed. Half of Manama seats were elected, the ruler filling the remainder with representatives of Jewish, Indian and foreign Muslim communities to strike a balance with those elected. Today, all the municipalities' councils are appointed by the government.

In 1973, a National Assembly was elected only to be dissolved after 18 months when members refused to pass Draconian state security measures. For the past 20 years, absolute control has been exercised by the Amir, Sheikh Isa Al-Khalifa, and closer relatives. They occupy the principal offices of the state as well as heading, even if only nominally, boards of commerce and industry, public and private. The Khalifas are believed to number at least 8,000 and besides being a drain on the public purse, for they have to be maintained, those in good jobs frequently block promotion of better qualified citizens.

With free schooling available to all Bahrainis and more than 6,000 places in the university (apart from faculties top heavy with professors and assistant professors!), the pool of talented and qualified young men and women, many with doctorates and masters' degrees, widens steadily. To educate individuals to high standards and then to stifle their initiatives and

deny them the opportunity to express themselves - in every sense of that term - is to foster frustration and court trouble. It is the search for freedom that takes numbers of Bahraini overseas to take up responsible positions in medicine, education, industry and commerce. Still heavily dependent on imported professions and labour, Bahrain has a two-way brain drain.

The real embarrassment is suffered by educated, thinking Bahrain citizens who observe the practice of their dynastic rulers - the patronage, corruption, nepotism, the intrigue and jostling for power. The Amir, aged 61, diminutive and ailing, expects his son Hamad, crown prince and defence chief, to succeed him. The Amir's younger brother, Khalifa, now prime minister, would like to rule; but if he can't have the crown, he wants his son, Ali, transport minister, to get it.

In planning for and adjusting to a democratic system, Bahraini opposition leaders would need friends. Considering their vast numbers, I am not optimistic that foreign workers in Bahrain will be helpful. Forty years ago, in the isolated Anglo-American enclave of Awali, I was conscious of a general indifference to Bahrain life and culture by expatriates who were not interested in politics. (A Bapco law said Europeans were forbidden to engage in local politics). We do not know what actions the governments of the United States or Britain would take to support pro-democracy. They seem to choose to support the status-quo. And in the Gulf, the West's oil interests come first.

Economic problems are global and they affect Bahrain and the Gulf. The recession, budget deficits, the growing gap between rich and poor, rising unemployment among rapidly increasing population and other factors create tensions. The climate suggests that Bahrain and the Gulf should prepare for political change. One must hope it will be a change for good and achieved without violence.

Bert Mapp

Author of "Leave Well Alone" on Bahrain

The Constitution Must Be Restored

On Monday 11 May 1970 at 3 p.m. the fifteen hundred and thirty-sixth meeting of the United Nations Security Council held at the Headquarters in New York decided upon the status of Bahrain. Delegates from the fifteen nations represented at the Council had been in a position to study a draft resolution to the question of Bahrain based on the report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Winspeare Guicciardi, who stated: "The Bahrainis I met were virtually unanimous in wanting a fully independent sovereign State. The great majority added that this should be an Arab State". To satisfy the internal political forces that helped bring the independence of Bahrain, the Al-Khalifa allowed a half-elected Constituent Assembly to debate a draft constitution, that was later signed by the Amir and the Assembly. In 1973, the National Assembly was elected only to be dissolved in 1975 by the Amir himself. The pro-democracy movement demands the reactivation of the Constitution. The Al-Khalifa responds by killing innocent citizens!!