

respect for the political system. The decay of the Qing administration may be explained not only in terms of its incapacity to respond to new and complicated problems, but also in the increasing corruption and venality of its officials. The power-struggles amongst the Party leadership first surfaced in the late 1950s but became graphically exposed in the following decades; Lin Biao, Mao Tse-tung's constitutionally established successor, was killed in a bizarre plane accident, having allegedly failed in a coup to overthrow Mao; and the Gang of Four, whose rhetoric imposed a most distinctive political and cultural style on the whole nation, were summarily ejected from power immediately after Mao's death. It is almost certainly the case that these manoeuvres among what had been considered an exemplary leadership gave rise to a crisis of confidence for many Chinese.

Other factors in contemporary Chinese society compound this problem. The generation trained during the Cultural Revolution, whose educational and professional qualifications have at least in part been invalidated by the discrediting of the teaching standards and recruitment policies of that period, are to be heard voicing their frustrations. In addition, the younger people, who are unable to match the fierce competition for entry into advanced training, are left with their disappointment and the prospect of job allocation, over which they can be given little choice. The mood of

lassitude which has been widely observed in Chinese cities must derive at least partially from feelings of personal frustration. What China sadly appears to be losing is not the ability to criticise but that sense of service to the nation, which was such a marked characteristic of those earlier intellectuals, even in their gloomiest moments.

To see China, as some Chinese evidently do, as a nation still locked in the inefficient, bureaucratic practices of its past and lacking the will now to break out of them, may be an unduly pessimistic view, but it is almost certainly the case that China has still a long way to go before its Revolution is complete. Some measurable advance in the standard of living would undoubtedly influence attitudes, but the very scale of the problems is overwhelming. This year's census is expected to confirm that the population is in the region of one thousand million, which is an unthinkable responsibility for one government and nation to encompass. It must be in the interests of all of us that China achieves some economic progress. The time has passed when we can look at China either with stony hostility or seek there inspiration for radical fantasies. The country's problems in coming to terms with the modern world are linked inexorably with the operations of its highly distinctive society, and the utmost patience and understanding must be shown by us if we are to offer serious and constructive help.

Late

In the rented rooms above the bay
 The simmer of epistles was like sleep.
 Old men grow bored with young men's books,
 But still they followed and were sold
 At the stall that an uncle had kept.
 His landlady found roses in the hall
 Without a note, and for the afternoon
 There was the itch of Sundays at the Spa:
 Band-music, marble, heat and wickedness.
 He did not have to work, she thought.
 Eat greens for the conduct; wear sensible shoes;
 Keep up with the journal; walk out to the light
 At the pier's end, a mile in the ocean.
 Look back for the window seen only from here.
 It is only a place you can see.
 It survives you. It makes you a ghost,
 Where she lived, where we both lived once.
 I am embarrassed to have stayed
 So long and on so little and for this.

Sean O'Brien

CONVERSATION

The Middle East: Illusions, Great & Small

By *Elie Kedourie & Andrew Mango*

KEDOURIE: *The situation in the Middle East is very dispiriting. There is the Lebanon, and Beirut is almost destroyed; there is war in Abadan and Khorramshahr, and now in Basra; and there are other very difficult and disagreeable situations. I think it possible to provide some kind of explanation for each and every one of these events, but one wonders whether there isn't some underlying factor which has to do with "the character of the Middle East" today. What do you think?*

MANGO: I find it hard to accept all-embracing explanations, but none the less one must try and isolate certain factors which seem to operate if not throughout the Middle East at least in most countries. One historical factor: it seems to me to be the case that "the Middle East" as a region was controlled from outside throughout most of recent history until the years following the Second World War. To be sure, the Ottoman Empire was an indigenous power; and if one includes Turkey and the Balkans in the Middle East, then control was exercised from within, but certainly as far as the Arab countries of the Middle East are concerned, they were under outside control. Istanbul lay outside the Arab world as we know it today; and what is more, the Ottoman Empire was itself under (or, to some extent, interpenetrated by) Western influences; and with the help of the West, or playing off one Western power against another, it could maintain control. Outside control gradually ceased after World War II. There were attempts thereafter to influence events, but local forces

began finding their own level. This is a bloody process. It brings destruction in its train; and it is changing both the political map, the social map, and (as we are seeing particularly in the Persian Gulf, in Khorramshahr, in Iran in Abadan, perhaps in Basra tomorrow) even the physical appearance of the cities of the Middle East. That is one factor.

KEDOURIE: *I agree. I think that the Middle East is now out of all control. There isn't any power there, whether "inside" or "outside", which can influence events in any significant way. Consider for instance the Iran-Iraq war. All the great powers are, it seems to me, either unwilling or, more likely, powerless to intervene in order to impose a solution (even assuming that they know what "solution" they would like to impose). The same thing is to be seen in the recent events in the Lebanon. Again, what is so very remarkable is that the great powers, the Superpowers as well as the "great powers of Europe", are on the sidelines. They attempt to mediate; they exhort; they make declarations; occasionally they threaten. But there is very little they are able or perhaps even willing to do. And that is a remarkable thing. It is disagreeable for the great powers and the Superpowers, but it is also disagreeable for the peoples of the region themselves. Because it seems to me that by themselves, if they are left on their own, they might easily test the Middle East system of international relations to destruction.*

MANGO: Why has this come about? I think because of an equilibrium between East and West at the end of World War II. Within that equilibrium there was almost a vacuum of power in the Middle East where the local forces managed to assert themselves. If one could make an historical parallel (perhaps not a very accurate one but none the less useful), it is rather like the beginning of the independence of ancient Israel between Assyria and Egypt. There were two states of more or less equal power or countervailing pressure, and in between a local state, a smaller regional force which could assert itself. So one can see that Western control over the Middle East broke down when President Nasser concluded his first Czech arms deal—an outside power brought in to frus-

THIS ENCOUNTER interview was conducted recently in London between Professor Elie Kedourie and Dr Andrew Mango. Professor Kedourie is Professor of Politics, University of London, and Editor of "Middle Eastern Affairs." Dr Mango, born in Istanbul in 1926, studied classical Persian at the University of London. He is the author of "Turkey" (Thames & Hudson, 1968), "Discovering Turkey" (Batsford, 1971), and "Turkey: A Delicately Poised Ally" (Sage Pubns, 1976), and works as a broadcaster in London.