

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A statement in Professor Parvin's review of my Economic History of the Middle East needs correcting, viz. "not even one (essay) attempts to discuss the question from the Marxist point of view." Actually, I translated, from the Russian, three long essays by Soviet authors--but for all I know Soviet scholars are no longer considered Marxist.

One more point--I certainly did not intend to deny that Soviet aid to Middle Eastern countries (like American, British, Japanese and Chinese) would promote their economic growth. I merely suggested that, again like other aid, it would increase the donor's political influence. I do not think the events of the last ten years have proved that particular forecast wrong.

As for the more general question raised by Professor Parvin, of course I do not imagine that I have satisfactorily explained the causes of the economic decline of the Islamic Middle East. I am not sure such an "explanation" will ever be found--think of the numerous and contradictory theories that have been advanced, during the last three hundred years, to account for the decline of Rome. In the present

state of knowledge on the Middle East, the most one can hope for is some tentative suggestions and the gathering of material that can stimulate further research. This is all I aimed at in my book.

CHARLES ISSAWI

(Charles Issawi is Professor of Economics at Columbia University. His Economic History of the Middle East was reviewed in the Fall 1969 issue of Iranian Studies.)

THE REVIEWER REPLIES:

This is in response to a letter written by Professor Charles Issawi concerning my review of his book, Economic History of the Middle East.

I have no quarrel with Professor Issawi on the first point he makes in his letter. I have acknowledged the Russian translations which his book contains; however, what is Marxist is a moot question.

The second point raised by Professor Issawi is most important and thus the main reason for this reply. It is true that political influence generally follows (or even precedes) economic and/or military aid. But it is the nature and the extent, and thus the implications, of the political influence exercised which are of importance, not its mere existence. Surely the political influence exerted by the United States in Western Europe through the Marshall Plan cannot be compared, as far as its implications are concerned, to that implicit in American aid to the dependent military regimes of Latin America through the Alliance for Progress and other means.

I have neither meant to criticize the book due to the absence of a convincing theory of the economic decline of the Middle East nor can this be read into the review. I agree with Professor Issawi that this

is what is stated in my review--that after this book the phenomenon of economic decline remains one of the mysteries of the mysterious Middle East.

MANOUCHER PARVIN