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Camp David gives him hope. If standards of living improve, and if this is done quickly, say within a year, then Sadat will stay. If not, I don't know."

But Egypt is facing not only a period of political uncertainty, but a crisis of national identity shown at the time of Sadat's Jerusalem visit last year and one brought into greater prominence by the separate peace initialled at Camp David.

ECONOMIC PAYOFF WILL TILT SCALES

Egypt faces identity crisis

Mass opinion in Egypt strongly backs peace with Israel, but the people are uneasy about where Anwar Sadat is taking them. "Officially Egypt is behind the Camp David agreements, but not the intellectuals: the agreements do not meet minimum Egyptian demands", is the comment of a prominent journalist.

In private conversations in Cairo the agreements are often criticised, though usually with more ambivalence than this. A pro-Sadat Cairo socialite sums up Egyptian reactions to Camp David in this way: "The average Egyptian hates the Arabs, and

Cairo's intellectuals recall that last March Tawfiq al-Hakim, one of the country's most noted novelists, who had in December helped to found an Israel-Egypt friendship league, launched a public debate in the pages of *Al-Ahram* (by suggesting that Egypt should take a neutral position in the Arab-Israeli controversy). Underlying this theme was the insistence that Egyptians are not really Arab.

Dozens of Egypt's most notable writers commented, and most of them thought Hakim's suggestion impractical and undesirable. One of Hakim's opponents summed up: "Egyptians are not Arabs, but

Ambivalent Egyptian attitude in People's Assembly (Camera Press)



they cannot disregard the Arab component of their destiny - shared culture and language."

One university professor, reflecting on the debate held six months ago, feels that Sadat "may have been toying with a separate peace then, but backed off after finding that most Egyptians still felt an Arab identity and supported Arab unity".

But the promise of economic improvements seems to have triumphed over the more illusive issue of self-identity. Moreover, Sadat has nourished Egyptian hostility towards "the Arabs", something exacerbated by the have versus have-not reality of contemporary Middle East life. Meanwhile, Sadat has successfully managed to shackle the press and to repress intellectuals into political submission thus channelling opposition to Camp David into narrow, inbred circles.

One writer says: "I prefer not to write at all. If I can't say what I want to say at least I must avoid saying what I don't want to say." Another says: "I can't speak publicly or travel because you can now be sent to prison for spreading rumours abroad, true or untrue." And yet another - in this case a writer known for his pro-Sadat allegiance: "Many here are against the agreements but they are afraid to say so because they fear it will be thought they are against peace."

Still, Sadat's Egypt is hardly Nasser's police state; the mechanisms of political repression are far more subtle and far less brutal. The People's Assembly, for instance, did have a highly vocal debate where substantial opposition to the Camp David framework was expressed - even though the debate took place after Sadat had already dispatched his negotiators to Washington to work out a peace treaty. And members of the 1952 Revolutionary Command Council have written to Sadat about his "deceiving peace" which "is a relinquishing on the part of Egypt of its historical responsibilities towards the Arab nation".

There is widespread agreement among both Sadat's supporters and critics that without tangible improvements in daily life his gamble on a separate peace may be his undoing. One highly respected academic opponent concludes: "Support for the Camp David agreements is being eroded more and more every day as people find out what the agreements really are. There's already been sacking of people who haven't been supportive enough. But the real erosion will come six months or a year from now when the economic payoff, as translated into bread and butter, doesn't trickle down to the people.

"Another major historical moment may have been missed," this critic reflects. "We could have had a much better agreement satisfying the real needs of most of the parties. Now, so long as the Palestinian issue isn't settled this agreement will not last."

Mark Bruzonsky