

Supporters of the revolution who had, at the time, regretted the departure of Neguib, whom they assumed to be the leader, later conceded that, had he been in charge, Egypt would have returned to the political and economic mess and confusion of the Forties and, inevitably, to chaos. It required the vision, will, passion and political cunning of Nasser, as well as a degree of ruthlessness, to carry, against the opposition of the West (to the point of armed invasion in 1956) and of much of the Arab world, the reforms and ambitious projects he had in mind for Egypt: land reform, industrialization, the huge iron and steel works of Helwan, free education, social reforms, the Aswan High Dam and, above all, removal of the British military presence.

### Majority will

There is no doubt that the Free Officers came to power through the will of the majority of the people. The identity of the "leader of the revolution" and of his men mattered little to the mass of Egyptians. It was sufficient that they were Egyptian, that the Egyptian Army had taken over and would conclude the long, bitter struggle for independence.

By the takeover in 1952 — a *coup d'état*, not a popular uprising —, the people were the happy but passive recipients of a

new revolution announced over the radio. It was not until 1956 that the population took an active part in the revolution. It can even be said that the revolution did not take place until that year. The sudden withdrawal by Britain and the United States of their offers of loans to finance the High Dam, Nasser's reaction in nationalizing the Suez Canal Company and, finally, in October, the tripartite (Franco-British-Israeli) invasion of Egypt spontaneously mobilized the whole population into active support of Nasser and defence of the revolution. Even imprisoned Communists and other political opponents rallied to Nasser.

In a plebiscite that year for the constitution published in January and Nasser's candidature for the presidency, 99 per cent of the electorate voted "yes".

Nasser's popularity was such, at the time, that few doubted the authenticity of the polls. He had become not only the idolized leader in Egypt but also the hero of the Arab world. In achieving this acclaim, however, he had antagonized a great many people and groups in the country whom he had had to subdue to protect himself and his regime.

Abroad — and this constituted an added internal threat — he had brought on himself the hatred of most Western governments and the fear of the reactionary Arab



Wide World Photo

This 1952 photograph of the Army Revolutionary Council of Egypt shows the country's first President, Major General Mohammed Neguib (front centre), with ten of his 11 advisers. On his right is Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was to succeed him in the Presidency. The only member of the Council missing from the photograph is Anwar Sadat, who assumed the leadership in 1970 following Nasser's death.