

and weighing of crops must adhere to a schedule. Dozens of farmers were assembled. They had brought their produce on donkeys and camels from as far away as the Wad-el-Tair region to the north. All were attracted to el-Karra market by the promise of high prices. Now the farmers stood apprehensively beside their sacks of produce waiting for the auction to start. A crop buyer from el-Geifil had come to the market with his two assistants that day. He said that he would not be able to buy in the mizaan system because in order to participate in the auction the buyer had to obtain written authorization from the People's Council. Also, he did not think that he could afford to pay the higher 9ushuur tax which would result from determining the price in an auction. Moreover, he did not know if the truck-owner who regularly buys from him would find the auction prices acceptable.

At 11:00 a.m., Ibrahim,* a big merchant and truck-owner from a neighboring village stood on top of a pile of sacked sesame and addressed the farmers in a loud voice. Today, all prices would be determined by auction and all crops would be weighed. Any farmer who failed to get his crop weighed would not be allowed to sell it and would have to wait until the following week's market. Ibrahim and a fellow merchant, Muhammad, were firmly in charge. They appeared to know exactly what to do while the market clerk and his assistant were hesitant. First, the two merchants set up their own scales alongside the government scales. Then they began circulating among the producers and the piled sacks of produce. The merchants carried a notebook in which they recorded the producer's names and amounts of crops. Each producer was assigned a lot number for each kind of crop that he had brought.

The auction started about noon. The market clerk took charge but not without frequent advice from the merchants. Gum was sold first, followed by karkadee and then sesame. This arrangement of putting the sesame last is common because the operation of weighing and transferring sesame to the merchant's sacks is time-consuming so it is postponed until last to avoid stalling the processing of the other crops. Table I summarizes the auction results. The extent of the producers' dissatisfaction with the prices was not revealed until the bidding on sesame started. The merchants were visibly chagrined when one after the other of the producers' representatives for each sesame lot rejected the final bid price. Ibrahim, the big merchant, gave a harsh warning that he and the other merchants would not buy these crops later in the day if the farmers changed their minds and wanted to sell. The bidding on all crops took only one-half hour. There was a lot of angry shouting from the merchants and half-concealed smiles on the producers' faces.

When the bidding was finished the long process of weighing each farmer's crop and recording the weight and price began. And after that, the crops were transferred to the merchants' sacks. By 2:30 p.m., the merchants were paying the farmers who agreed to sell. Ibrahim, surrounded by farmers, is sitting under the crop market shelter where there is shade and calculating the payments he makes to each farmer with a pocket calculator. In front of him is a briefcase full of money. 2:45 p.m., the merchants have knuckled under to the producers' boycott of the auction. They are buying sesame by the mid at a price of 1.000 per mid.**

*All names are fictitious.

**At the previous week's market sesame brought 1.050 per mid.