

Vanity

Kawkab al-Sharq, 8 April 1933

If you see, in the political, social, or economic order, some evil, and become convinced that its removal is a duty, and that establishing good in its place is an inescapable necessity, then it is your right to call for what you believe, and it is your duty to persist in calling for it. You would sin against yourself were you to conceal your view and hide it from others; and you would sin against others were you to fail to point them toward the sources of evil in their lives, and fail to guide them toward whatever holds benefit and good.

These are elementary truths — truths that seem, to whoever states them, to say nothing new, and seem, to whoever hears them, to hear nothing fresh, since they have been repeated so often among people in every age and every land that both those who state them and those who hear them have grown weary of them. And yet, for all that, they remain obscure, and their obscurity remains the source of much evil in the life of nations and peoples; and it may well be that this same obscurity is the source of the corruption and turmoil in which we now find ourselves.

We may err in confusing right with duty, may go to excess in our estimate of this right and this duty; and this error, this excess, may drive us to seek reform and instead do harm, to intend guidance and instead lead astray, to set out deliberately to instruct and instead find ourselves entangled in aggression.

We become convinced of an opinion, and this conviction deludes us, leading us to imagine that we alone are right, and that everyone else is mistaken. Before long, this vanity takes hold of us and drives us to trample liberty underfoot; and there we are, attempting to impose our opinions upon others by main force, to compel them, against their will, to accept whatever good we wish for them; there we are, claiming infallibility for ourselves and absolving ourselves of error, sanctifying our own opinions, and treating those who do not share them or support them as enemies, dealing with them as one deals with enemies.

And perhaps, when you try to understand the crisis into which the Prime Minister and his supporters have forced us, you will find no explanation for it but this very vanity into which men of opinion, in politics, economics, and social affairs, so often fall.

The Prime Minister and his associates judged our old political order to be an evil, because it did not suit their hopes, their ambitions, and their highest ideals of government and administration. They saw in this order certain principles that ought to be removed, and other principles that ought to be established in their place. They saw that direct universal suffrage would never bring them to power, nor guarantee them a popular majority; and they saw that, were parliamentary authority to remain broad, its bounds far-reaching, it would never allow them to remain in power, should chance and circumstance happen to raise them to it. And so they wished to restrict and narrow the franchise, and wished to bind parliamentary authority and clip its wings. They attempted to campaign for this, and failed; they pressed on in the attempt, and no one answered them, no one believed in them.

And this refusal of cooperation, this turning away from their appeal, stirred their indignation against those who, called upon, would not answer, and, pressed with entreaty, paid no heed. This indignation only increased their faith in their own opinions, and their confidence in them, so that they pressed on and persisted all the more. And it was not long before they were seduced by these opinions, and grew excessive in their self-delusion, until they came to believe that these opinions alone were right, that these opinions alone were good, and that all else was false, all else was evil. Then they took to thinking and calculating, took to coming and going, scheming how to impose these opinions of theirs upon the people by main force, how to drive the people toward these opinions of theirs against their will — once persuasion had exhausted them, and the calm, confident path of mere appeal had failed them.

There, the scheme was perfected, and the Prime Minister leapt to power; he rose up against the old Constitution, dissolved the old Parliament, devised whatever new order he devised, held whatever election he held, and has conducted the affairs of Egypt, ever since taking up power, with force and violence, compelling the people to whatever he himself wants, forcing the people into whatever he himself favors.

There were, in Europe, reform movements whose outward face was force and severity, and how quickly the Prime Minister found for himself his likes and his peers, how quickly his supporters compared him to Mussolini in Italy — and now they measure him against Hitler in Germany. And yet the Prime Minister, on the day he abolished the Constitution, was nothing but an outlaw against the order, a wrongdoer against the law, a wrongdoer against the whole nation. For political,

social, or economic reform ought never to be forced upon a people; communities ought never to be compelled to accept it while they despise it and turn away from it; peoples ought never to be forced into it by the power of iron and fire. Indeed, the reformer ought never to touch those he wishes to reform with the slightest harm, however small or great, when they turn away from the reform he brings them. And if harm must, in the cause of reform, fall upon someone, then it ought to fall upon the reformers themselves; and these reformers ought to prepare themselves to endure harm and face adversity, even death itself at times, for the sake of the reform to which they summon others.

And perhaps these very days, which mark the beginning of the new Hijri year and call Muslims to remember their history, are rich with lessons and admonitions for whoever vanity has caused to forget them, so that it becomes incumbent upon them to remember. For the one who called men to Islam, the founder of this Islamic state, harmed no one, never forced his religion upon the people by imposition, never took them into this religion against their will; he called men to it gently, lovingly, with compassion for them. And in return for this gentleness he met with violence from them; in return for this love, hatred; in return for this compassion, cruelty and hardship. Yet he never ceased calling them to the path of his Lord with wisdom and fair admonition, disputing with them in the manner most gracious, so that the best among them answered him, while the worst among them met him with wrongdoing and aggression — until God's word prevailed, His light spread, His religion grew mighty, and even those who had risen against it and rejected it came at last to believe in it.

As for those whom the Prime Minister is praised for resembling, whose example he is said to follow — they never rose up against the order of their own countries as the Prime Minister rose up against the order of his. Mussolini never arrived at power in Italy except after first arriving at its leadership; and Mussolini never arrived at the leadership of Italy except after waging a peaceful, gentle struggle, consisting of calling men to the good and pressing them with counsel, until those who would answer him answered, and those who would be persuaded by his view were persuaded, and an Italian majority gathered around him, enabling him to demand power and win it, and to fashion for Italy a new order altogether.

Nor did Hitler himself arrive at the government of Germany except after calling men to his view and persuading them of it, and gathering

around him that majority which won him victory at the polls, so that the President of the German Republic found himself compelled to hand him the reins of power — a power he had long refused him, and defended against him with fierce and stubborn resolve.

There is a very great distance indeed between our Prime Minister and those reformers who truly deserve to be called by that name. He never struggled to spread his own view, never pressed hard in calling for it, never met with the slightest harm in doing so, never faced the smallest adversity in doing so. Rather, the circumstances were prepared for him, matters were arranged for him, and then he was simply seated upon a chair, handed the reins of power, and told: go — and he went, touching nothing without battering it violently, tampering with it in every possible way. And, for all this, he was not content merely to have had everything made ready for him without effort or hardship; he went further, and subjected his own nation to every manner of toil and hardship, reversing the natural order of things: sparing himself comfort in the cause of reform, while condemning his nation to misery and suffering in the cause of what he takes to be reform.

For this reason, our Prime Minister has succeeded in nothing, has reformed nothing; and our Prime Minister will one day descend from power, leaving behind him, in this nation, no trace but these painful memories, depicting the torment he poured upon his nation, the evil he brought down upon it. As for the policy he imposed, it will never take root once he himself has descended from authority — precisely because he arrived at power before he possessed this true popular strength; he arrived at power before he had persuaded the people of his views on reform. His arrival at power ought to have been the result of his efforts, not their preface.

Sidqi Pasha will resign, or be dismissed, and everything around him will dissolve, and every man around him will scatter, and matters will return, after him, to just what they were before him.

As for the true reformers, they withdrew from power altogether — indeed, they departed this life, and their reform remained strong after them, its dominion only spreading wider — because they never followed, toward their reform, the path the Prime Minister has followed, and never favored themselves with the very comfort with which the Prime Minister has favored himself.

How fitting it would be, then, for those who think about political, economic, and social reform to take heed of this harsh lesson the days have cast upon our Prime Minister, and to learn that nations are never compelled to the good by force, but are persuaded of it through persuasion, and drawn to it through inducement. And God — who alone has claimed perfection for Himself, who alone has claimed power and dominion — never compelled men to the good, never drove them to it by force and violence; He commanded His Prophet only to call them to it with wisdom and fair admonition, to draw them to it with argument and example, and to endure, in that cause, whatever harm he had to endure, and to bear, in that cause, whatever adversity he had to bear.

Shall God, then, prefer mercy and gentleness, and calling to the good in the manner most gracious — while men refuse to do anything but compel nations and peoples to what they do not want?