From Afar: Worshippers of Gold

Al-Gumhuriya, 11 August 1956

The Golden Calf still stands, worshipped by people across the countries of the earth, exactly as Goethe's own Mephistopheles once said, in his celebrated, magnificent story, Faust. Worshippers of this same calf never prefer measure and moderation in their own worship of it — they are worshippers, rather, who draw near to it with the very essence of their own souls, and the finest of whatever their own hands possess. Nor do they worship it with the refined, pure worship modern civilization would wish worship to be — they offer it, instead, exactly the kind of sacrifice the ancients once offered their own gods, before civilization ever touched them, before knowledge ever refined their own minds, before art and literature ever purified their own hearts and tastes. They offer it their own sons, the very flower of their own lives, hideous, abominable victims, for a hideous, abominable god, forever thirsting for human blood, forever craving human flesh, satisfied only when human blood is made to run in rivers for it, and human flesh piled up in heaps for it. And however much is offered to it, it remains greedy for still more than what has already been offered — it has filled its own worshippers' hearts with vain pride in strength, and ambition for it, not to protect themselves from aggressors' own aggression, but to use that same strength, rather, as a means of offering up the peaceful, and the secure, as a sacrifice to their own god, that same god forever thirsting for human blood, forever craving human flesh.

Those very wars, only recently laid down in Indochina, were nothing but savage worship of that same savage god. The French offered up, in them, hundreds of thousands of the peaceful and the secure, and just as many raiding aggressors alike, as victims to their own capital — the very capital Goethe symbolized as the Golden Calf. And those whose blood was spilled, whose limbs were scattered, in Korea — Koreans, Americans, and Europeans alike — were nothing but a sacrifice to American capital, which Goethe likewise symbolized as the Golden Calf. And these same people, whose blood was spilled, and is still being spilled, whose sanctities were violated, and are still being violated, in North Africa, are nothing but a sacrifice to this same hideous, dreadful god. And this very uproar, this very ferment, now raging in France and Great Britain, over the Suez Canal, and the problems her own nationalization has stirred up, is nothing but a summons from that same abominable god, calling for

fresh blood to be spilled, fresh limbs to be scattered — since he remains, as I have said, forever thirsting, never knowing satiation, forever hungry, never knowing fullness. And when, after all, have you ever seen capital content itself with little, or even a great deal, of profit?

The French themselves genuinely acknowledge that the capital the original shareholders invested in the old Canal Company has already returned to its own owners many times over — not once, not twice, but repeatedly, throughout this long era in which the Canal was exploited in full view, and full hearing, of generation after generation of Egyptians, who watched their own land, and their own Canal, dug by their own hands, exploited to multiply English and French capital, while they themselves simply looked on, unable to lay a single hand upon this same gold, flowing in rivers to the English and French worshippers of gold. What is genuinely strange is that this same worship of gold corrupts not only the hearts of conservatives and moderates in France and Great Britain, but corrupts the hearts of their own socialists too.

These very socialists, who build their own political and social doctrine on resisting capital, and whatever selfishness, injustice, oppression, and aggression it produces, and whatever wars it stirs up among peoples — these same socialists now rage in the fiercest uproar of all, simply because Egypt refused to have poverty imposed upon her own people, so that riches might be granted to a small handful of foreigners in France and Great Britain, and refused to let her own sons starve, while this same small handful of foreigners nearly chokes on its own surfeit of money. The Labour leader in Great Britain — a genuine socialist — whose own party had nationalized a great many companies, and transferred a great deal of capital from private hands into state ownership, proved even more enraged, even more violently indignant, than the British Prime Minister himself, despite the latter being a die-hard conservative, steeped in the worship of gold, and the sanctification of capital. And the French Socialist Prime Minister — whose own party had nationalized a great many companies in France, who had spent his own life fighting against capital, denouncing it, seizing every opportunity against it, lying in wait for its every turn, striking at it whenever he found any way to strike — this same old socialist leader proved even more enraged, even more violently furious, even more long-winded, even more delirious, than the French conservatives most deeply committed to preserving capital — for no reason at all, except that British Labour remained eager to reach power, and French socialists remained anxious to retain the power they

had already secured.

Both alike flatter capital, sell out their own principles, offering them up as a hateful sacrifice to that same capital Goethe symbolized as the Golden Calf. And so the socialists among the French and English have renounced their own god, Karl Marx, returning instead to worshipping the Golden Calf — exactly as their own predecessors among the Israelites, in ancient times and new, once renounced their worship of God, the Most High, the All-Powerful, when their own companion fashioned for them a calf of gold that lowed. They renounced Karl Marx, sacrificing his own principles to draw near to capital, preferring power over principle, disbelief over faith, hypocrisy over candour — agreeing with the conservatives to turn the Canal question into a grave political matter, and Egypt's own enjoyment of her own natural right, denied by none but fools, into an act of aggression against Europeans' and Americans' own right to cross the Canal freely, coming and going, no obstacle barring their own passage, no hindrance turning them back — Egypt, rather, easing every matter for them exactly as it had been eased for them before, indeed better than it had ever been eased for them before. Yet they still turned the whole world upside down, believing themselves capable of filling Egypt with fear and terror, through whatever soldiers they mobilized, whatever fleets they prepared, as though they could stir up war whenever they pleased, however they pleased, wherever they pleased — as though the earth had been left entirely empty for them, to do with it, and its own people, exactly as they wished.

As though Egypt would fear them today, exactly as she once feared them in days gone by, and would submit to them today, exactly as she once submitted to them in days gone by as well — as though the world would simply stand aside, and let them do whatever they wish, in stirring up war, should their own intentions of stirring up war even prove genuine. Egypt has already told them, and continues telling them, that she will never touch the Canal's own freedom, but will secure it, in the future, exactly as she has secured it before. They believe Egypt in their own hearts, yet deny her with their own tongues — since British and French capital has never yet contented itself with all the profit already granted it, still burning for more; and since their own savage, hideous god has never contented himself with all the rivers of blood already made to flow for him, nor all the heaps of scattered limbs already offered up to him — forever thirsting, forever hungry, forever tempting his own

worshippers toward stirring up war, and aspiring to it. And the strangest thing distinguishing the French and British, in these very days, is that they draw no real lesson from events, take no real warning from trials, and fail to see that the world around them has genuinely changed, that the wheel of fortune has already completed its own cycle of colonialism, oppression, and aggression, and begun a new cycle instead, whose own substance is freedom, the restoration of rights to their own rightful owners, and the establishment of justice among peoples. They see none of this whatsoever — they see, or imagine to themselves, rather, that they remain just as powerful as ever, still capable of controlling the destinies of peoples exactly as they once controlled them before. They remain genuinely ignorant of their own affairs, and genuinely ignorant of other peoples' affairs too. They refuse to feel that weakness has already begun creeping toward them, that the days have already begun frowning upon them; and they refuse, likewise, to see that strength has already begun making its way toward the once-downtrodden, and that the days have already begun smiling upon those they once frowned upon. And so they flatter the Americans, seek out means toward Russia, and incite every nation on earth against Egypt — as though Egypt had committed some sin graver, more hideous, than the countless, innumerable sins they themselves have committed, and continue committing, in various countries across the earth.

The French case proves even more astonishing, even stranger, and even more genuinely laughable, than the English case: the French have genuinely, truly lost their own reason, lost their own sound judgment entirely; a kind of fever has seized them, loosening their own politicians' tongues, setting their own writers' pens racing with words no sound-minded person, genuinely master of himself, genuinely in control of his own emotions, could ever possibly utter. They have indulged themselves, to excess, in worshipping that same golden calf of theirs, until they have become the very image of those ecstatic dervishes one sees at our own religious gatherings, rising and sitting, bowing and straightening, swaying to the right and to the left, until the very reins of their own nerves slip entirely from their own grasp, and they find themselves raving incoherently, understanding nothing themselves, understood by no one else either.

The French Prime Minister wishes to deliver the Egyptian President a genuinely harsh, severe lesson; the French Foreign Minister exceeds even the most basic bounds of decency, insulting the ambassador himself

— even though diplomatic convention forbids exactly that, even when war itself is being declared. And a former Prime Minister, once a professor before he ever became a politician, exceeds all measure, exceeds all moderation, describing the Egyptian President as a thief who stole the Canal from its own rightful owners — forgetting only a single thing: that the Egyptian President has simply restored his own homeland's own Canal to her, and that the real, genuine thieves are exactly those who spill Algerian blood, marching through Algeria exactly as they once marched through Morocco and Tunisia before it, filling their own hands, and their own pockets, with wealth forbidden to them. Would that Egyptians could read exactly what floods the French press — the conservative papers, especially — with threats that would lead any reader to imagine France was about to crush Egypt utterly, annihilate Egyptians entirely. I confess I read these same threats, together with my own family and companions around me, and no fear seizes us, no real dread takes hold of us — we simply drown, instead, in long, broad laughter, and I recall, myself, the ancient poet's own words:

"*Ziyad wished for my death — he lied;*
his own hand shall fall far short of reaching me."

In any case, it is only right, I believe, that the Egyptian government preserve Egyptians' own dignity, and deliver these same garrulous, pompous Frenchmen a genuine lesson, teaching them real reflection and restraint in what they say, and what they write — and our own government is entirely capable of delivering them this same harsh lesson, should it wish to, without ever overstepping its own right, or stirring up any real incident in international politics.