

Promises ...

Al-Balagh, 24 March 1946.

It would appear that the Egyptian people are approaching a life of contentment, which ease will seize from every quarter, and which goodness, charity, and kindness will fill so completely that nothing will be left over for anyone to ask for more, as the saying goes; Egypt will become God's own paradise on earth, just as she is already God's own chosen treasure on earth, and all the peoples of the East will look upon Egypt with a gaze full of admiration, and in some cases touched with envy, because Egypt will live a life of such ease that her people will know neither hunger nor misery nor sickness nor want of any kind. And the reader should not imagine that I am jesting, or aiming at pleasantry, or intending irony, for the life of peoples, their hopes and their needs, ought never to be made the subject of jest, pleasantry, or irony, but must rather be a subject for the utmost seriousness and the utmost care.

And I believe that the Egyptians are indeed about to receive a life of contentment and ease, seized from every quarter, such that not one of them will find any need to complain, whether secretly or openly. And the explanation for this is simple: the British Foreign Minister has declared — ever since he was able to speak, once the Labour government took power — that he is most anxious to pay special attention to raising the standard of living in the Near East, and to reforming its economy, so that its people might be secure against the afflictions of misery, sickness, and hunger.

Then the British Foreign Minister declared once again that Great Britain does not wish to dominate Egypt, but wishes only to establish with her a partnership founded on equality between equals, whose purpose is to reform the economy, raise the standard of living, and secure the people against the afflictions of disease, ignorance, and poverty.

And in the days of al-Nokrashi Pasha, the Egyptians used to hear such talk and grow most impatient with it, seeing in it a foolish attempt to interfere in their own affairs, and holding that it was their own right and duty to set their affairs right with their own hands, and to secure themselves against the afflictions of misery and the calamities of wretchedness. And they preferred the misery that came to them from the corruption of social institutions under independence to the happiness that might come to them from the soundness of social institutions under this partnership so dear to the soul of the British Foreign Minister. Just

as they preferred the injustice that came to them from the corruption of political institutions under independence to the justice that might come to them from the soundness of these political institutions under this partnership that Mr. Bevin wishes to establish, even were he to found it on a basis of equality between equals.

And they held that reforming the economy, raising the standard of living, and achieving social justice were all, without doubt, necessary things, but that they must come from the very depths of the Egyptian people, and be imposed upon the Egyptian governments by the people's own will, and ought never to come from across the seas, imposed upon the Egyptian governments by way of a partnership between us and the English.

And they held that our English allies might love us most dearly, and be most devoted to us, and show us the kindest affection, but that none of this had ever, on any day, brought them so far as to attempt the reform of the economy, the achievement of social justice, or the provision of prosperity, such that the standard of living might rise, and we might be secured against the calamity of poverty, sickness, and ignorance. For their attention to these matters, in these particular days, could not possibly be given purely for the sake of God, but could only be given purely for the sake of the British Empire! And for this reason they scorned this justice that came to them from London, and yearned instead for another justice that might come to them from the very depths of Egypt, whose trees take root on the banks of the Nile, to bear their fruit sooner or later.

And al-Nokrashi Pasha himself and his government — in my opinion — paid no heed at all to this summons to justice arriving from across the seas, nor to this aspiration toward reform which Mr. Bevin was calling for, but thought only of monopolizing power for themselves on the one hand, and of yielding, slowly and reluctantly, to the people's own demand for independence on the other.

Then it became clear, at certain moments — and particularly since last summer — that our British allies were thinking continually of establishing social justice in Egypt, and of winning the people's favor at Egypt's own expense in the process, and were speaking continually of how matters in Egypt had reached an intolerable degree of corruption, and of how the wealthy among the Egyptians monopolized everything while the great mass of Egyptians possessed nothing at all, and of how

the achievement of social justice was a matter of greater urgency than the achievement of political independence, and of how the Egyptians who demanded evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley ought, before all that, to secure their own people against poverty, sickness, and ignorance.

And these remarks were carried over from Great Britain to Egypt in the late summer and early autumn, but the Egyptians paid them no heed, nor did al-Nokrashi Pasha and his government dwell upon them; then events followed one upon another, and troubles multiplied, and al-Nokrashi Pasha's ministry resigned, and our present Prime Minister, Sidqi Pasha, leapt into power. And Sidqi Pasha's shrewdness is well known, denied neither by Egyptians nor by Englishmen; and Sidqi Pasha's tact is plain, doubted neither by Egyptian nor by foreigner; and Sidqi Pasha's capacity for seizing an opportunity is too famous and too evident to need any demonstration.

And for all these reasons, the atmosphere in Egypt and in Great Britain alike filled with the sense that the hour of social justice had drawn nearer than the blink of an eye, and that our new government had drawn, with its own strong hand, a naked sword with which it would strike off the heads of poverty, sickness, and ignorance, and that the Egyptians would soon find themselves secure against every one of these afflictions. This government would spare no effort in that cause but would expend it to the full. And for this purpose it would float a loan amounting to fifty million pounds, and would mount a vast campaign to drive these afflictions out of Egypt once and for all, violently and completely, so that there would not be a single city in Egypt without various centers for combating poverty, sickness, and ignorance, nor a single Egyptian individual who was not secured against poverty, sickness, and ignorance.

And our present government was not content merely to broadcast this news within Egypt alone, but set about broadcasting it abroad as well, and set about broadcasting it in Great Britain in particular, aiming thereby at two natural purposes: the one, to revive hope in the souls of the Egyptians; the other, to instill reassurance in the souls of the English.

For the Egyptians must hope, and must look forward to a life of ease better than their present wretched one, and Sidqi Pasha must dangle these hopes before them, so that they might turn their attention toward them, and covet them, and be kept busy with them — busy with concerns that ought instead to occupy them with matters of politics and government, and with matters of negotiation and independence too.

And on the other hand, Mr. Bevin and the socialist leaders of Great Britain must be reassured that the government now in power in Egypt — the government that will negotiate with them over evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley — seeks neither monopoly nor privilege, but is rather a sympathetic, compassionate government, merciful to its people, gentle with them, and eager to expend tremendous efforts to bring them nearer to justice, and give them their full due of fairness.

And so matters are set right for Sidqi Pasha: the people covet justice, and so are kept busy with it, away from politics; and Great Britain trusts in the Egyptian government's desire for justice, and so is reassured by it, and enters into negotiation with it neither reluctantly nor with any misgiving.

What cleverness could be more brilliant than this cleverness? What shrewdness could be more penetrating than this shrewdness? But the Egyptian people look about them, and see no social justice at all, nor any effort toward achieving this social justice. The hungry still complain of the pain of hunger, and the sick still complain of the pain of sickness, and the ignorant still take their pleasure in the sweetness of ignorance. The government has not, to this day, taken a single step, short or long, toward reform; indeed, it has not even laid the groundwork for taking any step, short or long, but has only spread its propaganda, and spread it to excess. And it may well be that it will never go beyond spreading this propaganda; indeed, it may well be that it has already begun to take paths directly contrary to the achievement of social justice, and to the rescue of the people from the afflictions of misery and wretchedness.

For its attention to the wealthy — so far — has been far more evident than its attention to the poor, and its concern for producers greater than its concern for consumers, and its solicitude for the stock exchange more intense than its solicitude for workers and peasants; but what matters, apparently, is that the government should speak, not that it should act. And so long as there are trumpets to fill the air with clamor and uproar, and so long as there are newspapers to write long articles and short ones, and so long as there are telegraph companies to broadcast abroad every variety of announcement and every art of propaganda, and so long as there are envoys speaking abroad whatever the government wishes them to say — so long as all this continues, there can be no doubt that Sidqi Pasha, that clever and tactful man so skilled at seizing an opportunity, has discharged his duty in the finest possible manner; for Sidqi Pasha's duty is to keep the people busy with hopes and

wishes, and to make the English imagine that he is a man with a genuine doctrine of reform, and with real plans for achieving social justice.

All this is well enough, but better and more useful still would be for Sidqi Pasha to return to his own senses, and to recognize that the spirit of the people has changed, and that those who could once be deceived with wishes and hopes in his first ministry are no longer satisfied with anything but facts and deeds in his second; and that if the spirit of the people has changed, the policy of the government must change along with it. Let Sidqi Pasha consider that Egypt has a people who are hungry, wretched, ignorant, and sick, and that it is not enough for this people to be promised happiness, satiety, and learning — rather, they need to touch these things with their own hands, and to win their rights, with their own efforts, as tangible reality, not as a distant hope, nor as a phantom shimmering somewhere in the sky.

And Sidqi Pasha is too shrewd to attempt to deceive the British about himself or his government, for the British know everything, and see everything, and after all this, what concerns them is not that social justice should actually be achieved in Egypt, but rather that they should be able to use social justice as a means of interference in Egypt's affairs, and as a pretext for delaying the surrender to her of her natural right to independence.

It is not enough for our Prime Minister to be clever, tactful, and quick to seize opportunities; he must also be sincere in his love of justice, sincere in his concern to achieve this justice, sincere in his feeling for the people's suffering and his desire to remove it, sincere in his recognition of the people's right to enjoy a true social justice, neither counterfeit nor built upon deception.

If Sidqi Pasha can change his own nature, and transform himself from a man of capital into a lover of justice, a champion of right, a fair arbiter for the people, then let him do so; and if he cannot, then let him spare himself these promises that avail nothing, these hopes that profit nothing, and this talk that serves no purpose, and let him speak frankly to the people in his second ministry — just as he spoke frankly to them in his first — telling them that he has come to govern, whether the people are pleased or not.

And we assure Sidqi Pasha that this frankness would serve him, and profit him, far better than all this pretense, which burdens him and burdens his own supporters with such heavy toil.

Sidqi Pasha ought to remember that people know perfectly well that some angels have been transformed into devils, but they have never yet known of any devils transformed into angels.