Tolerance ...

Sawt al-Umma, 20 October 1946.

1 Among the finest spectacles the world is witnessing these days is the spectacle of the negotiations, or the talks, or the discussions, or the exchange of views between the British Foreign Secretary and the Egyptian Prime Minister; and if it points to anything, it points only to the fact that the world, which has been weighed down by grief, fear, and apprehension ever since the Second World War broke out, stands in need of witnessing something to amuse it and something to divert it, and that the statesmen of victorious democracy are not stingy with amusement nor grudging with diversion.

2 You will perhaps agree with me that Mr. Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, is a socialist man — indeed, one of the leaders of socialism — and holds, in governing and conducting internal and external policy, a doctrine that suits his socialist party's line, at least in what is said and written about it; and that Sidqi Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, is as far from socialism as any man can be, and the most intensely hostile and indignant toward it of all men, and holds, in governing and conducting internal and external policy, a doctrine that ought to stand in the sharpest possible opposition to the doctrine of his counterpart in the negotiations, or the talks, or the discussions, or whatever name you please among those that people cannot agree upon. And yet the two of them meet and negotiate, or converse, or discuss, and the two of them hope, in doing so, to reach agreement on the very matter over which disagreement stands between Egyptians and Britons.

3 This is a clear proof that the world is advancing and not falling back, and that the idea of tolerance which Voltaire preached and proclaimed in the eighteenth century is still in good health, neither corrupted nor weakened by the rise of Russian communism, German Nazism, and Italian fascism.

4 And you will agree with me that Mr. Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, is a member of the Labour Party, and that by virtue of this membership he was elected to the House of Commons, and that he relies upon the enormous majority in the British House of Commons, and that this majority relies upon the trust of the British people — a trust utterly free of all falsity, utterly clear of all deviation, around which no suspicion hovers, whether near or far.

5 Mr. Bevin relies upon this majority alone, and borrows his authority neither from the support of his political opponents nor from the support of friends who ally with him today only to quarrel with him tomorrow. He speaks truly if he says he speaks in the name of the British Parliament, truly if he says he speaks in the name of the British government, truly if he says he speaks in the name of the whole British people, indeed truly if he says he speaks in the name of the independent dominions that make up the working strength of the British Empire. He can grow angry, and the whole Empire grows angry with him; he can be content, and the whole Empire is content along with him.

6 As for Sidqi Pasha, he is a member of the Chamber of Deputies, which Egyptians know well how it was elected, and which its own members and leaders testify was neither free of all falsity, nor clear of all deviation, nor immune to any distortion. Indeed, Makram Pasha himself said of it that its election was built on fraud, and al-Nokrashi Pasha said of it that the election of some of its members was built on fraud.

7 The Egyptian Chamber of Deputies, then, is doubted as to the validity of its election, and Sidqi Pasha is a member of it, though he is a member neither of its Saadist majority nor of its Constitutionalist minority, but rather a man who belongs to neither of these — he is independent.

8 This means that he relies upon the support of the independents only insofar as this support is temporary and conditional, and relies upon the support of the Saadists and the Constitutionalists only insofar as this support is likewise temporary and conditional. It means that, when he speaks, it is by no means certain that he speaks in the name of the Chamber of Deputies, neither in the name of its majority nor in the name of its minority. And suppose the Chamber of Deputies granted him its unanimous trust — even then, the value of this trust would be in doubt, for the Chamber of Deputies's claim to represent the people's will is in the gravest and most extreme doubt. Our Prime Minister, then, will never be believed if he says he speaks in the name of the people.

9 Uglier still is that our Prime Minister heads the negotiating delegation that neither trusts him nor finds any assurance in him; so he will never be believed if he says he speaks in the name of this delegation.

10 Uglier still than all of this is that the Council of Ministers is composed, in part, of Saadists whose party can issue them the order to withdraw their trust from Sidqi Pasha — indeed, they have not even

waited for this order to be issued, for one of them has declared more than once that Sidqi Pasha's ministry is not constitutional, and that it is a mere necessity soon to pass away! And it is composed, in part, of Constitutionalists whose party can order them to abandon Sidqi Pasha at any moment it pleases; and if they obey, Sidqi Pasha loses the trust of his own colleagues, and if they disobey, they become independents who no longer represent this party.

11 And the Council of Ministers, alongside these, is composed of independents, each of whom can abandon the Prime Minister at any moment, just as the Deputy Prime Minister, Lutfi al-Sayyid Pasha, and the former Minister of Commerce, Hubashi Pasha, abandoned him.

12 Sidqi Pasha, then, can never guarantee his own truthfulness if he says he speaks in the name of the Council of Ministers.

13 The two negotiators, or the two speakers, or the two disputants, differ, as you see, in the sharpest possible way: one is strong with the people's support to the utmost degree of strength, and the other is weak with the people's abandonment to the utmost degree of weakness. And yet the two of them meet and negotiate, or converse, or discuss.

14 More amusing still than all of this is that the British Foreign Secretary — together with the entire British government and the entire British Parliament behind him — cannot warn, suspend, or confiscate a newspaper except within the limits the law has drawn, and no Englishman, whoever he may be, can overstep them under any circumstance whatsoever, even when war is underway, even when martial law has been declared; while the Egyptian Prime Minister has warned, suspended, and confiscated newspapers, bound by no limit of law, constrained by no provision of the constitution. Parliament set about protesting, but the protest availed it nothing; the President of the Senate set about protesting, but his protest did not reach its goal, and he only met the Prime Minister halfway, or at a third of the way.

15 Even more amusing and witty than all of this is that the British Foreign Secretary cannot forbid a meeting, whoever its members, whatever its subject, wherever its place — even if the entire British government and the entire British Parliament backed him in it — except within the limits of the law, which there is no way to overstep. If someone were to tell the English that the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister of Great Britain wished to forbid Mr. Churchill or Mr. Eden from attending a meeting or delivering a speech, they would shrug their

shoulders, shake their heads, and burst into the broadest laughter!

16 As for our Prime Minister, he forbids — I do not even say the Wafd, for persecuting the Wafd is a natural thing — but he forbids Makram Pasha from meeting with his own colleagues, or speaking to them, or meeting people at his own club!

17 And our Prime Minister can forbid al-Nokrashi Pasha from all of this, should al-Nokrashi Pasha ever step outside this splendid alliance. Nor is Haykal Pasha's situation any better than that of his two companions, for meeting is permitted to the head of government and to those who support him, and meeting is forbidden to the government's opponents, even when they are members of Parliament. And despite this disagreement between the two men, they still meet, and negotiate, or converse, or discuss!

18 And there is no source for all of this except that the idea of tolerance which Voltaire preached and proclaimed in the eighteenth century is still in good health, untouched by the events of dictatorship! Sidqi Pasha is a tolerant man negotiating with this democratic socialist minister who believes in the freedom of the British people, and acts only relying upon their trust and support. And Mr. Bevin is a tolerant man negotiating with Sidqi Pasha, who gives the people no regard except when he speaks of them, and gives Parliament no regard except when he speaks of it too, and trusts no one but himself, and is trusted by no one but himself, and finds assurance in no one but himself, and is found assurance in by no one but himself. There is no source for this except the idea of tolerance which humanity has won for itself in the modern age!

19 The victorious democrats had made themselves a pledge not to leave any people on earth ruled by oppression and violence, or governed by force and brutality. But after making this pledge to themselves, they thought it over and weighed it, and it became clear to them that returning to the right path was no better than persisting in error — that despotism has as much right to live on this earth as freedom does, that injustice has as much right to govern some peoples as justice has to govern others, and that false democracy deserves no less care than true democracy. And for this reason they let General Franco's regime stand; and for this reason they disciplined the Greeks, who had believed that pledge and relied upon it; and for this reason they content themselves with the names and appearances of things — indeed, they may not even concern themselves with either the facts or the names.

20 General Franco has never, on any day, claimed that his regime was democratic, and yet his regime still stands, defended by the victorious democrats, because tolerance ought to be the foundation on which life rests, and on which relations between peoples rest.

21 The natural consequence of this is that the Egyptian people, for instance, is an intrusive, meddlesome people — intruding into what does not concern it, exposing itself to what is none of its affair — when it denies Sidqi Pasha his right to speak in its name or to negotiate on its behalf with the English; for the Egyptian people is among those peoples who were not created for politics, nor was politics created for them, but who were created to submit, to be subdued, and to acquiesce. If it ever sets about defying whatever order is issued to it, it is punished for this most severely: its newspapers are forbidden to appear, its meetings are forbidden to convene, its orators are forbidden to speak, and its young men and boys, its students and pupils, are forbidden to attend its places of learning.

22 As for the English people, their case is quite different: they would be derelict and do harm to themselves, to the world, and to every one of the highest ideals, if they left their politics to ministers and would-be ministers, and did not keep watch over their leaders and their policy through a free parliament, a free press, free oratory, and meetings that convene wherever they please, whenever they please, and however they please.

23 This means that the peoples of the earth are divided into two kinds: peoples created to be disciplined by their governments, to be governed despite themselves, and to be granted happiness or misery whether they like it or not; and other peoples created to discipline their own governments, and to direct them in managing their affairs as they themselves please, not as the governments please. Or say, if you like, that among the peoples of the earth are peoples created to serve their governments, and other peoples created so that their rulers might be their servants.

24 We, praise be to God, belong to the first kind; the passing days grant us, from time to time, a master who heads our government and conducts our affairs just as he pleases, and if we mutter, or attempt to mutter, we are taught what silence is, and how peoples are to be disciplined.

25 There is nothing at all strange in any of this; for it is said in the tradition: "As you are, so shall you be ruled." And our venerable teacher Lutfi al-Sayyid Pasha used to teach us that government is the mirror of the nation: if the people are weak, their government is strong over them and tyrannizes them; and if the people are strong, their government is their servant and submits to their command.

26 There is nothing at all strange in any of this; what is truly strange is that the memory of victorious democracy should prove so short, as we now see. How many were those who believed, in the aftermath of the war, that the earth would be filled with justice after having been filled with injustice, and that the peoples would be safe forevermore from fear, want, oppression, and aggression! And how many were those who believed, in the aftermath of the war, that the leaders of victorious democracy would never let their own hands shake the hands of despots!

27 But we must not forget what used to be said in the tales of the Thousand and One Nights: that the talk of the night is greased with butter, which scarcely sees the sun before it melts away.