

Program (1) ...

Sawt al-Umma, 25 October 1946.

What, one wonders, might these difficulties be — the ones connected with our internal politics, which Mr. Bevin alluded to even as he addressed the British House of Commons on Tuesday, and which he said stand in the way of reaching any result in the negotiations?!

It was said yesterday that the officials at the Foreign Office do not wish to elaborate on the interpretation of this allusion made by the British Foreign Secretary before the British House of Commons. It is natural that the officials at the Foreign Office should dislike such elaboration, and should not wish to involve themselves in it, for they appreciate, first of all, that the Egyptian Prime Minister, who has presented himself to them as a shrewd and perceptive man, contents himself with hints rather than declarations, with allusions rather than statements, with generalities rather than particulars. They know, secondly, that foreign policy has its own international language, which relies more on symbol and gesture than on dotting every i. And they know, thirdly, that the difficulties touching our internal politics are not their affair, or ought not to be their affair, and they do not wish to involve themselves in them, lest it be recorded against them that they desire Egyptian independence and meddle in what is not theirs to meddle in. It is not strange, then, that Mr. Bevin contented himself with his brief allusion.

Nor is it strange that the officials at the Foreign Office should avoid elaborating or interpreting this allusion; but what is strange, if anything from our strange Prime Minister can still be called strange, is that Sidqi Pasha should fail to understand this allusion, and should feel no regret over his insistence on pressing forward with the negotiations despite these difficulties touching our internal politics, and should feel no trace of shame — and I very nearly dictated a harsher word than this one — that such an allusion should be made before the British House of Commons, made by the British Foreign Secretary himself.

And Sidqi Pasha is residing in London, having gone there rejecting all counsel, turning away from all advice, disregarding every difficulty, giving no thought to what might be said to him in London, or what might be said about him in London.

*When he resolves, he casts his resolve before his eyes, and sets aside all
mention of consequences;
he consults none but himself in his own counsel, and accepts no
companion but the hilt of the sword.*

It is quite clear that the ancient Arab poet was not thinking of a man who carries the burdens of international politics and heads a government answerable to parliament first and to the people second, because it governs, as they say, under the shadow of a democratic order; rather, he was thinking of himself as an individual with the full freedom to risk his own interests, and to gamble with his own life if he so chose. Such a man, then, may well dispense with thinking of consequences and consult no one but himself, and take pride in the hilt of his sword to defend himself and his own opinion, exposing himself to whatever dangers his own stubbornness might bring upon him. But those who head governments, and are entrusted with the fate of nations, and are answerable for everything they say and everything they do, and are held to account for every error if they err, and for every wrong if they do wrong — these men must, before anything else, think of the consequences before they speak and before they act; and if they fail to do so, they are sinners against their own homeland. And these men must not consult themselves alone in forming their opinions, but must rather consult others — those to whom the democratic order has entrusted the charge of the people's interests: the senators, the deputies, the ministers, and the negotiating delegation — and must either carry out their collective decision and submit to their judgment, or resign; and if they act tyrannically without them and content themselves with consulting only themselves in their opinions, they are sinners against their own homeland. And these men must not rely upon the hilt of the sword alone — indeed, they must not rely upon the hilt of the sword at all, except in pursuing those who work corruption in the land, endanger people's security, and take life and shed blood without right.

In pursuing these men alone, and in repelling an invading enemy, the head of government may rely upon the hilt of the sword, within the limits of the law, and with the authorization of the judiciary and the competent authorities. But in the management of internal and external policy, the hilt of the sword has no value and no use whatsoever, and those who rely upon the hilt of the sword in these matters commit tyranny and sin against their own homeland. And yet we have seen Sidqi Pasha continue what he wished to break off, and renew what he wished

to let wear out, and travel to London to keep these negotiations alive, with no regard for the opinion of the people, nor for the opinion of Parliament, nor for the opinion of his own fellow negotiators, mentioning no consequences, giving no thought to them, caring nothing for the effect of these consequences on Egypt's rights and reputation; he consulted himself, and his own counsel advised him to travel, and he traveled, taking with him nothing but the hilt of the sword — he suspended instruction in all institutes of education for a month, forbade Egyptians to assemble and to make speeches, and drew against the newspapers a sword of fear, so that we should not say what loyalty to our homeland obliges them to say!

We are not mistaken, then, in supposing that this ancient Arabic verse might almost have been composed about our Prime Minister — this man who imposes his own will tyrannically in matters where he has no right to impose it, who sets the whole people aside on a shelf and then disposes of its interests, its rights, its reputation, and its dignity exactly as he himself pleases, not as this people pleases — a people shackled, unable to move; gagged, unable to speak; a people upon whom every variety of fear has been unleashed, until it can scarcely even think.

What strangeness is there, then, in Sidqi Pasha's indifference to what the English might say to him in London, or to what the English might say about him in London, or to this allusion that Mr. Bevin made before the British House of Commons on Tuesday?!

What concerns us now is not whether Sidqi Pasha pays heed to this allusion or not, for Egypt despaired of Sidqi Pasha long ago; nor does it concern us whether the English, to whom Mr. Bevin spoke, grasp the particulars of this allusion or not, for our demands are clear, our position is forthright, and our word is decisive. And those who have need of us must take the path that allows them to hear from us and to speak to us.

It does not concern us, then, where this allusion stands with Sidqi Pasha or with the English; what concerns us is where it stands with the Egyptians themselves, for it is they whom the matter of Egyptian rights concerns, and it is they who ought to have the final word in everything connected with these rights.

This allusion, if it points to anything, points to the fact that this Egyptian people, whom Sidqi Pasha has forbidden to assemble and to speak, and to enjoy its political freedom as civilized democratic peoples enjoy theirs — this shackled, gagged people, restricted in everything —

has nonetheless managed to triumph over Sidqi Pasha and over Mr. Bevin, and over everyone who wished a treaty to be concluded between Great Britain and Egypt that the Egyptians would not accept and in whose details and particulars they had no share.

For had Sidqi Pasha truly represented the Egyptian people and enjoyed its trust and support, these internal difficulties that stand in the way of the negotiations reaching their goal would never have arisen, and Mr. Bevin would never have needed to allude to them before the House of Commons.

And had Sidqi Pasha represented the Egyptian people even approximately, and spoken in the name of some respected portion of this people, it would have been possible for him and for Mr. Bevin to turn away from these difficulties, had they arisen, and to rely upon this consequential minority to conceal these difficulties from world public opinion, and to deceive the Egyptian people about itself and its own right, and to compel it to accept what it does not want. But Sidqi Pasha represents neither the people nor any portion of the people, be it large or small; he does not even represent his own fellow ministers, nor even his own fellow negotiators — he represents only himself, and himself alone. And this is why the internal difficulties arose, and this is why the British Foreign Secretary grew apprehensive about pressing the negotiations to their goal, and this is why the British Foreign Secretary declared this apprehension of his before the British House of Commons.

The Egyptians demand their rights, and will not be satisfied until they win them in full. This is a true right; but the Egyptians refuse to be ruled over by one individual or a handful of individuals, whether Egyptian or English. And through their refusal, their steadfastness, and their insistence on granting their trust only to those they can rely upon and feel secure with, they have managed, through all of this, to prevent Sidqi Pasha from signing a treaty unsuited to their rights and their dignity, and have managed, through all of this, to make Great Britain feel that treaties have no value unless accepted by peoples, even if accepted by governments. This is no small victory. It is, without doubt, a negative victory — but it is a negative victory today so that it may become a positive victory tomorrow.

The Egyptians, then, have only to be resolved, to be determined, and to hold fast to this one word that, in such a situation, only a noble people can hold fast to — the word "No" ...

Sidqi Pasha must hear this word, whether absent or present, asleep or awake, content or indignant; Mr. Bevin must hear it, whether residing in London or traveling to New York; and the whole world must hear it, in all its differing political doctrines and systems of government: Egypt does not wish to consider a treaty with the English before the evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley become established fact; Egypt does not wish its tongue to be spoken with, or its name to be invoked, in matters touching its foreign policy with any state whatsoever, except by those who enjoy its trust and carry the burdens of government as the result of a free election, unbowed by force and violence, untouched by fraud and falsification; Egypt does not wish its rights to become a subject of bargaining, whoever the bargainers may be, and whatever the circumstances that call for such bargaining; Egypt does not wish to gamble with its own interests and its future, and to stake the blood of its sons in the service of any state, whether that state lies in the East or in the West. And Egypt does not wish to conclude agreements here or there before it has secured its rights in full, enjoyed its independence, and is able to say yes or no out of a will and a consent that no foreigner imposes with an army of occupation, and that no Egyptian imposes with the hilt of a sword.

The Egyptian program in these days must be firm and decisive, luminous and conclusive, and as brief as brevity itself allows; no one should find any difficulty in understanding it, and no one should need any effort to pronounce it. It is but a single short word, as short as any word can be, as firm as any expression can be: the word "No" — a word that ought to echo throughout every corner of the Valley, from its farthest south to its farthest north, from its farthest east to its farthest west. "No" must be the watchword of the Egyptians, until God brings to pass a matter already decreed.