

What Did He Say

Al-Balagh, 7 August 1945.

We can affirm that the Prime Minister said nothing yesterday when he addressed Parliament on Egyptian rights. By this we mean that he said nothing of real weight that we could rely upon or take comfort in. For all Egyptians already know that the Prime Minister, like his colleagues, believes — among themselves, before their fellow citizens, and before the English — that Egypt has her full right to genuine independence, and to everything that follows from it, including evacuation, and the whole Nile Valley being left entirely to the people of the Nile Valley.

All Egyptians know this perfectly well, and they were never expecting the government of al-Nokrashi Pasha to inform them of his own opinion on the Egyptian question, nor to speak to them of his belief in the homeland's right to full and honorable independence; what they were asking him — and are still asking him — is to tell them what his government has done to secure this independence at once, and what his government intends to do to secure this independence at once.

This is what Egyptians asked, and are still asking, of the Prime Minister, and it is for this reason that we are exceedingly sorry to report that the Prime Minister said nothing yesterday to the Senate, nor to the Chamber of Deputies. He denied that Egyptian rights were a subject of interpellation in either chamber, since all Egyptians already agree upon them. And he would be right to deny this, were it not that no one had in fact made these rights the subject of an interpellation at all; rather, the subject of the interpellation was, and remains, what the government has done and intends to do to turn Egyptian demands into undisputed facts, accepted equally by Egyptians and English, or by Egyptians and foreigners of whatever nation.

Egyptians, then, have no disagreement over their rights, nor did they ask the Prime Minister for his opinion on these rights; what they asked him was to inform them that he had done something to secure these rights, and he informed them that he had done nothing. They asked him to inform them that he intended to do something to secure these rights, and he informed them that he would not fail to seize any opportunity that presented itself to negotiate for these rights — he would not fail to seize any opportunity that presented itself — but when will this opportunity present itself? How will it present itself? And who is to create

this opportunity? Will it present itself today? Tomorrow? In a month? In years? This is precisely what the Prime Minister did not say; instead, he merely expected to see Egypt enjoying her rights "before long." And this "before long" may shrink to a matter of hours, or may stretch into years, or may stretch into decades, for nearness and distance are relative matters when measured against time, and relative again when measured against the life of nations.

The Prime Minister, then, said nothing on this point either. And how is this opportunity to present itself? Will it arrive by chance, whenever it occurs to it to arrive? Will it descend from the sky? Will it spring up from the earth? Will it arrive on the Night of Destiny? Or will it arrive because we ourselves want it to exist, and want to seize it? On this too the Prime Minister said nothing. And who is to create the opportunity? Are we to create it? And why, then, have we not created it yet? Are the English to create it? In that case we may well wait a very long time indeed, if we insist on waiting for the English to feel inclined to grant it. Are the Americans to create it? The Russians? The Greeks? And what business is it of theirs, in a matter strictly between us and the English? Who is to create the opportunity? On this too the Prime Minister said nothing; he merely assured us that he does not expect the English to oppose or obstruct Egypt's full enjoyment of her rights. If so, what, then, is the Prime Minister waiting for, before asking the English to simply get out of the way of this independence, which he himself does not expect them to resist or oppose? And the strangest thing of all is that the Prime Minister should recite to both chambers an answer that resembles nothing so much as a Muslim's declaration that there is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger, or a Christian's prayer when he says, within himself and before others, "Our Father, who art in heaven" — imagining that by this declaration he has satisfied the Egyptians, since he holds the same view of independence that they hold, demanding it as they demand it, and awaiting it as they await it. The Prime Minister has forgotten only one thing: that the Egyptians did not raise him to the premiership merely so that he might say to them, in the end, "I love what you love, and I await what you await" — they raised him to the seat of government so that he might carry them to their goal, realize their hope, and demand of the English that they simply get out of the way of their independence. And the curious thing is that the Chamber of Deputies then moved on to the order of the day, and the head of the journalists' syndicate imagined this to be some kind of victory — because the Chamber of Deputies had not approved the Prime Minister's answer; that

is, because the Chamber of Deputies had taken a merely passive position on so grave a matter!

Forgive me, my dear syndicate head. The Chamber of Deputies ought to have resolved, unanimously, to charge the government with entering at once into negotiation with the English to achieve independence, so that Egypt might know what was intended for her, and so that Egyptians might know where they were being led; as for procrastination and stalling, passive postures, waiting for opportunities, and trusting in the good faith of an ally — all of this was talk that used to be acceptable, but ought no longer to be accepted as sufficient now. The Chamber of Deputies has heard, and the deputies have read in the newspapers, that Iran did not wait, did not bide her time, did not merely hope, but demanded evacuation outright, even before the war had ended.

And the deputies have heard, and read, that Syria and Lebanon are demanding evacuation, and achieving from it what they want, with Egypt herself helping them toward it — helped in turn by the Prime Minister himself — and that neither of them waited or merely hoped, but resolved and then acted, with the Prime Minister's own help in both their resolve and their action. What is it, then, that leads him to see and to help where Syria and Lebanon are concerned, yet to wait for an opportunity and hope for good faith where Egypt herself is concerned?!

And the deputies have heard, and read, of the grave events that unfolded at the San Francisco Conference, and of the grave events that unfolded at the Berlin Conference as well, and the deputies know, just as the Prime Minister knows, that these are precisely the circumstances in which action ought to be taken, that waiting, in these days, is itself a failure, and that delay may well risk the loss of our rights altogether.

And I have no doubt that the Prime Minister ought not to be accused of such failure, nor does he wish our rights to be lost; why, then, this silence, this waiting, this clinging to vague hopes?!

Is it not strange that the Egyptian Gazette should appear yesterday, and that the Prime Minister should speak yesterday as well, and that the spirit of the Gazette's leading article and the spirit of the speech the Prime Minister delivered should agree so perfectly that waiting is best, and that the whole question is merely a matter of time?! Does the Prime Minister know, do the members of Parliament know, do all Egyptians know, that the outside world has been discussing the Wafd's memorandum, and discussing too the possibility that the Egyptian

government will demand evacuation? And what, then, might the outside world be expected to say? It will say, of course, that political necessity has compelled the Egyptian government to bide its time and wait until the opportunity presents itself. But the Egyptian nation itself does not bide its time, nor does it wait; it demands its full right, and pursues it without hesitation or delay.

There is, then, a disagreement between the nation and the government: a nation that presses forward, and a government that waits. And who knows — perhaps a day will come when the nation and the government will agree, so that one no longer advances while the other stands still.