Impasse

Kawkab al-Sharq, 17 May 1933

Everyone is convinced that the political situation Egypt has arrived at is bad in the utmost degree of badness, wretched to the furthest reach of wretchedness. No one disputes this, no one argues it; people differ only over the way out that must be sought to escape this impasse, and to return to an easier life, in which minds grow calm and people feel secure in their positions and their hopes.

We do not merely assert this and leave it unsupported: you may rest assured that the people most convinced of how dire this situation we are in has become, and of the necessity of escaping it, are none other than the ministers themselves, and their chief, who left yesterday to convalesce and rest. They are the people most convinced of how dire this situation is, and the people most eager to escape it and shed its burdens — on condition that escaping it not mean escaping office, and that shedding its burdens not mean shedding the burdens of the ministry. That is why they met on Thursday evening, and that is why they met on Sunday evening, and that is why they met on the train, the way warring parties meet when they want a truce or are negotiating peace; and that is why they took, in these meetings of theirs, decisions — some of which have become known, and the rest of which will become known tomorrow or the day after — and what has become known of them is enough to prove that they are hard-pressed, and that they are seeking a way out of this difficulty, and a breathing space from this constriction.

They decided to open the door of exception for senior officials and their like among the favoured and the well-connected, and to spend the state's money on them freely, without reserve or economy. Why? To encourage whichever of them they see as well-behaved to continue behaving well, and to dissuade whichever of them they see as ill-behaved from his misbehaviour! To secure the support and backing of these officials, and the silence and quiet of these officials, come what may! Then they saw that this exception would not suffice, and that the ministry would gain nothing from winning over a small minority of officials, or from silencing this minority — that the benefit it might hope for would come only from satisfying the officials as a whole. So they turned the exception into the rule, and threw open the doors of promotions and bonuses as wide as could be, letting through them whomever the

ministers wished to let through.

You may search for the reasons that led the ministry's policy to change to this degree toward senior and junior officials alike, and you will find no convincing reason but one: that the ministry, sure of its own weakness and instability, wants to reinforce this weakness and confirm this instability, and has hit upon the paths it believes will lead to what it wants — namely, winning over the officials and satisfying them by restoring to them what it had withheld from them of promotions and bonuses.

And another decision, no less telling than this one of the ministry's conviction of its own weakness, and of its striving to secure the strength that would enable it to survive, is this million that the ministry has graciously granted for the relief of the peasants. The ministry's awareness of the peasants' need for this relief came late; the ministry did not hear the peasants' outcry, did not hear the peasants' groaning, did not see the peasants' misery, did not witness the appearance of hunger and disease among the peasants — not until this final moment, on the very eve of the Prime Minister's journey.

Indeed, the government had heard, had seen, had witnessed, and had been convinced long since that the peasants were wretched, and that they needed relief — relief this million falls short of — but it turned away from what it heard, saw, witnessed, and felt, turning away as far as it was able, so long as it believed itself strong and hoped to endure; until, when the sky darkened and the ground grew unsteady, and the wind's gusts grew fierce, and the grounds for hope grew feeble, it woke to its own predicament, thought of warding it off, and hastened to escape it — favouring the officials with bonuses, and offering the peasants a pauper's mite: this million.

There is no doubt, then, that the ministry feels, in the plainest way, that the political situation we are in is wretched, bad, to the utmost degree of wretchedness and badness. As for those who support the ministry and appeal to it to satisfy their own desires and achieve their own ends, they have doubted it for a long time, and extended to it the means of survival — sometimes exaggerating their caution, sometimes exaggerating their flattery — until, when the Badari scandals came to light, doubt turned to certainty; and then, when the Prime Minister fell ill, they despaired of the ministry and wished they could find some way to be rid of it!

The Prime Minister has now recovered somewhat from his illness, yet the Times still says that his ministry now has no head! And that any hope of his resuming the burdens of government, even after his return from Europe, is beyond reach!

The English, then, have despaired of the present ministry: their major papers have seen, and still see, that it is a headless ministry — that is, a ministry incapable of thought, judgement, will, and action, since all these faculties reside in the head, not in the shoulders! They had once resided in the ministry's head, namely Sidqi Pasha; and when he fell ill, they fell ill with him, and the ministry was left with shoulders and arms, with a chest and a back, but no head! There is, then, no way to hope in it or rely upon it. How, then, is one to be rid of it — or, to put it more precisely: what is the way out of this political situation, now that the ministry itself has proved powerless to lead us out of it?

As for Egypt, her opinion on the matter is well known; but you know full well that the decision, in this case, does not lie with Egypt. Had the matter of Egypt been left to Egypt — or to Egypt alone, at the very least — we would never have come to this pass, nor would there be anything now to trouble and vex our statesmen.

As for the ministry, it has known its own doctrine for escaping this situation, and it is the very thing the Times correspondent called, last summer, a bribe — meant to win over supporters and backers among officials and peasants alike.

As for the English, the solution that would satisfy them seems, so far as one can tell, unattainable: they want a ministry not dominated by the Wafd's reckless nationalism. It is as if they have studied the matter at exhaustive length, and researched it with the utmost thoroughness, and the outcome of all this long study and meticulous research was the conclusion that this reckless Wafdist nationalism stands sentinel against every ministry that undertakes the affairs of government against the will of the nation; that this sentinel-standing of Wafdist nationalism has already ruined the efforts of the present ministry, ending the experiment in a failure without equal; and that it will, without doubt, ruin the efforts of other ministries resembling the present one, and will end other experiments resembling the present experiment in failures without equal.

There are, then, only two solutions to the problem — one of which the English dislike, it would seem, and cannot stomach now, at the very least: namely, to leave the affairs of Egypt to Egypt, and to let this

reckless Wafdist nationalism manage Egypt's affairs in that well-known manner Egypt seems to love, and has no wish to turn away from, nor to lose its taste for, however much effort is spent trying to turn her away from it and wean her off it.

The second, the English can neither achieve nor manage: namely, to annihilate this reckless Wafdist nationalism utterly, to crush it entirely, and to wipe out its every trace completely. The various ministries have been set up precisely to achieve this end, to accomplish this very purpose — and each has been like al-A'sha's ox, butting the rock until it wears down its own horn, without making the slightest dent in the rock. So nothing remains but one decisive act that would relieve the English and their friends of this reckless Wafdist nationalism once and for all: namely, evacuating the Egyptians from Egypt, driving them from their own land, and scattering them across the far corners of the earth, to places so remote that no news reaches them, and no news comes from them.

Only there, and only there, could things be set right, and the present ministry — indeed, ministries far weaker than the present one — govern Egypt without hardship, without effort, without toil! And what effort would a ministry face in governing a land emptied of its own people, a country whose inhabitants have been driven out?

This is the correct solution to the problem of the Wafd's reckless nationalism. But when will the English find within themselves the courage and the capacity to uproot the Egyptian nation from its land and remove it from its country? And if they did so, to where would they send its driven, scattered multitudes?

This nation is infected with the Wafd's reckless nationalism: wherever it went, this reckless Wafdist nationalism would organize itself right alongside it. Confining it to its own home is better, then, than scattering it across the corners of the earth. Where, then, is the way out of this impasse? What is the path to escaping it?

There is no way out but this one, which the English will find bitter and galling: that the English become convinced that Egypt must live for herself, not for the foreigner; that Egypt must live by her own people, not by the foreigner; that Egypt must be governed as she herself wishes, not as the foreigner wishes; and that Egypt will never be content, will never submit, until she is left alone with this reckless Wafdist nationalism, to hand the reins of government to it for as long as she loves it, trusts it, and is satisfied with it — and, should she come to dislike it, or turn away from

it, or lose her taste for it, to free herself of it of her own free will, not by compulsion, and to pass the reins of government from it to some other people.

This is something the English do not love now, but they will love it tomorrow, without doubt — for the English, however great their power grows, however fierce their dominion, however sharp their sting, are too weak to change the nature of things.

And until the English admit this weakness to themselves, and until the English trust Egypt with her right to entrust her own affairs to whomever she wishes, even to the champions of this reckless nationalism, we must remain strong, and patient — but in hope, in dignity, and with a smile.