

An Attempt

Kawkab al-Sharq, 24 March 1933

That the Prime Minister has failed to implement the political plan he charted for himself, or that was charted for him on the day he formed his cabinet three years ago, is a matter beyond doubt — not merely by the standard of those who oppose and contend with him, but by the standard of those who support and champion him, and by his own standard as well.

Those who oppose the Prime Minister never doubted for a moment that his failure was inevitable and his collapse unavoidable, because he built his policy on an exaggerated regard for his own particular competence and a diminishment of the nation's standing to a degree that genuine competence cannot truly accept. Whoever builds his policy on exalting himself, however much an individual, and belittling his adversary, however much an entire nation, is bound to fail.

The Prime Minister's opponents took to observing his policy and following his steps in implementing it, smiling at these steps which he regarded as triumphs and which his opponents regarded as further descent down the road of failure and defeat. They were not taken in by the long speeches that were mustered, nor by the delegations that were dispatched, nor by the founding of what he called the People's Party, nor by the establishment of what he called the People's newspaper, nor by what he regarded as electoral victory, nor by his travels and his sojourns, nor by his journeys to Europe and his returns from them, his visits to capitals and his meetings with ministers and heads of government — nor even with the Pope.

They were taken in by none of this, because they reckoned — and it is every perceptive person's right to reckon — that the genuine, lasting, productive victory in these times can only be achieved by statesmen relying upon nations and peoples, for they alone are the stable foundation of any practical policy.

Şidqī Pasha had barely returned from Europe when his temporary victory had run its course, and there remained no alternative but for this victory to turn, little by little, into collapse and failure. Şidqī Pasha

manoeuvred as best he could, and concealed his weakness wherever he found a way to conceal it — but he deceived no one and concealed nothing.

It was not long before he himself acknowledged this failure in the letter of resignation he submitted to His Majesty the King, in order to rid himself of those colleagues who had opposed him on matters of governing policy. That resignation was itself a clear admission of failure — and what failure could be more severe, what collapse more complete, than for a Prime Minister to prove incapable of persuading his colleagues and the pillars of his cabinet of his policy, to be compelled to resign in order to rid himself of them, and to acknowledge all of this in his very letter of resignation?

Şidqī Pasha patched his cabinet as best he could, but gained nothing from this patching. He removed the patch he had affixed to his cabinet in January and set another patch in its place a few days ago — and this latest patching was simply another record of this same failure.

The Prime Minister's supporters revolve with the Prime Minister: they repeat what he says and write what he utters, proclaiming victory if he proclaims it, and softening his admission of failure when he admits to it. Perhaps the recording of this failure is the one and only thing on which the Prime Minister, his supporters, and his adversaries all agree at once — but they scarcely agree on this failure before disagreeing on the awkward path out of it and on how to rid themselves of its burdens and its consequences.

As for the Prime Minister and his supporters, it seems to them that patching is one of the means of escaping this collapse, so they patch and patch, gaining time and waiting to see what the days will bring.

As for his opponents and adversaries, they see that everything has provided conclusive proof that Şidqī Pasha's cabinet was never fit to endure, and is now incapable of even attempting to endure, and that it is futile to defy the nature of things and resist it. You know full well that however much you may be supported by visible and hidden powers, you will never be able to stand firm against the nature of things, nor to

overcome it.

There is, then, no way out of this predicament into which Şidqī Pasha has driven himself, and into which he has dragged his country's policy, except to resign, and to leave this policy to those better able than he to manage it and bear its burdens. It is enough that he has delayed his country's progress for three years; it is enough that he has squandered for his country many opportunities it could have seized to advance broad strides along the path of reform; it is enough that he has put his country to the test, and gone to excess in testing it, and tried his nation's patience and gone to excess in trying it — revealing weaknesses that ought never to have appeared so disfigured and so ugly as they have appeared under these circumstances.

But the Prime Minister loves life for his cabinet, just as every man loves life for himself; so he procrastinates and manoeuvres, unwilling to hasten his own removal from power, wanting instead to be overcome by harsh circumstances so that he leaves office unwillingly rather than willingly. He sustains himself with wishful hopes, and pursues various stratagems to prolong his term in office, and perhaps he will not lack, among the English who have gone to excess in supporting and assisting him, someone to share his view and resist the nature of things alongside him, pushing him to cling to power until he is compelled by necessity to relinquish it.

And thus the Prime Minister has placed himself in this painful position that stirs compassion and pity even in the souls of his adversaries and opponents: he is weak, having exhausted every stratagem for finding the strength to bear the burdens of government; he is ill, in dire need of rest; and despite his political weakness and despite his illness, he clings to his office, eager to remain in it.

People are saying — and some political writers agree with them and do not hesitate to express some satisfaction and hope at what they say — that the administrative reshuffle effected yesterday is a prelude to changing Şidqī's policy, whose corruption rests on a thousand and one proofs. It may appear that transferring governors from one province to another is simply giving these governors latitude to adopt a gentler

approach, unlike the harsh approach that Şidqî Pasha's own harshness, and his preference for displaying force and severity, had driven them to. It may indeed be difficult for the former governor of Asyut to soften after severity and ease off after harshness without exposing his dignity and his standing before the people. And a smile on people's lips does not always portray respect — it may portray the very opposite of respect. For this reason he was transferred to al-Gharbiyya, to be gentle and compassionate after having been violent and excessive in violence. And the former governor of Buhayra was sent to Asyut to show there the leniency and accommodation that its previous governor was unable to show. The same may be said of the other governors caught up in this change and replacement.

This may well be true, and Şidqî Pasha may have seen, or been advised, that it would be well to change policy in the provinces, to treat people kindly, and to lift from them the cloud of suffering that had overtaken them on every side, so that the people's turmoil might subside and the hatred for the rulers that had been kindled in their hearts might ease. But the thing that ought to be noted, if this account is true, is that the government was more solicitous of itself and its governors than of the people of the provinces. For it begrudges the Asyut governor having to be gentle after violence and to soften after harshness; it favours him with its affection and is careful of his dignity and his standing before the people — but it has shown these people no such affection or compassion, and has taken no such care for their dignity, even as the Asyut governor was subjecting them to a torment that combined both pain and humiliation. It fears for the governor the people's smile, but does not fear for the people the governor's scowl.

Its officials' dignity is more precious and more favoured by it than the dignity of the nation for whose service and whose interests the government was established in the first place — not to subjugate it to every kind of degradation, nor to favour particular officials over it. This also means, if what people say is true, and what some political writers hope will prove beneficial, that the government is toying with people's minds and playing with the nation as a man plays with a small child.

The people of Asyut grew impatient with their governor, so that governor was transferred and another sent to them, and the government imagined it had satisfied the people of Asyut — but the people of Asyut are part of the Egyptian nation, because Asyut is part of Egyptian soil. The wrongdoing of the Asyut governor towards the people of his province was wrongdoing towards the entire Egyptian nation. Transfer him from Asyut, place him wherever you wish on this earth — none of that will change the established fact, and the established fact is that this governor and his like did not wrong the people of their own provinces alone, but wronged the entire nation, because they wronged the law they were charged with enforcing, the order they were charged with safeguarding, and the justice they were charged with protecting. The age has passed in which governments distinguished between the provinces, regarding wrongdoing in one as having no bearing on the others.

That age has passed, and every single son of Egypt has come to see the entire Egyptian nation reflected in his own right to the government's protection and care. The provinces have become nothing more than administrative units. Moreover, transferring governors, or dismissing them, or putting them on trial — none of this changes anything so long as the one who has extended the governors' hands over the people remains in sole possession of power, capable of extending their hands once again. What calms the people's turmoil and softens the bitterness of their hearts is not the transfer or dismissal of a governor, but rather the resignation or dismissal of the cabinet.

Those who imagine that this administrative reshuffle might be a prelude to a new policy to be pursued by the present cabinet are making a very ugly mistake, and are providing the clearest evidence that they still do not understand the Egyptian people. The people can no longer be deceived by appearances and forms; the people will not be satisfied by the transfer of one governor in place of another. What the people want is for this policy to be uprooted from its very foundation, and for the present cabinet to step aside so that others may take its place — others who will not extend the governors' hands over the people except for good. Stranger still is that some political writers, blessed with an abundance and a far reach of imagination, suppose that this administrative reshuffle

is a prelude to changing the entire Anglo-Egyptian policy and to establishing one cabinet in place of another. How formidable, then, is the Prime Minister in his own estimation, and how worthy of admiration and esteem — and how cruel are those who whisper to him and dictate to him, driving him to pave the way for the opponents who will succeed him and erase his traces from the policy of the state!

This is too much to credit to the Prime Minister — for we have never known him to attain such a degree of selflessness — unless this anticipated change rests on some other foundation, the one to which the Near East recently alluded: namely the widening of the coalition and the addition of further heads to the head of the present cabinet. If so, then how fitting it would be for this change to meet the very same failure that befell Ṣidqī Pasha's cabinet.

Various solutions to Egypt's present political situation may occur to the minds of politicians, but the one thing indispensable to any solution that is to be considered with seriousness and reflection is that the Prime Minister step aside from directing state policy now — and how greatly he is in need of withdrawing from politics in these days, and resting.