

Suspended

The Prime Minister hangs suspended between remaining in power and stepping down from it, just as the High Commissioner himself had long hung suspended between remaining in Cairo and being transferred elsewhere. All that we wish for our ailing Prime Minister is that this suspension may not continue as long as the High Commissioner's did. Whatever a man's health or strength may be, such uncertainty is painful even for the healthy, let alone for the sick.

The secrets of this suspension were once deeply obscure to those who discuss politics. They all firmly believed, without the slightest doubt, that the transfer of the High Commissioner was purely an English matter: perhaps a serious decision, perhaps merely a passing amusement of English policy, but in any case something confined entirely to the English themselves and unrelated to Egypt in either great or small matters.

What concern is it of Egypt whether the English transfer one representative and appoint another, or whether the French replace one minister with another? The English are free in their own country, the French are free in theirs, and Egyptians are free in Egypt. Each nation has the right to appoint, dismiss, alter, and replace its officials without interference from others. Any such interference would be a blatant aggression and an omen of grave danger.

Everyone believed this and doubted it no more than they doubted the sun itself. It never occurred to them that when the English transferred their representative after keeping him suspended for so long, they might also bring down our own Ministry after suspending it in similar fashion.

Thus people began asking about the ropes upon which our Ministry now hangs: what are these ropes? From what material were they woven? And who wove them?

Some answered that these ropes were nothing more than the illness that had afflicted the Prime Minister for many months. But people did not believe this, because the crisis did not emerge when the Prime Minister first fell ill, nor shortly thereafter. It appeared only after he had advanced considerably toward recovery and his doctors had become satisfied with his condition.

After the transfer of the High Commissioner, others claimed that the ropes consisted of a disagreement between the Prime Minister and one of the high officials. Yet people doubted and rejected this explanation as well, because the fate of prime ministers does not lie in the hands of officials, however

powerful they may be. It lies in the hands of Parliament and the Throne.

The Prime Minister repeatedly declares that he continues to enjoy the confidence of Parliament—and indeed he ought to enjoy nothing less—and that he continues to enjoy the favor of His Majesty the King. If this is so, then a disagreement with any official, whether great or small, should neither suspend nor embarrass him, nor compel him to resign or even contemplate resignation.

Such disagreements may exist, and the Prime Minister may well find them unpleasant, but in any case they ought to be far easier to endure than provoking the sharp ministerial crisis now unfolding before us.

Yet this morning *Al-Ahram* appeared carrying reports that invite deep and careful reflection. They revealed that we were not mistaken yesterday when we said that behind this crisis—and behind the comic spectacle now witnessed by Egypt and the world alike—there lies a serious matter that may even prove frightening.

Al-Ahram presents these reports with certainty and insistence. At the same time, it expresses sympathy for the Prime Minister, defends him, and seeks excuses for him in his good intentions and his leadership of the parliamentary majority.

The essence of these reports is that while in Europe the Prime Minister considered resigning, *Al-Ahram* does not explain the reason for this desire to resign, so interpret it as you wish. Yet according to the paper, the Prime Minister also wished to create the crisis and determine its solution himself. He therefore sent a letter to Egypt proposing a division of authority: Shafiq Pasha would assume the premiership, while he himself would retain leadership of the parliamentary majority.

When we read this report in *Al-Ahram*, it reminded us of an old saying attributed to one of the false prophets of early Islam: “Half the earth belongs to us and half to Quraysh, though Quraysh are unjust people.”

We were shocked by this report because it contradicts entirely the opinion we had formed of the Prime Minister. We had indeed criticized his preference for harshness over gentleness, for coercion over goodwill, for imposing himself upon the nation, and for the serious errors into which such a policy inevitably led him. Yet despite all this, we had never doubted that the Prime Minister was an experienced and skillful politician, resourceful, knowledgeable, and thoroughly aware of the duties and

traditions of political life.

We could never imagine that he might fail in the simplest and most elementary principles of constitutional practice. One of the most basic rules is that when prime ministers wish to resign, they submit their resignations to the Head of State. If the Head of State later seeks their advice, they may then offer it loyally and sincerely for the good of the country.

But for a prime minister to resign and simultaneously suggest who should succeed him on the throne of government—this is an astonishing irregularity. We could believe almost anything before believing that such conduct might come from our capable and experienced Prime Minister.

In democratic countries the accepted tradition is clear: when a prime minister resigns, the Head of State may either ask him to reconsider or accept the resignation outright. Thereafter the Head of State consults parliamentary leaders and political figures before entrusting the formation of the government to whomever he judges suitable.

Accordingly, the natural and proper course would have been for the Prime Minister to resign, if resignation proved unavoidable, and then wait for His Majesty the King either to ask him to reconsider or to consult him—before or after consulting other political leaders—about who should succeed him.

But if *Al-Ahram* is correct—and we fervently hope it is not—the Prime Minister violated all these traditions. He offered advice before being asked for it and placed himself ahead of the Speaker of the Chamber and the President of the Senate in offering counsel.

Perhaps this sprang from Sidqi Pasha's conviction that he alone leads the People's Party and will continue to lead the parliamentary majority even after leaving office. Yet even the acknowledged leader of a parliamentary majority has no right to advise His Majesty the King before being consulted, nor to place himself ahead of the heads of Parliament. However powerful his majority may be, he remains only the leader of one bloc among many representatives, whereas the Speaker and Senate President represent their entire chambers and all their parties alike.

These truths appear to have vanished from the Prime Minister's mind either because he is exhausted and overburdened, or because he has come to believe too strongly in himself and his own power.

Strangely enough, supporters of the current Ministry accuse their opponents of tyranny and of

monopolizing authority while excluding allies and colleagues. Yet we know of none among those opponents who became so consumed with self-confidence that he advised His Majesty the King before being consulted or placed himself ahead of the presiding officers of Parliament merely because he led a majority.

And yet such irregularity now appears in the conduct of the Prime Minister who came to power, as he himself claimed, in order to fight and destroy the tyranny of popular domination.

It is therefore understandable that the crisis we now witness should be delicate, dark, and deeply complicated. For if *Al-Ahram* speaks the truth, then the Prime Minister has attempted to establish a dangerous precedent incompatible with constitutional life in any country: raising himself to a position where he claims the right not only to resign but also to designate his own successor in government.

This is grave enough in itself—graver still because it comes from the Prime Minister. We sincerely hope, and continue to hope insistently, that the entire report published by *Al-Ahram* proves false despite the paper's emphatic certainty.

We have no doubt that if this report proves true, its consequences may extend far beyond anything imagined by the ministers and politicians now discussing the crisis.

So let us wait. Perhaps before the sun sets this evening the report will be decisively denied and the political sky cleared of these dark clouds. Or perhaps it will not be denied, in which case the resignation of the Ministry will become inevitable and beyond all doubt.