

Frankness

□□□□ □□□□, 7 March 1933

It is certain that I have no wish to seize anyone by the throat in any matter, however weighty — still less to have anyone seize me by the throat.

When the matter is trivial and slight — such as the question of a coalition or national cabinet — my reluctance to quarrel over it is all the stronger, and my disposition to stand aside all the greater. Let the writers who love the national cabinet, are enamoured of it, and feel bound to defend it from this moment onward take comfort: I shall not dispute with them on the subject... Though I think they will agree with me that seizing one another by the throat is one thing, and the desire for clarity and frankness is quite another. And they will agree with me, I think, that to prolong the discussion and repeat ourselves endlessly on this subject now can lead to nothing — except talk in the air, and an argument that can at best be described as one likely to cause some embarrassment to no purpose and no profit...

The Prime Minister continues to clamp his feeble hands upon the reins of government; he has not released them, and no one has called upon him to release them. It would appear that he will continue to do so until his backers grow weary of him, and his supporters abandon him, and he is asked to withdraw from this power that he loves and prizes so dearly, and for which he sacrifices so much of his health and his repose, of his intelligence and his competence. And we have been speaking — God forgive us — or rather for more than a year now, about the cabinet that will succeed him: will it be partisan or national? Our talk yields nothing but disagreement and division, and nothing but an inducement to the English to persevere in what they are already doing — backing and supporting the Prime Minister — in the hope that his continued tenure may widen the rifts among us and intensify the turmoil in our ranks.

I think those who love the national cabinet and are enamoured of it will agree with me that discussion of it was premature a year ago, and remains premature now, and that the better course is still to leave it until Egypt is delivered from her present predicament, and the harm done by the present Ministry is lifted from her, and freedom of breath and movement and life is restored to her.

I had therefore wished I could persuade the advocates of the national cabinet to be satisfied with what they and their adversaries had said, and to fall silent — as their adversaries fell silent — and devote themselves entirely to what they ought to be devoting themselves to: recording the crimes that are being committed, the wrongs that are being done, and confirming the nation in its splendid stance — the stance of resistance to the tyranny of tyrants and the aggression of aggressors. But the advocates of the national cabinet are excessive in their love of it, and find themselves unable to keep silent about it, even temporarily; they go on talking and talking... without pausing to notice that others are talking alongside them, stirring suspicion, fostering doubt, and giving strong indication that this idea of a national cabinet, even if it is Egyptian in some of its aspects, is something in which the English have a disquieting interest...

Whatever the case, I am at particular pains to ensure that my view on the national cabinet is unambiguous.

I understand by a national cabinet — as I have said before — one that issues from the will of the nation, not from the will of the foreigner; and from the will of the majority when unanimity is not attainable, not from the will of the minority. Any cabinet inspired by the English is therefore not a national cabinet; any cabinet formed by the minority is therefore not a national cabinet. A cabinet cannot therefore be truly national except as the outcome of a free and valid election in which there is no coercion or injustice, around which no doubt or suspicion arises, and in which those who oversee it are moved by no personal inclination or bias.

This is, I think, plain and evident — and what it means is that in our present circumstances the national cabinet must be brought into being by elections, not conduct elections itself...

It is neither right nor logical to cite what the English have done as a precedent. It may be said that the Labour Prime Minister formed his national cabinet and then turned to the people to seek their ratification of it, and the people supported him and rallied to him. This may indeed be said — but those who say it forget that when the Labour Prime Minister formed his national cabinet he was in a free and independent country in which the provisions of the constitution ran their natural course. He had attempted to form his national cabinet from among the members of the

existing Parliament; when the Labour members deserted him and refused him, he had recourse to a popular referendum, and the people granted him their victory and supported him, whereupon he reconstituted his national cabinet in the light of the election results.

What obtained in England cannot serve as a standard for what applies in Egypt. The national cabinet that certain politicians have in mind cannot be formed from within the existing Parliament.

I think that all of these politicians, or most of them, believe it would be better for members of the existing Parliament not to participate in this national cabinet. Where then is it to be formed? And how?

It will be formed outside Parliament — and if the majority of people reject it, it will lose its national character and become nothing more than a partisan cabinet representing the minority. There is therefore no way out of this impasse except to abandon this idea for now and defer it until Egypt is delivered from the present Ministry, then for a neutral cabinet — call it what you will — to take charge and conduct free elections, with the national cabinet as the subject of those elections. If the nation supports it and grants it a majority, it will be formed in the strongest possible manner, and will realise the constitutional principle that is beyond dispute — namely that the majority should bear the burdens of government. And if the nation rejects it and supports its adversaries and grants them a majority, those adversaries will bear the burdens of government in execution of the constitutional rules.

This is the path that I believe holds all that is good, because it is clear and straight, without bend or deviation, without doubt or suspicion surrounding it. And I think the advocates of the national cabinet will agree with me that to take any other path is to court an uncertain outcome and incur undeniable risk — and the least it would produce is the transformation of their national cabinet into a cabinet that the majority fights and the people rejects with the utmost vehemence.

I am loath to see the advocates of the national cabinet follow the path of Sidqi Pasha — their memories, praise be to God, cannot be faulted for brevity. They know that Sidqi Pasha claimed, when he assumed the burdens of government, that he was forming a national cabinet, and said repeatedly that his cabinet belonged to no party and had no need to depend on the support of any party. And yet his cabinet was never

national for a single day, and he was unable to sustain this pose of national character, and was driven to what he was driven to: the formation of his marvellous party, and the establishment of his cabinet — or cabinets — on a foundation of partisanship, or rather of personal individual rule, which is the furthest thing from any genuine regard for the national interest...

I hope the advocates of the national cabinet will not stumble into the same trap as Sidqi Pasha. A resolute man of far-sighted judgment is one who learns from distant precedents, in addition to those still unfolding before his very senses. I say with conviction to the advocates of the national cabinet: one politician of the calibre of our Prime Minister is already too many for Egypt — what then if they thrust themselves into this national cabinet which the majority does not support and which does not issue from the will of the people, making of each one of them another Sidqi Pasha, and multiplying in Egypt the likes of our brilliant and singular Prime Minister... who ought to remain unique in Egypt, without peer or equal...