

The Crossroads

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 30 September 1945

It might well be said that the victorious powers, and the liberated states, now stand at a genuine crossroads: they might proceed toward a world genuinely new; or proceed toward their own old world, long since grown stale; or proceed, instead, toward some wavering, counterfeit world, neither genuinely old, nor genuinely new, but one stirring real anxiety and fear regardless.

This same matter, though, is not nearly so simple or easy as those observing the world's own postwar development might imagine — this development is genuinely, thoroughly complex, tied partly to peoples, partly to governments, and partly, too, to those same relations connecting states with one another, upon which cooperation among nations itself rests. Let us make an effort, then, to clarify this subject somewhat — it would do the Egyptian reader well, indeed it would do even the ordinary man in the street, as they say, well, to gain some real insight into the general state of human life, now that the ages of isolation and seclusion have passed, and now that any people's own withdrawal into itself has become the clear, established path toward genuine stagnation and decline alike. As for the peoples of Western Europe, there is no doubt whatsoever that their own advancement in civilization, their own considerable share of culture, and their own capacity for thinking through, and judging, complex politics, none of it prevented them from being genuinely deceived by the promises Allied statesmen made throughout the war — exactly as other peoples, in the near and far East, were likewise deceived by these same promises. European peoples, before this most recent war, had already grown weary of moderate democracy, inclining instead toward a democracy leaning leftward, toward socialism, toward communism. Yet moderate democracy — whether excessive in its own conservatism, or restrained in that same conservatism — still had powerful supporters, still held real sway, and real struggle raged, on this very account, between right and left. Most peoples hated the extreme right, exactly as they feared the extreme left — hating the die-hard conservatives, fearing the communists, and finding real comfort in a democracy that left capital untouched, or touched it only ever so gently.

Once war broke out, and peoples were promised complete freedom, and governments flattered the sentiments of every class alike, to secure national solidarity against the enemy, peoples believed what they were told, and sacrificed their own lives, their own wealth, their own livelihoods, for the sake of these same high ideals. War's own circumstances then required governments to take control of the national economy, to manage national wealth deliberately — if not outright communist management, then genuinely thoroughgoing socialist management: the state oversaw everything, intervened in everything, subjected capital to a genuinely harsh trial, and achieved real equality among citizens in securing life's own necessities, dispensing with its own luxuries, and abandoning extravagance almost entirely. Peoples tasted this same socialist life, finding it genuinely constricting at first, growing genuinely comfortable with it afterward, and preferring it, in the end, to that familiar old life once resting on inequality between classes. Then Soviet Russia joined the war, and the hesitant grew bold, the doubtful grew confident, the undecided pressed forward, and peoples grew genuinely certain the Allies' own victory would be a victory for liberty, fraternity, and equality alike. The war had scarcely laid down its own burdens in Europe before peoples pressed forward to attain their own wishes, and realize their own hopes, pressing forward with a force that knew no gentleness. Great Britain proved quickest of all in this same rush: the British people refused to retain the coalition among the parties that had managed the war's own affairs; the British people then refused to grant the Conservatives their own trust, forcing their own great leader, Mr. Churchill, to relinquish power to his own Socialist rival, Mr. Attlee. Everyone had imagined Mr. Churchill would remain Prime Minister when Japan finally surrendered — but the British people hastened to claim their own democratic rights, setting the Conservatives aside from power, at least for a time.

Nor was France in any way slow to hasten toward claiming these same rights: municipal elections were held some months ago, in which the left won a clear victory; regional elections were held only days ago, in which the left won a clear victory once more; and elections for the Constituent Assembly will be held in only a few weeks' time, with no doubt whatsoever that the left will win them too.

The Belgian problem is already well known to readers — a dispute, at its own core, between Conservatives and Socialists, but one never confined merely to matters of governance, touching the king's own

person as well, and perhaps the entire royal family besides.

Matters in Italy, too, rest with the left; the king's own fate stands already settled, and the fate of the royal family itself remains genuinely in doubt. Nor have people yet forgotten the Greek tragedy, nor the Yugoslav problem, nor both kings' own waiting on a popular referendum, in either country. Should we leave this part of Europe for the other part, under Russian control — in Poland, Hungary, and the Balkans — we would find that peoples incline toward the Russian direction, without any doubt whatsoever, while capital inclines toward Western Europe, without any doubt whatsoever either. It is certain that, were peoples genuinely, properly consulted, they would vote for the Russian communist system. Nor do European peoples hesitate, likewise, in choosing exactly which path they wish to follow — they want a genuinely new world, one resting neither on tyrannical reaction, nor on oppressive dictatorship, nor even on moderate democracy. Even the most moderate, most restrained of these peoples — the British people — has already declared it wants socialism, preferring it not only to Conservative democracy, but to Liberal democracy as well.

Peoples know exactly what they want, and want to achieve exactly what they want. But peoples are one thing, and governments quite another, even in the very countries most thoroughly committed to socialism and democracy — and it is precisely here that the genuinely terrifying danger lies.

Peoples' own natures, in themselves, remain genuinely sound and upright, disliking any crookedness or distortion — while governments' own natures, in themselves, remain genuinely crooked and distorted, fearing nothing so much as genuine soundness and uprightness. The British government, for instance, is socialist, without any doubt — but socialist with respect to the British people; with respect to other peoples, though, she remains as conservative as Mr. Churchill's own government ever was. The Russian government is communist, without any doubt — but communist with respect to the Russian people; with respect to other peoples, though, she remains as conservative as the Tsarist government ever was. The Fourth French Republic's own government will prove socialist, without any doubt, with respect to the French people — but, with respect to other peoples, will prove as conservative as Raymond Poincaré's own government ever was.

This same contradiction, between the direction governments take and the direction peoples take, produces genuine, serious turmoil in the hearts of European nations — they want one thing, and see something else entirely from their own government, receiving, from these same governments, genuinely dangerous lessons in political hypocrisy, corrupting both morals and taste alike. They want genuine human fraternity, and see their own governments never going beyond mere national fraternity; they want equality among individuals and peoples, and see their own governments genuinely hating equality among peoples — caught, then, in real turmoil between what they want and what they see, torn between what their own sound, upright natures genuinely love, and what their own immediate interests genuinely require.

Peoples find themselves caught, too, in genuine confusion between the justice, equality, and freedom the Atlantic Charter once promised, and the colonialism that actually satisfies real interests, and realizes real ambitions. Nor does this same contradiction, between the direction governments take and the direction peoples take, stop there — it naturally extends, too, to exactly this confusion we now observe in London. As long as securing real interests and real ambitions remains a genuine foundation of governance — even socialist or communist governance — disagreement among these same governments becomes inevitable, and real competition over these same interests and ambitions becomes inevitable as well. The British people, and the Russian people, find themselves standing equally bewildered before this fierce disagreement over spheres of influence — the only real difference being that the British people can openly declare their own opinions, agreeing with their own government at times, disagreeing with it at others, while the Russian people remain always in agreement with their own government. What matters, though, is that European peoples know exactly which path they have chosen — the path of a genuinely, truly new world — while European governments look upon their own peoples with a mere smile, hesitating between a genuinely, truly old world, and some other, counterfeit world, neither old nor new.

With respect to the East, though, matters prove genuinely more complicated — Eastern peoples have not yet developed sufficiently to think seriously in terms of socialism or communism at all; they feel only a single thing, the need for freedom, and think of only a single thing, securing that same freedom. They were deceived, exactly as European peoples were deceived, by the Allies' own promises, and waited for these

same promises to be fulfilled — but, once the war ended, secured nothing whatsoever, nor were even told to keep waiting; the victors simply turned away from their own hopes, openly and unmistakably, taking them up, instead, as an object of rivalry and dispute. Eastern governments prove no less naive than their own peoples in this respect — they too were deceived by these same promises, and waited for their own aspirations to be realized, only to look up and find the West entirely preoccupied with dividing the spoils, satisfying its own interests, and realizing its own ambitions — leaving them standing genuinely bewildered, not knowing what to do, even if they know well enough what to say.

This, precisely, is the world's own position, following the end of the Second World War: European and American peoples wanting complete freedom, complete justice; European and American governments wanting justice and freedom for their own peoples, while preferring their own interests over other peoples' own freedom; and weaker peoples and governments, across the earth, wanting freedom and independence, yet not knowing how to achieve or attain either. This same confusion is exactly what stirs the anxiety now filling the world's own atmosphere, in these very days. European and American peoples remain genuinely dissatisfied; their own governments remain neither reassured, nor stable, nor in agreement with one another; the peoples of other countries remain genuinely dissatisfied too; their own governments remain genuinely bewildered, matters having grown thoroughly confused for them; and the entire world remains in real turmoil, in an atmosphere whose very substance is resentment and fear — even though people once believed the Allies' own victory would put an end to exactly that same resentment and fear.

So which path, then, does the world find itself driven toward? Toward this same crooked path governments themselves follow, and stumble along?... Or toward this same straight path peoples themselves wish to follow? This question admits of two answers. The first comes from politicians, those who watch only immediate events, and seek only immediate interests — and holds that the world will follow counterfeit paths, ones containing a great deal of the old traditions, and very little of any genuine modern innovation, ones retaining colonialism itself, merely changing colonialism's own names and some of its own methods, retaining the old balance-of-power politics, merely changing that same policy's own names and some of its own appearances... paths containing a great deal of injustice, and only the smallest measure of any genuine

attempt at justice. The second answer, though, comes from those who neither govern, nor treat practical politics as a craft, but simply observe, and take note of, history's own development — and this second answer is genuinely simple: humanity has always striven toward justice, and secured a great deal of it already; its own striving toward justice will continue, its own struggle in that same cause will persist, and its own eventual attainment of it stands genuinely assured — though it will never be achieved until humanity has waded through truly formidable depths to reach it, depths whose very substance is the sacrifice of lives, wealth, and livelihoods. If any single piece of advice must be offered to peoples genuinely longing for justice, genuinely thirsting for freedom, then the only sincere advice is this: never falter, never weaken, and never wait for your own rights to be handed to you the way gifts are handed over — for rights are never given; they are seized, and never seized except through genuine effort, genuine toil, and the genuine bearing of hardship.