

Test (1)

Taha Hussein

Kawkab al-Sharq, 9 February 1934

We say today as we said yesterday, and as we said the day before yesterday: the idea of democracy in Egypt is now undergoing a precise and difficult test, just as the Egyptians' understanding of it, and their faith in it, are undergoing a precise and difficult test. Indeed we say today more than we said yesterday and the day before: the present order itself is what is now undergoing a precise and difficult test, and the one putting it to the test is Sidqi Pasha, the founder of the present order, who protected it for more than three years, who went to whatever lengths were needed to protect it, and who cost the Egyptians whatever that protection cost them.

For the true idea of democracy requires that ministers be questioned about what they have done, and it requires that the questioning of ministers be strict and searching, exacting in its strictness and its scrutiny; for it requires that those who undertake public affairs be upright and devout, not only in their dealings with themselves, but in their dealings with people before all else; for confidence in the integrity of ministers is the foundation of government in every order, and it is the foundation of government in the order of democracy especially. And there is no confidence where rumors abound, where people's talk of them grows abundant, where clubs discuss them night and day, and yet one finds nothing from the rising sun of truth to dispel their clouds, whether thick or thin.

The present order is democratic, as its proponents and founders say, and it has decreed that ministers are accountable, and it has decreed that ministers are to be tried should their acts require that they be tried. Sidqi Pasha and his associates, and the good man and his associates, have filled people's ears, hearts, and minds with words of justice, fairness, integrity, equity, and democracy, and the like of these words that people love to hear; but what they love above all is to see their beautiful, radiant meanings realized, to feel their sweet and gentle effects, to be blessed by their mercy, and to be assured that this mercy extends its shade over them, protects them from injustice, wrong, and caprice, and drives away from them oppression, tyranny, and despotism.

People are witnessing this test to which the idea of democracy is being subjected, and to which the present order is being subjected, and they would like to see the result of the test, so as to know that the idea of democracy truly exists in Egypt, and so as to know that the present order realizes this idea and protects it, and proves that it is fit to endure and capable of enduring. The subject of the test is easy and simple, neither an impossible problem nor a miracle; the simplest principles of democracy, and the simplest democratic systems, could pass it with great success. For the former minister of the interior, Sidqi Pasha, approved weighty undertakings whose danger people sensed, and about which people talked at great length, claiming that they had squandered hundreds of thousands of pounds of public funds; and the present ministry itself sensed this danger, and was alarmed by it, and showed eagerness to ascertain it and to punish those who were implicated, and who implicated others in it; and for this purpose a committee was formed and charged with a precise investigation, and people waited, and the government waited, for the result of this investigation.

So the question now put to democracy and to the democratic order in Egypt is this: will the investigation reach Sidqi Pasha, or will it fail to reach him? The first answer was, unfortunately, a sorry one; for it emerged that the investigation the government imposed, and for which it formed a committee, cannot reach Sidqi Pasha — indeed cannot even contemplate reaching Sidqi Pasha — because Sidqi Pasha was a minister, and because ministers are questioned only before parliament and parliament's committees, and the committee the government formed is not a parliamentary one; and it emerged too that the present judicial authority has no competence to question Sidqi Pasha, and that parliament alone has competence for this question. There is nothing objectionable in any of this; for the danger to democracy, to right, and to justice does not lie in Sidqi Pasha not being questioned before the committee or before the judicial authority, but the whole danger, the whole democratic bankruptcy, and the utter defeat of right, justice, equity, and integrity, lies in Sidqi Pasha not being questioned under any circumstance whatsoever. We spoke yesterday, and the day before, of the present ministry's stance on this question when the investigation committee was formed; for it knew, without doubt, that Egypt has a constitution, and that the constitution does not permit ministers to be questioned about their acts except before parliament, and so it formed this committee while resolved within itself that Sidqi Pasha should not be questioned before it, and we are loath to believe that the ministry was

ignorant of the constitution. The question now is this: will Sidqi Pasha remain safe from being questioned, so long as the committee cannot question him, and so long as the judicial authority cannot question him; or will the constitution Sidqi Pasha himself issued be enforced upon Sidqi Pasha himself? Or will the parliament whose election Sidqi Pasha oversaw form a committee to question Sidqi Pasha? Or will the present order furnish proof to its adversaries, and to the adversaries of its founder, that it is capable of enduring, that it realizes justice and integrity, and that it does not hesitate even to question its founder and source, who protected it for more than three years? This is the question, and it is, as you see, a question of the gravest import, deserving that people attend to it, turn their attention to it, and speak of it. It deserves — in particular — the attention of the ministers, not because they are adversaries of Sidqi Pasha, for matters of government must stand above rivalries, but because they are charged with enforcing the constitution, and because they rose up to protect the new order. It deserves the attention of the senators and deputies, not because they are friends or adversaries of the great dictator, for matters of state must stand above love and hatred, and above victory and rivalry, but because they are the pillars of the new order, and have all sworn an oath of loyalty to it, and of respect for its principles and provisions. And then it deserves the attention of Sidqi Pasha himself, not so that he might defend himself against what rumor fashions around him — for Sidqi Pasha may hold himself too high to be touched by rumor — nor so that he might defend himself against whatever suspicion he may be exposed to — for Sidqi Pasha may be too bold to trouble himself with suspicion — but so that he might protect the order he founded, and which he protected for more than three years. And Sidqi Pasha loves this order, as a compassionate, tender father loves his dutiful, devoted son; so it is the order's right upon Sidqi Pasha that he protect it, and it is Sidqi Pasha's right upon himself that he protect his son, and that he prove to people and to himself that he is a compassionate father who knows how to protect his beloved sons. Sidqi Pasha, moreover, has sworn an oath of loyalty and respect to the present order; so it is right that he keep faith with this oath, and it is right that he go to the present committee, even if it does not summon him, and that he speak to it even if it does not summon him, and that he speak to it even if it does not question him. And should he find this difficult, and see silence from the ministry, and silence from the senators and deputies, then it is right that he ask the Chamber of Deputies to form this parliamentary committee, which alone can summon him and question him, and rule for him or against him, and prove that Egypt has a

democracy and a democratic order.

And how much Sidqi Pasha would rise in people's eyes, were he to come forward to parliament and ask it to form this committee! We would like, moreover, to say plainly and clearly to the ministers, to the senators, to the deputies, and to Sidqi Pasha himself: the investigation conducted with the officials in the Corniche affair amounts to nothing unless it is followed by an investigation of the minister who authorized them to act, if he did authorize them, or who left them to act without authorization, if he did leave them to act without authorization. For the officials are, without doubt, accountable for everything they did; but their superiors among the ministers are no less accountable than they are — indeed they bear a heavier accountability and a weightier duty. It may be an overstepping of justice that subordinate officials should be questioned, because the government has the power to question and call them to account, while the responsible ministers are left alone, for no reason except that the constitution makes their questioning a matter for parliament! Let parliament, then, question them, and thereby set a sound example and a good model, and let it show the officials who are questioned that they are not questioned alone, but that their ministers are questioned along with them.

Have you seen, then, that the test which democracy, and the democratic order in Egypt, are now undergoing is not among the things that can be overlooked or treated lightly, but is truly among the things of grave danger? If matters proceed as they ought to proceed in countries whose temper injustice has not corrupted, there is no doubt that Sidqi Pasha will be questioned before long. But if Sidqi Pasha is not questioned, it may be difficult for us to believe that Egypt has a democracy, and that the present order has succeeded in the test.