

Protest

Al-Jumhuriya, 1 September 1954.

I do not know whether what I read in some of the Parisian papers is true: that France has conveyed to Egypt her protest against what is broadcast on the radio condemning her policy in North Africa in general, and in Morocco in particular.

But the thing that admits no doubt is that the French papers are furious in the extreme, condemning in the extreme, what is broadcast from Egypt supporting the Moroccans and Tunisians in their refusal to accept injustice, their demand for their rights, their resistance to oppression, and their revolt against colonialism.

Some days ago, Le Monde published an editorial under a distasteful title, in which it paired our prime minister's name with that of the two-faced Roman god whose temple used to be opened in times of war and closed in times of peace. It claimed that our prime minister holds two contradictory positions toward France: one of peace and gentleness, the other of hostility and war; for our prime minister — as Le Monde reported — is peaceable toward France, eager to establish between her and Egypt bonds of friendship and cooperation; he received with joy and good cheer that French delegation which arrived some time ago offering to invest vast French funds in realizing Egypt's attempted reforms.

He also instructed Le Monde's correspondent, Édouard Sablier, to say in Paris: that Egypt looks upon the present French government — the Mendès France government — with a great deal of hope and expectation.

It made clear that, if our prime minister did say this, he said it with reference to French policy in North Africa, and to Mendès France's attempt to satisfy the Tunisians by realizing some of their hopes.

And it is clear that, if our prime minister did say this, he meant by it to gently direct the French prime minister toward doing in Morocco something resembling, more or less, what he is attempting to do in Tunisia. This position of our prime minister's is the position of peace with France; but he has another position which Le Monde regards as a position of war — namely, when he leaves Egyptian radio free to call for fairness toward the Moroccans and Tunisians, and when he leaves the Egyptian papers free to call for the Moroccans' and Tunisians'

independence as well.

And so Le Monde portrayed our prime minister as contradicting himself, making peace with France and waging war on her at the same time, and expressed the wish that he choose one of the two positions. And the strangest thing in this article is that this French paper, always known for moderation, balance, and the avoidance of bias in its writing — as much as such papers can avoid bias in the political columns they write — is asking of the Egyptian prime minister something that is asked of no prime minister in any country on earth.

For between Egypt and France there exist official political relations founded on friendship, courtesy, and cooperation toward good and peace, and toward whatever benefits people and serves the interests of both countries.

These political relations have well-defined limits, recognized and established in international practice, and they do not prevent Egypt from condemning whatever French actions she sees it her right to condemn, just as they do not prevent France from doing the very same toward Egypt. So long as the Egyptian embassy stands with its doors open in Paris, and the French embassy stands with its doors open in Egypt, relations between the two countries rest on friendship, courtesy, and cooperation — but this does not dissolve either state into the other, nor does it make either a mere shadow of the other. Nor, beyond that, does it abolish the freedom of criticism that is a natural right of the Egyptian people, their press, and their broadcasting, even if that broadcasting is subject to the government's authority.

The present French government, like the French governments that preceded it, and like the French governments that will follow it tomorrow or the day after, neither loves Russian policy, nor endorses it, nor approves of it, and yet she conducts her affairs with Russia upon these familiar official arrangements founded on friendship, courtesy, and cooperation, so long as France has an embassy standing with its doors open in Moscow, and Russia has an embassy standing with its doors open in Paris.

And how often French prime ministers openly voice, in the French parliament, bitter and violent criticism of Russian policy, while the French press and French broadcasting go far beyond the bounds of courtesy in the criticism and denunciation they direct at Russia and her policy, and Russia repays France in kind, without either state protesting

against the other through diplomatic channels or through the press and broadcasting.

Between France and her closest allies and friends there are endless disputes, yet these call for no protest from either side. What, then, is the matter with the French — government and people alike — that they expect of Egypt what they expect of none of their friends and rivals alike? Why do they take offense at the slightest thing when it comes from Egypt, and not take offense at grave matters when they come from their other rivals and friends? And why do they demand of Egypt what they cannot demand even of their own French press, when among the French papers published in Paris and in the provinces are some that direct at French policy in North Africa a violence of criticism and condemnation to which Egyptian criticism, however harsh and violent it may become, bears no comparison?

I have before me, as I dictate this article, a Parisian French paper friendly to the present prime minister, Mendès France, and it directs at French policy in North Africa accusations of the gravest kind, and denunciations of the most violent kind; it informs us that Mendès France had intended to attempt in Morocco something like what he attempted in Tunisia, but that ill-counseling colonialists, some of whom it names, dissuaded him from that intention, and impressed upon him that it would be best to wait until the violence in Morocco subsided, lest France be seen to yield to the pressure of those rising up and raging against her.

And it informs us that President Mendès France disappointed the hopes the French had placed in him when he listened to those counselors, and when he left the colonialists free to do as they pleased with the people of Morocco.

It also informs us that this new policy of President Mendès France's is what permitted the French administration in Morocco to commit the grave offenses it committed as a precaution against the demonstrations it expected during the Feast of the Sacrifice, and on the twentieth of August, the day on which the legitimate sultan was removed from his throne; so it carried out what all the French papers call "purging operations" in the major cities, meaning that the army occupied these cities and arrested those expected to incite demonstrations. And as a result of this purge, those arrested by the army during this operation are counted not by the dozens nor the hundreds, but by the many thousands.

It also informs us that this new policy of President Mendès France's is what emboldened the French administration to storm the mosques, arrest the scholars loyal to the exiled sultan, and carry them to the palace of the installed sultan to declare their loyalty to him, compelled to declare it by sheer compulsion.

It also informs us that the French administration herded people together by force of arms to present their congratulations on the feast to the installed sultan. And when they did so, it gave each one of them a thousand francs, and a quantity of sugar and tea.

So she builds her policy on enticement and intimidation alike, the sword in one hand and francs, sugar, and tea in the other; and what could corrupt morals and sever the bonds between people more than a policy built on these abominable methods of enticement and intimidation, which abolish human dignity and base a person's whole condition not upon the contentment of conscience and the peace of the heart, but upon fear on the one hand, and the satisfaction of mouths, throats, and bellies on the other?

All of this, and more than all of this, and graver still, is what the paper friendly to President Mendès France informs us; and it is not alone in this condemnation, for other French papers share in it, papers that may well be more violent in their criticism, and still more severe in their denunciation and vilification. And I know that the French may tolerate criticism from their own countrymen while not tolerating it from others; but the Italian and English papers publish more news of French injustice in Morocco and Tunisia than do the Egyptian papers and Egyptian broadcasting.

Nor do I know that France has protested to Italy or to Great Britain on that account, and I will not even mention the papers of the countries that reject the policy of Western democracy altogether, which depict French policy in North Africa in the most hideous and abominable light, without a doubt; nor do we know that France has protested to any of those countries on that account... So why, then, does France single out Egypt for this protest, to the exclusion of all other nations?

As for me, I explain this by two things. The first: that what Egypt writes and broadcasts is read and heard by Tunisians and Moroccans, because it is written and broadcast in the Arabic language, whereas Moroccans and Tunisians scarcely read or hear what is written or broadcast in other foreign languages.

But France would do well to accept Egypt as she is, and to know that we cannot change our language, nor write and broadcast in a foreign language that our brothers in language and religion do not understand, merely to please France; for our language may well matter more to us than France does, however great the bonds of friendship and official courtesy between us and her may be.

The second thing: that France, it appears, distinguishes between Europeans and Easterners, and the Arabs among them in particular, because she has grown accustomed to a long-standing weakness among Easterners. And it is her duty to know that nations grow weak and grow strong, and that strength is not confined to an abundance of weapons and wealth, but that true strength, strength in its entirety, comes from the awakening of human conscience in the souls of peoples. And it is France's duty, and to her own good, to know that human conscience has awoken in the Eastern world, and in the Arab world in particular, and that she herself, and some of her allies, have already tasted the bitter fruits that have come of this awakening.

She has, then, no choice but to accept Egypt as she is once again, and to know that we will never silence our human conscience, nor remain silent before these abominable wrongs that colonialism commits in any land of the earth, and in the Arab and Islamic lands in particular; for those who remain silent before such wrongs are merely silent about the truth, and it has long been settled in our hearts, for many centuries now, that one who stays silent about the truth is a mute devil, and we do not wish to be devils, nor to be mute. Better than protesting against the word of truth when it is spoken is for France to return to the truth, to come back to right reason, and to restore to the Moroccans and Tunisians the rights they expect to be restored to them.