

POLITICS

The Struggle for Liberty and Parliamentarism in Egypt.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

The tension which was called forth for a short time by the election victory of the Wafd (Nationalist Party) at the end of May this year, the acquittal of the accused Zaghlulists, and in connection with it the resignation of the English Public Prosecutor Kershaw, which was followed by fresh threatening demonstrations by the English fleet, did not lead to any open conflict but was relieved by a provisional compromise. The leadership of the government, which is closely connected with parliament by whom it is supposed to be controlled, was taken over by Adly Yeghan Pasha, a representative of the Liberal Constitutional Party, which, although only possessing a minority in parliament, became acceptable for the Zaghlulist majority (thanks to a timely breach with their former allies, the Ittehad Party which after the May elections were completely discredited). The majority of the portfolios in the Adly Government as well as the Presidency of Parliament were in the hands of the Zaghlul Party. Thus even though the Adly government was actually completely in the hands of Zaghlul, nevertheless the latter, by keeping himself in the background, was much better able to preserve his popularity than if he were officially responsible for Egyptian policy, as in the year 1924.

For the present situation of the Egyptian government is by no means calculated to increase the popularity of those responsible for it. The session of parliament which lasted for three and a half months, presented the unique picture of an assembly which turned from its real tasks and duties to occupy itself with innumerable trifles, and assumed that it could also divert the electors, who were expecting from it something quite different, from the chief business. This chief business however — namely, two fundamental demands with which the Wafd went into the election campaign and emerged victorious: Evacuation of Egypt by the English and union of Egypt and Sudan —, was hardly touched upon during the whole parliamentary session; in fact every reference to this was anxiously avoided.

It is true, endeavours were made to placate disappointed public opinion by means of all kinds of sensational affairs. In the first place a thorough settlement of accounts was made with the Zivar government, the individual ministers of which were attacked, exposed and brought to trial. A whole number of decrees issued by this government were simply annulled. The budgets of the various Ministries are being completely revised, while great changes and alterations are being carried out in the staff of officials and in the diplomatic corps. In every question the sovereignty of parliament (which means in the present situation Zaghlul Pasha and his Party) is emphasised and Adly Yeghen Pasha is continually made to feel that he

only holds power by the favour of his former rival, Zaghlul. But what is weighing upon every deputy, what, in spite of every reserve, somehow finds expression in every speech and determines the mood of the deputies who have come together from the villages and towns of Egypt: the fact that all the decisions of parliament, no matter how democratic it may be, are worthless so long as the country is under the yoke of foreign rule — this is not discussed.

The parliamentary session, therefore, was concluded in a somewhat depressed mood. Zaghlul Pasha in his speech at the closing of parliament endeavoured to console his followers by telling them that although they had not "achieved any fame they had carried out a number of useful reforms". At the same time Adly Yeghen's Foreign Minister, Sarvat Pasha, has journeyed to London in order to renew negotiations with England regarding the most important matter: the liberation of Egypt.

These negotiations are now engaging the attention of Egyptian public opinion more than are the proceedings in parliament. The cotton crisis in Egypt, which has resulted in the impoverishment of broad sections of the population, is a clear reminder of the consequences of the separation of the Sudan, which may result in the complete ruin of Egyptian economic life. The vast sums which have continually to be paid out for the English officials and advisers expose in the palpable manner the lie of Egyptian "independence".

The Wafd leaders who wish to postpone as long as possible the open conflict with England, are endeavouring by every means to pacify the small peasantry. Fathalla Barakat Pasha, one of the most prominent Wafd leaders, has taken over the Ministry for Agriculture and is endeavouring to carry out a wide-scale agricultural co-operation in order to raise the position of the peasants.

But the mood of discontent prevailing among the population, and which is reflected in the ranks of the Wafd itself, can no longer be repressed. It is becoming clear to every Egyptian worker that the idea that a parliamentary regime can serve as a substitute for real national independence is an illusion. The actual problems of Egypt which are connected with the question of English rule, such as the abolition of the capitulations, taxation of foreign capital, equality of the officials' salaries etc., are being pushed more and more to the forefront, not only by the extreme nationalist press, but also by various wafd organs. And the demand that the Zaghlulist parliament, at the coming session in November, instead of being a debating Society, shall become an instrument in the struggle of Egypt for independence, is being formulated more and more clearly.