INTERVIEW
between
PRESIDENT ANWAR EL SADAT
and Egyptian students and residents in Paris,
during his visit to the French Capital
April 4, 1976

The first question was in connection with his trip to Europe, to which the President replied.

"My first trip to Europe was prior to the '73 Battle when we were busy preparing for it. After the battle we wrested the initiative from Israel and the held of manoeuvre became broader, in the Arab world and the world at large. Since I was able to overcome the axes, the rupture and the polarisation within a year and a half.

"We entered the battle as one family and should not for one moment stop capitalising on our October victories and to complete the liberation of Arab lands either by peaceful solution, if possible; if not, we need to resort to war. This is the reason of my perpetual movement to keep up the momentum to the cause.

"In 1973 we fought our battle, in '74, we effected the first disengagement, in '75 the second disengagement and the re-opening of the Suez Canal. Our relations are maintained with the two super-powers and the nations of the world and we move in all directions. The initiative should be kept in our hands and exploited to further
our cause. The re-opening of the Suez Canal is the first accomplishment of our victories».

President Sadat went on to say,

«Israel used to say that it wanted half the waters of the Canal and half the tolls. We re-opened the Canal on June 5th, 1975 and all the world attended, except Libya. We invited all the world, East and West, and the Arab countries as well. We recorded that June 5th is a Day for the Arabs instead of a setback. Formerly that day used to be reminiscent of defeat and bitterness. In other words, we are constantly capitalising on the October War.

«My trip to Europe started with a visit to Germany. Yesterday, I had a meeting with President Giscard d'Estaing. Tomorrow we shall be meeting again, over a working breakfast. After that I will be leaving for Italy and Yugoslavia. In Austria I shall discuss with Chancellor Bruno Kreisky application of the Socialist system, there, and how to reconcile the economic open-door policy with the inevitability of the Socialist solution, at this stage. The trip to Europe was preceded by one to the Arab countries. I meant to say that we have a broad field of manœuvreing and that the state should not be allowed to freeze or back-slide to the state of war-no peace».

The President then replied to a question concerning the threat to interfere in the affairs of Lebanon, and our attitude towards Lebanon. He said:

«Our position is clear. We communicated it to America, the entire world. If Israel attacks Syria, we shall abide by our commitment. Following our second disengagement of troops, it was said that there were secret provisions. That is true, there were three secret pages which I sent to Syria following the agree
The first provided that should Israel attack Syria, we will honour our commitments.

The second was on the necessity of effecting a second disengagement on the Syrian front. The third paper was on the necessity of having the Palestinian resistance take part in the final settlement. We were keeping these papers to show to the responsible Syrians. America was committed to the implementation of these provisions. But we saw no reason why they should be announced. We have matured and prefer to work out our policies quietly and secretly. When there is a new development, we reply to it. We have fixed policies and not outbiddings or announcements before the microphone.

With regard to Lebanon, we were in conference, last April, King Khaled, President el Assad and myself. I told them that the position in Lebanon was like fire smouldering under the ashes.

If left as it is, it will explode. Basically, the problem in Lebanon cropped-up from differences in the viewpoints of the Lebanese themselves, about the Lebanese formula. That is one point. President Sadat went on to say,

"The second point we need to take up is the relations between the Resistance and Lebanon. To settle these two points, it is necessary for the Lebanese to sit together with no other party present, neither Arab, like Syria, nor foreign such as Russia and America. I have stated my slogan; Hands off Lebanon.

"The first formula is that the Lebanese leaders should come to an agreement together. The second is that an agreement should be reached to maintain the Resistance and rest the minds of the Palestinian who have reservations."
President Sadat said,

«Prior to my visit to Riyadh, I told the Arab League Secretary-General Mahmoud Riad who represents all the Arabs, to go to Lebanon and arrange a meeting between President Frangieh and Yasser Arafat, and also among the Lebanese leaders to work out a formula among themselves.

«Since April, for ten months, nearly a year, you heard of the deplorable battles and the bloodshed with which we are faced. It is the irony of fate that a country should be devastated at the hands of its sons. Syria’s part was supplying arms to the two sides: the Resistance and those who sided with it, while the opposite party were the Phalangists and the others. Had Syria really intended to settle the problem, it would have stopped the supply of arms. I believe that the Syrians can utilise the problem to serve their ends, especially after establishing dubious relations with Jordan. It is now clear to the Palestinians that the understanding between Syria and Jordan will be achieved at their expense. It was clearly manifested to the Lebanese, after their country was devastated.»

President Sadat said that Lebanon’s losses had reached twice or three times our losses in the war with Israel in the course of one quarter century.

The President went on to say,

«I wrote more than ten letters to the Lebanese President who held the key to the solution. I asked him to bring together Lebanese leaders to set a formula for Lebanon and also meet with the Resistance. But he would not take the initiative. Then the position deteriorated.

President Sadat queried,

«How can we intervene, with arms or funds? I cannot...»
to work out a formula for Lebanon and did not sit with the Resistance to solve their problems together».

The President added,

«An American Ambassador went to Lebanon and was welcomed by all. We took the initiative of proposing the despatch of forces from four or six Arab states to separate the two sides and stop the flow of blood. They would then sit together. This of course would be subject to their approval. But Syria is resisting. During my trip, some countries asked me about my proposal. We are ready, but all depends on the host, the Lebanese leaders. In a message to the Lebanese President, I said that if it is a question of dignity, one eats humble pie for the sake of his country. But should not expose it to threats».

«On January 71, we had to take a decision following the termination of the cease-fire proposed by Roger’s initiative. The group representing the centres of power said that we had to engage in war and refuse to renew the cease-fire. The Upper Egypt batteries had not arrived, and our defence preparations had not
been completed, yet they shouted. ‘Our dignity’. But I said that I would not expose Upper Egypt to raids.

‘I announced a year of decision. But the Soviets let me down, and I couldn’t do anything. I had defended the Soviet Union. I am addressing these words to the Lebanese President who is a dear friend. For anything that may be claimed of us, be it military forces with their consent of course, or any other efforts we are ready, providing the Lebanese leaders are prepared and will accept to have the Arab countries work for creating a calm atmosphere in which they could reach a decision.

‘But this question of monopolising the operation, since Syria monopolises the incoming and outgoing of arms to the battling parties, this only leads to the two parties killing each other’.

The President answered a question on the system or the programme by which Egypt will go to the Geneva Conference, and what the chances are to convene this conference, in the light of the present position of the parties.

The President replied,

‘Our formula for going to Geneva, which we announced following the second disengagement is the over-all or final solution. As you heard me say previously, after the second disengagement, the step by step policy has now ended and we should turn to the over-all solution in Geneva. But we hear various reports on this question. America does not refuse to go to Geneva. The Soviet Union, despite the troubled relations between us agrees to go to Geneva. But Syria following the new position it has adopted with Jordan is trying to manoeuvre and says that it will not go to Geneva. It announces endless policies that are stated one day and denied the other. Some of these statements are for the purpose of outbidding, some for discussing in a closed room, while the Arab world hears others, and in an underhanded manner.'
America hears others; still I cannot work in that manner. I can only work in an open manner — what I say in a closed room, I will say before the microphone and announce to the entire world — I have but one policy. We must go to Geneva for the final solution.

President Sadat went on to say,

"All the parties concerned must be present, with the Palestinians foremost. Since without the Palestinians there can be no final solution, in fact, no lasting peace. This is the gist of the problem and not Sinai or Golan.

"The entire world knows that the basic problem is Palestine: in Germany from which the trouble emanated, in France which played a leading part in the recognition of Palestinian right, in America at present, it is recognised that the Palestine problem is not a humanitarian one, but a first rate political problem. It is generally accepted that Palestinians must have a home. Even Germany which did not recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization, as yet, admitted and announced this right.

Consequently, the step to Geneva should be for the final settlement and not a partial one leading to the final settlement. I imagined that in the course of 1976 the US presidential elections year and on account of America’s influence on Israel, being Israel’s vital artery supplying bread, butter, guns, aircraft and balancing the Israeli budget, because Israel is indebted to America for all these things and since the US would be preoccupied by internal affairs. I had hoped that we could meet in Geneva this year. We would have worked out the basic framework for the settlement, so that when the US elections would be concluded in November, we could pass on directly to the final settlement, in 1977.

"With regard to the Syrian-Jordanian position, I adopt the policy of watching and waiting. Why? because their attitude is in-
consistent. Will they go to Geneva or will they not? It is not a clear issue. Our line is clear-cut; I talk of it in a closed room, I voice it downtown and announce it all over the world. We want clear-cut lines from our brothers who are concerned with this problem, so that we could act accordingly. Otherwise, we need to reconsider the subject from the very beginning to ensure that:

First: the initiative does not slip out of our hands, the case does not lose its momentum and that Israel is not given a respite, but we should continue to exert utmost pressure to promote the cause of peace and reach final settlement.

On Egypt's progress in the question of the diversification of arms, President Sadat said:

«God be praised. This decision was taken in 1974, when the Soviet Union stopped supplying arms for good. This diversification decision has been carried out from 1974 to 1976, and western arms have arrived. I am pleased to say that your fellow Egyptian countrymen in the Armed Forces have a wonderful capacity for assimilation — all that is new and all that is complicated.

We have formed our programmes, have concluded our contracts and are getting on. But it is not in our interest to speak of these matters. Western Europe is prepared, and in America there is a controversy now over 6 S-10 aircraft which is nearing settlement in our favour.

«I must admit that I had not expected China's attitude. We asked to purchase some MIG engines since they produce them. We also asked them to overhaul our aircraft and to give us spare parts. They sent us the MIG engines and the spare parts and said that they were a gift from China, as they were not arms-mongers. This started a new stage in our relations with China since they appreciate our circumstances. They appreciate our battle for the preservation...
of our independence, and the preservation of our free will. China’s attitude had not at all entered my calculations, but was an outcome of the abrogation of the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty. Consequently the diversification of the sources of arms is progressing satisfactorily. All the contracts are carried out, and arms have been delivered as of the end of 74, 75 and are now proceeding in a normal course.

Speaking of reconciling the open-door policy with the inevitability of the socialist solution the President said:

«There is an important point: The open-door policy is not confined to the economic field but to all fields.

I compare the previous period to living behind an iron curtain. We wanted to develop by means of our available resources and the aid of the Soviet Union, including the production of our factories.

«This narrow outlook isolated us from the world and technological progress in the world and we became even more backward. You who are living here are conscious of the fact that technology progresses hour after hour and not only day by day.

«The second matter is that we lived on our resources. Before the battle I convened the National Security Council and informed them that our economy had reached a point below zero. We actually could not ensure the load of bread for the year 1974. Yet we started the battle and our Arab brothers hastened to our aid, then we began to strengthen our economy. But we were faced by obligations, as for instance, the diversification of arms.

I could not leave our Armed Forces with scrap iron in their hands, since the Soviet Union refused to supply spare parts and the things I required from them. I had to keep your Armed Forces in good shape so that I might meet any possible danger, to
maintain the drive and preserve the October victories. If the Israelis feel that we are in a weak position, they will not respond to anything, they will have nothing to fear and we will not reach any solutions with them.

Whether the solution is military or political it needs to be backed by force. This is why we had to allocate part of the Arab aid for the arms we are purchasing.

"Thereupon, when I look at the picture it reminds me of a full grown man whose blood vessels are dry and have been completely drained of blood. He needs a blood transfusion, but how am I to provide it? The picture is gloomy but not depressive; still it is a difficult position, because for the next five years in order to balance our economy, we must adopt radical measures, on the one hand, and tighten the belts on the other. We also need a project like the Marshal plan in Europe, which revived the post-war Europe.

I gave Germany as an example to your brothers, it had been completely devastated by World War II. For reconstruction in Germany, did the German Government do it alone? Never; the ordinary German, and every dollar in the Marshal plan which yielded ten, the popular initiative and the concentrated government work — all these worked together. Every German volunteered to work an hour in reconstruction work to help the Government to complete its work in the shortest time possible."

President Sadat went on to say:

"Frankly speaking, I attempted to solve the housing problem by the effort of the government, but it will take me 20 years, even then it will not be settled. We accustomed our people to a bad habit — passivity. They would not undertake an effort more. Things like eggs and chicken must be provided by the ordinary man."

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< President Sadat went on to say:

When we discussed the food question with Chancellor Kreisky, he said that Britain imported milk from Austria, they had that much surplus. That meant that they had no food problem. We, too, should not have a food problem, except for the wheat we have to import. We have foodstuffs. But the trouble with us is passivity which is also concealed under the slogan "Whoever implements a project would be a bourgeois."

Or, « How I wish every Egyptian would implement a project and become a bourgeois, yet the country would find food to eat ».

The President went on to say:

«Kreisky, who is the leader of the Socialist party, has a successful experiment. The public sector in Austria is 65% while the private sector is 35%. The two sectors inter-mingle to achieve
prosperity. No strikes are admitted in Austria, whilst they are in Britain, America, France and everywhere; since it has adopted a socialist theory where the public and private sector are intermingled».

«The Soviet Union is very much concerned about our public sector and thinks that it is going to the devil. The capital of the public sector in Egypt is L.E. 7 billion and it dominates the basic production in the country. I want the private sector to reach one billion only, not 30%, we could then achieve the intermingling which took place in Vienna, so that prosperity would begin in the country, individual enterprise would move, and all the people will take part. But to sit back as a nation of idlers and expect the government to do everything, that is no socialist at all».

«This is how I view the forthcoming stage. The private sector should reach 30 to 35 percent. The public sector in Egypt is over 90%. If the private sector would reach 20% or 30 percent, the public sector would be 70%. Naturally, if the private sector moved, the public sector would spring from 7 to 20 billions since it controls all the raw materials in the country.

The President went on to say:

«We need not import (the Austrian form of socialism) the written and planned form of socialism. Let us view it on the spot. What is required in our country to build up prosperity, with the participation of the people? No nation can stand with folded arms, without the individual capacities of the citizens being fully exploited. Furthermore, every individual should improve his condition and have the hope to own a villa, and a car.

«What we did in the past interval was to stop all this and draw a line. The deal was distributed among them, every one was
President Sadat went on to say,

«The people are passive and want me to supply them with everything, eggs, chicken and everything . . . Alright, providing they take part.

But they can raise chickens, produce milk and cheese etc. etc. and at the cheapest prices, just as we were wont to all our lives. We should adopt the technology of the age in agriculture and up-to-date methods. That is the essence of the open-door policy. If we follow the methods applied in America, agricultural output will be trebled. I have asked for the whole method to apply it in Egypt.

«Thus we will reconcile the economic open-door policy with the inevitability of the socialist solution.

«We live on a narrow strip of fertile land, in our country, about 4%, while the desert occupies about 96%; this is why I urge building new societies in the desert, our rate of growth reaching 1 million annually».

The President went on to say:

«Without the socialist solution we will back-slide to what we used to be prior to the Revolution, which is impossible, as history never turns backwards. The gains of farmers and workers are beyond discussion nor can any one encroach on them or diminish them.

Can we go back on education and free education?, so that the poor man's son remains doomed to poverty, while the rich man's son will himself be rich? No, we have equal opportunities. He who gets a high average (in a Secondary School Certificate) will be admitted

stand and freeze in his place. The application was wrong and abnormal, but it has ended ».
to universities without resorting to nepotism. He who does not get a high average will be admitted to the institute that admits lower levels. This rule was applied on Abdel Nasser and myself.

Furthermore, there is no going back on the inevitability of the socialist solution or providing equal opportunities, since history never moves backward. We march forwards and do not recoil.

President Sadat replied to a question on the fate of the Socialist Union after the formation of the platforms.

"The Socialist Union will become a framework. It is very obvious, and we must all agree that the Socialist Union played its part in one of the stages, but has always expressed one view.

"In the Union one view prevails at the top and guides its trend. This position, while we are about to build a democracy and enter a new stage, is unsatisfactory. There must be a diversification of views. The Dialogue dominates, a most dynamic one, you may have heard of it over T.V., the wireless, and the papers. For the first time since 40 or 50 years, every man expressed his opinion and the committee decided on three substitutes for the A.S.U.:

"Substitute One: Fixed platforms within the Arab Socialist Union consisting of the Right, Left and Centre. In any democracy in the world there are not more than three trends. These are to be fixed platforms with programmes on the basis of which to run elections this year, and present their candidates. Thus we will enter democracy from its widest doors.

The President added:

"Substitute Two: Mobile platforms, just to express views of the hour, such as when the problem of industry is taken up, one platform could suggest devoting our efforts to heavy industry, the second might suggest consumption industries, w
the third might recommend adopting the two at the same time, so that this does not become the scapegoat generation.

« Substitute Three was the formation of parties, of which I am not in favour. I shall give Portugal as an example. This country jumped from dictatorship straight to parties. The result was that the people began fighting among themselves and were in a state of dispersion. Why the Government itself blew up the Broadcasting Station? because it was controlled by the party. In my view this leap from dictatorship to parties is a leap in the dark.

« This is why I proposed the First Substitute which was formation of the three fixed platforms. The work of the Socialist Union is over and it must take a step backwards and act as the framework within which the three platforms operate. Yet having no authority over them to tell them what to do. When the constituent assembly and the programme of platforms is established, it can start practising, it is the practice that will decide. The Arab Socialist Union will stay back and observe three aims: National unity, the inevitability of the socialist solution and social peace ».

The President added:

« Socialist peace is that none of the five categories of the active forces of the people should impose its view on the others.

« If any of the platforms deviated from the three aims the Socialist Union should hold a democratic debate, before the people and the T.V. and it be brought back in line in a democratic way. Thus we will avoid the leap in the dark and the practice will begin. The three platforms will run for elections in September-October and will hold their propaganda campaigns in the A.S.U. premises. The Union will serve them all and will not interfere in the form of these platforms by political practice.
It is possible that parties are formed in the practice since parties and political organisations are not formed by law or decree; only by practice.

For instance, in the United States the parties were formed by practice and reached the Democratic and Republican parties existing at present. We shall start from three trends, since no democracy in the world has more than that.

The President added:

«What democratic practice will result, we cannot tell. It may get us to adopt a fourth trend or bring us back to two.«

«We have freedom of the press. God be thanked, 24 years ago I announced the inception of the revolution. At the end of 23 years I handed over the sound democracy, security and stability that have been lacking for the past 40 years.

«Politically, the whole world admits that Egypt is a leading nation with a special position, especially after we proved ourselves in combat. Now we are laying the basis for rectifying our economy. The Arab brothers have agreed to establish a fund whereby our economy could be rescued in 5 years, implementing joint projects and providing long-term loans.

«It is for the first time that the Arab nation wins a war, in performance and planning which were purely Egyptian since we do not have one Soviet expert.

«We are carrying out an economic, political and military development. The freedom of the press constitutes the Fourth Authority. Despite the errors committed in this field, we shall never go back to censorship, I have formed new administrative boards. If certain people have private battle or feuds they should go, so that...
could progress with persons of hopeful and liberal outlook. There will be no return to censorship, no going back on democracy or re-institution of detention camps.

The President then spoke of the abrogation of the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty saying: «In the 73 War, President Boumedienne visited the Soviet Union so that they would supply us with arms to the value of $100 million. He went without telling me, being a most loyal friend and the arms were air-lifted to us. I do not want to embarrass anyone or engage in a battle with anyone, but I will not allow anyone to encroach on our will and independence. no one, neither a major power nor anyone else. Then Kissinger came and the first and second disengagement agreements were concluded. But the Soviet Union did not like it, because it imagines that its permission should be sought, for every step. We paid very heavily at the cost of our free will. How can I take their leave for every step? Then the Soviet began supplying Boumedienne tanks and after that ceased supplying altogether for the period of 14 months.

This was at a time when they kept up their flow of supply to Syria, in fantastic quantities. They fixed the date for the visit our Foreign Minister to them, then came back and asked to postpone the visit.

Then the Foreign Minister went and agreed with Brezhnev that the latter should come to Egypt in January 75. But they said that Brezhnev wasn't coming and sent us some arms using the word replacement which we reject.

I told them that I refused to take gratuitous arms. To which they replied that I did not consult them on any thing.

According to the estimate of Soviet experts I should have crossed the Canal over the dead bodies of 40,000 Egyptian soldiers and
that the first Air Forces strike would destroy 40% of the force and would only achieve 20 to 40 percent or results.

But we crossed the Canal and only lost 400 soldiers. We pierced through 3 Barlev lines in six hours. 222 aircraft took part in the first air attack of which I only lost 5, thus bringing the result to 99%. Sinai was isolated from Israel, and consequently Israel lost its balance for four days.

President Sadat further said:

«They did not send any arms, they cancelled Brezhnev’s visit, they sent a small quantity of arms on Feb. 5, 1975 and nothing more after that. So now the game is exposed.

«For a whole year they did not supply anything; then one shipload in February ’76. They also said that they would not overhaul our planes so I contacted India and asked if they would overhaul our planes and sell us spare parts. They said they would seek the permission of the Soviet Union. After 4 months, they said: «Sorry». We contacted the Soviets and insisted, but they refused. Their plan was based on the fact that arms after a year’s disuse turn to scrap iron. The alternative was to seek their forgiveness.

«I said what use is the (Friendship) Treaty, if only one party abides by it and the other does not. They also refused the re-scheduling of debts, in fact they demanded interest on a military debt whereas the custom is postponement of military debts to give chance for rehabilitation operations. We asked them if they had settled the World War II military debts to America and they replied that they had not.

«In short, they refused to replace our arms, would not reschedule our debts and also claimed payment of military debts.

President Sadat said:

The Arab fund that will be established will balance our economy.
It is for the first time that we will be exporting oil this year. The Canal has been re-opened, we shall tackle all our difficulties at the same time and then conditions will improve and we will stand on our feet.

President Sadat then said:

«My term of office will end in October. As for this treaty with the Soviets, after I eliminated the centres of power, they came and asked me to conclude it. I told them it was ill-timed, still I signed it. Not one Egyptian was in favour of it, but people know that I serve the interests of the country.

«As my term is ending, I have a moral obligation, as I announced. The Revolution on July 23 and May 15 has placed everything in the hands of institutions which I hand over, at present free from all restrictions. This is why I abrogated the treaty and the facilities granted to the Soviet Navy.»

Replying to the question of a resident abroad on the efforts exerted for the combat of diseases such as bilharzia and eradication of illiteracy, the President replied:

«Bilharzia is a basic problem since it affects our most precious possession which is man; as for the eradication of illiteracy it requires our combined efforts.

We work out clear programmes, out without the participation of the people, nothing can be accomplished. We must lay programmes requiring the participation of the people, or else we shall not succeed. The interval for the people's passivity has ended. People's positivity must now keep pace with the reconstruction of the country, according to the latest in the age.»

The President said:

«We are constructing tunnels below the Canal with the most
up-to-date equipment and means available in our epoch. As for the Council of Ministers statement on the importance of the industrialisation of crops, I want to meet our demands and export the surplus. I wish to use technology for converting agriculture to mechanised agriculture, in addition to solving the crisis of communications and telephones.

Concluding, the President said:

«The people in Egypt lead happy lives. Any one of you desiring to go to Egypt and visit his relatives can do so, even if under court sentence, he still can do so. I have granted general amnesty and every one is secure for his present and future.»