

died in the year 1304 of
ima huwa matbu' [The

7. Antun Sa'adeh Declares His Vision of "Greater Syria" or
Regional Nationalism, June 1, 1935

Antun Sa'adeh (1904–1949) was born in Lebanon to a Christian family. In 1921 he left Lebanon with his siblings to join his father in Brazil. During his stay in Brazil (about nine years), he became involved with politics within the Lebanese emigrant

community and published many articles in the emigrant press. He established the Free Syrians Party, which agitated against French occupation of Syria and Lebanon, and he called on the pope, the League of Nations, and the press in South America to support an independent Syria. After returning to Lebanon, he taught German at the American University in Beirut and lectured about his concept of "Greater Syria."

According to Sa'adeh, Syria—which he defined geographically as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and parts of Iraq—always had been a national entity with a distinct culture and civilization, separate from the Arab world. His interpretation of the history of this area—a viewpoint actively rejected by many contemporaneous intellectuals and nationalists—led him to argue that "Greater Syria" transcended Arab, Islamic, and Christian history and was the product of unique geographical features that determined its "eternal national" character.

To implement his idea of a "greater Syria," Sa'adeh established the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) in 1934, with himself at its head as al-Za'im (leader). His ideas about nationalism were influenced by the fascist tendencies then emerging in Europe. He was executed in 1949, along with six members of the SSNP, by the Lebanese government because of an attempted coup d'état. In the speech included here, Sa'adeh announces the establishment of the SSNP, its ideology, and its goals.

Discussion Questions

- i. How does Sa'adeh define the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and how does he differentiate it from other political organizations in Syria?
- ii. What are the constituent elements of the *Nizam*? Within this system, what is the relationship of the individual to the nation?
- iii. What is the basis for Syrian nationalism as elucidated by Sa'adeh, and how do they compare to those defined by Leo Pinsker, Michel 'Aflaq and Hasan al-Banna?

Ever since the hour in which our social national ideology began to bring together thoughts and feelings, to unite the forces of youth threatened with dispersion by the political and national chaos that blanket our country, and to transform this union into a new system (*nizam*) with new methods, deriving its life from the new nationalism, namely the system of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party—ever since that hour, dawn has followed darkness and movement has come out of lethargy and the force of organization has burst out of confusion. We have become a nation after having been mere human herd, and a state resting on four fundamental pillars—freedom, duty, organization, power—which are symbolized by the four pointers on the flag of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

Ever since that hour we have repudiated by our actions the judgment of history and begun our true history—the history of freedom, duty, organization,

Antun Sa'adeh, "Speech of June 1, 1935 of the Leader of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party." <http://www.ssnp.com> (12 February 2003).

it press. He established the
tion of Syria and Lebanon,
the press in South America
mon, he taught German at
concept of "Greater Syria."
eographically as Palestine,
national entity with a dis-
id. His interpretation of the
ny contemporaneous intel-
er Syria" transcended Arab,
ique geographical features

established the Syrian Social
ad as al-Za'im (leader). His
endencies then emerging in
nbers of the SSNP, by the
tat. In the speech included
its ideology, and its goals.

onalist Party, and how does
ions in Syria?

? Within this system, what
1?

dated by Sa'adeh, and how
nsker, Michel 'Aflaq and

ogy began to bring together
eaten with dispersion by
ntry, and to transform this
s, deriving its life from the
ial Nationalist Party—ever
ovement has come out of
of confusion. We have be-
and a state resting on four
ower—which are symbol-
ial Nationalist Party.
ctions the judgment of his-
edom, duty, organization,

. Social Nationalist Party." <http://>

and power, the history of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the true history of the Syrian nation.

Ever since the hour in which we united our hearts and our hands to stand or fall together for the sake of the realization of the highest ideal proclaimed in the principles of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and in its aim—ever since that hour we have put our hands on the plow and directed our eyes forward toward the ideal. We have become one community, one living nation seeking the beautiful free life, a nation loving life because it loves liberty and loving death when death is a path to life.

Before the Syrian Social Nationalist Party was constituted, the Syrians were not a nation in the true sense of the word. All that existed was a certain dissatisfaction with an unnatural situation which the Syrian people could not accept and in which they could not find satisfaction for their vital needs. Some people took up the leadership of this popular dissatisfaction and exploited it in order to obtain the positions they sought, and they bolstered up this leadership by the remains of family power derived from the principles of a bygone age—principles which consider the people as herds to be disposed of by certain families, dissipating the interests of the people for the sake of their personal power. And when these so-called leaders found that the family and the home were not sufficient in this age to uphold leadership, they resorted to certain words beloved by the people—the words of liberty, independence, and principles—and they played upon these words, words which are sacred when they indicate an ideal for a living nation, but which are corrupt when they fire a means for assuming leadership and a screen behind which lurk ambition and private aims.

The word "principles" should be noted in particular, for it should represent the living power and the basic needs of the nation. . . .

Thus it came to pass that in this age, which is the age of the struggle of nations for survival, and in this difficult time when the factors of corruption and division and national nullification are rampant amidst our people, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party rose, as dawn rises from the darkest hours of the night, to proclaim a new principle. This is the principle of will—the will of a people that wants sovereignty over itself and over its country (*watan*) in order to realize its lofty ideal; the will of life for a truly enduring nation. . . .

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party therefore is not a mere society or group, as may still appear to some members whom time has not yet permitted to understand the fundamental principle which the Syrian Social Nationalist Party embodies, or the need of the Syrian nation in this age. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party is indeed much more than a society which brings together a number of members, or a club which was established for a particular set of people or youth. The Party is an idea and a movement which embraces the life of a nation in its entirety. It is the renovation of a nation which some imagine to have collapsed forever because the various factors which have conspired against its national spirit have been so great that an ordinary nation could have hardly borne their impact and still preserve its existence or the hope of surviving. It is the rise of an extraordinary nation—a nation unique in its capacities,

surpassing in its powers, rich in its characteristics—a nation which does not accept the grave as its place in the sun. . . .

From now on, our will guides the rudder. Every member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party feels that he is being liberated from foreign hegemony and from external dominating factors because he feels that the Party is like his own independent state, which does not derive its power from a mandate or rely upon external authority. The truth, fellow comrades, is that we have bound ourselves together in this Party for the sake of a very important task, which is the establishment of our state, so that every one of us will become a subject of his independent state. This task is no doubt difficult. Will we be capable of it? The answer to this question stirs in our souls and resounds in our breasts, and may issue from our mouths. To inscribe it on the pages of history will depend upon our struggle, for history does not record hopes or intentions, but actions and facts. And I do not doubt, with these faces displaying the manifestations of power and resolution before me, that our actions and our facts confirm the judgment of our will, which does not know incapacity.

Within the Party, we have liberated ourselves from foreign authority and from external factors, but we still have to deliver our nation and liberate our whole country. In this important work we shall meet many difficulties, internal and external, which we must overcome, beginning with the first, namely, the internal, because we cannot overcome the external difficulties completely except after having conquered the internal ones. The first internal difficulty which confronts us is the lack in our community of deep national traditions to be reared on and to hold to. Our personal selves are always in conflict with our general self in all that has to do with our national causes and the way we meet them. Add to this the conflicting traditions derived from our sectarian organizations, and the effect of these traditions in resisting the national unity of the people.

I must declare here that the Syrian Social Nationalist Party has found a means of overcoming these difficulties by its system (*nizam*) which breaks down both the traditions that oppose the unity of the nation and individual psychologies which opposes the psychological individuality of the nation. Our final success depends, in fact, upon our understanding of this truth and upon the application of the four pillars of the Party which bind us indissolubly, namely freedom, duty, organization, and power. . . .

Likewise, I have on this occasion to declare that the system (*nizam*) of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is not a Hitlerite or a Fascist system, but that it is purely a Syrian system which does not stand on unprofitable imitation, but on basic originality which is one of the characteristics of our people. It is the system which is indispensable for the molding of our national life, and for the preservation of this remarkable renaissance (*nahda*) which will change the face of history in the Near East and liberate it from the influence of the reactionary forces which cannot be trusted and which may constitute a serious danger, threatening every renovating movement with corruption under the auspices of the traditional parliamentary system that is powerless to reform itself.

—a nation which does not

every member of the Syrian
 ed from foreign hegemony
 ls that the Party is like his
 ver from a mandate or rely
 es, is that we have bound
 y important task, which is
 is will become a subject of
 . Will we be capable of it?
 sounds in our breasts, and
 ges of history will depend
 or intentions, but actions
 ying the manifestations of
 and our facts confirm the
 ty.

om foreign authority and
 ar nation and liberate our
 et many difficulties, inter-
 ng with the first, namely,
 al difficulties completely
 he first internal difficulty
 deep national traditions to
 always in conflict with our
 uses and the way we meet
 rom our sectarian organi-
 ; the national unity of the

onalist Party has found a
 m (*nizam*) which breaks
 the nation and individual
 duality of the nation. Our
 ng of this truth and upon
 ich bind us indissolubly,

the system (*nizam*) of the
 Fascist system, but that it
 nprofitable imitation, but
 cs of our people. It is the
 r national life, and for the
 which will change the face
 fluence of the reactionary
 nstitute a serious danger,
 tion under the auspices of
 s to reform itself.

Embodied in the principles of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is the way of liberating our thoughts from decadent beliefs and fancies which have prevented us from seeking what we ought to seek. Such is the fancy, cultivated by a group of spiritually weak and mentally sterile people, that we are a weak nation incapable of doing anything and with no hope of achieving a purpose or a desire and that the best that we can do is to recognize our incapacity and let our national self disappear from among the nations and be content with any state which we attain. The members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party have liberated themselves from such false fancies and have taken upon themselves to liberate the rest of the nation from them. This is a responsibility incumbent upon every member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a responsibility which is greater than all other responsibilities, a responsibility in comparison with which every other responsibility is small indeed. As the sense of this responsibility develops and grows, there grows with it the living force of every member of our group.

The rising Syria [which] is built on the new national forces represented by the Syrian National Party will be different from the old Syria laid down by tradition, given over to the fancies of those who have lost their national spirit and their self-confidence. The Syria of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is the Syria of national unity organized in such a way as to make the abilities stored up in it a general force capable of achieving what it wants. We have full faith that the spirit created by our principles will achieve a final victory and overcome all the internal difficulties. If this needs time, it is because time is a necessary condition for every important achievement.

As for the external difficulties, these become small once we overcome the internal ones and once the will of our nation is crystallized in our system (*nizam*) which guarantees its unity and prevents the divisive forces prevalent outside the Party from infiltrating into our solid unity for which we are ready to sacrifice everything. At this juncture, I do not wish to deal with our external problem as a whole. This I shall do on another occasion which I hope will be soon. Now, I shall merely mention a general principle which applies to the whole of our history, namely, that the destiny of Syria has been decided by external bargaining without the actual participation of the Syrian nation itself. It is on this principle that the big powers rely on in their rivalry to spread their influence upon us. I wish to declare now that the establishment of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and its continuous growth will take it upon themselves from now on to dispel such fancies from the heads of ambitious politicians.

We feel now the existence of a strong Italian propaganda in this country in particular, and in the Near East in general. We feel a similar propaganda from Germany and similar ones from other countries. The Leadership of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party warns all its members against falling prey to foreign propaganda. We recognize that there are considerations which call for the establishment of friendly relations between Syria and foreign nations, in particular the European states, but we do not believe in the principle of propaganda. Syrian thought must remain free and independent. When it comes to foreign relations,

we are always ready to clasp the hands that are extended to us with a frank, good intention and in a situation of common understanding and agreement.

The foreign states which desire to establish solid, free relations with us should recognize in the first place our right to live and should be ready to respect this right. Otherwise, the new Syria will not remain silent in the face of political maneuvers intended to lead our nation to make the political mistakes which were committed in the past and which have done her so much harm.

The task of preserving our national revival is among the most important tasks of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and we shall not fail to undertake it in the best possible way. Foreign propaganda may spread in the chaos of parties, but when it reaches the Syrian Social Nationalist Party i[t] finds a solid barrier through which it cannot pass because the Syrian Social Nationalists form a Party which is not built on anarchy and because they follow only the policy decided upon by their party. They are not a disordered group but an organized force.

I repeat once more this organized force will change the face of history in the Near East. Our forefathers witnessed the conquerors of the past and trod on their remains. But we, we shall put an end to conquests.

Amidst the confusion of irresponsible talk and shouting spread all over this nation, the Syrian Social Nationalists undertake their work with calmness and confidence; and the spirit of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is growing in the body of the nation and it is organizing its groups. The day shall come, and that day is near, when the world will see a new sight and an event: the sight of men clad in black sashes on gray suit[s], with sharpened spears shining above their heads; men walking behind the banners of the Red Tempest carried by giants of the army. The forests of spears will advance in well-organized ranks and the Syrian nation shall have a will which cannot be checked. For this is destiny.

8. Syrian Michel 'Aflaq Addresses the Relationship Between Arabism and Islam, 1943

Michel 'Aflaq (b. 1912) was a Christian and a member of the emerging urban middle class in Damascus, Syria. He received a "modern" education in secular schools and colleges in Syria and continued his university education in Europe. His experience with French colonialism, the corruption and inefficacy of many of the traditional political elites, and his exposure to socialism in Paris, where he attended university during the early 1930s, prompted him to articulate a new political vision for Syria and for the Arab world as a whole.

'Aflaq and fellow student Salah al-Bitar argued for nationalist independence from colonialism, for a united and singular Arab nation, and for justice and equality among all social classes. After they returned to Syria, both men began to attract a

Michel 'Aflaq, Choice of Texts from the Ba'th Party's Founder's Thought (Florence: Cooperativa Lavoratori, 1977), pp. 71–83. Translated by Akram Khater.