

MIKHAIL, KYRIAKOS (1877-1957)

An Egyptian journalist and politician. He was born at al-Maraghah, near Suhaj, in Jirja, and educated at the American [College](#) of Asyut and the Coptic College in Cairo (Madrasat al-Aqbat al-Kubra). His interest in journalism was demonstrated at an early age when he combined his reporting to the *Egyptian Gazette* and the Arabic-language newspapers *Al-Mu'ayyad* and *Al-Watan* with his teaching profession. Later he assumed a full-time job as a correspondent and moved to Alexandria in 1908. Here he wrote to the London press a vehement criticism of the High Commissioner Sir Aldon Gorst's Annual Report of 1911, in which Gorst attacked the Coptic Congress for its show of "Coptic grievances" in that year (Mikhail, 1911, pp. 28-29; Kilani, 1962, pp. 105-106; Bahr, 1979, pp. 59-67).

In 1911, Mikhail was delegated by the Coptic Congress and the [Coptic Society](#) to go to London, where with the assistance of Louis Fanus, a Coptic political personality, he established an Egyptian Information Bureau. This was the beginning of a new phase in his career as he published articles supportive of the Coptic cause in the English press. During 1911 Mikhail wrote *Copts and Moslems Under the British Control*. A. J. Butler reported that the tone of the book was "admirably calm and temperate, and the author has been obviously careful to avoid any expressions to which a Muslim reader may take exception" (Mikhail, 1914, p. 13).

It was about this time when the Nationalist Party (Al-Hizb al-Watani) was founded, and its leaders were outspoken in their hostility to the Coptic cause. These party leaders were exiled in Europe in 1911-1912, and they "found another target for abuse in the visit of Kyriakos Mikhail, the young Coptic journalist, to London, where he was endeavouring to seek redress for certain grievances of his people" (Alexander, 1911, p. 369).

Mikhail asserted that the Copts "have asked for justice and equality with

other Egyptians” (Mikhail, 1911, p. 19). He accused Prime Minister Riyad Pasha of siding with the Muslim Congress in Cairo and with its fanatic newspaper, *Al-Ahali*, published in Alexandria. The paper repudiated the Coptic claims voiced by the COPTIC CONGRESS OF ASYUT (Mikhail, 1911, pp. 32-35; Bahr, 1979, pp. 67-71).

When Mikhail founded the bureau in London, he used it to address business and political issues until the outbreak of World War I. He was able to combat the views of a certain member of Parliament named Robertson, who in a series of articles in the *Times* defended Commissioner Gorst’s colonial policy in Egypt.

In 1912 he decided to start his own newspaper in Egypt, but his request was rejected by the Egyptian government. Consequently, he published *Freedom of the Press in Egypt* (1914), in which he attacked restrictive laws on the press as well as [discrimination](#) against Coptic organs. Shortly before Egypt was declared an English protectorate in 1914, Mikhail protested this expected action in an article in the *Westminster Gazette*.

During World War I, he was not allowed to leave Britain and so made a living by writing and lecturing on Egyptian politics, society, and history at Birmingham and Oxford universities, as well as at the Egyptian Christian Club in London. During that period, Egyptians in Britain were threatened with arrest as Ottoman subjects, but a debate in the House of Lords led by Lord Cromer contested any such action, thus enabling Mikhail to retain his freedom. With the end of World War I, the English merchant marine replaced Egyptian workers with Englishmen back from war.

The dismissed Egyptians faced many difficulties, but through Mikhail’s efforts, Parliament [convinced](#) the government to extend financial aid to them until they left for Egypt six months later. Mikhail also led the Egyptian workers out of Cardiff during the riots against non-English colored workers in 1918. To make both ends meet, he wrote articles and opened the Redline Bookstore, which proved to be a principal supplier of

literature on the Middle East. This was a successful financial venture, but was closed in November 1919 at the time of his deportation from Britain.

With the emergence of Sa'd Zaghlul, a leader in the modern history of Egypt, and his exile to Malta on 8 March 1919, Mikhail wrote approximately a hundred articles in the English press and submitted numerous memoranda to British members of Parliament in defense of the nationalistic Wafd party and its exiled leader. After Zaghlul's release from exile and the departure of the Wafd to Paris, Mikhail assumed the role of informing the English public of Egyptian affairs.

His involvement in Anglo-Egyptian relations intensified with the issuance in November 1919 of his *Egyptian Newsletter*, which was intended for members of Parliament. This was censored by the authorities, who also accused him of meddling with the opposition Labour Party and leading an Egyptian student demonstration in London. His position was discussed in Parliament, and he was accused of working against British interests. His residence, office, and bookstore were searched by the police. On 9 December 1919 he was arrested and incarcerated, pending his final deportation from Britain.

On his arrival in Egypt in late December 1919, though he had been instructed by the authorities to refrain from discussing politics, he was received by the public as a national hero in Alexandria and Cairo. In January 1920 Mikhail was elected a member of the central committee of the Wafd Party.

With the normalization of relations with Britain and Egypt's declaration of independence in 1922 Mikhail returned to London, where his residence became a focal point for the Wafd politicians and many governmental missions visiting England. He also helped incoming students obtain higher education in that country.

In 1950 he was recruited for participation in the Wafd negotiations with

Ethiopia concerning the regulation of the Nile waters, on account of his personal friendship with Emperor HAILE SELASSIE, which had grown during the imperial exile to London in 1936. After Mikhail died in London, his body was taken back to Egypt and buried in his native village.

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