

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL HISTORY

List of the collection of

ISAM AL-DIN HIFNI NASIF (1899-1969)

1921-1940 (-1949)

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## INTRODUCTION

### History

Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif (1899-1969) belongs to one of the most important early socialist thinkers and activists in Egypt. He was born into a prominent family which played an important role in Egyptian politics and culture. His father, for instance, participated in the Urabi revolution against the British occupation in 1882.

Hifni Nasif became at an early age involved in the nationalist struggle for independence, first as a sympathiser of the Nationalist Party, and later as participant in the 1919 revolution, which was led by the Wafd. During the upheavals of the 1919 revolution he left for Berlin to pursue his studies in agronomy. There he continued his revolutionary activity as one of the main organisers of the Egyptian student movement in Europe. At the same time, he was strongly influenced by the socialist revolt in Germany and the social and political upheavals which followed the First World War. He became convinced that social reform was a precondition for the success of the struggle for national independence. Inevitably, Hifni Nasif's radicalisation led to a confrontation and an eventual break with the more moderate nationalist movement of the Wafd.

Hifni Nasif's embracement of socialism was enhanced by his keen interest in science, especially natural evolution. In this regard he followed his older contemporaries in Egypt, Shibli Shumayyal and Salama Musa (1887-1958). His main inspiration he found, however, in German socialist thought and Marxism, although he never was a pure Marxist. He rejected, for instance, the idea of the working class as the leading revolutionary class that formed the vanguard of history. Instead, he put his faith in the reformist potential of independent intellectuals and the middle classes. They formed, according to him, the social categories which would lead Egypt towards independence and development.

Hifni Nasif's fame rests partly on his courage and outspokenness at a time when this was a rare phenomenon in Egypt. Apart from the rejection of colonialism, he criticised the myopic selfishness of large landowners, the adverse influence of foreign monopolies, the deplorable situation of the workers and the peasants, as well as the exclusive character of national education that was limited to the rich.

Hifni Nasif's activism led to a continuous confrontation with the authorities, who arrested him in 1919, 1921, 1924, 1931, 1933, 1936 and 1946, and occasionally put him on trial, occasions which became for Egyptian freethinkers rallying points for the defence of free speech. Two incidents became especially famous. In 1921 Hifni Nasif was not allowed to disembark from a German ship in Alexandria on account of an article in which he had offended the king, and in 1931 he was persecuted for his work *al-Tajdid al-Ijtima'i (Social Renewal)*. In effect, this trial was a means to prevent Hifni Nasif from establishing a socialist party in Egypt.

Hifni Nasif's first attempts to establish a socialist party date from 1927. In that year he organised a founding committee with friends. When this attempt failed, he established in 1930 a magazine called *Ruh al-'Asr (The Spirit of the Age)* as a means to mobilise support for a socialist party. This initiative turned out to be a success and in the same year the Peasants' and Workers' Party (Hizb al-'Ummal wa al-Fallahin) was founded. Its theoretical underpinnings were published by

Hifni Nasif in his treatise of 1931 'al-Tajdid al-Ijtima'i, Abhath fi Shu'un al-Ummal wa al-Fallahin' (Social Innovation, Studies on the Situation of the Workers and the Peasants). The party was immediately suppressed and its founders arrested. Another attempt to establish a socialist party, in 1932, led again to Hifni Nasif's arrest. Despite these failed efforts, he never decided to form an underground political movement. For a short while he established relations with Abbas Halim, the aristocratic labour leader.

Hifni Nasif's ideas on socialism are expounded in his work *al-Mabadi al-Ishtirakiyya (The Principles of Socialism)* published in 1933. During the same year Hifni Nasif made two translations of German socialist thinkers. Apart from his theoretical and political works on reform and socialism, Hifni Nasif wrote a famous social realist novel in 1939 which dealt with the social problem in Egypt, *Asifa Fawq Misr (Storm over Egypt)*.

## The collection

The collection of Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif was given to the IISH by Dr. Rif' at al-Sa'id. It consists mainly of newspaper clippings of articles written by Hifni Nasif himself, as well as articles written in response to his essays and works. Nearly all of them are in Arabic. Hifni Nasif's own articles deal with a variety of topics, ranging from socialism in Europe to Egyptian culture and values. Other documents mostly deal with the trials of 1924, 1933 and 1948. Finally, the collection contains hand written notes of Hifni Nasif. Its size is 0.12 m.

## Consultation

Access of the documents is free.

## L I S T

### Socialism in general

- 1-3. Clippings of newspaper articles and essays by Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif on socialism and communism, with typescripts by Hifni Nasif. 1927, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1938, [1942] and n.d. 3 covers.
  1. Articles by Hifni Nasif on socialism in: *al-Wadi, Kawkab al-Sharq, al-Siyasa* and *al-Masa'*. 1927, 1932 and n.d.
  2. Articles and essays by Hifni Nasif on communism and the Soviet Union, in: *al-Siyasa, al-Kutla, al-Dustur, al-Wadi, Majallat al-'Usur* and other newspapers. 1927, 1930, 1934 and n.d.
  3. Reviews by Hifni Nasif of foreign books in typescript. N.d.

## Socialism in Egypt

- 4-6. Clippings of newspaper articles by Hifni Nasif on the Egyptian labour movement, socialism and the Socialist Party. 1932, 1937, 1940. 3 covers.
4. Articles on the foundation of the Socialist Party in Egypt, and the confiscation of propaganda material. 1932.
  5. Articles on workers, the trade union movement, peasants, and the establishment of the Egyptian Workers' and Peasants' Party in: *Majallat Sanduq al-Dunya*, *Shubra* and *al-Wadi*. 1932, 1937 and n.d.
  6. Articles in *Majallat al-Tatawwur*. 1940.

## Situation in Egypt

- 7-13. Clippings of newspaper articles and typescripts of essays by Hifni Nasif on the political, economic, cultural and religious situation in Egypt, with notes by Hifni Nasif. 1922, 1925, 1927, 1931, 1937, 1938, 1949 and n.d. 7 covers.
7. Articles on Egyptian politics and economics, in: *al-Siyasa*, *al-Muqattam*, *Majallat al-Misriyya*, *al-Misri*, *al-Liwa al-Misri*, *al-Wadi*, *Sanduq al-Dunya*, *al-Kutla*, *al-Akhbar* and *al-Balagh*. 1922, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1937, 1938, 1949.
  8. Articles and essays on values and culture, women, the family, prostitution and cremation, in: *Kawkab al-Sharq*, *al-Tali'a*, *al-Hayat al-Jadida* and other periodicals. 1938 and n.d.
  9. Articles and essays on Islam, including 'Haqq al-mar'a al-intikhabi fi al-tashri' al-islami' (The Franchise of Women in Islamic Law), in: *al-Siyasa*, *Wadi al-Nil*, *al-Ahram* and *al-Nuwwab*. 1921, 1922, 1927, 1932, 1939 and n.d.
  10. Articles on education culture, books and newspapers, in: *al-Kutla* and other newspapers. 1932, 1930, 1933, 1948, 1949 and n.d.
  11. Typewritten articles and essays on fascism and corrupt society. N.d.
  12. Hand written notes by Hifni Nasif.
  13. Transcribed articles of Hifni Nasif on stationary of *Akhbar al-Yawm*. NB. Probably made for research purposes. [1960s].

## Foreign affairs

14. Clippings of newspaper articles by Hifni Nasif on Germany, the impending Second World War, imperialism and peace, in: *Wadi al-Nil*, *al-Wadi al-Hawali*, *Majallat al-Adab*, *Akha' al-Watani* and *Shubra*. 1925, 1930, 1937. 1 folder.

## Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif and the Hifni Nasif family

- 15-17. Clippings of newspaper articles concerning Hifni Nasif, including announcements of and reactions to his works, reviews of his books, as well as newspaper articles concerning other members of the Hifni Nasif family. 1926, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1936, 1938, 1944. 3 folders.
15. Reviews of Hifni Nasif's works, announcements of his books, and reviews of translationshe made of novels, short stories andsocialist theoretial works, in: *al-Ahram*, *al-Fatah*, *Majallat al-'Asima* 1933, 1938 and n.d.
  16. Articles in reply to Hifni Nasif's ideas, by Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, Hasan al-Banna, and others, in: *al-Siyasa*, *Kawkab al-Sharq* and *Ruz al-Yusuf*. 1926, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1936, 1944.
  17. Articles on the Hifni Nasif family.  
NB. Contains pictures of Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif, his father and his sister.

## Trials of Isam al-Din Hifni Nasif

- 18-21. Clippings of newspaper articles and documents on arrests and trials of Hifni Nasif. 1924, 1931, 1933, 1948 and n.d. 4 covers.
18. Articles about the trial of Hifni Nasif in 1924, in: *al-Muqattam*, *al-Liwa'*, *al-Akhbar*, *al-Nizam* and *Kawkab al-Sharq*. 1924.
  19. Articles on Hifni Nasif's trial and his defense in 1931, in: *al-Ahram*, *al-Musawwar*, *La Réforme*, *al-Balagh*, *Kawkab al-Sharq*, *al-Muqattam*, *al-Jihad*, *al-Siyasa*, *Alif Ba'*, *al-Liwa* and *al-Masa'*. 1931. With his own description of his trial and prison sentence, as well as the preamble of the sentence of acquittal and pictures in *al-Musawwar*.
  20. Articles on the Hifni Nasif affair of 1933 and the confiscation of his translation in 1948. 1933, 1948.
  21. Collection of English brochures collected by Hifni Nasif, etc. N.d.