

Urgency

Kawkab al-Sharq, 12 September 1933

Our Prime Minister is in a hurry — he will not settle and does not want the people around him to settle; he will not rest and does not want the people around him to rest, ever since he returned to the seat of power after his long illness.

For he sensed at the very last moment that the Egyptian economy is in danger, that Egyptian wealth is on the verge of disappearing, and that the misery which has begun to send its clouds drifting over parts of the Egyptian atmosphere is on the verge of filling the entire Egyptian sky with that dark cloud through which hunger flashes like lightning, death thunders, and bolts are unleashed upon the wretched and the deprived. Our Prime Minister is compassionate and tender; our Prime Minister is tender and compassionate; our Prime Minister is gentle and kind; and our Prime Minister has chosen in these days to sacrifice his health for the sake of his country — he abandoned the resignation and resolved to remain in power. Our Prime Minister has covenanted with God, covenanted with the people, and covenanted with himself, ever since he resolved to remain in power, to ward off every danger from the Egyptian economy, to secure Egyptian wealth in the hands of the Egyptians, and to drive the clouds of hunger, deprivation, misery, and death violently from the atmosphere of Egypt.

Our Prime Minister is preparing for this with a seriousness the like of which has never been seen, and pursuing it with a resolution the like of which has never been seen, and for all of this he has quarrelled with tranquillity, severed all connection between himself and rest, just as he has severed all connection between his assistants and rest as well. The proof of this is plain and clear, the evidence manifest and evident: he has spoken by telephone to the Under-Secretary of Finance and instructed him to task the financial inspectors with studying the financial and economic conditions of the provinces and submitting reports setting out the state of the people: are they capable or incapable? Are they solvent or insolvent? Are they able to pay taxes, or are they compelled to evade them and make excuses for not paying?

The inspectors have dispersed across the provinces to investigate, study, inspect, and probe, then draft and write. All of this may take days, longer or shorter. When the reports reach the Ministry of Finance, studying them may take days, longer or shorter. When this study in the ministers' offices is complete and its summary is submitted to the Finance Minister, the minister will no doubt need days to study this summary — for the minister is ill and exhausted and cannot take on heavy burdens. When the minister has finished his study, he may propose a remedy if Egypt's economy is sick; or he may speak to Egyptian and foreign journalists and tell them that economic life in Egypt has never at any time been better than it

is now, just as political life in Egypt has never at any time been better than it is now.

The Ministry need have no concern about the length of this study and research, and about the dispersal of the inspectors to inspect, probe, write reports, and submit them — for revenues are collected in any case. Either the people pay these taxes of their own accord and thereby give relief and receive relief; or the people are unable to pay these taxes and they are taken from them by force and violence, whether or not they have anything to give. Agricultural produce may not be moved, sold, or disposed of in any manner without the permission of the village headman and the tax collector. This headman or tax collector will only give this permission if he is certain that the state's treasury is not at risk — because the money has been paid and the tax has been discharged. The money may be paid and the tax discharged, but the headman is angry with the farmer or the tax collector is irritated by the farmer, and there is no harm in refusing or delaying the permission until the farmer learns that the fearsome authority is not merely the authority of the district officer, the administrator, and the minister, but also the authority of the headman and the tax collector.

And so some people must inevitably be set over others, some people must inevitably be humiliated before others, and some people must inevitably hold power over the lives of others — because the state wishes to live and needs money to live, and because the state wishes to live in luxury and needs money to live in luxury. How is the Aviation Conference to convene at the end of this year? How is the Postal Conference to convene at the beginning of next year? How are the subsidies for male and female actors and performers to be paid when autumn comes? How are the exceptional increments to be granted? How is the lecture hall at the university to be built? And how is Egypt to present itself to the world as wealthy and luxurious if it does not pay the state its funds and discharge its taxes? And how are funds paid and taxes discharged if the authority of the headman and tax collector is not extended over rich and poor, strong and weak, solvent and insolvent? Nor should the Egyptians be troubled by this or complain of it — perhaps the Egyptians dislike something that is good for them. And what good do the Egyptians aspire to more than taking up proper democratic governance, so that all their faces bow before the headman and the tax collector, with no distinction between those who think themselves above the station of the headman and tax collector, and those who see themselves as having no share in this station?

The Egyptians are all equal before the law, all equal before the headman, all equal before the tax collector. But the law equalises the Egyptians by right and justice, while the headman and the tax collector equalise people by appetite and whim. The Egyptians need have no concern about this — in it there is training for them in bearing hardships and being patient with what they dislike. Nor should the Egyptians be troubled by it or complain of it: the Prime Minister is in a hurry, and has devoted his attention to studying conditions and learning about

affairs — he is inquiring about the cotton market, he is meeting the director of the Agricultural Bank, he is tasking the financial inspectors with dispersing across the provinces to investigate or study and then submit their reports.

If you ask where the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister were before these days, in order to learn about the state of the people and their affairs and their capacity to pay or inability to do so — your question invites a smile, a shaking of heads, and a shrugging of shoulders. For the Prime Minister and Finance Minister were ill, resting in Europe, travelling between Lucerne and Paris. The Prime Minister was occupied with his precious health to the exclusion of the people's conditions and affairs, and to the exclusion of the people's capacity and incapacity. The health of the Prime Minister is the very foundation of Egyptian life, and the Prime Minister is right to attend to it before attending to economic affairs. Do not say that one whose health distracts him from public affairs must attend to his health and leave public affairs — that is empty talk that sensible people do not utter, for the Prime Minister, in health and in illness, near and far, strong and weak, is a man whom circumstances have imposed on Egypt by compulsion, and he alone, to the exclusion of all others, is capable of understanding affairs and conditions and managing politics and the economy.

The Prime Minister is excused, therefore, for being occupied with his health to the exclusion of the crisis. And the Prime Minister is also excused for being occupied with his own private ministerial crisis to the exclusion of the general economic crisis. The Prime Minister and Egypt need have no concern, for the Prime Minister will make up for everything that has passed and will accomplish in the coming few days what he was unable to accomplish in those long past months. And what evidence of this is more inspirational of hope and more conducive to expectation than that he has begun to inquire about the cotton market, to meet the director of the Agricultural Bank, and to task the financial inspectors with research, study, and the submission of reports? Do not mention the matter of the banks and the mortgage debts; do not mention the matter of the national debt and the payment of principal and interest in gold or paper — all of this is a simple matter that the Prime Minister will attend to after he has acquainted himself with the state of the cotton market and read the inspectors' reports on the people's capacity to pay taxes.

The Prime Minister is in a hurry — but after his own fashion, not after yours. Every grave minister is tasked above all else with procuring the funds that enable the government to live its soft and luxurious life, then attending afterward to the affairs of the people — making things easy for them and warding off what they fear. Let the Egyptians be reassured, then, and sleep soundly, and submit to the headman's domineering and the tax collector's meddling, and wait. For the Prime Minister is in a hurry, and he is pledging to them from today that taxes shall be paid properly and the government shall be happy and comfortable; that debts shall be

paid to the banks and the banks shall be happy and comfortable; that the nation shall settle and rest; and that the problem of the national debt shall be resolved and the government and nation shall gambol in a splendid garden of good fortune and glory and bliss and limitless prosperity.

Adversity has descended upon Egypt frightfully and terrifyingly — but Egypt has no cause to be afraid or alarmed; the Prime Minister is in a hurry. He is inquiring about the cotton market, meeting the director of the Agricultural Bank, and tasking the inspectors with investigating or studying and submitting their reports.