

Privilege

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If the Egyptians complain of the privileges of foreigners and demand their abolition — a thing no one disputes or denies them — then they owe it to themselves that none of them should enjoy privileges over the rest, that none of them should hold advantage over the rest in public employment, and that no distinction should exist among them save that which nature ordains and which people can find no way to abolish.

Everything in our life today shows that we are striving neither for equality nor for the abolition of distinctions; rather we are striving, swiftly and deliberately, toward a class system — and toward a violent class system at that, one which provokes resentment and fills hearts with bitterness, which makes people despair of right and justice, and which causes the individual to lose all hope in the fairness of the law.

The principle is that civil servants should all stand equal before the government in obtaining promotions and raises, with no exception save for the one whose rare competence manifestly demands it; and in this very exception there is encouragement for the other servants to exert themselves, to toil, and to improve themselves and their work, in the hope of reaching what would make them worthy of being singled out. But the government singles out senior officials and favors them, to the exclusion of others, with its affection and bounty. And from among these senior officials it singles out those closest to the ministry and most capable of carrying out its policies, thereby creating distinctions among the servants whose source is not pure competence, and whose source is not good service in the public interest. And the government favors, among the junior servants, a group of intimates and favorites, of protégés and cronies, granting them exclusive raises and promotions denied to their colleagues, and granting them other kinds of advantages and benefits that set them conspicuously apart. By this it makes the generality of servants feel that justice is not the measure by which their advancement is gauged, nor the scale by which their share of raises and the favor of their superiors is weighed. By this it fills the hearts of these servants first with doubt of their superiors, then with resentment of their superiors, then with hatred for these privileged ones, then with rancor against these

privileged ones, then with grief at their own ill fortune, then with contempt for a system that does not rest on justice and equity, and that does not reward people according to their competence and their work, but according to their nearness to or distance from the superiors who hold the power of reward.

And what do you expect of the junior servants — nay, of juniors and seniors alike — that they should do? And how do you expect them to be content, or to trust, or to be loyal to their work and their superiors, when they see privilege not in raises and promotions alone but in things that would never have crossed their minds!

Here are two minor functionaries in the office of the Minister of the Interior. The state places at the disposal of each of them, as they say, a state motor car, maintained at the state's expense, driven by a chauffeur paid by the state, and adorned with a soldier also paid by the state. It is the right of senior and junior servants alike to ask: what is the purpose of this privilege? It is the right of all people to ask: what is the purpose of this privilege? And it is the duty of Parliament to question the minister about this privilege, to hold him to account for creating it, to censure him for it, and to compel him either to abolish it or to resign.

And if you leave the servants and what they are subjected to by way of these practices that create among them a class system, you will see this very class system growing and strengthening in the countryside, where the propaganda for the ministry's policies is conducted, and where supporters are won for it through all manner of favoritism and forms of inducement. The government's opponents are persecuted and their paths to livelihood are blocked; the government's partisans are drawn close and favored with good things, the doors of sustenance are opened wide for them, and the straits of the economic crisis are eased for them. And the Egyptians, in all their diversity, come to feel that they are not equal before the justice of the state, and that their Egyptian-ness is not the measure that entitles them to obtain this justice and to shelter under its shade; rather there are other measures that grant prosperity to some and impose hardship on others, and that create between the one group and the other such enmities and hatreds whose evil consequences none but God can know.

And if you leave the people of the countryside and look to the people of the cities, you will find their condition no better than that of the country folk. The working class among the city people toils wretchedly, meeting all manner of harm — its source being the severity of the companies upon them, the excessiveness of that severity, and the inability of the government — or its pretense of inability — to secure justice for them and to restore their affairs to right and equity.

Egyptians are deprived and go hungry; they taste the bitterness of misery when morning comes, and they swallow that bitterness when evening falls. And foreigners profit and save, and send their profits overseas to where other people enjoy them beyond the sea.

Leave the whole people, in cities and countryside alike; leave the servants too; and look at the students themselves in their schools. What is intended for them, and how is the government striving to create among them a class system? The Minister of Education has for weeks been announcing that higher education and secondary education must be restricted against those unable to pay their tuition fees, and the Chamber of Deputies endorses this announcement; so Parliament and the government agree that secondary and higher education should be the right of the rich, not the poor. And no sooner do some students — and they are many — prove unable to pay their tuition fees than they are expelled from the schools and barred from sitting the examinations.

Nor does the matter stop there. For the headmasters of the higher schools and the deans of the university faculties — yes, the deans of the university faculties — gathered yesterday at the office of the Undersecretary of Education — yes, at the Undersecretary of Education — to agree upon restricting higher education by every means at their disposal. Any student who did not obtain fifty per cent of the passing marks on the secondary certificate has the doors of the university and the higher schools closed in his face. Any student expelled from one higher school is not to be admitted to another. Any student who did not obtain forty per cent of the passing marks in the transfer examination from the first year of the School of Commerce is expelled from that school. And any student who does not hold the scientific secondary certificate has no hope in this Higher School of Commerce. The meaning of all this is that a great number of holders of the secondary certificate will, God willing, be turned away from higher education, and will, God willing, be sent back to

the streets and the cafés.

Upon this the deans of the faculties and the headmasters of the higher schools agreed, under the chairmanship of the Pasha Undersecretary, and it only remains for the minister to ratify this directive for it to become a thing from which there is no turning back. And so there will form in Egypt an army of the idle and the discontented, and this army will be very large, and it will be very diverse. In it will be the peasant whose back has been torn by the whip and whose bowels have been scorched by hunger. In it will be the worker against whom the doors of employment have been shut and whom the companies have exhausted. In it will be the student turned away from school because he could not pay his tuition, and the student turned away from school because he did not obtain fifty per cent of the passing marks. And in it will be the young men who graduated from the faculties and from the higher schools and then found no work — either because the economic crisis shuts the doors of employment in their faces, or because the sons of the rich and the powerful monopolize, to their exclusion, the posts of the state and the municipalities, as with that post given to the son of the Prime Minister in the Alexandria municipality — a post of which he has no need, and to which others may well have a greater claim, and for which others may well have a more pressing need.

This idle, discontented army will be composed of all these people, and it will have a large reserve as well — not idle, but deeply resentful, deeply indignant — made up of those discontented servants who complain every day of the wretched state of affairs, of straitened means, and of the favoring of their few over their many in raises, promotions, and privileges; and made up of the men of primary education who number in the thousands, who cannot find enough to spend in order to live, against whom schemes are plotted, upon whom insults are heaped, and for whom harm is devised, and whom it is desired to deprive of the little that is in their hands so that another set of people may have it — people whom the political powers wish to favor with bounty and patronage in these days.

In this fashion our government busies itself with assembling these two armies whose hearts are filled with resentment, and which the wretched state of affairs may prepare for an evil that none but God alone can ward off from Egypt. Were there to be established in Egypt one of those organizations that prepare for revolution, plot sedition, and strive

to change the system, do you suppose it could work toward these ends more than the government works? Do you suppose it could prepare the ground for achieving these ends more than the government prepares it? Do you suppose it could succeed in achieving these ends more than the government succeeds? No indeed: this ministry, which claims for itself that it establishes order and upholds it, cannot do more than it already does to threaten that order and expose it to the danger of corruption and upheaval! Those who care about this country, and who are eager for it to pursue its path toward progress in tranquility and calm, in security and confidence, and in distance from violence, would do well to reflect upon this condition to which Egypt has come. For to leave Egypt to follow the path down which it is being pushed in these days risks kindling in it a terrible fire that may not burn it alone, but threatens to burn other countries with it.

Let those who care about Egypt reflect upon this abyss over which Egypt stands; let those who care about order reflect upon this danger to which order is exposed; and let those who care about peace reflect upon this storm that threatens to sweep peace away.