

## **An Experiment**

*Kawkab al-Sharq, 14 May 1933*

Its success is beyond all doubt — so it must be exploited to the fullest. The experiment in question is the one the Prime Minister undertook to establish, for himself and for those who support him, whether affairs in Egypt might proceed in one fashion or another without there being a functioning government. The Prime Minister set out on this experiment and it succeeded brilliantly — beyond all dispute! He travelled last summer, and shortly after him a group of his ministerial colleagues travelled, and public order was not disturbed, and no system broke down, and the ministerial crisis did not grow more complicated; then he returned and his ministerial colleagues returned with him, and public order was no more stable than before, and no system was any more firmly established than before, and the economic crisis had not advanced a single short step, or a long one, toward resolution. Then the Prime Minister sent a group of his colleagues home and summoned a group of his favourites and friends to the ministerial offices — and nothing in Egypt's affairs changed.

Then the Prime Minister fell ill, and his illness rendered him incapable of bearing the burdens of government and of managing its affairs independently — incapable indeed even of thinking about them — and public order was not disturbed, and no system broke down, and no crisis grew worse, and nothing in Egypt's affairs changed. Then the Prime Minister returned a group of his colleagues to their homes and summoned in their place a group of his loyalists and favourites — and nothing in Egypt's affairs changed; and the illness continued to weigh heavily on the Prime Minister, preventing him from managing affairs as he ought, and the illness afflicted the Foreign Minister — and nothing in Egypt's affairs changed. Then the Prime Minister is to travel the day after tomorrow to Europe to take the cure, and three ministers are to travel to Europe for leisure and recreation, and the Under-Secretary of Finance and the Chief of the Royal Counsellors are to travel to participate in the Economic Conference — and nothing in Egypt's affairs will change.

The experiment has therefore succeeded brilliantly — beyond all possibility of dispute. We must therefore have minds that comprehend, hearts that feel, and the courage to proclaim what we observe, call for what we believe, and declare openly that this experiment ought not to go to waste — but that we must draw the lesson from it and profit by it. We

propose, with boldness and resolve, that Egypt dispense with ministries, and economise what it spends on these offices and those who fill them — in basic and supplementary expenses, in visible expenditures and hidden ones — for the rational man and the rational people ought not to spend their money unless there is no avoiding spending it, or unless spending it yields some pleasure or profit of sufficient importance to warrant the expenditure.

The Prime Minister and his Ministry have proved that Egypt's affairs can proceed without ministers to manage them. The Ministry is therefore not something indispensable in Egypt, and money ought not to be spent in its cause. And we do not think Egypt finds strong pleasure or evident benefit in having a ministry as other countries have ministries. The Ministry is therefore not a luxury worth coveting, or straining after, or spending money to maintain. We do not think Egypt is particularly eager to grant its ministers the salaries it grants them so that they may live in comfort while its sons live in wretchedness. Nor do we think Egypt is deeply fond of these ministers of hers — bestowing on them warmth and beneficence, singling them out for affection and kindness, spending on them these vast sums that could instead be spent on thousands of the hungry and the near-hungry scattered across the countries of the earth, upon whom disasters descend and calamities play havoc, and upon whom the lethal disease calls — and perhaps does not depart until it takes them along with it, presenting them as a gift or an offering to death!

You can push this train of thought further still. Egypt cannot dispense with ministers alone — but it can dispense with a large number of directors and senior officials: those who are absent and nothing goes wrong; those who are present and nothing goes right; those whom illness strikes and affairs run smoothly; those who recover their health and affairs run smoothly. Those who arrive at their offices when the forenoon is well advanced, and leave them when noon approaches; who sit in their offices smiling, conversing with friends near and far, demonstrating their authority over one category of officials and another category of servants, conducting business by telephone at one moment and by discussion at another. As for when evening comes, or night advances! Egypt can dispense with the Ministry or with a large number of these directors and senior officials.

You can push this train of thought further still. Egypt lived without a ministry until the end of the last century; it lived without this vast number

of senior officials until the end of the last century as well; and it lived without a parliament until well into the present century. And when the Egyptians are asked their opinion of their present life — and of their life since the formation of ministries and the creation of senior offices and the establishment of Parliament — they reply that the difference between the two lives is not great, and is perhaps closer to the worse than to the better: in their former life they were wretched and they knew they were wretched, they were enslaved and they knew they were enslaved. Whereas now they are wretched and are told they are fortunate, and they are humiliated and are told they are free.

Their ordeal is therefore doubled now, because it afflicts both their lives and their estimate of those lives; and their misery is doubled now — because in former ages they were miserable with no hope of happiness, whereas now they are miserable and full of hope, and find no way to realise their hopes.

And to what purpose are ministries and offices and parliaments established, if these ministries and offices and parliaments are not means of making the people happy and setting their affairs right — of making them feel that they were wretched and are now happy, that they were abased and are now honoured, that they were slaves and are now free? Who claimed that ministries are established so that ministers may enjoy them and live in ease, and travel in ease? Who claimed that senior offices are established so that their occupants may use them as instruments of luxury and comfort? Who claimed that parliaments are established so that deputies and senators may dominate, and deputies and senators may speechify, and deputies and senators may collect their stipends at the end of the month — while the people remain in humiliation and wretchedness and poor condition exactly where they were?

No — the offices of governance are not ends; they are means. If they are transformed into ends, they must be abolished; and if most or some of them are transformed into things that are of no use or benefit, they must be abolished. The question in truth is not whether Egypt has offices or not — the question is whether these offices are beneficial to the people, in which case they stay, or not beneficial to the people, in which case they go.

This proposal has an element of audacity — but I challenge every fair-minded Egyptian of sensitive conscience and pure heart, and ask

him: does he say all of this when alone with himself? Does he complain of all of this when alone with his intimates? I am certain he cannot answer: No — he is compelled to answer: Yes. We are therefore being compelled toward this form of European civilisation under compulsion. We are not enemies of European civilisation — we love much of it and are devoted to much of it — but on condition that we choose it ourselves, not that it be chosen for us; that we direct it, not be directed by it; that we adapt it to our needs and interests, not that our needs and interests be sacrificed in its cause.

Let the Prime Minister therefore take yet another bold and frank step — one that returns us to where we were before ministries and offices and parliaments were established. If he does so, he will preserve for us much of our squandered money; if he does so, he will spare us much of these exhausting hopes; if he does so, he will remove from Egypt a great deal of evil — the evil of competition for offices, the craving for positions, the sacrifice of the public interest in the cause of salary and compensation, and in the cause of prestige and power; and if he does so, he will spare us many of the causes of moral and political corruption to which we have nearly been carried in a manner to which no other people has been carried!

But the Prime Minister will do none of this — for he will not abolish his own office with his own hand, nor erase his own authority with his own hand, nor reduce himself to being a man like other men, having already become a great personage whom the state pays when he resides, pays when he travels, and pays when he falls ill. The Prime Minister will do none of what is asked of him — so you must endure as we have endured, and be patient as we have been patient, and accept the belief that we have a ministry even though we have no need of one, until God decrees something from His own command.

Who knows? Perhaps this decree will restore all things to their proper place, and grant Egypt ministries that prove their usefulness and efficacy — and ministers who believe that they assumed their offices not to enjoy them but to bear within them the toil and exertion owed to those who elevated them to these offices and placed upon them their heavy trust.

Who knows? Perhaps the air of Europe will touch the Prime Minister in such a way as to make him feel how difficult it is to combine the rest he

needs with the exertion that is beyond him — and so he will truly give himself rest; and in his genuine rest there is rest for Egypt too!