

Interpellation

Kawkab al-Sharq, 10 May 1933

The Chamber of Deputies has savoured the pleasure of the interpellation, tasted the sweetness of thrust and parry, and the delight of debate and contest — and no sooner had it done with the interpellation over Jabal al-Awliya than it launched into the interpellation over the reduction of taxes. If expectation holds, this session will not end until the deputies have had their fill of interpellating and the ministers have had their fill of being voted confidence.

And why not? In the interpellation there is vigour, and vigour has long been absent; in the interpellation there is work, and idleness has long prevailed; in the interpellation there is speech, and silence has long reigned. Why should the deputies not desire the interpellation, so that they may be vigorous and work and speak, and the people may know that their representatives are discharging their duties on their behalf as well as any representatives can discharge their parliamentary obligations — and so that the people in Egypt and England may know that the leader of the official opposition in Parliament was not correct when he claimed that the Chamber is the body responsible before the Ministry, instead of the Ministry being responsible before the Chamber.

And who knows? Dreams are absolute in their freedom — they know no boundary at which to halt and no term at which to end. Perhaps one of these roaming dreams that visit people at the break of dawn, before the earth is clothed in the light of the rising sun, has paused beside the interpellators as they sleep like the wakeful or wake like the sleeping, and conjured for them the vision that a new interpellation could embarrass the Ministry and compel it to resign — that the miracle of miracles would occur, the wonder of wonders, the Chamber would vote to withhold confidence, the Prime Minister would submit his Ministry's resignation, and people would say that this Chamber, which some of its own members accused of being the Ministry's shadow, has refused confidence to the Ministry and driven it to fall.

And the English would find a solution to the problem in which they are presently entangled — the problem of displeasure at the current political situation and the desire to maintain strict neutrality — the Ministry would fall, those of its former friends who have grown weary of it would be rid of it without any appearance of interference in Egypt's

affairs or departure from neutrality.

And the Prime Minister would find a way out of the predicament to which circumstances have driven him — resigning not because the English wished it, or hinted at it from afar, but because the Chamber of Deputies had withheld confidence from him. The Prime Minister has said a thousand times that the Ministry's continuance depends on the pleasure of His Majesty the King and the confidence of Parliament; if he loses Parliament's confidence he will resign. And the English remain neutral — even if the opposition, which does not believe in this neutrality, finds it distasteful.

And who knows? Perhaps this dream suggested to the interpellators that their interpellation, if it brought down the Ministry, might dissolve the solidarity between the Chamber and the Ministry, and sever those heavy bonds connecting them and compelling them to bear together whatever good or ill befalls them. And if this solidarity dissolved and these bonds were severed, the Ministry might depart and the threads of life might continue for Parliament.

Then the dream cleared, the sleeper awoke — and how swiftly the tax question appeared, and how swiftly the interpellation was issued to the interpellators!

The newspapers say that efforts are being made to persuade the interpellators to withdraw their interpellation, and the Ministry's newspaper is today exerting itself to convince these interpellators to abandon the pursuit of this dream — because the government is compelled to refrain from touching the taxes at present, even though it had previously promised to adjust them and subject them to reduction. This is because the interpellating deputies appear to be newcomers to ministerial politics, or are affecting to be newcomers.

For the Ministry promised to reduce taxes when this promise was useful in winning supporters and deceiving people with hopes and expectations. As for now, there is no way to this reduction — for such a reduction would anger the foreigners, cause them to doubt the government's good intentions, and affect our financial situation; and what you hear of this is evil enough.

Where would the Ministry find the courage to anger the foreigners? And what would the Ministry do about the debt if the mixed courts do not rule in our favour for payment in paper, and the negotiations that the Ministry has yet to succeed in beginning do not succeed? And where would it find the funds for Jabal al-Awliya? And where would it find the funds for the works entailed by raising the Aswan Dam, mentioned by the Under-Secretary of Finance in the report of which we published portions yesterday? And where would the government find the funds to spend on conferences when they are held in Egypt, and on those who represent it at conferences when they are held outside Egypt? And where would it find the funds for all these projects? And then from where would the Ministry economise three and a half million pounds to enjoy this economy, and then apologise for purchasing an automobile for the Prime Minister costing a thousand or more — he who has economised millions?

All these are things that the interpellators ought to consider carefully, in the view of the Ministry's newspaper, before they submit their interpellation or persist in it.

The interpellators then wish to realise the dream; the ministers fear this dream; and the days alone will confirm what we have said and what we always say: that the whole affair is performance within performance; that the deputies have not had their fill of interpellating and the ministers have not had their fill of confidence; that life is heavy and exhausting, and worries are many and pressing, and some diversion is necessary. And what diversion for the deputies is better than the interpellation? And what diversion for the Ministry is better than the vote of confidence?!

As for you, wretched and sorrowing people — beware lest a promise deceive you, and beware lest the interpellation open before you a door of hope. Remain as you are, wretched and sorrowing, burdened and worn, and endure as you endure today the payment of these taxes from the sustenance you cannot find, from the blood that has nearly dried in your veins, from the food and the schooling of your children — and prepare yourself, should payment prove beyond you, for the blow of the whip, for the confines of the prison, and for a tasting of every manner of torment.

All of this must befall you, until God grants you near relief — but do not expect relief from this interpellation, for peace between the Ministry and the interpellators will be made in any case.

Tomorrow, they say — or if not, the day after.