

Investigation

Al-Siyasa (Hadith al-Yawm), 17 July 1932.

At the Ministry of Education there is underway an investigation grave in its danger, far-reaching in its consequences, and alarming to those who think well of public affairs in Egypt and suppose that there is, in truth, an education system here, and a ministry to oversee it.

At the Ministry of Education there is an investigation that the Ministry does not oversee in its entirety; rather, it is overseen by a committee, half of whose members come from the Ministry, the other half distributed among the University administration, the administration of the Royal Endowments, and the administration of the religious institutes. The meaning of this is that the Ministry of Education does not trust itself, does not feel at ease with its own people, and does not see fit for its committee to be made up of those who oversee education within it—so much so that it must bring in other parties, and so arrange matters within this committee on equal footing that the Ministry's own men, by themselves, cannot form a majority on the committee or settle on a decisive opinion unaided.

The Ministry of Education, then, disavows itself, and you may believe me when I assure you that it has succeeded in nothing so well as it has succeeded in this disavowal. It deserves not to trust itself, deserves that people not trust it; for it has lost, it would seem, everything that might inspire trust or invite ease of mind. It is not I who claims or alleges this—it is the Ministry itself that affirms it, and sets down a thousand proofs of it.

Watch it form its committee in this fashion, and it becomes plain to the sharp-witted and the dull alike that it does not feel at ease with its own men, and fears that, were the committee made up wholly or mostly of them, they would be unjust in judgment, favor their own Ministry, and speak other than the truth about it. The Ministry wants the truth, wants all of it, and wants it stern and decisive; for it wishes to fix responsibilities and punish the negligent with a punishment that guarantees it good results in the years to come.

Then look at it in this very investigation: with whom does it investigate, against whom does it raise this uproar, around whom does it stir this clamor, and about whom does it cast these shameful suspicions?

Against the entire teaching staff of the secondary schools, the entire body of headmasters in the secondary schools, the entire inspectorate of the secondary schools, and then the Inspector of Secondary Education and his deputy.

Teachers, headmasters, inspectors, the Inspector-General and his deputy—all of these are now subject to an investigation conducted against them by a committee half of whose members are not even men of the Ministry. And then you would have me believe that the Ministry of Education is fit to trust itself, or to be trusted by the people?!

And for whom is this investigation being conducted? For the Minister of Education and his Deputy. And where are the Minister of Education and his Deputy? One of them has gone to France to seek a cure, and the other has gone to England to rest, or so it is said. Do you not agree with me that the very least one can say of the Ministry of Education, in this condition, is that it is laughable? And if the Ministry of Education is laughable, then one ought not expect from it either instruction or education; for instruction and education have nothing whatsoever to do with comedy.

The Ministry of Education orders an investigation of the teachers, the headmasters, the inspectors, the Inspector-General and his deputy, and forgets to order an investigation of the Minister and the Deputy Minister. For these two alone are the ones who ought to be questioned, and with whom the investigation ought to be concerned. If public affairs in Egypt ran as they should, the Council of Ministers would never accept that a minister order an investigation into the whole of secondary education, only to set sail for France the moment he had signed his decision, to seek a cure and to rest. And if public affairs in Egypt ran as they should, and if the interests of the people were tended to in this country as they are tended to in other countries, the Council of Ministers would never permit education to be overseen by a Deputy Minister who, no sooner has he proposed the formation of this committee, sets sail for England to rest—if it is indeed true that he has gone to rest.

And where were the Minister of Education, his Deputy, and the Secretary-General of the Ministry throughout the year? Where were they in relation to the teachers, the headmasters, the inspectors, the Inspector-General and his deputy, that they should only now come to know their affairs, and now ask a mixed committee to tell them whether these people discharged their duty or fell short of it?

What I do know is that these three men spent their year at the Ministry of Education, and were in contact every day with the Inspector-General and his deputy, and that this Inspector-General laid before them every day the affairs of secondary education in all their variety. What, then, is this investigation for, and what is this questioning for? And what is this scandal, which no ministry that valued itself and its dignity could bear, were the Prime Minister attentive to his own ministry instead of absorbed in the pursuit of negotiations or flights to the frontier?

Yet the matter at the Ministry of Education does not need an investigation—or at least not an investigation of this sort—but needs another investigation, one ordered by the Council of Ministers or by Parliament; for the Ministry of Education is occupied with the bureau at the expense of education. And if I say it is occupied with the bureau, I mean that it is kept from education by two things: one is politics, and the other is rivalry among the senior officials.

As for politics, it comes at the Ministry of Education in many kinds and colors. And you may believe me, for I speak of what I know: at the Ministry of Education there is a variety of politics meant to advertise the government, and to furnish proof that the people have come to love it and have turned to it away from the opposition. This variety appears when the Minister graciously condescends to visit the schools and institutes, whereupon speeches and poems are prepared for him, and communiqués are then sent off to the newspapers.

And at the Ministry of Education there is a variety of watchful, calculating politics, by which an official is hounded because, at some time in the past, he was Saadist in color or Constitutionalist by inclination. And at the Ministry of Education there is yet another variety of politics, which I shall not name, and on which I cannot dwell at length, but which the Deputy Minister, the former Minister of Education, the Prime Minister, and other persons—Egyptian and non-Egyptian—are able to detail.

Then, at the Ministry of Education, there is rivalry between the senior officials and those of middling rank. Matters run smoothly for a time between the Minister and the Deputy, then go crooked between the Minister and the Deputy's adversaries, who are many. Then matters go crooked between the Minister and his Deputy, and at once run smoothly between the Minister and the Deputy's adversaries. And these

adversaries of the Deputy are drawn from the senior officials and those of middling rank. And if you ask what the junior officials are doing meanwhile, they run back and forth between the two camps, carrying good and ill, bearing to each side what is proper and what is improper.

Last summer, the Minister of Education sensed that the Ministry's bureau stood in need of some reform, and observed a fierce rivalry between two senior men in the Ministry that was corrupting the business of the bureau; so it occurred to him to separate the business of administration from the business of education. No sooner had this innocent idea, which the Minister intended for nothing but good, appeared, than the atmosphere in the Ministry was utterly corrupted, and there raged a savage, deaf, truly violent war between the inspectors-general and the deputy inspectors-general: which of them would have the technical side, and which the administrative? This war went on as a running contest, now one side winning, so that the newspapers would publish that so-and-so would become Inspector-General of Education; then the other side winning, so that the newspapers would publish that the appointment of so-and-so had not yet been decided; and the junior officials in the bureau would laugh among themselves as they read these contradictory reports.

As for the teachers, the headmasters, and the inspectors, they went on discharging their various duties as best they could, with no one paying them any heed, and no one taking notice of them.

And if the men of the bureau are occupied with politics and intrigue, and turn away from the affairs of education, by what right is the teacher, the headmaster, the inspector, or the Inspector-General to be blamed if the examination results turn out poorly? And what is the worth of the committees formed within the Ministry or outside it—committees that subject these wronged men to questioning and interrogation, and then to blame and punishment, when they are innocent, with no sin upon them and no reproach due them?!

I do not claim that our body of secondary education attains the ideal of competence and diligence in the discharge of duty; indeed, to our great regret, it falls very far short of that ideal. But in any case it is, of all people, the least deserving of blame and of bearing responsibility when the examination results turn out poorly.

There is another matter, much spoken of, yet never to be given its due however much it is spoken of: the moral weakness of those who

oversee education. For these men, who make war upon one another, scheme against one another, and whose mutual rancor grows ever greater, fear one another to a strange degree! And for the sake of this fear they sacrifice a great deal of what an ordinary man would rarely care to sacrifice.

I recall that when I was transferred to the Ministry of Education, and went to it in anger at the Minister, there turned away from meeting me certain people who had shown me affection, and something more than affection, back when relations between the Minister and myself were good. I did not hold this against them, for I had already witnessed their coming and going with the changing of ministries. But one of them felt that the matter between him and me could not bear such avoidance, and so, as the French say, he took his courage in both hands, and came to visit me in my room; and there he was, drinking coffee and smoking his cigarette, and launching into the affairs of the Ministry, when the door of the room opened, then closed, and the servant glanced in between whiles as though he wished to know who was in the room. At this my visitor stopped short, as though pushed violently to a halt, and said: "Good heavens, they are spying on whoever visits you—you will not see me again after today." And he spoke the truth, for I have not seen him to this day, though I used to see him often; nor have I heard his voice to this day, though he used to speak to me often on the telephone—and for all that, he is among the bravest men in education at the Ministry of Education!

No—the matter at the Ministry of Education will not be set right by an investigation, be it conducted by a mixed committee or ordered by the Council of Ministers or by Parliament. Rather, the Ministry of Education stands in need of change, in need of being built anew, in need of being left by this generation that Dunlop, al-Maghrabi Pasha, and Abd al-Fattah Pasha Sabri shaped, and succeeded by a new generation untouched by these three. On that day, it will not be only the examination results that improve, but education itself, in its very substance, and morals too will improve, and Egypt will be able to expect good from the Ministry of Education. But before that, no.