At the Ministry of Education: The Reform Movement

al-Siyasa, 10 October 1923

The Minister of Education has established his Technical Bureau, and we commended him for establishing it, expecting from it a great deal of good; and we still commend its establishment, and believe it will be a source of much good for learning and education. We still hope for a great deal more from the Minister of Education, and press him not to content himself with establishing this Technical Bureau alone, but to add to it whatever further reforms are truly needed. We proposed to him, and still propose, that he change the organization and composition of the Supreme Council of Education; we proposed to him, and still propose, that he form independent departments for education of every kind; and we proposed to him, and still propose, that he grant higher-education schools some measure of independence in their own affairs, enabling them to manage their own educational business, and to elect their own dean or headmaster, as they call it.

We proposed all of this, and continue to press for it. We believe the Minister of Education will take these proposals seriously and give them thought — do we not? The very establishment of the Technical Bureau itself encourages us in this hope, since it is precisely the Bureau's business to study proposals of this kind honestly and properly. It seems to us that this Technical Bureau, were it to examine these proposals closely, would see that we are not asking the Minister of Education to invent something unheard-of among the ministries of education of the East, but rather asking him to bring his own ministry into line with them, and to organize his ministry in a way that guarantees it real benefit and real output on the one hand, and safeguards it from trifling with learning, education, and teachers on the other. The Technical Bureau might well examine the history of education among the various European and American nations, to see the results these systems we propose have actually produced, and compare these results with what our own barren educational system has produced — a system that was never expected to produce any good, and was never designed to produce any.

We have read this circular the Minister of Education sent out to school headmasters, asking them to submit their proposals on education and its reform to this Technical Bureau, and promising them that these

proposals would be studied, examined, and properly weighed, and that whatever of them seemed to hold real good would be put into effect. This is a sound step in the very direction we have been calling for — the direction of consulting teachers on educational matters — and we can only commend the Minister of Education for acknowledging that teachers may well have opinions on education worth expressing, worth studying, and worth sometimes acting upon. This is a sound step; but we do not want — and we are certain the Minister of Education does not want either — the Ministry's consultation of teachers to stop at this point. We want the Minister of Education to take a second step: changing the organization of the Supreme Council, and constituting it from a body in which teachers form an absolute majority.

Indeed, we want the Minister of Education to take yet another step, so that he does not confine his invitation to school headmasters, nor to teachers in government schools alone, but makes it a general invitation, addressed to all who are capable of understanding education and offering counsel on it — so that these people, too, can submit their proposals on education to the Technical Bureau, confident that this council will study them, examine them, and give them their due weight. We hope for this, and believe the Minister will not object to it, and that the many different proposals al-Siyasa has published for us, and will go on publishing for us, will receive some real attention from the Technical Bureau, be studied and examined, and that whatever of them appears to hold real good, and can be put into practice without excessive difficulty, will be carried out.

Perhaps it is only right that we not press the Minister of Education to hurry in reforming and reorganizing his ministry; reforming education is no easy matter — indeed, it may well be the hardest reform of all. We know this, and so do not press the Minister; we content ourselves, instead, with the impression we find confirmed every day: that the Minister genuinely wants the good, and pursues it in earnest, and that the evidence mounts daily that he does not content himself with good intentions alone, but adds to them good works — he has established this Bureau, and asked the teachers to supply it with proposals. We read today in the newspapers that he intends to attach to this Bureau another bureau for scientific and technical translation, which will undoubtedly be of real benefit to the Ministry of Education and its schools. We have seen the Minister's position on that misconceived girls'-school scheme, and that he has postponed it pending consultation with specialists; we have seen the Minister's position in doing justice to certain competent men

wronged by the previous central authority at the Ministry of Education. And it may be only right that we thank the Minister of Education in particular for a new measure the newspapers have just announced — we thank him for it in particular because it carries out a proposal we ourselves put to the previous Minister of Education in these very pages, and pressed repeatedly, which the previous Minister and his advisers paid no heed to, but which His Excellency Zaki Pasha Abu al-Saud has taken up — and for that, he deserves our thanks.

We proposed to the Ministry of Education that it consult the foreigners working in education in Egypt on the matter of universalizing primary education, and that it bring a number of these foreigners onto the committee it had formed to consider the spread of primary education. We read in the newspapers today that this proposal has begun to be carried out: the Minister of Education intends to add an American, an Italian, and a Frenchman to this committee, an Englishman already sitting on it. This is a good thing — but we want these foreigners added to the committee not simply because they are foreigners, but because they are specialists in education. We want this, and hope the Minister of Education will choose these foreigners from among those who actually oversee the American, Italian, and French schools themselves.

We wish, however, to close this piece — one which even strikes us as strange, for how free it is of criticism, containing little but praise — with a simple proposal, one that will cost neither the Minister nor the Ministry any real hardship or effort, and that will do good both for ministers and for the public alike: that the connection between the Ministry and public opinion be made strong and solid, such that the Ministry publish, in clear and unambiguous communiqués, what it is doing and what it intends to do by way of reform. This would be a good thing, for it would improve people's opinion of the Ministry, encourage people to assist it, and allow people to understand, without vagueness or confusion, what the Ministry actually intends to do. We would be glad if the Minister would begin by informing us about this translation bureau he is establishing, or intends to establish: what is it? What will it do? And what is the real purpose behind its establishment?