

Taha Hussein Tells al-Akhbar: Why He Called Farouk 'The People's Teacher'

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Al-Akhbar asked Dr. Taha Hussein about a statement in the pleading of the lawyer Ahmed Rushdi: that while Minister of Education he had made a speech describing the former king as the people's teacher in morals, and so on.

Dr. Taha said: "I did not speak of Farouk. I spoke of the King as a king ought to be. I did not mean to praise him by what I said; I meant to win some good work for my country, and I think I achieved much of what I wanted."

It was well known that there was a disagreement between you and the former king. Did these words end the disagreement between you?

He said: "The disagreement between the former king and me never ended at any time ... The proof is that in the last Speech from the Throne prepared by the Wafd government I proposed that it state that university education would be free. I found some ministers hesitant to accept the proposal, and when I looked into it I learned that the former king had told them of his dislike of the policy of spreading education among the classes of the nation, and had said: Taha Hussein wants to turn it into communism!"

— Did your disagreement with Farouk begin after you took the ministry?

He said: "I do not know exactly when the disagreement began. All I know is that I met him to take the oath in January 1951, with the former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahhas and his fellow ministers, and the former Prime Minister Hussein Sirri, who was chief of the Royal Cabinet. He said to me in front of everyone: 'Hussein ... this is a trial for you ... this is the last time I test you, and I don't want subversive principles. Hussein ... this is the last trial!'

"When we came out of the audience my colleagues began to tease me, saying: Hussein ... Hussein ... Hussein.

"Naturally I did not answer the king while he was giving me his advice ... but I knew how to answer him in practice ...

"In the Speech from the Throne delivered two days after the audience I set out the cabinet's policy of free education ... the very policy he called subversive ... because it builds Egypt's future ... and makes education the right of every Egyptian!"

Dr. Taha went on: "When I addressed Farouk I was not addressing his person but the king, whatever his name. I did not mention his qualities but the qualities a king ought to have. With this 'tremendous talk,' as Mr. Rushdi calls it, I was able to do a great deal: I was able to make free education general, I was able to found universities, and then I was able, thank God, and this is what I take pride in, to leave the ministry as I entered it ... I gained no rank, acquired no money, and used my influence in nothing, great or small."