Monopoly!

Al-Musawwar, 2 April 1948.

1 If the Egyptians were told that their government intended to be stingy with them over the various means of transport and communication that ease their lives — whether by open force or by roundabout stratagem — among airplanes, ships, trains, cars, trams, the telegraph, the telephone, or the post, if the Egyptians were told that their government intended to be stingy with them over these many different means which they take as instruments to meet and to part, to connect and to separate, they would chafe at it in the extreme, and would be indignant at their government in the extreme, and would find no rest until they had brought their government back to reason, good sense, and what is right; for the Egyptians, like other peoples, believe in modern civilization, and believe, with especial and most ardent faith, in the material side of this modern civilization, and want to take from the means of this modern material civilization whatever they are able to take, without hesitation or delay, without slackening or shortcoming. Listen to the Egyptians who travel to Europe and America by airplane, and hear how they praise the speed and comfort it secures for them, and the far-off benefits it realizes within so short a span, and how they weigh the speed of airplanes against the slowness of ships and trains. And it would be possible, had people the leisure for talk and reflection — that literary indulgence which scarcely profits its practitioners anything — for new varieties of modern literature to arise, weighing the various means of transport against one another in speed and slowness, in comfort and hardship, in haste and delay, just as the people imagined, in the last years of the past century and the first years of this one, that amusing dialogue between the train and the telegraph, in that charming little booklet we used to read as children, delighting in the exchange between the wire and the locomotive!

2 But in these days we are in haste over everything, scarcely managing to preserve even our old literature, let alone devise new literatures around the means of transport or anything else. What matters is that we are most anxious to preserve all these means of transport, and hasten toward whatever new ones may be devised, never pausing to hesitate over this or to take precaution; but as for the means of intellectual communication between individuals and communities, between nations and peoples, between the lands of the earth however distant from one another, and between the varieties of civilization

however they may differ — these we do not trouble ourselves with, do not pause over, scarcely turn our attention to, and give no thought to preserving what we already have of them, let alone think of adding to them new means we have not yet made use of, let alone blame our government for falling short in preserving what we have of these means!

3 These means, of course, are foreign languages; for airplanes, trains, cars, and ships transport our bodies, and allow our minds to think and to increase in knowledge, while languages transport our minds, and allow them to connect with what the minds of other nations produce, and transport our hearts, and allow them to connect with whatever stirs in the hearts of other nations of feeling and sentiment.

4 But we were created this way: we attend to our bodies before we attend to our minds, and more than we attend to our minds, and we concern ourselves with our material interests before we concern ourselves with our spiritual interests, and more than we concern ourselves with our spiritual interests, and the proof of this is that we grow civilized in matter before we grow civilized in mind; and you will find many Egyptians — indeed you will find all Egyptians — making use of the means of material civilization without asking themselves how these means arose, or how they came to be made available to them; they ride the train, the airplane, the ship, and the car, and nothing concerns them but to ride them! There is nothing strange in this, for not every person is obliged to understand everything, nor ought every person to understand everything; what is strange, rather, is that those in charge of affairs do not reflect that it is only natural that among us there should be some who divide among themselves the knowledge of civilization's fine points and realities, and the understanding of these means which we are permitted to use for all their abundance, variety, and diversity.

5 I set out this long discussion on the occasion of the Ministry of Education's attention to the teaching of foreign languages in Egypt; for it was thought that the nature of Egyptian life, and the nature of the ties that modern life has forged between us and the nations and peoples of the earth, and the nature of the progress toward which we have been driven and from which we have won no small share, would all cast into the mind of the Ministry of Education that the expansion of the teaching of various foreign languages had become one of the necessities of our modern life, and would also cast into its mind that the resumption of consideration of educational programs and curricula was an opportunity that must be seized, so that we might make the expansion of language

teaching an established fact. But I look, and I see the Ministry of Education turning its attention to this grave development in our intellectual life only in order to lessen our attention to the study of foreign languages!

6 I used to think that our modern life would move the Ministry of Education to allow some of the boys and young people of our rising generations to learn some of the major foreign languages, so that there might be among us those skilled in connecting directly, without mediation, with the various cultures of the world, so that among our young people there might be some who translate from German, Italian, and Spanish — and were it not that I must spare certain hearts, I would mention Russian as well, for Russian culture holds literature, science, and art, and Russian culture is not entirely communism! But the Ministry of Education, to my great sorrow, gave no thought to any of this, and instead kept the English language as it was, or even strengthened it further — and I find no harm in that — while weakening the French language and reducing it to such narrow confines that the young people's study of it becomes a waste of time that profits and benefits nothing, and may well harm them and make the pupils detest study and learning altogether!

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8 What matters is not whether the Ministry attends to this language or that, but rather that the Ministry turn its attention to the fact that foreign languages are the means of intellectual communication, and that intellectual communication is the foundation of material communication, and that our modern life imposes upon us direct, active participation in universal human culture, just as it imposes upon us the understanding of our friends and our adversaries, just as it imposes upon us that we both benefit others and benefit ourselves, just as it imposes upon us that we rely upon ourselves in giving benefit and receiving it, and that we not remain dependents upon others.

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10 And all of this imposes upon us that we grant the young people of Egypt the chance to study foreign languages in all their abundance and variety; there is no escaping this if we wish to be a truly mature nation, after we have made the Egyptian mind a monopoly divided between French and English culture ever since our modern renaissance began; and the time has come for us to liberate the Egyptian mind and the

Egyptian heart from this monopoly, and the way to this is, first, for the Ministry of Education to reverse what it has undertaken in its recent reform of neglecting the second foreign language, whether French or English, and to resume its consideration of language teaching, permitting young men and boys and their families to choose two foreign languages from among the world's major languages, without being bound to these two languages we have grown accustomed to until now!

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12 And if the Ministry of Education is not able to keep pace with this modern development, then Parliament was not established in vain, but was established precisely to bring the government back to its proper purpose should it stray from it, and to enlighten it as to where benefit lies. The reform of education is before Parliament, or soon will be; so let the Ministry of Education perform its duty, and let Parliament perform its duty, and let the educated remember that culture holds claims upon them that ought to be honored.