These Teachers ... on Strike!

Al-Musawwar, 11 April 1947.

People have been saying these days that the teachers in the private schools have gone on strike against giving lessons, and have taken to remaining in their schools, neither leaving nor doing anything at all, in order to show the government and the people that they have rights which must be rendered to them — for they have concluded, in all likelihood, that gentle persuasion has availed them nothing, and that persistence in their demands has won them no right at all!

When there is no mount but spear-points, the one in dire need has no choice but to mount them.

And then, beyond all this, he knows that the jurists have condensed this long and complicated story into a brief, short, easy sentence, saying: "Necessities make permissible what is forbidden!"

And these teachers reckon, within their own conscience, that there are rights owed to them which must be rendered to the pupils — pupils who ought never to be made to answer for the state's own failure toward the teachers themselves. But God does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear. He does not, then, burden the starving teacher with the hardship of giving his lesson. Nor does He burden the teacher who feels hunger settle into his very home, and who has begun to see his wife and children suffer for it, with the hardship of giving his lesson. Nor does He burden the teacher weighed down by unceasing cares and pressing pains, distracting him from learning and teaching — because he has a family that must live, a dignity that must be preserved, a standing that must be safeguarded — with the hardship of giving his lesson. The state alone is the one burdened with the duty of enabling teachers to teach, of enabling pupils to learn, and of allowing fathers and mothers to rest assured that their children will not be exposed to ignorance through schools closing on them, nor exposed to the loss of their time through teachers refusing to teach them.

It is for this, and for the like of this, that the state was established. If it does not satisfy the people's need for this, and for the like of this, then it has no claim upon their necks, and no right to their obedience! These are first principles that ought to have settled firmly in the hearts of all Egyptians, and in the hearts of the ministers and their aides before all

other people.

The Egyptians will never prosper, their affairs will never be set right, and they will never become fit for freedom, independence, and dignity, unless these first principles settle firmly in their hearts and minds, mingle with their very blood, and become the foundation of their life both in word and in deed… And there are other first principles the state has not grasped. And how little the state has grasped of such first principles! For the pupil who attends a private school is as Egyptian as the pupil who attends a state school, and possesses every one of his rights in full… And the teacher who teaches in a private school is as Egyptian as the teacher who teaches in a state school, and possesses every one of his rights in full. Without this, the equality that the very nature of things has decreed, and that the constitution has made the foundation of Egyptian life, would collapse entirely.

The state, then, is not indebted to its pupils and its teachers by way of a separate debt owed to each; rather, it is indebted to all pupils and all teachers, in every school alike, by one single debt — namely, that an education suited to the people's needs be delivered to the generations of the people, with no distinction between one teacher and another, nor between one school and another, nor between one pupil and another.

It is well known that the teacher in the state schools is treated unjustly in Egypt, and that the state is very far indeed from doing him justice or rendering him his rights in full. How much more so, then, when we observe that there exist, between him and the teacher in the private schools, disparities that ought never to exist between the sons of a single homeland, nor between the members of a single profession? The least that justice requires is that people be treated alike in whatever injustice the circumstances of life impose upon them. But that some should suffer a light injustice while others suffer a heavy one — this is a thing that cannot possibly be accepted, and the state ought never to entangle itself in it.

I have long held — and still hold, and shall always hold — that the state's first duty is to make teachers equal in every right and every duty alike, provided the teachers are equal in the qualifications that entitle them to teach. All teachers alike ought to be civil servants of the state, under a single cadre, sharing a single measure of the state's concern for them, drawing their salaries by a single standard, awaiting their promotions and increments by a single standard, and resting assured of

their pensions by a single standard. Let the state take up these burdens without hesitation and without any sense of embarrassment, for they are burdens imposed by the people's need for education, by the people's right to education, and by the equality that the constitution has made the foundation of Egyptian life.

But that some teachers should rest assured under a settled order of life guaranteed by the laws of the state, while others remain exposed to the vagaries of events, to the caprice of circumstance, and to the whims of those who happen to hold the reins — this is the very sin that a government mindful of its duties toward the people ought never to entangle itself in.

The education of the people ought not to be built upon any distinction between teachers in the state's concern for them, nor upon any distinction between pupils in the state's concern for their teachers and their schools. And if the state takes up this burden and renders this right, it is only natural that it should extend its hand over every school alike, and impose upon them a single system of oversight, since it has granted them a single measure of concern.

The Ministry of Education once attempted to achieve all of this, but was blocked from doing so by obstacles arising from the Ministry of Finance. It had wished to put the matter before Parliament during the presentation of the budget in the year 1945. There is no reason the Ministry should not resume this effort from where it was left off, now that it is once again presenting the budget to Parliament — so as to make teachers equal in rights, in order to be able to make them equal in duties, and so as to make pupils equal in the education offered to them, and in the oversight exercised over that education.

But that the teachers in the private schools should be told: you must do this and do that, you must give up this and give up that, and you have no right to ask, nor to protest, nor to press your asking and your protest — this is the very thing I would wish the state to absolve itself of, and to keep itself entirely clear of ever undertaking.