New Egyptian Premier Acts To Cut Prices, Relieve Poor
By ALBION ROSSSpecial to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Feb 2, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2003)
pg. 3

New Egyptian Premier Acts To Cut Prices, Relieve Poor

Order to Reduce Living and Regime Costs Is Part of Plan to Ease Mass Discontent

By ALBION ROSS
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

CAIRO, Feb. 1—Egypt's new Government appears to have come awake to the danger inherent in the discontent of the poverty-ridden Oriental masses.

In this respect it has the example of the Shah of Iran, who is distributing immense imperial estates among the peasantry, and also of the military regime of Syria, which is pushing through a series of reforms.

The immediate problem in Egypt is the desperation of the large city proletariat under the pressure of steadily rising prices. The events of last Saturday indicated very strongly that a third force existed in Egypt, consisting of an alliance between the extreme nationalists and t he left-wingers.

The systematic activity of fairly small groups, under leaders whose authority they recognized, followed by the pouring out into the streets of the destitute and the disinherited, indicated the existence of something close to a subversive organization.

In others words, it would appear that nationalism and a concept of social revolt have merged. What had started as an anti-British demonstration, which could be understood as pure Egyptian nationalism or patriotism, turned into an outbreak aimed against dispensers of luxuries for the more privileged groups.

Premier Talks Bluntly

The Egyptian press is now showing a refreshing interest in the fact that the people are suffering bitterly under high prices and in the announced program of the new Premier, Aly Maher Pasha, for getting prices down. The Premier assembled twenty Ministers and Under secretaries and laid down a program. He spoke openly of the "horrors of the high cost of living." He ordered the costs of government, which have been mounting steadily, to be brought down. Then, addressing his remarks to the under secretaries, who are the permanent technical heads of the Egyptian Ministries, he said:

"You will be held personally responsible. That is why I tell you that there is no responsibility unless there is complete freedom in carrying out your responsibilities."

In another step toward establishing a more equable economic system the Premier gave orders for a radical amendment of the ration card system with the object of assuring an adequate supply of essential commodities to the poorer classes. Many persons were found to have no cards at all. The Premier declared that there could be no social stability if the poor classes found it difficult to obtain basic commodities. He also indicated that the sugar ration would be increased by from a third to a half.

This system of placing responsibility on the permanent Under Secretaries is one that has been adopted in Syria by the military reform regime there, which has pushed through one measure after another that had been lying dead in the drawers of the ministries or parliamentary commissions.

The Premier announced that tomorrow he would hold a meeting of all the officials concerned with supplying the populace with necessaries together with the leaders of finance and industry and that a series of meetings would follow. He said he believed that decisive measures could be taken that would reduce prices.

A decree is being drawn up to force profiteers holding supplies of rice, a basic commodity for the Egyptian masses, to register them. Local authorities have been authorized to purchase 250,000 tons of wheat from the United States and a Canadian offer of flour is scheduled to be accepted. An order has been issued for a rapid investigation of the supply and prices of textiles used by the ordinary people in preparation for price measures.

On the symbolic side the Premier announced that each minister in the future would have only one car at his disposal and that that car would be a Ford. The great cars in which the ministers and the wealthy rode around during Saturday's events indicated that they have become a symbol of privilege to the destitute masses of Cairo.

Symbols of Privilege

The destruction of new cars in display stores by angry crowds has been evidence of something besides nationalism stirring in Egypt, as in the rest of the Middle East.

The resentment against foreign things is linked inextricably with resentment against privilege. New foreign cars, foreign clothes, foreign food and foreign establishments have become symbols of privilege.

There can be little doubt that the Premier is being advised by the chief of the Royal Cabinet, Hafez Afifi Pasha, who is one of the best—if not the best—economic minds in Egypt, having spent years since the war bringing back Bank Misr, with its large combine of industrial establishments, out of bankruptcy and into a fairly flourishing state.

Afifi Pasha is the chief proponent of the doctrine that the only way out for Egypt, with her immense overpopulation, is industrialization combined with a modern social system.

Premier Maher Pasha tried hard to get Achmed Hussein Pasha, former Minister of Social Welfare, who fathered Social Security in Egypt, to join his Cabinet. To date Hussein Pasha has hesitated. He resigned from the previous Wafdist Cabinet because politics and political favoritism had been pushed into his ministry.

Thirty social security offices for the implementation of Hussein Pasha's social security legislation, adopted late in 1950, were opened yesterday in Cairo. Application of the law had been dragging previously. Social security had never been very popular with the privileged caste and the opinion has been expressed that in view of the national crisis such matters were of secondary importance.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.