



CENTER FOR TRADE UNION & WORKERS SERVICES (CTUWS)

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WORKERS PROTESTS FOR LEGITIMATE RIGHTS

Introduction:

A new wave of workers strikes broke out during the past days in different economic industrial and service sectors. Although everyone recognizes the fair demands of the striking workers some people repeated the same old accusations both after and before the revolution. Some people described the workers as stooges and said that the workers strikes are but a part of a foreign plot to invoke instability and that it is not the time for such 'categorical' demands. Far from these venomous accusations which do not provide solutions but make matters more complicated, we will review the facts of some of the most important strikes and their causes. Then we will reach a number of the outputs of these strikes.

In September 2013 the Prime Minister issued a sudden decision to raise the minimum wages for the state employees to EGP 1200 starting from January. In stead of causing fragmentation to the workers who struggled much for the minimum wages as a priority in their demands, the reaction was the opposite. The workers received the decision with doubts and with fear for many of them. The decision raised many questions about whether it was the minimum wage as defined by the ILO rules (i.e. the wage of a starting unqualified worker) or a minimum level for income? If the decision is going to be applied on the newly appointed workers for the state and those who will be appointed in the future (which are small in number), what about the old workers? Is it going to be applied on the private sector workers? Why was it issued by a decision of the Prime Minister not by law? On the background of these questions, the decision raised many arguments until it was January the time for implementation. The executive decisions were disappointing. The said minimum wage was not more than an allowance which does not cope at all with the prices which rose after the announcement of the decision last September. Negotiations with the government and businessmen on implementing the minimum wage decision on the private sector workers did not reach any result. January came with what is called the "minimum wages shock" and thereafter the suffering of the business public sector workers. Such state owned companies which were saves from being sold and liquidated in the privatization programme of Mubarak's regime since 1990. On top of these companies were the Iron and Steel and Mehalla and Kafr el Dawar Spinning Companies which suffered for years from negligence. They underwent productivity decrease and heavy losses. Its workers wee hoping that the post revolution governments will act to save them but they wee disappointed because these governments ignored the business sector file and did not show any positive sign so far that they intend to implement any programmes to save these companies so that they can survive and remain and to be competitive in the market.

Thus, the previous wave of strikes was caused by the minimum wages decision, neglecting the public business sector, corruption in the state institutions, and the continuous role of the governmental Egyptian Trade Union Federation in its biased role to the government.

Egypt/Helwan - Mohammed Said Ahmed st.- Petrogas buildings- Alexandria building-

Second Floor – Apartment No. (2)

P.O. Box. 114 Helwan

Tel& Fax: +202 255 93 929 / + 202 255 93 932 /+202 276 53 491

Mobil: +2012 0532 488

Website:<http://www.ctuws.com>

E-mail: ctuws.ctuws@gmail.com,

The sit-in of the Iron and Steel Company Workers:

- The company workers started their sit-in on 26th November 2013 inside the company premises. They called for their share in the profits at 16 months salary and they were supposed to be paid up in November 2013. The demonstrating workers cheered against the management, called the president of the holding company to resign and withdrew their confidence from the plant union. Two weeks prior to the sit-in, the workers gathered signatures to withdraw confidence from the plant union which was accused of being in alliance with the management against the interests of the company and the workers. As a result, the management started a series of repression against the responsible trade union leaderships. Ahmed Adel, a young worker from the transport sector was transferred to the oases and sent to the legal affairs for investigation. He was accused of gathering signatures to withdraw confidence from the plant union. The same procedure was taken against Sayed Saad Eddin who was transferred to a lower job which will lead to losing 50% of his monthly incentives. The management referred Mohamed Omar member of the plant union and ECTUWS' activist to the medical commission claiming that he was injured in an accident 'which took place more than 20 years ago'. It was very strange that the management took this procedure by itself disregarding that Mohamed Omar is an elected member of the plant union. Strange enough, the plant union took a similar procedure and cancelled his full time assignment as a trade unionist. The management could refer him to the medical commission (so that it may force him to retire).
- On the seventh day of the sit-in and in response to the confirmation of the president of the holding company (Zaky Bassyuny) that there is no money to distribute profits for the workers, thousands of workers started escalating their protests. They closed the gates by oxygen torch welding and prevented the top management staff from entering the company. They brought their families to sit-in with them. The partial strike was completed and all the sections, other than the furnaces, stopped completely. In defiance of the workers, the management filed a police report with the Public Prosecutor Office against 14 trade unionists. They were accused of delaying production and causing losses to the company. In addition, the management filed a report with Al Tibbeen police station against Mohamed Omar, Sayed Saad Eddeen and Gad el Haq Taha Mahmoud accusing them of holding up the management staff. The defendants denied the accusation and emphasized that the staff members were participating in the sit-in by their own accord.
- On 9th December 2013 more than two thousand workers demonstrated before the premises of the Holding Company for Engineering Industries at Simon Boulevard Square in Garden City. They called the president of the Holding Company and the chairman of the Iron and Steel Company to resign. They also demanded to disburse the production award at 16 months salary as decided by the Company's general assembly, dissolve the plant union and refer the corruption files in the company to the public prosecution.
- On 14th December after 19 days of continuous sit-in and three days of continuous negotiations supported by CTUWS and the participation of Ms. Rahma Refaat CTUWS' legal adviser, the workers ended their sit-in according to a written agreement. The government was represented by the Minister of Social Solidarity and the Minister of Industry. The workers were represented by Mohamed Omar Osman (head of the team). Sayed Saad Eddeen, Ibrahim Mustafa, Emad Abdel Haleem, Ayman Ahmed Fathy, Mahmoud Abd el Dayem, Mohamed Nasser and Mahmoud Abdel Rahman. The agreement which was met with satisfaction from more than 12 000 workers stipulated the following:

- Resignation of the board chairman and reformation of the board of directors,
 - Reorganization of the relationship between the Company and the Coke Company especially that they work under the umbrella of the same holding company in order to provide coal as necessary for the factories to run in full capacity,
 - To send all the files of the transferred workers and those referred to the medical commission to Prof. Dr. Ahmed Hassan el Borae'i for examination and to determine the compliance of the pertinent decisions with the law within two months of the receipt of these files, and
 - Because the Company and the Holding Company are not in a position to provide more than EGP 70 million from the amount decided by the general assembly for the workers' incentives, the government decided to increase this sum to EGP 100 million and to postpone the final settlement of the incentives until 1/6/2014.
- During the 19 days of the sit-in, CTUWS issued 16 press releases which formed the sole source for the newspapers and TV channels which followed up the sit-in.
 - CTUWS participated in giving the strike leaders the opportunity to express their demands through the Egyptian TV ground and satellite channels.
 - CTUWS' lawyers supported the workers' leaders daily against the management's attempts to prosecute them and helped the workers formulate their demands.
 - CTUWS made a documentary film for the sit-in and the viewpoints of the workers themselves. The film was uploaded on the social media and the YouTube.
 - The CTUWS lawyers headed by Ms, Rahma Refaat drafted the agreement signed with the Government of Egypt which secured their rights. After it was signed, the workers finished their sit-in.

The Strike of the Spinning and Weaving Sector Workers:

The workers of the Spinning and Weaving Sector started their strike on 10th February 2013. The beginning was from Mehalla Spinning Co, which employs 22 thousand workers. The strike continued for 12 successive days. Twelve companies from the public business sector participated in the strike. They included spinning and weaving companies in Mehalla, Kafr el Dawar, al Mahmoudiya, Delta, Zefta, Shebin el Koum, al Nasr Co., Koum Hamada, Synthetic Silk Co., Fayoum and Minia. The number of striking workers reached more than 45 thousand. They called for the resignation of the president of the holding company for spinning and weaving (Fouad Abdel Aleem Hassaan), opening the files of corruption in the company and referring the responsible to public prosecution, distributing the remaining portion of the 2013 profits which was supposed to be disturbed last November (two-month salary) and to apply the minimum wage system.

In spite of the government's approval to disburse EGP 157 million as profits and to announce the disbursement of 2-month portion and the arrears of profits so that the total share in profits reaches 100 days, the companies' workers continued their strike until the realization of their remaining demands including the resignation of the president of the holding company who keeps his position since the era of president Mubarak. It is known that Fouad Abdel Azeem was the chairman of Mehalla Spinning Company.

After 12 days the workers suspended their strike according to an agreement reached with the Minister of Investment which provided "reformation of the company's board of directors and releasing the managing director (the new board consists of 4 members and a chairman), considering the strike days as paid leave, redevelop the medical complex and purchase new X-ray and resonance equipment to be financed by the Ministry of Investment, relieve the workers from paying EGP 220 from their incentives to the insurances (in cooperation with the Ministry of social Solidarity) and the application of the minimum wage system after it is decided by the National Council for Wages. In addition, the Minister undertook to withdraw confidence from the president of the holding company at the first meeting of its general assembly".

The Strike of the Public Transport Authority in Greater Cairo:

In the morning of 22nd February 2013 the public transport workers started a strike according to the invitation of independent trade union. They called for the application of the minimum wages or the equivalent according to the regulations of the Public Transport Authority. They also called for increasing the nature of work allowance by 100% similar to the Metro Co. and the Railway workers, unifying the performance incentives at EGP 500 (in stead of the current EGP 150), disburse profits at 6 months salary (similar to the Metro workers), allocate 25% of the selling price of junk for the workers' mutual fund and amend the regulations so as to reduce the big differences in the workers' wages and incentives. About 38 thousand workers in 28 garages throughout Greater Cairo participated in the strike.

The workers refused the offer of Cairo Governor to disburse EGP 200 as incentive for 3 months until the remaining demands are considered. They demonstrated more than once during the strike period in front of the Authority premises at Nasr City calling for the resignation of Brig. Hisham Atiya chairman of the Authority after his announcement that the strike days will be considered absence days.

After six contiguous days, the workers suspended their strike after a meeting held with the chairman of the Authority, members of the executive board of the independent union and more than 20 trade union leaders. They agreed on the following:

1. Raise the nature of work allowance to 100% similar to the metro and the railway workers.
2. Continue disbursing the EGP 200 with the wages as a social allowance and increase this sum annually by 10%.
3. Because the Authority is one of the economic bodies, the workers will obtain the advantages of economic bodies such as the 7% annual increment and the annual profits.
4. To consider the disbursement of risk allowance at 60% for all the workers.
5. To form an administrative committee to amend the administrative and financial regulations which are applied since 1966.

6. To consider the strike days as work days with the average incentives. The average will be cancelled as from 1/3/2014. The security prosecutions for the workers will stop.

The chairman agreed to form a committee comprising the head of the Central Department of Financial and Economic Affairs and other related persons to conduct the study. A number of workers will participate and follow up the study and any related developments.

The Strike of the Post Workers:

According to the call of the Professional Federation of the Egyptian Post Authority the 52 000 workers of the authority stated a strike on 23rd February 2014 in tens of post offices all over the country. More than 100 workers representing all the governorates and the different post regions announced a sit-in at the premises of General Administration in Ataba. They called for the application of the minimum wages on all the Authority workers, the application of the 7% annual increment as stipulated by the Labour Law, the amendment of the salary structure so as to reduce the differences and achieve social justice which was one of the objectives of the Egyptian revolution. They also refused the return of all the advisers. Those advisers were fired after the last strike of the Authority workers but they started to be reappointed again!!

The strike escalated on its ninth day to include 70% of the post offices in the country (3900 offices in 28 regions). The workers refused the offer of the chairman of the Authority to give between EGP 200 and EGP 250 as an incentive in stead of applying the minimum wage system. Then they called the Authority chairman to resign after he insulted them and accused members of the Professional Federation who called for the strike that they do not represent the post workers. He said he will deal only with General Trade Union which is affiliated to the governmental federation "ETUF". On 6th March 2014 the workers suspended their strike which lasted for 13 days after negotiations among the Minister of Communications, members of the independent Professional Federation for Post Workers and some leaders from the post regions in governorates. The Minister responded to most of the workers' demands and asked to form a committee to study the demands and submit them to the Authority's board of directors.

The Minister agreed to issue the annual increment at 7%, issue 50% of the basic salary as an incentive starting he firs of March 2014, give soft loans to the workers and to distribute profits according to the workers' professional performance in addition to the 6 months salary which is issued annually. It was also agreed to apply the decisions regarding the minimum wages on the Authority workers, consider the strike days as work days and stop legal and administrative prosecution. The Minister emphasized that investigation will be made regarding the recorded insults of the chairman and said that he will apologize for the workers on his webpage.

The workers resumed their strike on 16th March 2014 when the government did not fulfill its promises. The board of directors met but did not discuss the workers' demands. The workers held another negotiations session on 20th March for 2 hours with the Minister of Communications and members of the board of directors. The Minister gave an offer which the workers thought will not meet their demands. The rejected offer was to apply the performance incentive by 30% of the basic salary with a minimum of EGP 100 and a maximum of EGP 150 starting from next July and give one month basic salary with a minimum of EGP 300 and a maximum of EGP 600 starting from next April. The profits will be a percentage from the total profits of the Authority: if between 50 and 100 million pounds (disburse 1.5 basic salary with a minimum of EGP 450 and a maximum of EGP 600, if between 100 and 150 million pounds (disburse 2 month basic salary with a minimum of EGP 900 and a maximum of EGP 1500). If the Authority realizes more than 150 million pounds of profits (disburse 3 month basic salary with a minimum of EGP 1200 and a maximum of EGP 1300).

The above offer angered representatives of the post workers who exchanged sharp discussions with board members. Several questions were addressed to the Minister about the profits of the Authority

and how they are expended. When the discussions reached a dead end the workers' representatives withdrew from the meeting amidst complete silence from the board members and the Minister!! After the failure of the negotiations, all the post regions all over the country announced an open strike until the realization of the workers demands namely the application of the minimum wages on all the Authority workers, the application of the 7% annual increment as stipulated by the Labour Law, the amendment of the salary structure so as to reduce the differences and achieve social justice which was one of the objectives of the Egyptian revolution. They also refused the return of all the advisers. Those advisors were fired after the last strike of the Authority workers but they started to be reappointed again!!

In a serious development a security force attacked the houses of five leaders from the independent union of Alexandria and arrested them. They are: Ayman Hanafy Mahmoud, Haytham Osman Mohamed Gaber, Ismail Thabet, Hisham Abdel Hameed Mohamed and Samy Saeed Sabah. The force said they have orders to arrest 11 trade unionists from Alexandria. This was after a press conference held by the chairman who emphasized that police reports were filed against trade unionists accusing them of calling for strike and for delaying work in the Authority. This angered the workers who insisted to continue their strike until the realization of their demands, the resignation of the chairman, the immediate release of their detained colleagues and stopping legal prosecutions of trade union leaders in all the governorates. The arrested workers were investigated in the lawsuit No. 2035/2014 / Administrative / Muharram Bey. They were accused of gathering in front of the transfer center of Alexandria Post Authority, blocking private and public traffic, causing harm to the interests of the General Post Authority, leaving the work site without justification, hindering the performance of work and calling others to go in strike. The prosecution decided to detain them for 4 days then for 15 days for investigation.

On 30th March security forces of Alexandria assaulted the houses of three trade unionists from the Independent Union namely Samir Abu Bakr, Mohamed Abu el Ma'aty and Abdel Haleem Mohamed Yasseen to arrest them under the pretext that they called for a strike and encouraged workers to delay the citizens' service. The three workers were not at home, so the police destroyed the contents of their houses and insulted their families.

On 31st March hundreds of the post service workers from all governorates demonstrated in front of the cabinet of ministers calling to release their arrested colleagues members of the executive board of the independent union in Alexandria and stop all security and administrative prosecutions against the leaders of the strike which continued for 16 days.

One day earlier. a delegation from the workers met with the governor of Alexandria who asked them to stop their strike in order to release their colleagues. They agreed but the prosecution office of Muharram Bey refused to release them claiming that the accusations against them concern the state not only the claimant!!

On 1st April 2014, the General Attorney of West Alexandria decided to release the five arrested. To announce the continuity of their protest movement representatives of the post regions all over the country prepared for another protests in front of the Authority premises in Ataba Square to be followed by an open sit-in and to mobilize the workers for a comprehensive strike I stead of the partial strike which is still going on.

The Strike of the Notary Offices:

Employees of the 331 notary offices of the Ministry of Justice went in strike for about two weeks in all governorates. The Notary Consultants' Club called for the complete strike when the officials ignored their call for negotiations which was announced in a protest stand in front of the Ministry of Justice one week earlier. They issued a statement in which they said that workers of the Egyptian Notary sector the guardian of public and private property of the country have thousands of questions about the intentional ignorance of their demands. They do not have suitable work environment which enable them to live and work in an honorable manner. They do not receive

equal treatment similar to other employees of the Ministry of Justice. They lack health service and social care. On the other hand, they are burdened with work. Their work hours are the longest in the republic of Egypt. They said in the statement: "We, who apply the rules of the constitution and the law call for applying the same rules on us. We need justice and equal treatment with the other employees of the Ministry of Justice. Employees of the Notary offices are the first to deal with the previous and the coming presidential elections in addition to their usual work. But their rights are denied. Some of them have to file reports with the State Council because they are not issued "meal allowances". It is like slave work which vanished from the whole world. This stand is but the beginning"!!

More than 20 thousand workers participated in the strike calling for an equal treatment with other sectors of the Ministry of Justice such as the forensic medicine and experts in the courts and the State Lawsuits Authority whose salaries were increased by the decision of the Minister and were given 3 months salary as bonus retroactively for 3 years. But the Notary offices employees were ignored. They also called for delegating or appointing more employees to cover manpower shortage in the offices, provide security for the offices against burglars, consider Sundays as paid leave similar to other sectors in the Ministry of Justice, support the Health and Social Care fund by EGP 2 on every operation made in the office and cancel the evening shift and issue EGP 900 as nature of work allowance.

On 27th February 2014 they suspended their strike after Prime Minister Eng. Ibrahim Mehleb undertook to end the crisis and find solutions for their problems within two weeks. In another statement they announced the suspension of their strike to give the Prime Minister and his cabinet the time to solve their problems.

The Sit-in of the Workers of Privatized and Non Operating Companies:

For the second month successively representatives of workers from several companies which were sold but courts judged to return them to the public sector (such as Tanta Linen Co., Shebin Spinning Co. and Steam Furnaces Co.) and representatives of companies which stopped to operate sat-in in the premises of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation "ETUF". They call for pumping new investments in these companies and to bring them back to operation (such as Samanoud Wool Co. and el Nasr Automobile Co.). the protestors organized several protest movements before the cabinet of ministers during the past weeks. Nobody responded to them.

On Wednesday 12th March, thugs belonging to ETUF president attacked the workers and drove them out of the building.

The strike of Alexandria Public Transport Workers:

The strike of Alexandria public transport workers which lasted for 11 days started on 9th March 2014. The workers called for keeping the end of service compensation at 2-month salary as usual during the past years. This practice was stopped in July 2013 without any justification. They also called to apply the minimum wages decision, renew the transport fleet, provide spare parts to operate buses in full capacity, amend the annual increment to be not less than 10% of the basic salary, raise the ceiling of the income tax to EGP 30 thousand, improve the Authority's performance, fight corruption which deteriorated conditions in the Authority and amend the financial regulations so as to be equal to the railways and metro workers.

The strike which caused complete paralysis of Alexandria included the garages of Sidi Bishr, Smouha, Muharram Bey, Al Agamy, Burg Al Arab, Tram Al Raml and Tram Al Balad.

The Independent General Trade Union of Public Transport in Cairo announced solidarity with the transport workers of Alexandria emphasizing the unity of the demands of transport workers all over the country and that the government should consider them seriously and find solutions far from the sedatives which it offers here and there.

The Independent Union which called for the strike issued a statement to the people of Alexandria apologizing that the workers were forced to go in strike after trying every possible way to negotiate on their demands but nobody listened to them.

On 17th March, after failure of several negotiation sessions with Alexandria governorate, the Ministry of Finance responded to the workers demand and stopped their strike. The agreement included the end of service compensation for 2 months for every year of service and to disburse incentives for EGP 150 monthly starting from 20th March 2014. This was already achieved.

The sit-in of the Aluminum Complex Workers:

The 16 000 workers of the Aluminum Complex started an open sit-in on 19th March 2014 inside the Complex in front of the Administration building. The sit-in lasted for 5 successive days. The protestors called for the assignment of the president of the holding company because he ignored their demands, fighting corruption in the company and holding the officials responsible for wasting millions of the company's funds.

The workers announced their demands in a statement which was distributed. It says, "We the workers of the Aluminum Complex waited for long years but the officials did not feel us. We knocked at all the doors to show them that more than 16 000 families suffer every day from ignoring us as if this Complex is outside the concern of all the successive governments which used to listen only to those who shout. We are not less than our colleagues in the Iron and Steel Company who, through their stand, forced the government to respond to their demands which signed an agreement with the workers' representatives to develop the company and to stop the realization of any losses. We are not less than our colleagues at Mehalla Spinning Co. who forced the Prime Minister to go to them and agree to pump new investments in the company to work in full capacity. We are not less than our colleagues in all the other public business sector who moved during the past two months to preserve their factories and call to fight corruption which destroyed their resources during the last years.

Let our sit-in be the beginning for or unity and participation in deciding our destiny and that of our sons and of our factory ... let us be one hand calling for the following:

- The resignation of the president of the holding company because he disregarded our demands throughout the past years.
- Increasing the cash allowance from EGP 460 to EGP 600.
- Increasing the meal allowance by 40%. It was agreed in 2010 to increase this allowance by 10% every year, but this was not fulfilled during the last 4 years.
- Employ more workers to bridge manpower shortage in several sectors.
- Develop the medical system adopted in the company's hospitals.
- Support the mutual fund by a reasonable percentage from the Penalties' Fund.

Five days later the sit-in was ended after a meeting with the board of directors. Board members promised to meet some of the workers' demands in the first meeting of the general assembly to be held in April 2014!!

Conclusions:

The above mentioned samples of the workers' strikes during the past days, we can reach the following important conclusions:

First: The absence of a clear mechanism for negotiations between the government and the workers participated not only in causing strikes but also in lengthening the period of strikes.

Second: The governmental federation "ETUF" was disclosed. It became apparent that the independent unions organized these strikes and negotiated for the workers (such as in the case of the public transport of Cairo, the Post Authority and the public transport of Alexandria). In sites where there are no independent unions (such as Mehalla Spinning Co. and the Iron and Steel Co.) representatives of workers other than the governmental trade unions organized the strikes and negotiated for the workers.

Third: The government performance is weak. It is remarked that the announcement of some officials made the strikes stronger and longer. "See the officials' statements regarding the Iron and Steel Co. and Mehalla Spinning Co. as well as those of the chairman of the Post Authority and the chairman of Public Transport".

Notice that the Minister of Investments, the Minister of Communications, the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Social Solidarity were late in responding and participating in the negotiations. The Ministers of Social Solidarity and Industry, for example, met with representatives of the Iron and Steel Company on 14th December, i.e. 18 days after the sit-in which started on 26th November.

The Minister of Investment attended the negotiation session with the workers of Mehalla Spinning Co. on 20th February, i.e. 10 days after the beginning of the strike.

The Minister of Communications met with members of the professional federation of post workers on 6th March, i.e. 11 days after the strike which started on 23rd February.

The performance of the former Minister of Manpower was weak. He tried to exploit the workers' strikes to achieve personal political gains for himself through declarations and promises which were not fulfilled and caused embarrassment for the government before the public opinion.

Fourth: The workers lost confidence in the officials' promises. There is still a gap which officials widen continuously because they do not keep their promises. For example, the agreements reached with the workers of the Iron and Steel Co. and with the post workers were not observed.

Recommendations:

- Reconsider the application of the minimum wage decision and drafting a law which is in compliance with the international and realizes justice in wages.
- Establish a sustainable mechanism for negotiations between the workers and the government.
- Implement reform programmes for the public business sector companies and free them from corruption.
- Operate the companies which were stopped and the companies which were returned to state ownership by court sentences.

Cairo, 2nd April 2014.

