

An Elusive Victory – Egyptian Workers Challenge the Regime
(2006-2012)

Heba Fawzi El-Shazli

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Joel Peters, Chair

Timothy W. Luke

Rachel M. Scott

Ariel I. Ahram

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Abstract

“We started the 2011 revolution and the rest of Egypt followed,” say Egyptian workers with strong conviction. Egyptian independent workers’ continuous claims of contention and repertoires of protest were one of several main factors leading to the January 25, 2011 uprising. After thirty-two years of a Mubarak-led authoritarian regime, massive protests began in January 2011 and forced President Mubarak to step down from his position. The first question of this research endeavor is: how did Egyptian workers challenge the regime and how they became one of the factors leading to the January 2011 uprising? These workers were organized into loose networks of different independent groups that had been protesting for a decade and longer prior to January 2011. However, their regular protests for over a decade before 2011 challenged the authoritarian regime.

This dissertation examines the combative role of Egyptian independent workers’ formal and informal organizations as a contentious social movement to challenge the regime. It will examine the evolving role of workers as socio-economic actors and then as political actors in political transitions. Social Movement Theory (SMT) and its mechanisms and Social Movement Unionism (SMU) will be the lenses through which this research will be presented. The methodology will be the comparative case studies of two different movements where workers who advocated for their rights for a decade prior to January 2011 experienced significantly differing outcomes. One case study showcases the municipal real estate tax collection workers who were able to establish a successful social movement and then create an independent trade union. The second case study examines an influential group of garment and textile workers, who also developed an effective social movement, yet were not able to take it to the next step to establish an independent union. I will explore within this research a second question: why one group of workers was able to establish an independent union while the other arguably more influential group of workers, the garment and textile workers, was not able to do so. This had an impact on the influence they were able to exercise over the regime in addition to their effectiveness as a social movement for change.

Dissertation Motivation

Ira Katznelson wrote in agreement with historian William H. Sewell, Jr. “labor history has lost much of its élan, directionality and intellectual purpose.”¹ The goal of this research endeavor is to contribute to the return of the study of labor, its history, its political contributions and challenges, and its stature within social science. By studying labor, we are peering into our own lives. Barrington Moore wrote that intellectuals alone could not pursue political goals or initiatives unless they align themselves with massive discontent.² So this research is also focused on highlighting the “massive discontent” exhibited by the masses, the workers and their families; and without them change cannot happen.

¹ Katznelson, Ira, “The Bourgeois Dimension: A Provocation about Institutions, Politics & the Future of Labor History,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, No.46 Fall 1994, pp. 7-32, page 7

² Moore, Barrington, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy – Lord and Peasant in the making of the modern world*, Beacon Press, 1966.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the courageous Egyptian workers, men and women, who continue to struggle for decent work, respect for fundamental worker rights, freedom of association and for democracy. It is also dedicated to my parents, Fawzi M. El-Shazli and Amal Alm el-Hoda Rifaat whose dream was for me to complete a Ph.D. degree. Sadly, they are not with us today yet they are always with me in spirit.

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Chapter One: Introduction

*If the ruling class has lost its consensus i.e. is no longer leading but only “dominant,” exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.*³
Antonio Gramsci

Thesis and Questions

This dissertation will examine and propose answers to the following two questions: **First**, what was the political role of the independent Egyptian labor movement leading up to the 2011 uprisings, and how did the workers use repeated contentious collective actions to challenge the regime? **Second**, regarding the two case studies, why did one group of civil servants succeed in establishing the first independent union since 1957, while the other much larger and influential garment and textile workers were not able to do so? These two questions are interrelated since the inability of the garment and textile workers to establish an independent trade union raises the question regarding their leverage over the regime thus their ability to effectively challenge the regime, and their ultimate effectiveness as a social movement for change.

The independent labor movement did have a political role, albeit limited and contested. The workers valiantly fought many battles but lost the overall war, that being the actual implementation of democratic political reform. Thus, these workers view their efforts as leading to an elusive victory.

My research will show that labor’s influence was embedded in their acts of defiance that challenged the state using the power of strikes, protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins, which also contributed to breaking down the “barrier of fear” within the

³ Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith, International Publishers, NY, 1971, page 275-76.

hearts and minds of many Egyptians. Through their repeated acts of contention and protest over the years addressed in this research, the workers became a role model for action opposing the regime thus creating additional cracks within the fabric of authoritarian rule leading to wide breaches in the regime's firm efforts to control. Workers were indeed present in Tahrir Square and elsewhere around the country in the January 2011 uprising but as individuals and not under the organized banner of a large independent workers' social movement – why? The independent workers' social movement was still shackled with its past, insecure in the present, leading to an unstable future. Its existence and plans made all the more confusing by the unambiguous nature of an authoritarian regime. The independent labor movement was not able to achieve a coherent political stance or role, especially post-February 2011 and up to the 2012 presidential elections. They had fallen prey to bureaucratic in-fighting, leaders' large political egos and quest for power, and the continued authoritarian nature of the post-February 2011 rule by the military.

Social movements are generally understood as “challenges to ‘existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.’⁴ These movements, ranging from large grassroots organizations to small ‘principled’ groups⁵ acting ‘on behalf of largely silent constituencies,’⁶ are all defined by and committed through the contentious activities they implement to achieve a common, collective good. Regardless of their most immediate [short-term] demands, these movements invariably necessitate extensive political changes as the lynchpin of their success.”⁷ Extensive

⁴ Meyer, David S., and Sidney G. Tarrow, “A Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century.” In *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, edited by Meyer and Tarrow, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1998:1-28.

⁵ Sikkink, Kathryn, “Human Rights Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America,” *International Organization* 47 (3): 411-41, 1993:411

⁶ Ottaway, Marina and Theresa Chung, “Toward a New Paradigm.” *Journal of Democracy* 10 (4) p. 99-113, 1999: 107

⁷ Grodsky, Brian K. *Social Movements and the New State, The Fate of Pro-Democracy Organizations when Democracy is Won*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2012:3

political changes were a requirement of the workers' social movement's success, thus the elusive victory in Egypt's case.

The Egyptian workers were indeed part of the struggle for political reform. Early on they voiced the need to change from an authoritarian regime to a democracy. Starting in 2006 and earlier, they initially used an economic discourse, which then changed to a more nuanced political discourse in 2010. The change in the nature and framing of the discourse came about with the debate over instituting a minimum wage for all workers in 2010.⁸ However, the workers' contentious collective actions were not able to secure the goal and desired results of a state truly transitioning to a democracy; one that respects fundamental and universal human and worker rights.

In social science research, particularly political science, there has been a debate elucidated by Jillian Schwedler⁹ regarding the need to identify the central question, the "puzzle" at the center of any political research inquiry. So to find the answers is then the critical goal for the research. The process of finding the answers to the puzzle and the understanding that the conditions in question are puzzling is also part of the overall inquiry process, writes Schwedler.¹⁰ In this research endeavor, I started with a certain amount of knowledge based on my twenty-five years work experience in the field. With so much exposure, as a practitioner in the field, I thought that I knew the answers. Initially, I believed that without the labor movement's activism there would not have been an uprising in January 2011. I believed that the workers had a pivotal role and they pushed the regime over the brink. I believed that the workers led the wave of protests and activist social movement. Yet, after more than two years of dedicated research, along with my professional work experience, I found that my initial answers

⁸ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2010/05/201052161957263202.html> "Hundreds of Egyptian workers have gathered outside Egypt's cabinet building demanding a rise in the minimum wage, which has been set at \$6.30 a month since 1984. The protesters were calling for the government to implement a court order that would boost the minimum wage and help millions of poor cope with rising prices. About 500 protesters in central Cairo on Sunday chanted: "We need wages that are enough for a month!" while some called for an end to the rule of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's president for more than 28 years. The protest is the latest in a series of demonstrations demanding more assistance for poor Egyptians and greater political freedom in the tightly controlled state."

⁹ Schwedler, Jillian. "Puzzle", *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research*, Fall 2013, pp. 27-30

¹⁰ Ibid. 30

were not supported by empirical evidence or did not respond fully to the questions at hand. And so embarking on a deeper inquiry and research process, it was apparent that the impact of labor was not as strong as I had anticipated or as many people had hoped for. They had an important role, and that is shown within this research, but the political impact is still being deliberated.

This dissertation will not attempt to measure such an elusive and difficult to prove concept as “impact”, since one cannot precisely answer the question of what is the desired or actual impact one can only conjecture. If we define the impact as the success of the uprising and Egypt’s transitioning into a democracy with respect for freedom of association among many other fundamental universal human right, then labor’s role had a failed impact. However, if we further clarify the meaning of what is considered a success, understand Egypt’s historic and current reality, and examine democratic transition theories and the nature of authoritarian rule, then we can determine that the independent labor movement did indeed have an impact, albeit limited. The approach needed for democratic transitions in the Arab world is explained by Brumberg as, “what we need here is a more ‘bounded’ approach, one that looks at how political change, contestation, and negotiation in the Arab world are conditioned by local, national, or regional forces,”¹¹ rather than returning to old standby of “Arab exceptionalism,”¹² which is not a useful concept anymore especially in the context of global democratization and transitions. So this research endeavor will focus on the role of trade unions and will not focus on impact since it implies after the event (in this case the January 2011 uprising), its elusive nature with many variables involved, and the difficulty in proving impact in a satisfactory scientific qualitative manner.

¹¹ Brumberg, Daniel, “Theories of Transition,” Chapter Two in *The Arab Uprisings Explained, New Contentious Politics in The Middle East*, Marc Lynch (editor), Columbia University Press, 2014:30.

¹² Arab exceptionalism: “The awful modern legacy of Arab political exceptionalism in the world—of an entire region’s permanent authoritarianism, abuse of power, corruption, and lack of social equity and citizen rights—has now been challenged across the board, with common grievances and varieties of activism being met with a range of very different responses,” “Arab Exceptionalism,” by Rami G. Khouri is Editor-at-large of The Daily Star, and Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in Beirut, Lebanon. <http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cairoreview/pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=116>

There is empirical evidence on how there was at least a decade if not more of labor organizing and activism prior to the January 2011 uprising. “There had been sustained protests for at least a decade before the January 25th uprisings, which functioned as the political incubators that nurtured the forces of the revolution, shaping people’s political consciousness and organizational capacities. Over the past decade, Egyptians have protested against just about everything: regional occupations and Mubarak’s inheritance plans, from encroachments on the judges’ independence to poor wages, shortages of water and butane cooking gas, and attacks on [Egyptian] Christians. In these demonstrations, [...] some of the most innovative and effective mechanisms of protest were deployed; yet the [left-wing] intelligentsia dismissed these events as too inconsequential for challenging the *status quo*. They were proven wrong.”¹³ The Egyptian independent worker social movements contested many of these policies and were in the center of these protests along with other civil society organizations.

The Egyptian lawyer and political activist, Khaled Ali, cites signposts along the way that were indicators of the uprising to come. The following signposts according to Ali were a harbinger for the events to take place starting in January 2011: 1) the establishment of the ‘Popular Committee to Support the Palestinian Intifada’ in 2000; 2) the American invasion of Iraq in 2003; 3) domestic Egyptian issues such as the rise of the Kefaya movement in 2004 where the main thread tying these organized demonstrations was the refusal of an extended Mubarak reign through his son, Gamal; and 4) the judges’ battle with the regime regarding the rigged 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections.¹⁴ The Egyptian Judicial Club (the association of judges that protects and defends their professional interests) demanded independence from the

¹³ Ali, Khaled. “Precursors of the Egyptian Revolution.” *IDS Bulletin* Volume 43 Number 1 January 2012 © 2012 The Author. *IDS Bulletin* © 2012 Institute of Development Studies. Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA. Khaled Ali is a labor lawyer, former presidential candidate, and head of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 17 More details: “In 2005, the Mubarak regime had forced judges into a corner; they had agreed to supervise the elections with no guarantees of transparency and accountability. The president of the committee overseeing presidential elections disqualified 1,700 judges from election supervision, and a bill drawn in 1991 to safeguard their independence was ignored. Judges were thus asked not only to sign off on election rigging, but to remain silent about attacks on voters, harassment by thugs, and voter suppression.”

executive branch. Additional signposts included: 5) The highly contested trade union elections in 2006 due to corruption and manipulation by the authorities, and the El-Mahalla strike of 2006 (the first of many in this decade); 6) rising labor anger with more strikes and protests leading to a serious clash in El-Mahalla in 2008; and 7) the average peoples' protests in 2007 over clean potable water, availability of cooking gas, subsidies for bread and flour.¹⁵

The year before January 2011 was another year full of confrontations challenging the regime, which provided additional indicators of the imminent 2011 Egyptian uprising. First, there was the brutal murder of Khaled Said in June 2010, the 28-year old blogger who was tortured to death by two police officers after he uploaded a video online of police brutality in Alexandria. Second, a reinvigorated independent labor movement that had protested in their workplaces (December 2006, 2007 and 2008 in El-Mahalla), and then in 2010 they brought protest to the front door of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF)¹⁶ in downtown Cairo, and to the headquarters of the Cabinet of Ministers in addition to major public spaces for large numbers to witness their repertoires and discourse of contention. Finally, the bombing of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve 2010 and the Tunisian revolution in December 2010, further added to the increase in the people's boiling point. "Before the [first] Mahalla strike in December 2006, neither political forces nor the social and cultural elite paid attention to working-class movements, which began to gain steam in 2004

¹⁵ Ali, page 21 - For example: "On 3 July 2007, some 3,000 citizens from Burg al-Burullus in the governorate of Kafr al-Shaykh in the northern Delta came out to protest against a more than 20-day interruption of potable water service; the water had been diverted to the Baltim resort to meet the 24-hour needs of holidaymakers. After one extended demonstration, locals cut off the international coastal road, located on the Mediterranean coast, causing 14-hour traffic jam that stretched over some 80 km, and chanted slogans against the governor General Salah Salama, the former head of State Security Investigations – demanding his removal and blaming him for the water crisis. By 29 July 2007, the water crisis had spread to several governorates, including Cairo, Giza, Daqahliya, Gharbiya, Minya, Kafr al-Shaykh, Qalyubiya, Fayum and Manufiya, to the indignation of citizens who had no access to water in the simmering heat of Egyptian summers. Others in Marg (a district of northern Cairo) blocked the road to a cavalcade that included three ministers, among them the minister of housing. Residents of Faysal and the Pyramids area threatened to block the Ring Road, while in Daqahliya, the thirsty refused to break up their sit-in and demanded that President Mubarak himself visit them."

¹⁶ The official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), a government-sanctioned labor federation of 23 trade unions established in 1957

and reached their peak in the trade union local elections from August to November 2006. For them, the Mahalla action of 6 December 2006 came as a shock.”¹⁷ Yet, unfortunately, the disconnect between the working class and the political elite was one of those hampering factors influencing the effectiveness of the overall uprising especially post-2011. There is a long history of mistrust between the working class and the political elite and how the regime exploited this fissure to their advantage. This will be discussed further in chapter three of this research endeavor.

The Case Studies

I will examine and compare two similar yet different case studies of workers’ activism in the form of social movements. These case studies will enable the reader to further understand the realities and complexities that the Egyptian workers were dealing with and how they managed to push for socio-economic demands leading to political ones. I will use the comparative case study method to present factual evidence to support my arguments. “A case study is a study that focuses empirically and analytically on a case of something, that is, on single instance or variant of some empirical phenomenon rather than on multiple instances of that phenomenon”.¹⁸ However, one also needs to explore the question of a case of what? Ragin suggests that one needs to ask what is the object of study – needs to be bound in time and place, what one studying is one example of many other cases/objects of study, “often it is an instance of an important theoretical concept or process”¹⁹, and at times the case or object of study is an interesting historical or cultural entity on its own.²⁰

The first case study is of the Independent General Union of Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors Authority (IGURETA) employees, the first independent union since 1957 established in 2008. The second case study is of the El-Mahalla al-Kubra’s Misr

¹⁷ Ibid. 23

¹⁸ Trom, Danny and David Snow. “The Case study and the study of social movements.” *Methods of Social Movement Research*, Klandermans and Staggenborg, editors, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, page 147.

¹⁹ Trom and Snow, 2002:147

²⁰ Ibid.

Spinning and Weaving Company's workers, the garment and textile workers local factory union. These two case studies represent workers in two different economic sectors with similar contentious political tactics using similar repertoires. While both cases had a shared vision and ultimate goal, they had different ways of interacting with the government, mechanisms, and outcomes. They shared the vision of improved working conditions and wages and an ultimate goal of achieving freedom of association to form independent and democratic trade union organization free of government control. These case studies (the independent variables) will provide outcomes (the dependent variables) that will support my hypothesis. The second question in this research endeavor is, why did one group of workers, the real estate tax collectors, successfully organize an independent union from a social movement while the second group of workers — considered economic and political “heavy weights” — were not able to establish an independent union to continue their fight for worker rights and political reform?

The case studies will also show that the workers' organizing efforts were successful in bringing to the forefront of the public agenda, the grievances at the workplace. They did indeed contribute to the national rallying cry to protest as seen in the events of January 2011 and beyond. The slogan, “bread, freedom and social justice”, was born through and from the workers' protests for social democracy. This slogan is known to be a typical mantra for workers, in particular, not just in Egypt but also all over the world. Other protest movements also adopted this slogan across the Arab world. Their protest social movement was a trial run and a training ground in confidence for the mass revolt to take place in January 2011 and beyond. However, the inherent weakness in the labor movement (due to many factors – historical baggage, leadership, complicated rules governing public sector trade unions, and workers' pension funds controlled by government-sponsored trade unions, as well as the nature of Egypt's authoritarian governance and framework of laws) was a handicap in creating a national, strong, independent labor movement that could cross social boundaries and

succeed in building political alliances and demand a transition to democratic governance.

The first case study is of the municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors Authority (RETA) employees'²¹ contentious actions, and then the first independent union (IGURETA) established in December 2008 since 1957. These workers exhibited a new, independent, vibrant, activist organizational format that started as an effective social movement for the first year. Once they achieved their demands and obtained concessions from the government, they continued to form an independent trade union despite the legal restrictions. They interacted with the state, negotiated, and pushed for their agenda despite the potential and perceived threats. The organization was built on a solid grassroots basis with representation from all over the country. A unique characteristic is that these workers were white collar and civil servants in the public sector and therefore much more under the control of the government, yet they were in the sensitive area of tax collection, i.e. bringing in revenue for the government. So when these workers stopped collecting taxes, they had leverage to work with. The government was then caught off guard and had to listen and compromise with these employees after much “hand wringing” delays and deliberations. So the RETA workers cleverly used that unique position to attain their demands for improved salaries and better working conditions. But most importantly, they were the role model for the ability to form an independent trade union in 2008 and not punished by the authorities.

²¹ Background: The Independent General Union of Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors (IGURETA) with 55,000 members is the only workers to have succeeded in establishing an independent union in 2008 since 1957. Their salaries were considerably lower than their counterparts in the Ministry of Finance in Cairo. They went on several strikes and protests to demand wage parity and affiliation with the Ministry of Finance instead of the local municipalities. During the fall of 2007, they organized several escalating protests and refused to collect taxes, using as leverage the government’s negotiations with the IMF to their advantage. This culminated in December 2007 with about 3,000 members holding a sit-in for eleven days in front of the Ministry and Cabinet of Ministers offices. The strike ended with the Minister of Finance granting them a bonus equal to two months’ pay, raising their salaries by approx. 325%, and giving them wage parity with their counterparts at the Ministry of Finance in Cairo. During 2008, the strike committee did not disband and continued to organize all over Egypt, gathering over 30,000 signatures endorsing the creation of an independent union. The first independent union since 1957 was officially established (announced) in December 2008 at a huge gathering at the Journalist Union headquarters in downtown Cairo.

The second case study is similar in terms of contentious actions (very large protests, strikes, and excellent grassroots local organization) yet has a very different outcome. The El-Mahalla garment and textile workers were never able to form an independent national union for the whole industry before the January 2011 uprising or even at the present time. These 25,000 workers at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in the city of El-Mahalla al-Kubra belong to the one of the largest sectors of the Egyptian economy where the state still owns the major factories – it is often referred to as the crown jewel of Egypt’s garment and textile industry. They did inspire the creation of an activist student’s movement, the April 6th Movement, that played an important role in the two years leading up to the uprising. The workers’ grievances were equally as egregious as in the first two cases, and they were successful in holding three massive strikes in December 2006, September 2007, April 2008, and several more in later years, but they were never able to organize an independent union of garment and textile workers. The local leaders of the workers acknowledged the futility of the official trade union’s representatives on-site and even created a new “trade union local committee” but they did not establish a national independent trade union for their sector like the municipal RETA employees.

Examining these events during the decade prior to January 2011 is important in giving us a more robust picture of the challenges that Egyptians faced and the precipitous absolute decline of the state, institutions and services. The Egyptian revolt in 2011 was not part of an organized political institution’s actions, however, it was not just a spontaneous event...there were many factors including the workers’ contentious collective actions leading up to the revolt in January 2011.

In democratic countries where freedom of association is respected, ideally workers’ unions tend to be the best-organized, grassroots, civil society organization that can easily communicate with and mobilize members to advocate for their rights. However, the situation in Egypt highlights an official corporatist labor movement that was functioning under an authoritarian regime. Egypt has been governed by a long succession of authoritarian regimes starting from 1952. The Mubarak regime, in

particular, consistently implemented neo-liberal economic restructuring policies that affected the livelihood of Egyptian workers and caused much hardship for them and their families. It is also a case where freedom of association was not respected and the establishment of independent trade unions was illegal. Under these circumstances, it is essential to examine the role of independent workers' organizations leading up to the 2011 January uprising, and whether it was a significant pivotal role. The workers suffered greatly from neo-liberal economic restructuring policies, and they had been consistently protesting for several years prior to the 2011 uprising. So their role was that of a consistent repertoire of protest against government policies that contributed to low economic growth, low wages, continued high unemployment (youth unemployment over 30%), privatization without the proper transparency; and against their employers, which were in many cases the government itself. It was a significant role, yet not the only factor leading to the 2011 uprising.

I contend that if the workers had not been protesting for over a decade before January 2011, the actual uprising would not have taken place in such a massive, effective, and widespread manner. "Effective" in this context means that millions of Egyptians protested publicly (without the accustomed fear of retribution) against the regime — a victory in itself. Yet, their victory remains elusive so it was a victory within limits. It is a bold contention, yet I intend to provide the empirical evidence to support my hypothesis using the lenses of Social Movement Theory (SMT) and Social Movement Unionism (SMU). I will demonstrate that independent workers' organizations did indeed play a causal political role in laying the groundwork for the January 25, 2011 uprising despite several challenges. Yet, their efforts in calling for reforms fell short of success because Egypt did not transition into a democracy. Democratic transition theories will be explored to support this research, showing that very few democratic transitions have resulted in actual democracy.²² There were many challenges that contributed to their elusive victory or success. Some of these challenges include: the

²² Kalandadze, K., & Orenstein, M. A. (2009). Electoral protests and democratization beyond the color revolutions. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(11), 1403-1425.

lack of strong national independent union organizational structure; high threat of violence or incarceration posed by the authoritarian state's security apparatus; initially the use of a predominantly economic discourse to frame their demands, thus appearing parochial and limited only to their specific "special" interests; the cultural and historical baggage of nationalism and the role of the public sector; the post-colonial national development project and their views of "a moral economy"; the workers' strong allegiance to an ailing public sector; fragile alliances with already weak political opposition elites while not being united and not presenting a convincing argument to the whole populace; and that their mere organizing into independent trade unions was a violation of the law. In addition, there were the challenges that were posed by the continued existence of the entrenched authoritarian Egyptian state itself, referred to as "the deep state", and the significant role of the military. This was the case that, no matter the relative strength and appeal of the workers' social movement or social movement unionism, they would not have been able to influence, guide, or promote the needed political change. Their efforts were not vain, despite the workers with other members of civil society not being victorious in achieving their ultimate desired goals. The workers' contentious politics and collective action became a role model for other activists and a path of resistance to follow. In order to fully assess the "role model" role that these workers played, please review Appendix Two (2) for a review of several additional worker protests from varying economic sectors.

The purpose of this research is to add to the already existing scholarship to understand all of the factors involved in leading to the January 2011 uprisings. This would include the reasons and events leading up to it, and to highlight the contribution of the independent workers' movement through the lens of Social Movement Theory (SMT) and Social Movement Unionism (SMU). Using the framework of civil society and democratization does not give us the adequately satisfactory picture according to Beinin

and Vairel's observations.²³ So there is a need to use the political economy, class, gender, social justice, and equity issues analyses (lenses) as an imperative tool within our analytical framework. This research will add to our knowledge of how a social movement with great potential and desire to contribute to significant political reform ultimately did not fully succeed in achieving that goal. It had limited success, thus an elusive victory.

Background: The Egyptian Independent Workers' Movement

Egyptian workers regularly protested, primarily using economic discourse; demanded from the government socio-economic improvements; and beseeched the government to protect their gains. However, because one cannot accurately measure the impact of the socio-economic demands on the political arena, it is unappreciated. From my research over the last three years, interviews, and observations over two decades, Egyptian workers know that the January 2011 uprising was a culmination of their many years of protests, strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations that began in the early 2000s. It is my belief and hypothesis that Egyptian workers paved the road for the January 25, 2011 uprisings that resulted in the removal of the Mubarak regime. This was done through their repeated collective action as a social movement and use of contentious politics with repeated performances such as repertoires of claim-making routines from 2006 to 2010.

The independent labor movement for many years prior to January 2011 regularly contested the regime's power. According to The Land Center for Human Rights based in Cairo, there were a total of 3,426 sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations from 1998 to 2010. There were 2,206,508 workers participating in these episodes of contention from 2004 to 2010.²⁴ This workers' movement was disparate and not necessarily united under one umbrella organization, disputing classic Social Movement Theory (SMT) that

²³ Beinin, Joel and Frederic Vairel (editors). *Social movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, CA, 2011

²⁴ Source: Markaz al-ard li-huqûq al-insân (The Land Center for Human Rights), *Silsilat al-huqûq al-iqtisâdiyya wa' l-ijtimâ'iyya* (the series for economic and social rights), <http://bit.ly/1hJKlt> [Counting the period of December 1998-January 2011, no 5 to 88]. <http://www.lchr-eg.org/en/>

emphasizes mobilizing structures.²⁵ Thus, “years before the ‘January 25 Revolution’, a social movement of workers, their families, and their neighbors established its presence. Through strikes and other collective actions, workers had made substantial economic gains, teaching many Egyptians a crucial lesson: Engaging in collective action, previously regarded as a losing game by all but [a small group of] committed middle-class activists, could achieve something of value.”²⁶ This lends further support to the argument that the January 25, 2011 uprising was a culmination of over ten years of contentious politics with social movements led by workers and thus their undeniable political role. All along Egyptian workers believed that the January 2011 uprising was a result of their many years of protests, strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations that began in the early 2000s and earlier “We started the 2011 revolution and the rest of Egypt followed,” is a statement echoed with conviction when talking with many Egyptian workers during my field research. This statement was only echoed among workers since they had been carrying out protests for several years leading up to January 2011. Egyptian workers paved the road for the massive January 2011 uprising resulting in the removal of the Mubarak regime.

In addition to SMT, Social Movement Unionism (SMU) is an important lens to consider when addressing workers and their trade unions in the developing world. SMU is a trend of theory and practice in contemporary trade unionism. Strongly associated with the labor movements of developing countries, it is distinct from many other models of trade unionism because it concerns itself with more than organizing workers around workplace issues, wages, and working terms and conditions. It engages in wider political struggles for human rights, social justice, and democracy. Social Movement Unionism grew out of political struggles in developing countries and was theorized as a distinct

²⁵ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.14-15

²⁶ Beinín, Joel. “Workers and Egypt’s January 25 Revolution”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 80, Fall 2011, pp. 189–196, p. 192.

industrial relations model in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁷ SMU according to Heery, “First, it adopts broad goals oriented towards the achievement of social justice and is not confined to the narrow economic agenda of traditional collective bargaining. Second, it seeks to extend the terrain of union action outwards beyond the enterprise to the community and advocates the creation of broad labour-community alliances. Third, it seeks to recreate unions themselves as social movements which mobilize their members against workplace and wider social injustice.”²⁸ In developing countries, trade unions have been generally very active in political causes and activism with other civil society organizations outside of the strictly workplace realm. For example, the strong link between the South African trade unions, namely COSATU and the United Democratic Front, in the 1980s in the wider fight against Apartheid.

These different workers’ groups organized into “unofficial” independent trade unions and networks began to agitate for reforms but achieved an “elusive victory”. This can be attributed to several factors including a corporatist labor movement that was forced into a pact with the state, a so-called “social contract.” These factors include the Egyptian labor movements’ history, organization, and the development of capital, class-consciousness, and colonialism leading to the eventual turn towards “Arab socialism”, in other words, a planned economy. That pact, or social contract, with the state survived from 1952 to the 1980s. It began to unravel with the deep fiscal crisis starting in mid-1980s Egypt’s state budget with the drop of revenues from the Suez Canal, oil, migrant workers’ remittances, and foreign aid.²⁹ A decrease in the state’s revenues contributed to a weak state financially, so the regime was purely focused on maintaining the funding of the police and all security and interior personnel through the Ministry of Interior.³⁰ The final blow came with the increased privatization and economic re-structuring

²⁷ Waterman, Peter. "[Social-Movement Unionism: A New Union Model for a New World Order](#)". *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*. Fernand Braudel Center. Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), pp. 245-278.

²⁸ Heery, Edmund. "Social movement unionism." *A dictionary of human resource management*. Oxford University Press Inc., 1 January 2009.

²⁹ Soliman, Samer, *The Autumn of Dictatorship, Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*, Stanford University Press, 2011, pages 2-3, 29

³⁰ *Ibid.* 63-65

programs demanded by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), which the regime supported. These factors all impacted the lives of workers while the organizations that traditionally defended them remained silent. Egyptian workers then began to organize independently of the official trade union structure. Yet, the Egyptian independent workers' movement continued to be weak, reflecting the result of decades of authoritarian rule and corporatist trade union structure.

Another crippling factor with respect to Egyptian civil society, including the labor movement, is that it was corrupted by misguided foreign funding for mostly irrelevant (general public) programs, excessive state controls, and the absence of the implementation of the rule of law.³¹ Civil society reflected the embedded authoritarian attitudes and behavior. Egypt had both a weak state financially and a weak civil society — so the calls for the needed political reform did not have the leadership to take the mantle and go forward... the leadership and organizations were lacking just to name a few factors. While the regime continued or more aptly pretended, as window dressing, to implement so-called “democratic reform”.

The characteristics of the Egyptian authoritarian regime are also to be considered in this research. Juan Linz's definition of authoritarianism is perhaps the most comprehensive and distinct of all the attempts made by scholars throughout the years. An authoritarian government has six distinct characteristics according to Linz: limited political pluralism, lower levels of social mobilization, a dearth of ideology, one-party rule, limited room for private enterprise to function, and largely corporatist leanings.³² The focus is on how power is used and implemented rather than what kinds of institutions are developed. Authoritarian regimes, according to Linz, are “political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding

³¹ These are from my notes from a conversation with two Egyptian leading human rights activists and lawyers in Cairo on 16th June 2013.

³² Linz, Juan. "Authoritarian Regimes," Chapter 4 in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Lynne Rienner, 2000), excerpted from "Authoritarian Regimes," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson J. Polsby, editors, *Handbook of Political Science*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley: 1975), pp. 159-171.

ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive not intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones.”³³ Linz speaks of authoritarian regimes, not governments, since political institutions play a minimum role and there is limited pluralism. Authoritarian regimes can even determine the behavior of institutions and limit or prescribe how political participation takes place. So, an official or a single political party is the result of limited pluralism, as we note is the case in Egypt after 1952 with the exception of an omnipresent and an abundance of ideology.

So here enters the hope for democracy, reform, and possibilities of transition by the working class from an authoritarian regime to a democracy through political unionism. Many scholars and practitioners have shown that the political role of trade unions in pushing for reform is historically proven to be effective with examples from the developing world such as in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. “Union-backed [social] movements have also wrested power from non-democrats around the world.”³⁴ The labor movement in the form of trade unions has played a significant political role in other developing and developed countries such as in South Africa in the fight against Apartheid, in the Philippines against Marcos’s dictatorial rule, and in Poland through Solidarnosc against the communist rule. In several Latin American countries, the labor movements have had a history of pressuring governments to adopt democratic transition plans or leading protest movements that eventually bring about full-fledged democratic transitions. “From Pakistan to South Korea, trade unions in the twentieth century created strong pressures for change.”³⁵ However, the Egyptian labor movement was anchored by statist/corporatist structures and culture while the nascent independent movement was a fragile, newly born entity with a tough uphill battle to fight. So this newly fragile independent workers’ movement

³³ Ibid. 159

³⁴ Grodsky, Brian K. *Social Movements and the New State – The Fate of Pro-Democracy Organizations When Democracy is Won*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2012:143

³⁵ Ibid.

was indeed able to contribute to the breaking down of “barriers of fear” leading up to the January 2011 uprising. Yet, its past and the continued authoritarian “deep state” hampered its progress and development into a fully developed social movement that could impact the course of transition.

Despite a serious fiscal crisis that contributed to a weak state, and an already weak civil society; this allowed the regime to ensure that the security apparatus continued to protect and sustain Mubarak’s authoritarian regime. The regime was unable to provide the needed socio-economic development with increased opportunities for employment. All the while the regime was continually reducing the availability of public services, social welfare, healthcare, and education. The regime continued to be strong yet the state (institutions) declined and became weak due to lack of funding among other reasons.³⁶ There is a debate between several scholars including Samer Soliman and Nathan Brown³⁷ as to how Egypt is effectively governed by its strong institutions. I would venture to propose that these strong institutions were omnipresent yet not necessarily effective or interested in implementing the law. These are all reasons that respond to the question of why did Egyptians go to the streets to protest. How this developed into an atmosphere of acquiescence for more than fifty years needs to be addressed. The opportunity presented itself with cracks in the regime’s control, exhibited by the following major events that tested the regime’s resolve to maintain order. First, the Kefaya (Enough) protest movement gained steam starting in 2004. However, Kefaya was an elite group speaking to the mostly educated elite and not necessarily to the average citizen workers. Their protests began to wane within two years yet still left many unresolved grievances waiting in the wings. Second, the protest mantle was then taken over by El-Mahalla el Kubra’s garment and textile workers who held major strikes in 2006, 2007, and on April 6, 2008. Third, many other workers

³⁶ Soliman, Samer, and Peter Daniel (translator). *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2011

³⁷ Brown, Nathan (Amr Hamzawy and Michele Dunne), “Egypt – Don’t Give Up on Democracy Promotion,” Policy Brief #52, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Washington, D.C. June 2007

were then emboldened to protest against their poor working conditions, reduction in benefits, and low wages, and ultimately the overt breakdown of the “social contract” with the government. The Egyptian government, starting with Nasser’s presidency in 1956, had initiated this “social contract/pact” with the people. It bartered or traded away civil and political liberties with the promise of social and economic welfare for all. This led to a large increase in the state bureaucracy, and the public sector became another tool used for authoritarian control.

In addition, workers were suffering from the indiscriminate and an un-transparent privatization process. Workers found themselves without jobs and pensions or working for a new owner who was more interested in selling the property (land and equipment) and not interested in the workers’ continued employment and welfare. The contentious actions that began with an economic discourse became a call for political rights since the workers were committing a political act by challenging their employers, who were in most cases part of the regime.

There were several thousand protests involving millions of workers from many differing economic sectors in the public and private sectors between 2006 and 2011. For several years before January 2011, Egyptian workers organized into independent social movements and networks. They protested regularly against the continued daily life hardships and difficult working conditions. This will be explained in more details in the chapters to follow. Workers held “wildcat”³⁸ strikes, not only against private employers, but also against the government, which is the “public sector” employer of record, and against the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), a government-sanctioned labor federation of 23 trade unions established in 1957. The ETUF’s main role was to

³⁸ Unsanctioned illegal strikes

suppress workers' demands for better working conditions and wages, ensure that they tow the government's line, thus keeping them in place as loyal supporters of the regime.

“Between 2004 and 2008, more than 1.7 million workers participated in contentious collective actions. In the absence of a credible body representing Egyptian labor, strikes and demonstrations had become the only influential tools for labor to exert pressure on employers (in the private sector) or the government (in the public sector). Calls to focus attention on workers' grievances were consistently ignored if they were not backed by contentious collective action. Labor activism had begun to emerge in Egypt in 2004 as a consequence of the economic policies established by the government of Ahmed Nazif (2004–2011). His government's promotion of economic growth at the expense of social justice resulted in vast social inequality.”³⁹

There were approximately 3,300 worker strikes and protests that took place between 2006 and the January 2011 revolution and about 1,100 from May 2011 to April 2012.⁴⁰ Mathematically, it is clear that in one-year post-January 2011, there was a significant increase in protests against the “new government's” policies than in the prior five years. This is significant and will be explained in the Epilogue section of this research endeavor.

The independent labor movement has been regularly contesting the regime's power starting back in the 1980's and leading to January 2011 and thereafter. They contested the regime's power through repeated protests, strikes, sit-ins, calls to the media to support their cause, and by soliciting other civil society organizations and activists to support them. Demanding respect for their rights and improved wages and

³⁹ Abdalla, Nadine, *Egypt's Workers - From Protest Movement to Organized Labor, A Major Challenge of the Transition Period*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) Comments*, October 2012, page 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*2

working conditions are acts that effectively contest the regime's power. The regime was their employer in most cases particularly in the public sector. So the regime would react first by dispatching the head of the official trade union or the head of the official trade union federation. When that failed, which it generally did, the Minister of Manpower would be sent to negotiate with the striking workers. These contestations of the regime's power extended into the private sector where the Minister of Manpower would act as a mediator between the private employer and the workers. In most cases, the private sector employer had an ongoing relationship with the state apparatus through the Ministry of Manpower. This will be discussed in more detail in the case-study chapters to follow.

Egyptian workers had a significant role in the struggle for political change from a repressive regime to create an opportunity to establish a democracy. The workers slowly broke down the barriers of fear by their sustained repertoire of contestation. Although their discourse was predominantly calling for economic and social demands, this was ultimately a defiant political act because they were challenging the regime's power to control them. They were also not cowered by the regime's possible retribution in the form of arrests, trials and incarceration. The connection is between the workers' sustained repertoire of contestation and ultimately the political act of defying and challenging the state. It has been described to me through several interviews conducted during my field research that these workers' protests were a training school, a trial run for what was to eventually take place in Tahrir Square in Cairo and around the country. One could argue that in hindsight this is clear and it is possibly an optimistic and hopeful way to describe the events before the 2011 uprising. However, from the workers' point of view they believe that through their repertoire of contention, they paved the way for Egyptians to stop fearing the authoritarian state's retribution as a result of their protests at least for the short-term since post 2011-2012 the situation has worsened. Also, the establishment in December 2008 of the Independent General Union of Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors Authority (IGURETA) employees, the first independent union in Egypt since 1957, gave a huge boost of confidence to many

other workers in different sectors to demand their long-lost socio-economic rights and begin to advocate for political change. “With inflation rates in recent years reaching levels unprecedented since the early 1990s and 40 percent of Egyptians living on less than \$2 per day, the visible signs of socio-economic discontent, which so-called *fi’awi*⁴¹ protests epitomize, are not surprising.”⁴² The message became clear that in order to improve socio-economic benefits; these labor social movements had to pursue the call for political reform.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research is the comparative case studies method with direct interviews with leaders of the independent Egyptian trade union movement: national and local leaders in the IGURETA union and the garment and textile workers local union in El Mahalla al-Kubra as well as rank and file workers activists (male and female). In addition, interviews were conducted with civil society activists, journalists, and academics in Egypt who have written extensively about the so-called revolution, youth, women, labor, and political, economic, social transition. The research is primarily qualitative with an ethnographic approach, including “listening, questioning strategies, participant and non-participant observation, recording and visual recall, mapping the environments and contexts in which participant behavior occurs, and engaging in ethnographically informed survey research”.⁴³ Field research was conducted in Egypt from May through July 2013. Interviews were conducted with approximately 85 persons over those three months in Egypt (Cairo, Helwan, Giza, Tanta, Mahalla el Kubra, Ismailia, Sadat City, 10th Ramadan City, 6th October City, and

⁴¹ According to Sallam, “The Arabic term *fi’a* simply means “group,” but has acquired negative connotations and might be compared with how the term “special interest” is used to disparage American labor.” Sellam, Hesham. “Striking Back at Egyptian Workers.” *MERIP report* #259, vol. 41, Summer 2011. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers>

⁴² Sellam, Hesham. “Striking Back at Egyptian Workers.” *MERIP report* #259, vol. 41, Summer 2011. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers>

⁴³ Jean J. Schensul (Author), Margaret D. LeCompte (Author), *Essential Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach* (Ethnographer's Toolkit, Second Edition) [Paperback], AltaMira Press; 2nd Edition (October 1, 2012).

Alexandria) with male and female labor movement activists in IGURETA, the teachers union, the local union of garment and textile workers in El-Mahalla, political opposition, the Egyptian women's rights movement, and other civil society activists. These interviews enriched this research and added personal insights and stories to clarify certain events and issues. The persons interviewed were pleased to have their views heard to highlight the role of workers leading up to the January 2011 uprising events.

This research fits into the fields of political change/transition, revolution, authoritarian rule and transition to democracy, the labor movement (working class), social change, and civil society in Egypt leading up to the January 2011 uprising. In addition to economic political analysis, transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, the political role of trade unions in developing countries; comparative studies on the role of trade unions in political change; and autocratic regimes and neo-liberal policies adopted by developing countries, including Egypt, help us understand the realities of the context in which Egyptian workers were toiling and making claims.

I will assess these variables using the comparative case study qualitative research method with ethnography as a tool to gather information and data. I will compare case studies of two groups of workers in different economic sectors: real estate tax collectors (civil servants in the Finance Ministry) and garment and textile workers (state owned manufacturing sector) and their continuous repertoire of contention against the state, their employer. The purpose of the comparison is to provide empirical support for my hypothesis: Egyptian independent workers' organizations' continuous claims of contention and repertoires for over a decade were one of several factors leading to the January 25, 2011, uprising. In addition, in the process of examining these case studies, one will identify differing paths/strategies of action, framing of the issues, and organizational structures characteristics, which will coincide with social movement theory. Also, one will be able to identify the points of weakness and vulnerability that the Egyptian labor movement suffers from and that led to an elusive victory.

A brief overview of the two case studies:

Group	Organizational Characteristic	Outcome
Real Estate Tax Authority (RETA) Employees	<p>Established a successful contentious social movement starting in 2007</p> <p>Confronted the government while appealing to the president for help – an interesting and creative use of discourse framing</p> <p>Egalitarian and diffused organizational structure with a national representation</p>	Established an independent trade union (first since 1957) in December 2008
Garment and Textile Workers	<p>A long history of militant worker activism since the 1920s; held several large significant protests starting in 2006 - 2011</p> <p>Hierarchical and centralized organizational structure in one city, El-Mahalla al-Kubra (did not go national)</p>	An independent national union of garment and textile workers was not established, yet was always on the verge of being organized

Why conduct a comparative study of these two case studies?

The Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Authority (IGURETA) is a good case study to examine of how a group of dedicated civil servants challenged the

Mubarak authoritarian regime. Initially established as a social movement that later became an independent trade union despite the Egyptian laws preventing the creation of independent unions outside of the officially sanctioned Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (ETUF). It influenced other blue and white-collar workers to establish independent unions leading up to the January 2011 uprising and afterwards. It is also of interest that these workers are civil servants working within the civil administration of the regime. I will examine the reasons for their success, and what were the internal and external influences and pressures that contributed to their success.

The second case study of the El Mahalla al-Kubra garment and textile workers represents an activist group of workers with a long history of militancy. They had at least two very large protests/strikes with over 25,000 workers participating, capturing the media attention locally and internationally. Yet, they were not able to form an independent national trade union to represent all garment and textile workers. Why were they not able to create and then lead a national movement? The El Mahalla garment and textile industry is composed of several large public sector (owned by the government) factories that are still considered the “crown jewel” of that industry in Egypt. The Egyptian government was consistently pressured to privatize that industry, but many issues and challenges were involved, including historic reasons. This will be an interesting case to study and compare with the other case study of another type of public-sector workers – civil servants.

The Egyptian independent labor movement was regarded as weak and not well connected to the echelons of traditional social oppositional movements in Egypt. They were often viewed by the opposition elites with derision and as being inept while also ideologically belonging in the Nasserist leftist camp. The contentious movement that led to the creation of the Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Authority (IGURETA) workers was one strong *spark* to ignite more protests and strikes and leading to the creation of additional independent unions. This *spark* led the way for broader and larger worker protests, leading to the mass protests starting with the

January 25, 2011, uprising. This proved the naysayers in the traditional “opposition elites” wrong that workers can indeed be successful agitators for reform, improved wages, and working conditions and even political change. Workers can be agitators for change, yet in the Egyptian case, they could not quite complete the task at hand, and thus they achieved an elusive victory.

Definitions

First, as a form of background and introduction, one needs to define certain organizations and concepts such as “trade unions” and “political unionism”.

a. What are trade unions?

Labor unions are a voluntary, grassroots organization/association of workers at a private or publicly owned workplace (office and/or factory). The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines a trade union organization as “an organization of employees usually associated beyond the confines of one enterprise, established for protecting or improving through collective action, the economic and social status of its members.”⁴⁴ The ILO confirms, “The right of workers and employers to form and join organizations of their own choosing is an integral part of a free and open society. In many cases, these organizations have played a significant role in their countries’ democratic transformation.”⁴⁵ Labor unions are the best-organized grassroots organizations and thus have a direct interest in contributing to political reform.

Free and independent trade unions are civil society organizations (CSO) that contribute to a democratic society. According to labor expert Barbara Fick, trade unions are a stabilizing force for democracy because of their organizational structure and characteristics, i.e. “democratic representation, demographic [and geographic] representation, financial independence, breadth of concerns, and placement within

⁴⁴ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/iira/documents/congresses/regional/lagos2011/2ndparallel/session2b/tradeunionleadership.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/freedom-of-association-and-the-right-to-collective-bargaining/lang-en/index.htm>

society.”⁴⁶ There is a direct relationship between free trade unions and a democratic society. In a democratic nation-state, generally freedom of association is respected and promoted, thus paving the way for an independent democratic trade union movement to exist and flourish.

Trade unions have the means themselves to create and protect the space for others to advocate for rights, monitor government activities, and protest when needed. Fick succinctly writes that:

“Trade unions are a key element for sustaining a stable democracy. They provide a voice not only for workers within the workplace but also for worker-citizens within the polity [...] trade unions are one of the best mechanisms for providing an authentic and effective voice for worker-citizens. A society concerned about maintaining a vibrant democracy should be concerned about maintaining the conditions necessary for a vibrant trade union movement.”⁴⁷

Ideally, trade unions, in cooperation with other civil society (non-government) organizations, can be a positive force to promote democratic principles when the rulers are faltering. Trade unions, however, have to exemplify the aforementioned characteristics and strongly maintain their independence from the government.

Union membership also cuts across gender, ethnicity, religion, and age. Unions do not distinguish between those differentiating human characteristics, but what is binding is that the person is a worker at the same workplace. The organization’s financial independence is achieved through union dues that are collected from each member, and these make up the operating budget of a trade union. There is a contribution, generally based on the number of members in the union (per capita), which supports the federation of trade unions on a national level.

⁴⁶ Fick, Barbara J. "Not just Collective Bargaining: The Role of Trade Unions in Creating and Maintaining a Democratic Society." *Working USA* 12.2 (2009): 249-64. p.249

⁴⁷ Fick, p.259

Another characteristic of organized labor is their “breadth of concerns,” as Samuel Gompers declared: “Labor wants more school houses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more constant work and less crime; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge; in fact, more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures ...”⁴⁸ This is understood to be a universal demand of labor unions around the world and without exception in Egypt.

Last but not least are trade unions’ place and role in society. It is understood that unions can be effective mid-level mediators for conflict resolution. They can mediate between the lower-level of the grassroots (rank and file members) and the upper level-elite (management) in a conflict situation. Fick writes, “trade unions, as strategic mid-level actors, can genuinely voice the interests of its grassroots constituency to the high-level actors and, by virtue of their societal position, effectively influence those actors, as well as mediate between conflicting positions within a society both horizontally and vertically.”⁴⁹ That position within society can be very valuable for bringing together workers based on where they work and not their ethnicities or religious affiliations. In several high conflict areas such as Bosnia, Iraq, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland, trade unions successfully organized across ethnic and religious boundaries to protect their workers’ rights. Trade unions were able to play a mediator/unifier role and even become a role model in circumstances plagued by prolonged conflicts.⁵⁰

In addition to the traditional role of trade unions, such as organizing workers, negotiations with employers, and collective bargaining, trade unions do have a political role. Some would argue that in order to protect the “bread and butter” role of trade unions in today’s industrial relations, it is imperative for trade unions to have and practice a political role. Particularly, in developing countries and with all the

⁴⁸ Gompers, Samuel. 1893. What does labor want? In *The Samuel Gompers papers*, vol. 3, ed. S. Kaufman and P. Albert, 396. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

⁴⁹ Fick 2009:11

⁵⁰ Ibid.

aforementioned characteristics of trade unions, it is irrefutable to recognize and affirm the important political role that trade unions can play.

b. What is “political unionism”?

Political unionism does differ between developing and developed countries and trade unions do have a history of playing a political role particularly in developing nations. Bruce H. Millen wrote his book on the political role of trade unions in developing countries in 1963. Although it was published in 1963, Millen’s *Political Role of Labor in Developing Countries*⁵¹ is timeless; his ideas, concepts, and conclusions still ring true today. Political unionism is an extension of the economic role of trade unions and it enables workers to gain their socio-economic demands.

Despite the overall decline in trade unions’ role in political democratic societies, in the U.S. model, trade unions do lobby and support politicians who enact legislation favorable to labor. In Western Europe, including the U.K. in the twentieth century, the trade unions were much more directly involved in politics through their participation in the Labor Party, for example, and developed a tendency to participate in political movement/forces with the goal of acquiring and keeping political power.⁵² However, in the last two decades, economic realities have changed and labor party politics have also changed even in the UK. In the Middle East (similar to the former Soviet Union and countries in Eastern Europe before 1989), the political elites managed to control trade unions instead of being included in mass movements. “As a consequence, the union leadership is likely to engage in maneuvers that are still highly political but uninspired by an ideology.”⁵³ However, during the period of colonialism in the Middle East, trade union organizations played an active role along with other political forces in overthrowing and pushing out the colonial powers, such as in Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia. Egyptian workers first protested in the 1919 revolution, a countrywide uprising against British rule, pushing the nation toward independence in 1922. The

⁵¹ Millen, Bruce H. *Political Role of Labor in Developing Countries*. Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. 1963

⁵² Millen, p. 9.

⁵³ Ibid.

largest strike in the nation's history took place in 1947 at El Mahalla al-Kubra, the nation's largest industrial center and home to the first textile factory in Egypt.⁵⁴ And within a few years, in 1952, there was the Free Officer's coup d'état against King Farouk and continued British influence, leading to the declaration of a republic of Egypt; Egyptian workers did play a catalyst political role. This will be further detailed in the subsequent chapter three on the history of the Egyptian labor movement in this research endeavor.

Trade unions are the best grassroots organizations for expressing the needs and interests of a majority of citizens. In countries where the government is going through a transition or appears to be fragile, trade unions have an imperative political role to ensure a more egalitarian program. Millen calls this "political unionism". Political leaders seeking mass approval and support lean on trade union organizations, pre and post-independence, in developing countries. Before independence in several countries, political forces joined with trade union movements (mass social movements) to push out the colonial powers. After independence, with an increase in nationalism leading the drive for national development (industrialization with more urbanization), political leaders cannot "safely ignore the promises, for the disaffection of the workers cannot be risked. On this fact rides much of the union strength."⁵⁵ Trade unions contributed to the national development goals of newly independent nations around the globe in addition to the fight against colonialism. The arguments to support the essential role of workers in democratic transitions continued through Ruth Collier and James Mahoney's research, which established that working class mobilization was key to five of eleven Latin American and Southern European transitions in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁶ They also challenged the widely accepted and unchallenged "transitions paradigm" by Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter that presents transitions as the sole domain of political elites, "a conversation

⁵⁴ Lynch, Sarah. "Key force in Tahrir Square: Egypt's labor movement". *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 8, 2011.

⁵⁵ Millen, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Collier, Ruth Berins and James Mahoney, "Adding Collective Actors to Collective Outcomes: Labor and Recent Democratization in South America and Southern Europe," *Comparative Politics*, April 1997.

among gentlemen, with labor protest having relatively little consequence.”⁵⁷ Labor protests have shown time and again, with Poland’s Solidarnosc in the 1980s as a vivid example of labor’s important and consequential role in political transition.

Trade unions contributed to the political development in these newly independent nations in the Middle East and North Africa such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. According to Millen, labor organizations possessed the necessary skills and experience to participate effectively in the politics of pre and post-independence. They provided political education, leadership, and modernization.⁵⁸ What is meant by political modernization? Unions are generally moving in sync with the innovations and changes in an economy and industry. In most new governments, they are looking for a consensus on how to modernize the political and economic systems. “Unions are the natural partners of political forces with this goal in mind, partly because they are the intermediary between the political complex and the labor force – and it is on the labor force that a large part of the modernizing effort must depend.”⁵⁹ In addition, Millen emphasizes that unions can be that essential democratic modernizing element that counters anti-democratic extremist movements. Before 1952, trade unions in Egypt developed and grew their membership with their members and leaders possessing those afore-mentioned skills and experiences. The hopeful point of departure is that many of these union activists are still active, or they have passed on the knowledge and inspiration to the next generations.

Background: The Rise of Protest Movements in Egypt

Egypt’s Prime Minister Nazif’s neo-liberal economic restructuring policies starting in 2004 gave the impetus to the first of many social movements to organize and to act. Hugh Roberts comments, “(L)ong before the uprisings of late 2010 and early 2011, it seemed to me the extreme accumulation of power that characterized the Mubarak regime [...] had at least one definite implication for the future: it couldn’t

⁵⁷ Ibid. 299

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 113-116

⁵⁹ Millen p. 117

possibly be sustained after Mubarak's departure."⁶⁰ Both Roberts and Holger Albrecht⁶¹ believe that Mubarak orchestrated a liberalized authoritarian regime that controlled from the top and allowed venting at the bottom in the form pluralism in the media and other civil society outlets. However, in 2014, we can challenge the opinions stated above with the "extreme accumulation of power" by the current Egyptian ruler.

The Kefaya (Enough) movement, also known as the Egyptian Movement for Change, began with simple, straightforward, small protests in significant public spaces in Cairo (in front of Egypt's Supreme Court of Cassation, the Journalist Syndicate headquarters, or Cairo University) with a simple message: Kefaya (Enough). Roberts describes Kefaya as dominated by secularist Arab nationalists and Nasserists attempting to bring back a bygone era – less concerned with democracy and more concerned with getting rid of Mubarak. He also reviews Albrecht's book about opposition movements under Mubarak, which has a good account of Kefaya and its origins, development as a movement, and eventual demise.

The protesters would place large stickers on their mouth with the word: KEFAYA in large letters and they would stand silently for hours for all passersby to see, or they would hold signs and placards with the same word: Kefaya (Enough). Even before the Kefaya movement took center stage, the first Palestinian Intifada was reason for many Egyptians to protest in Cairo. Protestors took the opportunity to call for more political freedoms and socio-economic improvements in daily life. "Kefaya brought together people from across the political spectrum with a simple message, 'enough', and was the first movement to call directly for regime change. But few people joined the demonstrations, and the movement suffered internal tensions that weakened its effectiveness."⁶² However, the Kefaya movement captured the imagination of the

⁶⁰ Roberts, Hugh. "The Revolution that wasn't", *London Review of Books*, vol.35, no. 17, 12 September 2013 pages 3-9:4 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n17/hugh-roberts/the-revolution-that-wasnt>

⁶¹ Albrecht, Holger, *Raging against the machine: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism in Egypt*, Syracuse Press, October 2012.

⁶² Lesch 2011:43

limitedly independent Egyptian media using different mechanisms, brokers and processes to diffuse its message. Kefaya became a regular fixture in the burgeoning opposition to the Mubarak regime.

Interestingly, there was not much heavy-handed state security and police interference – I believe the regime felt that it was a “venting” mechanism that would eventually fizzle and go away. These protests were tolerated by the regime except when they stepped outside of the capital; there was no reason to destroy any social capital already built up to support Mubarak. However, both Roberts and Albrecht present evidence that “Kefaya was essentially an agitation conducted by a dissident wing of the Egyptian elite against Mubarak’s monopoly of power and the prospect of his son succeeding him.”⁶³ The pluralism that was allowed by the regime created the space for groups of elites to bicker and argue with each other.

Kefaya also crossed certain “red lines” in terms of violating the Emergency Law’s ban on unauthorized demonstrations and criticizing Mubarak and his family. Kefaya would hold protests in Cairo without being harassed when at times the police force outnumbered the protesters. Roberts addressed these issues and wrote that Kefaya was able to get away with these violations unscathed due to their composition (mentioned previously), the military elite’s support, and because the Mubarak regime wanted to downplay schisms in the ranks of elites, his supporters. Since, the Mubarak regime controlled the top, the “venting” allowed at the bottom did not impact power, control, or longevity in power.

By 2006, the Kefaya movement was still somewhat on the scene yet it was beginning to exhaust itself. It had succeeded in cracking the hegemony of the Mubarak regime on the civil-democratic movement. However, it was not able to bring in workers, peasants, and the informal sector proletariat into its movement. The purely negative

⁶³ Roberts, Hugh. “The Revolution that wasn’t”, *London Review of Books*, vol.35, no. 17, 12 September 2013 pages 3-9:6 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n17/hugh-roberts/the-revolution-that-wasnt>

political discourse exhibited by Kefaya did not address the socio-economic grievances faced by workers.⁶⁴ It continually presented a negative discourse – it did not have a positive agenda or a set of demands to pressure the regime. Cut off from society at large and ridden with internal disagreements, the Kefaya movement began to disintegrate just as the Mahalla workers strike movement was beginning to grow. Baho Abdul of the Tadamon (Solidarity) organization acknowledges: “Before 2006 no one in the political field was interested in the workers’ movement, because there did not seem to be a real movement. The strike of December 2006 changed everything. All [political] parties went to the [workers’] movement.”⁶⁵ This was a wakeup call to the traditional opposition intellectuals and political elite to return to the working class to find militant action and a challenge to the Mubarak regime.

Hugh Roberts wrote for the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2005 and argued that Kefaya’s mainly negative message was a major reason for its failure to gain a wider audience. “Outside the legal opposition parties, *Kefaya!* (Enough!) has remained essentially a protest movement without a constructive vision of change. The result is neither wing of the secular opposition has been able to make appreciable gains, leaving the Muslim Brother[hoo]d despite their illegality, still the most substantial opposition force.”⁶⁶ Roberts came to the conclusion that Arab Nationalists/Nasserists’ real objection was the abandonment of the pan-Arab vision that Nasser had championed and not Mubarak’s authoritarianism.⁶⁷ As a result, the Kefaya movement was not capable of mounting a democratic agitation involving the public to agitate for their dreams.

The workers began to protest low wages and high cost of living starting with the garment and textile workers in 2004 and with more frequency in 2006 in various large

⁶⁴ Beinin, Joel. *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, Published by the Solidarity Center, February 2010, page 14 [http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The Struggle for Workers rights.pdf](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The%20Struggle%20for%20Workers%20rights.pdf)

⁶⁵ DeSmet, Brecht, “Egyptian Workers and their Intellectuals. The Dialectical Pedagogy of the Mahalla Strike Movement.” *MIND CULTURE AND ACTIVITY*, ISSN 1074-9039, 2012, Volume 19, Issue 2, pp. 139 - 155, page 148.

⁶⁶ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2005/mena/reforming-egypt-in-search-of-a-strategy.aspx>

⁶⁷ Roberts 2013:7

public sector workplaces in Alexandria, Kafr al-Dawar, Qalyub, and El Mahalla al-Kubra. Between 2004 and 2011, it has been estimated that there were over 3 million workers who had participated in one form of a collective contentious action, counting about 3,000 of these instances. Workers had serious contentious claims (grievances) and the means to organize themselves into social movements with a regular repertoire that was often quite creative in methodology and discourse. At times, they were even appealing to the regime for protection from the “savage” private owners who were stripping the workers of their benefits, a clever way to remind Mubarak of the “social contract” made back in the early heady days of the after the 1952 revolution. This workers’ social movement became in one instance an established organization led by a charismatic union leader, Kamal Abu Eita, per the Weberian view or perspective of social movements. Abu Eita led the establishment of the first independent trade union in 2008.

The first independent trade union of civil servants working in tax collection was formed after one year of agitation and protest. In December 2008, the Independent General Union of Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors Independent Union (IGURETA) was publicly formed contrary to the laws of the land yet in full accordance with the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) conventions signed by Egypt in 1987 and 1997. These conventions called for the right to freely associate, organize unions, and, bargain collectively. Egypt had been placed on the ILO’s blacklist as violators of core principles outlined in the Declaration of Fundamental Worker Rights passed by the ILO annual conference in 1998. IGURETA, for example, used international certification by the ILO and sectorial international labor institutions such as Public Services International (PSI) to support and give credibility to their social movement.

Egyptian independent workers became a social movement using mechanisms and repertoires with initially an economic framing of their claims (grievances) against the state. This claims’ discourse became increasingly more political as we reach January 2011. The defining moment was during the summer of 2010 when the debate over

establishing a minimum wage for workers hit a crescendo. The government was opposed to the proposal and stalling – the workers’ discourse became more and more political with some even saying, “(I)f this government is not supporting a minimum living wage; then it is time for them to go home.”⁶⁸ About 500 protesters in central Cairo on May 3, 2010, chanted: "We need wages that are enough for a month!" while some called for an end to the rule of Mubarak, Egypt's president for more than 28 years.⁶⁹ This was the transformation to add the “political” to the workers’ protest discourse.

The Egyptian Uprising “Arab Spring” in January and February 2011 was incomplete. These were heady, exciting, and dangerous times where a spark hit a powder keg of discontent, bringing together many civil society actors. These actors included independent labor organizations and retiree groups; civil society organizations; youth/student movements (such as the April 6th movement); professional white-collar associations such as journalists, professors, and judges; the Muslim Brotherhood (albeit joining in late – one needs to distinguish between the official MB leadership which was caught between the military and the Mubarak regime while ordinary MB members who were freer to act and participate); and ordinary Egyptians from all walks of life – lower, middle, and upper classes. They all came out to protest the Mubarak regime’s policies and actions (or lack of action on several social/economic issues). The revolutionary spirit and zeal spread like wildfire, and starting in earnest on January 28, 2011, when millions of Egyptians came out to the streets and squares all over the country. They stayed in these public spaces until Mubarak stepped down on February 11, 2011. Mass euphoria, jubilation, and even disbelief that Mubarak stepped down were rampant everywhere, yet this joy and euphoria lasted for a short time.

⁶⁸ From various interviews conducted in June and July 2013 in Egypt

⁶⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2010/05/201052161957263202.html>

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theory

*“People were pushed to the brink by the sharply rising prices of basic foods, escalating unemployment, crackdowns on the media and universities, outrageous rigging of the parliamentary elections, an ever-lengthening list of corrupt actions by the elite, and fear that 82-year old Mubarak might run for election again in September 2011, or even worse, hand power over to his hated son.”⁷⁰ **Ann Lesch***

Egyptian Workers’ Contentious Collective Action – an Overview

For decades since the late 1880s, Egyptian workers have collectively organized and toiled to bring respect for social justice to their work lives and society as a whole. This quest has been eternally elusive with some success. In the pre-1952 era, there was a more vibrant independent labor movement with strong political alliances to effective political parties. There were still significant disagreements and fall-outs between trade unions and political parties that wanted to take advantage of their mass organizational support. However, in post-1952, the state actually initiated labor protections at the expense of the labor movement’s freedom of association. The labor movement became an official state entity and thus a co-opted a “corporatist” style of organization, accepting government power and control as the norm.⁷¹

In the post-1952 years, workers acquiesced and were led to believe that they participated in decision-making and policy-making.⁷² However, as the years passed

⁷⁰ Ann Lesch, "Egypt's spring: causes of the revolution." *Middle East Policy* 18.3 (2011): 35-48.

⁷¹ Posusney’s *Labor and the State in Egypt* (1997), Goldberg’s *Tinker, Tailor and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt* (1986), Bianchi’s *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth Century Egypt* (1989), and Vitalis’ *When Capitalists’ Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt* (1995).

⁷² Bianchi (1989), Vitalis (1995), Beinun and Lockman (1987)

through the 1990s, Egypt found itself in a “fiscal crisis” crossroads, and the state was unable to support the public sector and its workers at the accustomed levels. Starting in 1991, Egypt was pressured by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to restructure its economy, cut subsidies, and privatize public sector factories. These government policy actions were considered and implemented without societal input.

Trade unions are examples of the “art of presence and active citizenry”, according to Asef Bayat.⁷³ Trade unions and workers are an important political actor within the workings of a nation-state. Workers made claims and demands, and established themselves as an effective social movement over a period of consistent contentious politics or the intersection between collective action, politics and contention. However, in Egypt’s case the workers’ movement was effective only to a certain extent, thus achieving an incomplete victory.

a. Protest Events Leading to the January 2011 Uprising

We have observed with great interest the unfolding developments, and coined the “Arab Spring” term to describe events taking place in the Middle East. As the new term quickly became fashionable as shorthand for the tumultuous events of 2011, today the “Arab Spring” term is often subject to derision and even ridicule due to the results thus far. During the Arab uprisings of 2011, subjects became citizens by taking to the streets, shaking off the yolk of authoritarian rule, and demanding the overthrow of the regime. Throughout the region, thanks to the well-developed media and social media networks, the protesters chanted in unison in practically every major city in the Middle East: “El shaab yurid isqaat el nizam/ الشعب يريد اسقاط النظام”, meaning the people demand the overthrow of the regime. In the early days and months of 2011, the same Arabic chants,

⁷³ Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics, How ordinary people change the Middle East*, Stanford University Press, CA, 2010

slogans, placards, and tactics were used throughout the region from Morocco to Yemen, and as far as Syria in the East. These demonstrations, impressive for their audacious courage, have changed the political structure of several of the Arab regimes, but this did not necessarily create the foundations for fundamental positive political change and reform. There was a role of social movements and especially the workers through their trade unions. Egypt's labor force makes up nearly a third of the nation's population,⁷⁴ and it played an important role in the years leading up to the still-unsecured revolution. "Dr. Joel Beinin sees the last decade of mobilization by various political and social groups — many of them workers — as one of the driving forces behind the revolution. This was a huge laboratory for democracy".⁷⁵

Ann Lesch⁷⁶ outlines the varying protests starting in 2000 and earlier — a continuum of events, one after another, led to the massive January 2011 uprising. One has to look at this major uprising in 2011 as part of a larger continuum and not an event that came out of nowhere. There was a building up of anger against the Mubarak regime over a period of many years; it just needed a tipping point, a spark to ignite into a full blown uprising breaking down the barriers of fear. The independent Egyptian workers' movement and protests led the way.

Initially, there were protests against the Israeli reinvasion of the West Bank from 2000 to 2002 supporting the Palestinian intifada. Traditionally, the regime allowed such demonstrations — anything to deflect from Egyptians' worries and concerns about their daily lives. These protests initially began against Israel and then became more and

⁷⁴ <http://socialistworker.org/blog/critical-reading/2011/07/09/workers-play-central-role-egypt>

⁷⁵ Lynch, Sarah. "Key force in Tahrir Square: Egypt's labor movement," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 8, 2011.

⁷⁶ Lesch, Ann M. "Egypt's Spring: Causes of the Revolution", Article first published online: 15 SEP 2011, Volume 18, Issue 3, pages 35–48, Fall 2011, Middle East Policy © 2011, Middle East Policy Council

more of a reflection of anger against Mubarak with the tearing down of many of the large downtown Cairo billboards featuring his face. In 2003, there were large demonstrations against the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and Lesch states that these demonstrations were larger than the most famous bread riots of 1977. Soon thereafter, two major social protest movements were created: “The March 9 Movement, formed in 2004 to call for university and academic independence ... Kefaya was [also] founded in 2004 by intellectuals and community activists concerned about the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. They spoke out on the intertwined issues of corruption, the state of emergency, Mubarak's running for a fifth term in September 2005 and dynastic succession”⁷⁷ Kefaya was the first public street movement to call directly for a change in the regime.

Meanwhile, collective action protests based on labor grievances earnestly began in the fall of 2004. The Egyptian government, led by Prime Minister al-Nazif (his surname name means “the clean” in Arabic, which is indeed ironic), pushed implementing a neo-liberal economic policy of selling public-sector factories to private investors. “Public-sector workers were deeply concerned at the loss of benefits, forced retirement with inadequate (or unpaid) compensation packages, and the shrinkage of job opportunities in both the public and private sectors”.⁷⁸ Workers were relatively well organized and had the necessary structure to protest and speak out, unlike other sectors of society. From 2004 to 2009, there were approximately 2,623 protests (strikes, gatherings, sit-ins, and demonstrations).⁶ The most significant in size and prestige was

⁷⁷ Lesch 2011:43

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the strike by the crown jewel of Egypt's public sector, the El-Mahalla al-Kubra's giant textile and garment factories, in December 2006.

Over 25,000 workers were on a strike for one week, occupying the huge factory complex. They demanded payment of year-end bonuses; implementation of a minimum wage; dismantlement the official, corrupt trade union federation, Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF); and they protested the lack of reinvestment in the factories' infrastructure and equipment as well as poor working conditions.

ETUF, created in 1957, has functioned as the principal means by which the government has exerted control over the country's workforce. The ETUF monopolized all labor union activities and funding provided by the Trade Union Act of 1976. This draconian legislation limited the nomination of union heads to regime-approved candidates and mandated prison sentences for striking workers. "Egyptian law states that strikes can only be declared with the ETUF approval, which is almost never given. Workers who defy the de facto ban on labor stoppages to protest low wages and deplorable labor conditions invariably find their union heads have sided with the government and company managers".⁷⁹ A union is supposed to protect, defend, and advocate for workers' rights. Then, the Unified Labor Law of 2003 was enacted, which preserved ETUF's monopoly on trade union organization. It did allow for temporary worker contracts that could last for many years and become "permanent-temporary". This further eroded worker rights in Egypt and added to the slow demise of the social contract between government and workers that started with the 1952-56 legislation.

⁷⁹ McGrath, C. "Independent unions flourish in post-Mubarak Egypt". *The Middle East Magazine*, May 2011, page 38.

The independent labor movement for many years prior to January 2011 regularly contested the regime's power. They contested the regime's power by protesting and going on strike demanding respect for their rights, freedom of association and the right to establish independent unions in addition to "bread and butter" issues, especially in enterprises still owned by the government. By having the courage to protest, these workers were indeed challenging the regime and its allies. Workers protested working conditions, low wages, loss of benefits, closures of their workplaces, and the loss of their pensions — and many time their jobs. The unexpected selling of factories in the dark of night to private entities without making proper accommodations for workers' benefits and wages was another major issue of contention. This movement was disparate and not necessarily united under one umbrella organization, disputing classic Social Movement Theory (SMT), which emphasizes mobilizing structures.⁸⁰ "Thus, years before the 'January 25 Revolution', a social movement of workers, their families, and their neighbors established its presence. Through strikes and other collective actions, workers had made substantial economic gains, teaching many Egyptians a crucial lesson: Engaging in collective action, previously regarded as a losing game by all but committed middle-class activists, could achieve something of value".⁸¹ This further adds to the argument that the January 2011 uprising was a culmination of over ten years of contentious politics and social movements led by workers.

b. Mass Collective Action and the Process of Democratization: Theory and Practice

The process of democratization is highlighted and understood through the field of comparative politics and the study of transitions. The paradigm, or framework, of

⁸⁰ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.14-15

⁸¹ Beinlin, Joel. "Workers and Egypt's January 25 Revolution", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 80, Fall 2011, pp. 189–196, p. 192.

academic scholarship tends to focus primarily on the role of elites in democratic transitions while the role of mass collective action demanding political reform and workers' organization are most often ignored. The focus of this research is to show how empirical facts point to the important, yet most often over-looked role, of organized workers in the transition process in Egypt. There has been a "privileging" of elites as the leaders and masters of political change. Mahoney and Collier who wrote about Latin America, argue: "(T)he labor movement often played an important role in recent transitions. Labor was not limited to an "indirect" role, in which protest around workplace demands was answered through coopted inclusion in the electoral arena. Rather, the labor movement was one of the major actors in the political opposition, explicitly demanding a democratic regime. In some cases union-led protest for democracy contributed to a climate of un-governability and de-legitimation that led directly to a general destabilization of authoritarian regimes."⁸² Labor's continued collective action of protests also keeps the process going forward and monitors any backsliding. Therefore, the best course of scholarship and study is to not separate the workers' movement from the elites' movement for democratic change.

Labor became part of the political opposition in the case studies presented by Collier and Mahoney in Latin America. However, in Egypt, labor did not sit at the national political negotiations table and was not able to play a critical political role for reforms and democratization of the state. From the case studies in this research endeavor, it will be made clear that independent labor organizations paved the road for the major upheaval starting in January 2011 by removing barriers of fear and served as a

⁸² Ruth Berins Collier and James Mahoney, "Adding Collective Actors to Collective Outcomes: Labor and Recent Democratization in South America and Southern Europe," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, *Transitions to Democracy: A Special Issue in Memory of Dankwart A. Rustow* (Apr., 1997), pp. 285-303

“political training school”. These “barriers of fear” dissolved slowly with every protest that took place whether at the workplace (employer is the government) or in front of a government building such as a ministry or Council of Ministers or the Parliament building. There were several illustrative examples from different economic sectors of how the workers challenged regime starting in 2006. This is well documented in the publication, *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, between 1998 and 2008 a total of 2,623 strikes, gatherings, sit-ins, and demonstrations took place in Egypt. These contentious actions took place in the governmental (public), and private sectors.⁸³ Participating in these collective contentious actions were approximately 1,741,870 workers.⁸⁴ Workers, through their collective action, persistence, and courage (repertoires of contention), confronted the regime’s business cronies and state institutions. However, labor’s role as part of the political opposition became mired in its legacy, history, and lack of trust, perceptions and baggage inherited from the past.

In the Latin American cases studied and presented by Collier and Mahoney, “the collective action of labor movements thus played a key democratic role not only in propelling a transition, but also in expanding political space and the scope of contestation in the new democratic regime.”⁸⁵ If we are to take these experiences and compare and contrast with the Egyptian case, we are then able to see the potential role of labor despite the limits of its abilities, and its vulnerabilities. This will be presented in the case studies in the succeeding chapters. In Egypt’s case, the workers definitely propelled the call for transition and political change, contributed to the expansion of

⁸³ Beinlin, Joel. *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*. Solidarity Center, Washington, DC. February 2010, page 18 [http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The Struggle for Workers rights.pdf](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The%20Struggle%20for%20Workers%20rights.pdf)

⁸⁴ Ibid. 2010:16

⁸⁵ Collier and Mahoney 1997:301

political space, and broadened the scope of contestation, but failed to achieve the desired results of a democratic government.

c. Social Movements, Contentious Politics, and Workers

Egyptian workers' social movement of protests was successful in bringing their grievances (claims) to the forefront, forcing the government's concessions to many of their demands. This was indeed a political action when it was considered dangerous to confront the regime. Their success was in tearing down the barriers of fear and leading the masses of discontent from the factories to the streets — taking it from the realm of special interest to the public street and square protests, including the iconic Tahrir Square and beyond.

A social movement is the campaign of continuous claim-making using mechanisms of brokerage and processes of diffusion in repertoires (regular performances) based on solidarities, networks, and organization (also known as social movement bases).⁸⁶ Contentious politics are the intersection between politics, collective action, and contention.

⁸⁶ In *Contentious Politics* by Tilly and Tarrow (2007) social movements are considered part of contentious politics.

The following Figure 1: shows the components of contentious politics:

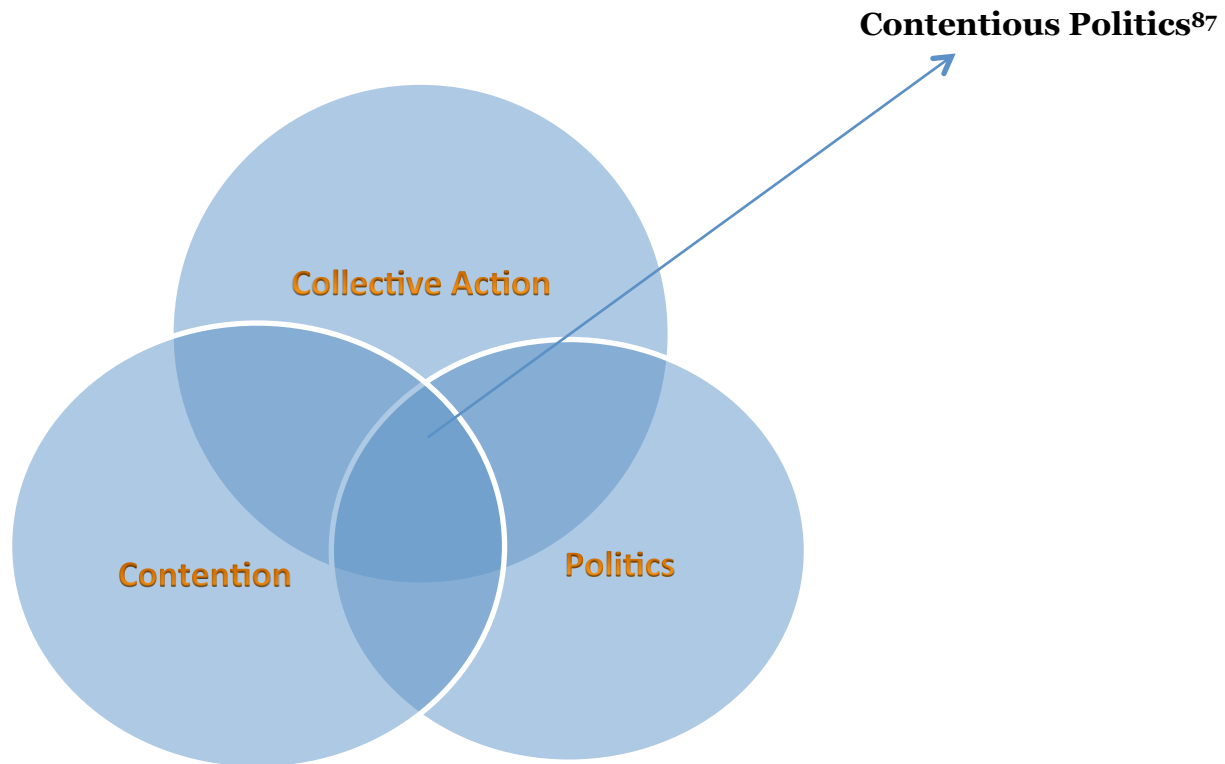


Figure 1: the components of contentious politics

Classic Social Movement Theory has evolved over the years from several drawbacks, including static versus dynamic analysis, and originates from the context of America's civil rights movement in the 1960s. It has also evolved from a Political Processes Mechanism (PPM) to a more dynamic Political Opportunities Structures (POS) that considers opportunities into its analysis.⁸⁸ Another important development has been to focus on repertoires, i.e. what people do when they protest, which is much

⁸⁷ Tilly, Charles and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, Paradigm Publishers, 2007:7

⁸⁸ Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G. Tarrow. *Contentious politics*. Boulder, Colo: Paradigm Publishers, 2007. Print.

more dynamic, insightful, and relational. In addition, there is now improved research and understanding of inducements, types of brokerage, diffusion mechanisms, and framing. Framing is a concept that was developed early on by Goffman⁸⁹ and further refined by Snow and Bedford⁹⁰ in their writings. The framing of claims or grievances is critical for the cohesion of a social movement uniting their claims/grievances within a familiar voice, vision, and discourse expressing their demands.

Collective action has been described and analyzed by several scholars; the most notable is Olson.⁹¹ He wrote that the self-interest (individual or group) is the only way for collective action to succeed. He argues that individuals in any group attempting collective action will have incentives to "free ride" on the efforts of others if the group is working to provide public benefits such as trade unions. Individuals will not "free ride" in groups that provide benefits only to active participants. So if it is stipulated that you have to be an active member to receive benefits then such groups will not have free riders and thus will succeed. Again, using the trade union example, only dues-paying members will receive benefits then the organization/union will be successful and there will not be free riders. We need incentives to motivate active participation in collective

⁸⁹ "Goffman, Erving 1922–82, American sociologist, b. Manville, Alta. His field research in the Shetland Islands resulted in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), which analyzes interpersonal relations by discussing the active processes by which people make and manage their social roles. Using metaphors of the stage ("dramaturgy"), Goffman describes how ordinary individuals give performances, control their scripts, and enter settings that make up their lives. This active notion of "role" is often associated with the symbolist interactionist school of George Herbert Mead, which argues that humans manipulate social situations by selecting appropriate roles and by maintaining some distance from these roles. Goffman later studied deviance and the "total institution" in *Asylums* (1961); he later returned to patterns of communication in *Frame Analysis* (1974) and *Forms of Talk* (1981). Widely recognized for his distinctive writing style, he served as president of the American Sociological Association in 1981. The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia® Copyright © 2013, www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/

⁹⁰ Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment" *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26, (2000), pp. 611-639.

⁹¹ Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965. Print.

action/collective organizations. Yet, Olson argues that large groups are more costly when attempting to act collectively and will have difficulty even if they have common interests. Minority groups within a large organization could overtake the overall mission and can dominate the majority.⁹²

He believed that coercive, mandatory membership in trade unions, for example, is the only way for the organization to survive. He also points to the “free-rider” problem, which cannot be overcome. The free-rider problem is that there will always be people who will not take a risk but gladly will let others lead the way. Lichbach,⁹³ on the other hand, disagrees with Olson in “the rebel’s dilemma”. He states that extreme anger, frustration, and feelings of inequality and injustice will lead a person or persons to collective action. Deprived Actor Theory takes deprivation, such as discrimination, for example turns it into dissent. However, Olson’s seminal work, *The Logic of Collective Action*, challenges the Deprived Actor Theory and questions the extent extreme anger will lead to dissent and collective action because of the free-rider problem; it can hamper the level and intensity of protest against the employer, or in this case the government.⁹⁴ Lichbach continues to explain: “Rebels, in sum, face dangers and risks, possibly disastrous costs and certain benefits, and hence rational people will almost never rebel.”⁹⁵ Using this understanding, we can infer that those who dissent and protest are irrational actors, thus a small minority of the overall discontented population.

⁹² Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965. Print

⁹³ Lichbach, Mark I. *The Rebel's Dilemma*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. Print.

⁹⁴ Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 1965

⁹⁵ Lichbach, Mark. “The Rebel’s Dilemma: An Evaluation of Collective Action,” page 182

The application of the above synopsis and overview of social movement theory (SMT) and principles apply particularly to the Arab Spring and to Egypt. Starting with collective action – whether it was in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, or Yemen, a significant level of collective action took place but with varying differences. Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen all sectors of society protested, signaling the masses' discontent with the ruling regimes – a form of collective action. With each day of these protests, more and more of the concrete barrier of fear came falling down, piece by piece, which is significant for these societies. The barrier of fear refers to the many years of fear of retribution and punishment by the state security apparatus.

Starting on January 25, 2011, throngs of persons began to protest and then in earnest on January 28, which brought this barrier of fear tumbling down. Also, initially, the military did not attack the citizenry in the streets; they stood by, protected, or actively took part in these protests. There were many instances recorded via photographs and video with military personnel being embraced by the people. However, the military's role escalated and took on an increased political role in the months after February 2011. The Egyptian military is a central actor in addition to civil society organizations such as the labor movement. The military, through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), was effectively the beneficiary of the January 2011 uprising with its greater political and economic powers. Their stance against workers is well documented: "The army has been diligent in disciplining striking workers, while the SCAF has dragged its feet on draft laws setting minimum and maximum wages and legalizing independent labor unions. These moves might also be seen as invoking the spirit of Nasser, who himself hanged two strike leaders less than a month after the coup that brought him to office, except that the army has paired the crackdown with other

measures that were preached by the IMF and World Bank.”⁹⁶ The role of the Egyptian military was not modest by any way, shape or form. It appeared sympathetic with the protesting masses and neutral; however, that was not the case.

Kandil’s⁹⁷ work on the role of the military and state security/interior ministry is also enlightening regarding the causes of the January 2011 revolt. Mubarak had a blinding penchant for wanting his son, Gamal, who was not remotely connected or related to the military, to succeed him, so for many years prior to 2011, he had been slowly winnowing the best and brightest military cadres into early retirement. Because state funding for the military was decreasing, given their large income from military industries and financial support from the U.S. and elsewhere, there was no love lost between the military and the Mubarak family. That is one reason that the military initially intervened on the side of the people versus the state security apparatus.

The average citizen’s contention was another serious and important factor underlying the Arab Spring uprisings. The main overarching thread among all the Arab countries was the following: sharp increase in unemployment; large unemployed youth population with little hope for a future; bloated state apparatuses, especially state security with heavy handed tactics; decline in overall economic performance; sharp price increase in daily consumer goods; high levels of corruption and lack of transparency; serious endemic human rights violations; fraudulent electoral practices; and excessive controls over civil society organizations. The picture of daily life is dismal, and for many observers it was a matter before contention would explode.⁹⁸ As Tilly,

⁹⁶ Marshall, Shana and Joshua Stacher, “Egypt’s Generals and Transnational Capital,” MERIP vol. 42, Spring 2012 <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/egypts-generals-transnational-capital>

⁹⁷ Kandil, Hazem. *Soldiers, spies and statesmen: Egypt’s road to revolt*. S.I: Verso, 2014. Print.

⁹⁸ Please note that the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Arab Human Development reports are an excellent source of information about the state of freedoms, knowledge, security, women’s rights, education and

Tarrow, and McAdam wrote, social movements' contention could take the imagery of a "steam boiler about to explode".⁹⁹ Since the uprising, each country has evolved into different states of affairs with varying degrees of success and failure, one being that Syria is now in a full-blown civil war with the end nowhere in sight.

In the Arab world, politics took on an "unnatural" scope within civil society outside of its proper place in the political arena of political parties, elections, parliaments, and regular change in political leadership, which alternates between ruling party and opposition as in most Western democracies. Politics became ensconced in "civil society organizations", thus corrupting its behavior and derailing it from its true mission. Everything became political, whether it was environmental issues, women's causes, children and youth concerns, senior citizen affairs, pollution, or defense of human rights. In the intersection of the three circles of politics, contention, and collective action, we find contentious politics exhibited or carried out via social movements. Social movements in contentious politics are essentially the opportunity for "challengers" to demand of the "elite", who already has access to power, to make changes/reforms. That is precisely what the protesters were attempting to do; whether it was in Tahrir Square in Cairo; Benghazi and Tripoli, Libya; Tunis, Tunisia; or Sana, Yemen, and elsewhere in the Arab world.

Theoretical Basis for Research

I will analyze the Egyptian independent workers' formal and informal organizations' contentious actions and protests through both Social Movement Theory's (SMT) mechanisms and processes and Social Movement Unionism (SMU). SMU is a

other critical areas. The reason for these reports being so relevant is that they were written by a brave group of Arab scholars, thinkers and researchers with excellent credentials.

⁹⁹ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

trend of theory and practice in contemporary trade unionism. It is strongly associated with the labor movements of developing countries, and it is distinct from many other models of trade unionism because it concerns itself with more than organizing workers around workplace issues, wages and terms, and conditions. It engages in wider political struggles for human rights, social justice, and democracy.

It is important to note that in the “classical social movement agenda” the following factors are considered: “social change processes, political opportunities and constraints, forms of organization (large correlation between strong organization and ability to gain concessions), framing, and repertoires of contention.”¹⁰⁰ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly identify four major defects with this model as a tool for the analysis of contentious politics. First, defect is the focus on static rather than dynamic relationships; second, it does not work well for broader episodes of contention; third, it was rooted in the open politics of America’s 1960s, which emphasized opportunities over threats and increased confidence in organizational resources; and fourth, it focused exceedingly on the origins of contention rather on its later phases.¹⁰¹ Thus, referring to social movement unionism will complement and add to the more dynamic mobilization model detailed below.

I will examine two congruent case studies going beyond the classical definition to a more dynamic mobilization model in order to fully understand their movements and impact. I will use McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly’s proposal to employ “a new path to the analysis of contentious politics: neither through the stamping of the same general laws onto all the world’s contention, [...] but through the comparison of episodes of

¹⁰⁰ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, page 41.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 42

contention in light of the processes that animate their dynamics”¹⁰² while including the historical and social context. This model leads to a much broader set of interpretative processes, leading to a more innovative collective action.¹⁰³ Classical SMT focuses on mobilizing structures, framing processes, opportunity and threats, and repertoires of contention – a structuralist approach.¹⁰⁴ I intend to push beyond the classical structuralist SMT toward an interactive dynamic model, and I will review the interaction between mechanisms and processes, or “actions, actors, identities, trajectories or outcomes”.¹⁰⁵ My focus will be on investigating the repertoires of collective action within these two case studies: the shared values, interests, and goals that led to mobilization; workers’ protest repertoires and actions; the frame of their grievances and demands; the internal structures of these formal and informal organizations and networks of workers; the decision-making processes; the leaders and how they (positively or negatively) influenced the movement; and the differing roles of men and women workers in these repertoires of collective action. “Analyzing repertoires allows us to examine the anticipations, perceptions, and self-definitions of contentious actors and how they take up a position in the political field”.¹⁰⁶ I will also examine the nature and role of these “informal” networks created by workers because in authoritarian regimes, such as Egypt, and with high levels of poverty and lack of essential services, networks become vital for survival and collective action.

¹⁰² Ibid. 314

¹⁰³ Ibid. 48

¹⁰⁴ McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.37

¹⁰⁶ Beinin, Joel and Frederic Vairel (editors). *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, CA, 2011:14

The Egyptian independent workers' movement highlights the following: “ 1) the importance of perceived threats, as opposed to opportunities, in motivating collective action; 2) possibilities for collective action and movement-building in a resource-poor, authoritarian environment; 3) local networks' capacity simultaneously to enable local mobilization while disabling mobilization on a national scale; 4) the differential effects of political change (“opportunities”) on the urban intelligentsia compared to workers; 5) the continuing relevance of class; and 6) the agency of insurgent workers in expanding their repertoire of contention”.¹⁰⁷ This explains sustained action and protest but without the formation of a strong, national organization, although working class-consciousness is still strong in Egypt. Therein lays the puzzle that despite the lack of a strong, national labor organization, these disparate worker groups and networks were able to hold successful protests and increase the political pressure on the Mubarak regime, thus challenging the regime, leading up to the January 2011 uprising. In hindsight, I would argue that several foretelling events took place, for example, the massive strike by workers on April 6, 2008, in El-Mahalla al-Kubra (large industrial city) when several thousands of workers protested the low wages and high cost of food. Yet Egyptian workers' independent organizations were unable to form coalitions with other civil society organizations and activists to bring about a complete victory, which means a revolution against the authoritarian regime.

There are several assumptions to be examined: the perceived weakness and lack of a strong organizational structure due to the nature of functioning in an authoritarian regime; and these networks of workers succeed only on a local level and not a national

¹⁰⁷ Beinin, Joel. “Workers and Egypt's January 25 Revolution”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 80, Fall 2011, page 182.

level. These protest movements were initially based on “bread and butter” issues, demanding the regime to protect their gains instead of democracy and regime change per se. Then these movements evolved to demand political reform since such reform is an essential ingredient to protect their basic gains with the potential for improvements in their socio-economic condition. However, the problem was the workers’ ability to lead a more universal revolt. In addition, the question of threat as defined by Tilly and Goldstone as “the costs a social group will incur from protest or that it expects to suffer if it does not take action”¹⁰⁸ is applicable to the Egyptian workers’ movement. I will examine whether no action (i.e. no protests) was considered a higher cost to be paid than protesting and that this threat propelled workers (men and women) and influenced their motivation to join these independent trade unions and worker networks.

There is a consensus that labor and workers receive less attention in social and historical research than in the heyday of the early twentieth century. It seems that it is no longer fashionable to have social mobilizations based on class grievances. We often read about the “death of the labor movement” and how labor has been increasingly hampered in their ability to carry out effective action, not just in the U.S. but also in a globalized economy as a whole. In Egypt, the situation begs to differ, and labor’s class struggle is not yet completely irrelevant. According to Beinín, “Egyptian workers have not received the message that class struggle is unfashionable. From 1998 to 2009 over two million workers participated in more than 3,300 factory occupations, strikes,

¹⁰⁸ Goldstone, Jack A., and Charles Tilly. 2001. “Threat (and Opportunity): Popular Action and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action.” *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, ed. Ronald R. Aminzade et al., 179-94, page 183. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

demonstrations or other collective actions.”¹⁰⁹ Tilly and Tarrow’s definition of a social movement is “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities.”¹¹⁰ The creation of the Egyptian independent trade union movement is a social movement according to this definition.

It has been a sustained campaign of protests and making demands that the authoritarian Egyptian government make economic and political reforms to address workers’ grievances. Any action in this environment against an authoritarian regime would be considered a potential threat and not necessarily an opportunity for positive change. Despite the high level of potential threats, Egyptian workers took to the streets and used this peaceful repertoire: to march, to chant, sit-in, and make verbal and written demands addressing their serious “bread and butter” grievances. However, these grievances eventually gravitated from purely socio-economic to political demands starting in 2010.

The perceived threat defined by Beinin is broader than Tarrow’s (2011); “the costs a social group will incur from protest, or that it expects to suffer if it does not take action”, is more relevant to the Egyptian independent workers’ movement.¹¹¹ Interestingly, in the Nasser era (post 1952) and into the Sadat “infatih” (open economic door policy) 1970s era, and even during the 1980s during the first decade of Mubarak’s

¹⁰⁹ Beinin, Joel and Frederic Vairel (editors). *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, CA, 2011:181.

¹¹⁰ Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G. Tarrow. *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, Colo: Paradigm Publishers, 2007:8.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

rule; workers rarely called directly for democratic reform and political change. Their demands were primarily “bread and butter” socio-economic needs. However, with the increase in the number of protests over the years, the deterioration of socio-economic daily living conditions, and the development of support by other sectors of civil society, such as students and several sectors of professional white-collar workers, the movement started to develop into a more traditional social movement with political demands. The worker movement’s full participation in the January 2011 uprising further adds to its portfolio as another call for political change. One can argue that demands for economic and social justice are another form of calling for political change or even a first step. This argument will be expanded upon in later chapters.

Political opportunity analysis is the strategy of assessing the potential of a change to achieve a goal. Undergoing an opportunity analysis helps to provide an understanding of what effects, positive and negative, are likely to take place if a particular approach is implemented. “It emphatically includes not only opportunities but also threats [...] it leads us to pay attention to changing opportunities and threats. It helps people decide whether to mobilize, make decisions about optimal combinations of performances to use and which are likely to succeed or fail”.¹¹² The leaders of the employees of the Real Estate Tax Authority (RETA) used this approach to support their strategies for each protest event. They had to weigh the opportunities and perceived threats and evaluate how they could minimize the threats from State Security and other government forces. They had to consider what the minister would do, not do, and how they could bring about external influence to affect his decision-making. They had to determine when to step up the pressure and escalate their actions, such as organizing

¹¹² Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, page 49-50

massive demonstrations with thousands of protesters at strategic places in Cairo for media and government officials' attention. It was all done peacefully with clever repertoires including chants and slogans highlighting their demands.

The overarching hypothesis that frames the relationship between the independent and dependent variables¹¹³ of my research is that workers' consistent collective action for a decade before January 2011 contributed to the mass uprising, yet it was an incomplete victory. The key variables in my dissertation are as follows. 1) The independent variable is the Egyptian independent workers' organizations and non-governmental organizations that supported workers. The independent workers' are the two cases in my research: real estate tax collectors and garment and textile workers. The non-governmental organizations that supported workers include the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS), The Land Center, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Research (ECESR), and others. 2) The dependent variable is the Egyptian "Arab Spring", starting with the January 25, 2011, uprising and culminating with the first "post-Mubarak" presidential elections in May 2012 as an outcome, an explanation, and a result of their activism, i.e. the sustained collective action by the workers. The theory is that through sustained collective action, i.e. a social movement, the working class can and will contribute to political change. A good theory's "independent variable has a large explanatory power with an effect on a wide range of phenomena under a wide range of conditions".¹¹⁴ I hope to add evidence to the already existing literature that massive groups, i.e. workers with significant grievances (whether

¹¹³ Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, page 11

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 17

organized into institutions or are informal networks as in Egypt's case) in authoritarian regimes can affect political change. Yet in this case, their influence was limited, and incomplete.

A complementary set of theoretical lenses can also be found in Social Movement Unionism (SMU) theory. SMU has four dimensions or key aspects: 1) locally based and rank and file member mobilization; 2) use of different collective action tactics beyond workplace strikes, 3) building alliances and coalitions with others in civil society, and 4) embracing a socio-political discourse beyond the "bread and butter" economic, i.e. developing a political vision for all and not just for workers.¹¹⁵ I will show within this research endeavor how the Egyptian workers' independent movement did indeed exhibit all, if not many, of these key aspects in the years prior to January 2011. SMU also helps us to further understand how worker activists can build support for labor's demands using varying tactics to include the community at-large. Waterman (1979) first used SMU to describe striking transport workers in India.¹¹⁶ These workers were excluded legally from the national industrial relations system, so these workers were not covered by the traditional collective bargaining agreements. They challenged the authorities in a creative, different, and unpredictable manner; for example, they called on their community, religious leaders, and neighbors to support their strike. They were acting more like social movement activists than union organizers and negotiators.¹¹⁷

SMU began to be used more widely to explain how workers were reacting to the globalization of the economy, particularly to neo-liberal economic restructuring policies.

¹¹⁵ Fairbrother, Peter. "Social Movement Unionism or Trade Unions as Social Movements," *Employee Responsibility Rights Journal*. Volume 20:2013-220, 2008, page 214.

¹¹⁶ Waterman, Peter. "Strikes in the Third World" *Development and Change* (Special Issue) vol. 10 no. 2, 1979

¹¹⁷ Seidman, Gay. "Social Movement Unionism: From Description to Exhortation," *South African Review of Sociology*. Vol. 42, no. 3, pages 94-102:94.

Workers in the developing world began to face newly structured workplaces, thus their traditional trade unions were not able to advocate for or protect their rights using the traditional methods. In the global south, SMU was able to capture the mood and action of labor militancy, demanding a greater share in the country's wealth. For example, "in authoritarian Brazil as well as apartheid South Africa, factory workers backed up broad demands for political democratization with shop-floor militancy, disrupting production in support of both workplace and political goals."¹¹⁸ There are additional examples in the Philippines; a militant alliance took place between the workers and community groups to topple the Marcos dictatorship. In South Korea, the term was used to describe the militant activist movement to include women and migrants in calling for inclusion and democracy.¹¹⁹ Post-colonial militant labor movements adopted a broader view beyond their members' interests and developed a broader base of support among the community at-large. Marshall, in his work, *Citizenship and Social Class: Other Essays* (1950), had predicted that the new unionists saw democratic citizenship as a key step toward gaining the economic and social rights that their members were denied under colonial rule. He gave us an important conclusion: the working class truly earned the right and position in society to participate fully in political life.¹²⁰ Labor movements are not of the past, and class-based social movements are not to be dismissed as stale, limited, or restrictive.¹²¹

Social capital is the main condition to promote social change through collective action. Michael Edwards, the civil society expert, commentator and author notes, "social

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 95

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Marshall, T H. *Citizenship and Social Class: And Other Essays*. Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1950.

¹²¹ Seidman, Gay page 97

capital is seen as the crucial ingredient in promoting collective action for the common good.”¹²² Relating this to the labor movement – workers are social capital and can be interpreted as the collective action of workers. This collective action of workers in a social movement can be an effective mechanism in the quest for democratic transition.

Literature Review and Context

The literature describing the independent variable in my research (the characteristics, role, and development of the Egyptian working class, independent trade unions, and worker non-governmental organizations) includes journalistic reporting endeavors. Especially regarding strikes, scholarly journal articles and several books cover the history of workers and the working class. There are historical and socio-economic accounts of the Egyptian working class highlighting the dynamic relationship between workers, union leaders, managers, and government. These studies also give a more accurate picture of developing countries’ that are increasingly becoming the manufacturers of exported goods in a more globalized economy. The main and most thorough research study on Egypt’s history of workers was conducted by two history scholars, Beinín and Lockman, published in 1988 as *Workers on the Nile, Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*. There are also several scholars who took on certain aspects or angles and particular time periods of Egyptian workers’ modern history and current challenges such as Vitalis, Issawi, Goldberg, Shehata, Bianchi, Alexander, and others. Scholars such as Goldberg and Posusney among others focused their research on beyond the 1950s until the present

¹²² Edwards, Michael. *Civil Society*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013, page 14

day. They took Beinin and Lockman's work and added contemporary modern issues intertwined with changing political, economic and social realities.

The first important historical work to set the stage is *Workers on the Nile – Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class 1882-1954* by Beinin and Lockman. Posusney's *Labor and the State in Egypt* continues this genre of writing on labor and labor relations, then it is continued with Goldberg's *Tinker, Tailor and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt*, Bianchi's *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth Century Egypt*, Vitalis' *When Capitalists' Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt*, Lockman's *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*, Paczynska's *State, Labor, and the Transition to a Market Economy: Egypt, Poland, Mexico, and the Czech Republic*, Alexander's journal article "Leadership and collective action in the Egyptian trade unions", and more recently, Shehata's *Shop Floor Culture and Politics in Egypt*. There are also studies that give a more dynamic societal description to highlight the importance of networks, family, kinships, and friendships, including neighborhood connections, such as Singerman's *Avenues of Participation – Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo*; all play an important role in social movements and add to the literature on the working popular (sha'abi) class in Egypt. Labor as a social movement is covered well in Beinin, Tarrow, Tilly, McAdam and Zald's various writings on social movement theory, contentious politics, mobilization, and contestation.

However, in order to gain a full understanding of the situation in Egypt, one has to review the literature on the political role of trade unions in developing countries. This is in addition to comparative studies on the role of trade unions in political change in

Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe with Poland as a prime example. Egypt is an interesting case study for examining the political role of trade unions in developing countries, especially in transition from authoritarian to democracy. Egyptian labor movement has a long history of activism, yet this can be an educational case of how labor was corporatized (co-opted) by the state and became a reluctant democrat. This is also a case of how workers found their voice and power through consistent collective action due to serious economic difficulties (neo-liberal policies), thus creating a social movement to move away from the corporatized status to an activist one. *Trade Unions and Democratic Participation in Europe: A Scenario for the 21st Century*, edited by Kester and Pinaud (1996), is one example of how much has been written on the historical development of trade union democratic participation in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. Collier and Collier present the most comprehensive study of the political history of labor in eight countries in Latin America over a period of 100 years to attempt to understand the political trajectories of state-labor relations. Collier and Collier use “the concepts of ‘critical juncture’ and ‘legacy’ in order to make sense of the process of labor’s incorporation into a hegemonic capitalist regime and its political and institutional aftermath.”¹²³ Unfortunately, Collier and Collier adopt an “political elite approach” where workers are considered ignorant of their own interests and are therefore easily manipulated by their leaders. Valenzuela presents cogent arguments in his journal article in *Comparative Politics* (July 1989) titled “Labor Movements in Transitions to Democracy – A Framework for Analysis”. Labor movements have significant input into democratic transitions through increased strikes and protests, yet they cannot necessarily alone trigger a successful transition as part of a “resurrected

¹²³ Rees 1994:270

civil society” (O’Donnell and Schmitter) in conjunction with a broader upsurge of mobilization by a variety of other civil society groups.¹²⁴ Independent workers’ organizations in cooperation with the rest of civil society organizations can play an important catalytic role in transition to democracy.

Bruce Millen’s short monograph titled *The Political Role of Labor in Developing Countries* (1963) clearly outlines that in countries where the government is going through a transition appear to be “uneasily fragile”. Millen wrote that trade unions have an imperative political role to ensure a more egalitarian program, and he calls this “political unionism”. Political leaders seeking mass approval and support will lean on trade unions pre- and post-independence in developing countries. Before independence, political forces join with trade union movements (mass movements) to push out colonial powers. After independence, with an increase in nationalism leading the drive for national development (industrialization with more urbanization), political leaders could “not safely ignore the promises, for the disaffection of the workers cannot be risked. On this fact rides much of the union strength”.¹²⁵ Millen builds upon Lipset and Galenson’s work on how trade unions are a major component of community power and a key institution that sustains democratic process in the larger community.¹²⁶ Coleman in the same volume wrote that labor unions and their leaders give “lip service” to democracy, and their behavior is affected or influenced by the democratic values at-large in the community.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Valenzuela 445

¹²⁵ Millen 1963:95

¹²⁶ Galenson and Lipset 1960

¹²⁷ Coleman 1960

There are several studies on the authoritarian state in transition to democracy regarding political-economic development, autocratic regimes, and neo-liberal policies adopted by developing countries, including Egypt; these studies help us understand the realities in the context of Egyptian workers and their claims. O'Donnell and Schmitter¹²⁸ wrote the seminal work in 1986 showing the diverse transition paths from authoritarian rule to the prospects of democracy. The literature on the connection between the need for economic stability and political legitimacy as prerequisites for democracy (Lipset 1959) and political transition is also helpful in understanding the context. Linz and Stepan show in their research, published as *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (1996), why and how democracies need five interacting arenas to become consolidated: 1) a lively civil society, 2) a relatively autonomous political society, 3) rule of law, 4) a stable state, and 5) an economic society. In addition, they offer a definition of democratic transition, which entails liberalization, but it is a wider and more specifically political concept. Tilly, in *Democracy*, wrote of democracy's global advancement, its retreat, and the process of "de-democratization". Tilly describes the general processes that cause democratization. He makes the claim that prospects for democracy hinge on three-large scale processes within a country: 1) interpersonal trust networks into politics, 2) the insulation of politics from economic and social inequalities, and 3) the elimination or neutralization of the coercive power of autonomous power centers such as clans, war lords, or military elites.¹²⁹ Brumberg contributes to the literature of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. He wrote in 2002, "Over the past two decades, the Middle East has witnessed a 'transition' away

¹²⁸ O'Donnell, Guillermo A., Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead. *Transitions from authoritarian rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Print.

¹²⁹ Tilly, Charles. *Democracy*. Cambridge England New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

from—and then back toward—authoritarianism. This dynamic began with tactical political openings whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracies. Enticed by the prospect of change, an amalgam of political forces—Islamists, leftists, secular liberals, NGO activists, women's organizations, and others—sought to imbue the political process with new meanings and opportunities, hoping that the ‘inherently unstable’ equilibrium of *dictablandas*¹³⁰ would give way to a new equilibrium of competitive democracy.”¹³¹ He confirms the strong durability of “liberalized autocracy”, and this continued trap engulfing the Middle East.

Neo-liberal policies and the demise of the “social contract” in Egypt are important lenses through which we can and need to analyze the events in Egypt. “Bresser, Pereira, Maravall, and Przeworski see neo-liberalism as having a natural inclination toward such autocratic and technocratic forms of rule, given the need to override or evade the political opposition”¹³² of interest groups that would be harmed by such structural adjustments. They argue that autocratic neo-liberalism weakens social and political institutions that could play a mediation role. Heydemann also contributes to the urgent need for a new social contract – “the unprecedented labor crisis confronting the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region underscores the urgent need for both a new social contract — the basic laws and understandings that define the relationship between the state and labor — and for political reform.”¹³³ The old social

¹³⁰ Definition: a word used by political scientists to describe a dictatorship in which civil liberties are allegedly preserved rather than destroyed. Origins are from Spanish *dictadura* = dictatorship and *blanda* = soft

¹³¹ Brumberg, Daniel, “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, volume 13, no. 4, October 2002, pp. 56-68

¹³² Roberts 101

¹³³ Heydemann, Steven, “Towards a New Social Contract in the Middle East and North Africa,” January 20, 2004, Carnegie Endowment’s Sada publication

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2008/08/20/toward-new-social-contract-in-middle-east-and-north-africa/ffyg>

contracts favored strong state intervention in the economy while providing workers with stability, employment, and welfare in return for allegiance to the state.

In order to fully grasp the long-term economic roots of the 2011 uprising for political change, Soliman's book, *The Autumn of Dictatorship – Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*, presents a thoughtful analysis of Egypt's political economy. He argues that both the state and civil society were weak, and the way out is to strengthen both based on a rule of law framework. Soliman analyzes how the Mubarak regime functioned like all authoritarian regimes, using the carrot and stick method by distributing benefits to select segments of society (primarily elites) and using harsh repression whenever needed. The regime used public monies to impose political stability. He describes how Mubarak's regime dealt with the steep decline in state revenue in the 1990s by allowing state institutions to degrade over time (except military and security institutions) and by allowing business elites to circumvent the law and prosper on the backs of workers and the society at large (Soliman 2011).

The dependent variable, the Egyptian "Arab Spring", or the January 25, 2011, uprising, has several causes (equifinality) that contributed to the mass uprising, including independent workers and their organizations. The literature that has been written since these events has not given labor and workers a prominent role except work by a handful of scholars, including Beinun, El Mahdi and Korany, Haddad, Lynch, Ali, Paul, El-Hamalawy, Dabashi, and Shehata. The popular narrative attributes the main leaders of the Egyptian uprising to be the students, youth, and intellectuals fighting for political freedom using social media. History indicates the opposite, that many years of

labor organizing laid the foundation for the January 2011 uprising.¹³⁴ Ali's "Precursors of the Egyptian Revolution" argues "that there had been sustained protests for at least a decade before the January 25th [2011] uprisings, which functioned as political incubators that nurtured the forces of the revolution, shaping people's consciousness and organizational capacities".¹³⁵ The Arab Spring ushered in these "open-ended revolutions", and some experts argue that these are not revolutions in the classical meaning of the word and deed. These are uprisings that have yet to develop into full-fledged revolutions (for example in Egypt) that will truly upend the regimes thoroughly without just removing the top leadership, its supporters, and its benefactors. "The uprisings are an exceptionally rapid, intense, and nearly simultaneous explosion of popular protest across an Arab world united by a shared transnational media and bound by a common identity,"¹³⁶ writes Lynch in *The Arab Uprisings*. After the initial euphoria calmed down, observers around the world recognized the gravity of these uprisings and how they are still in process. These are still "open-ended", unfinished revolutions. More than two years later, the manifestation of a deeper political, social, and economic transformation is still in process. Lynch further contributes to this literature with his most recent publication *The Arab Uprisings Explained – New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by him. The main puzzle of interest is "the speed and magnitude of mobilization across multiple countries and the divergent political outcomes."¹³⁷ Authoritarian resilience in the Middle East and North Africa was proven many times over by resisting the major pressures in the region, including an employment crisis, a

¹³⁴ Paul 2011:11.

¹³⁵ Ali 2012:16

¹³⁶ Lynch 2012:9

¹³⁷ Lynch, Marc, *The Arab Uprisings Explained – New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press, 2014:5

young population, Islamism, globalization, and a civil society that was spearheading a call for democracy.

The focus on labor unions, Dabashi argues in *The Arab Spring* is important for the legitimacy of the new state. He wrote that until voluntary organizations, i.e. labor unions, women's rights organizations, and student assemblies, are institutionalized and allowed a legal framework respecting freedom of association to continue to organize from a grassroots level and are enabled to fully participate and influence policy-makers, "the state will be able to build itself again on a societal foundation, and hence will have legitimacy."¹³⁸ So the state's legitimacy depends on respecting freedom of association allowing grassroots organizations like labor unions to develop and prosper in order to contribute to national policies and protect workers' rights.

Literature Review: Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation: Theory and Practice

The Egyptian case, according to Beinin and Vairel's (2011) book on social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East,¹³⁹ had certain characteristics. First, this was a situation of a resource-poor movement within an authoritarian regime context; second, the threat of no action was greater than any available opportunity; third, class designation still matters and; fourth, informal social networks played a critical role when organizations could not be formed; fifth, within the Egyptian context, there were creative continuous repertoires; and sixth, the workers'

¹³⁸ Dabashi 2012:240

¹³⁹ Beinin, Joel and Frederic Vairel (editors). *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, CA, 2011

social movement remained on a local level and did not always blossom into full-fledged national organizations (with the one exception of the IGURETA union).

The first to take informal social networks into consideration in their research were Deneoux (1993) and Singerman (1995). Singerman's extensive ethnographic research on Egypt's popular quarters (sha'abi neighborhoods) in Cairo, *Avenues of Participation*, highlights the importance of taking into consideration the social, informal, familial, relationships as well as workplace, neighborhood, and friend networks, especially under an authoritarian regime. Diani with McAdam in an edited volume, *Social Movements, Contentious Actions and Social Networks: "From Metaphor to Substance"* (2003) also focused on and pleaded the case of the importance of social networks in social movement analysis. Diani argues the need to reorient social movement research along network lines. Looking at networks as a powerful pre-condition of collective action has proved to be a fruitful exercise. We would then be better able to specify the relationship between movements and coalitions, solidarity campaigns and political organizations. Social movements are strings of connected events, scattered across time and space, consisting of groups and organizations with varying levels of formalized, linked-in patterns of interaction, from centralized to decentralized and from cooperative to hostile. This harks back to Tilly's initial work focusing on dynamic inter-relationships, particularly within networks. Within that edited volume, there is an interesting chapter by Broadbent highlighting the importance of "thick" analysis of networks within social movements. Broadbent analyzes Japan's environmental movement, for example, and how the focus on networks needs to be viewed as a bridge between resources and cultural attitudes.

Lapidus and Burke, as editors of *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (1988),¹⁴⁰ also offer interesting insights into social movements from secular and religious perspectives and with a focus on the resurgence or revival of Islamic activism. By reading their edited volume, today particularly given the events of the last three years, one can further understand the motives of workers making contentious claims and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (in Egypt's case). Beinín wrote one chapter in the Lapidus and Burke book from his neo-Marxist perspective on workers' activism and class struggle in a sugar production factory. Goldberg wrote another chapter from a corporatist perspective discussing how the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) initially was not interested in building blue-collar trade unions and was more interested in promoting its religious principles and ideology. Goldberg's case studies of trade unions in the 1940s presented a more nuanced Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and a far clearer picture of the limitations on the leaders' abilities to turn ideological sympathy or formal membership into practical political consequences. Islam appears more like other ideologies, which claim a broad hold on their members, but in reality the control is not so complete.¹⁴¹ Goldberg discussed how union leadership (MB members) attempted to fuse Islamic vocabulary with a movement for social change. Since that era, starting in the 1990s, the MB became more involved in the professional associations, known as syndicates, for white-collar professions such as doctors, dentists, engineers, lawyers, and journalists.

¹⁴⁰ Burke, Edmund, Ira M. Lapidus, and Ervand Abrahamian. *Islam, politics, and social movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.

¹⁴¹ Goldberg, Ellis, "Muslim Union Politics in Egypt: Two Cases", Chapter 11 page 228 in Burke, Edmund, Ira M. Lapidus, and Ervand Abrahamian. *Islam, politics, and social movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988

Literature review: the measurement of the impact of social movements

Social scientists are still struggling with this task on how to measure the impact of social movements and why do they matter. Giugni and fellow travelers Tilly and McAdam in an edited volume, *How Social Movements Matter*, (1999) emphasize the need for more research and exploration on how to measure the impact of social movements in promoting and actually achieving change. The authors examine how social movements relate to the processes of social change, and does it matter. Giugni et al examine what has been done so far in scholarship: 1) disruption versus moderation, where the capacity to achieve goals depends on the ability to create innovative and disruptive tactics; 2) internal versus external explanations, where success depends on the Political Opportunity Structures (POS) (social movements can succeed only insofar as they act disruptively and as political circumstances lead the rulers to make concessions); and 3) defining and determining the consequences of social movements by looking at successes and failures and focusing on policy outcomes.

Davis with McAdam, Scott, and Zald, in *Social Movements and Organization Theory* (2005)¹⁴², expand our views in the world of social movements' analysis and research. The application of religion, space, voice, discourse, and culture to the analysis can further expand our understanding and also the ability to apply the theory to varying situations and conditions, including in the Arab world. It is of interest to examine spatial analysis of social movements as one of the processes and mechanisms that can be “spatially situated” to achieve impact. In the past, protesters followed those who were

¹⁴² Davis, Gerald F. *Social movements and organization theory*. New York, N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

committing the grievance, so the protests moved from a World Bank meeting location or WTO meeting location to another.

Today, it seems that global social movements are staying in one physical place to highlight their claim and with each day the number of protesters increases. We have seen contemporary examples starting with the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. In the Egypt of 2011-2012, Tahrir Square became an iconic, well-recognized symbol and space of the uprising as well as a physical, open space for protest even though the government's security forces attempted to clear out the square several times. In 2014, this physical open space has been shut tight by the current regime. The impact of social movements in the Arab world on social interaction starting with social media, varied public discourse, public art and graffiti, blogs, and chat venues have been immense but not quantifiable. We are just at the cusp of beginning to see, analyze, and fully understand the full impact of social movements in the Arab spring uprisings. Scholars will have to monitor social movements over a period of time to effectively evaluate the full impact.

Literature review: The role of trade unions in political life, revolutions and its significance

Throughout history, the role of trade unions in revolutions and transitions to democracy has been heralded with much praise and fanfare as the main engine behind the success of a revolt or denigrated, given a back seat, and even blamed for the failure of a revolution. "Unions have been hailed as defenders of democracy and equality, and damned as preservers of privilege and corruption [...] both sides of the debate have

merit with reference to particular currents within the labor movement of each country. The relationship between unions, democracy and equality is mixed and complex.”¹⁴³ I adopt in this research endeavor Tilly’s definition of a democratic regime, which is the “degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected, and mutually binding consultation.”¹⁴⁴ Labor’s impact on democratization has been determined in Latin America and elsewhere by the depth of its relationship or connection with the ruling political party, the level of internal democracy within trade unions, the degree to which unions advocate for the broader majority’s interests and concerns, the degree of unionization at the workplace, and if there has been a long history of this as a democratic voice at work. If the regime has the mechanisms and adopts broad consultation with citizens (through their institutions like trade unions), and these institutions prize and value democratic structures and behavior, then there is a democratizing impact by unions on the state/regime.

Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens have presented through their research that organized labor is a consistent advocate and champion of democracy and that as a result, strong labor movements support a more-likely democratic outcome.¹⁴⁵ However, evidence presented by Levitsky and Mainwaring challenges this argument.¹⁴⁶ Latin American labor movements have played an important and leading role in the struggle

¹⁴³ Tilly, Chris. “Trade unions, inequality, and democracy in the US and Mexico.” UCLA: The Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0wt3v445>, pp. 68-83. eScholarship, University of California, 2013, page 68. http://www.irle.ucla.edu/publications/documents/Tilly-Unions-inequality-democracy-inUS_MX-13-45-1-PB-RethinkingInequality_Devel-2013.pdf

¹⁴⁴ Tilly, Charles. *Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007:12-13.

¹⁴⁵ Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 1992

¹⁴⁶ Levitsky, Steven and Scott Mainwaring. “Organized Labor and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics*, vol. 39, no. 1 (October 2006), pp. 21-42, page 21.

against dictatorships, yet their record regarding democracy has been mixed at best, they say. In Argentina, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru, the labor movement actively supported nondemocratic regimes. In Argentina and Bolivia, the unions supported military coups against elected governments. In Chile, Bolivia, and Peru they were involved in maximalist strategies (no compromise) that put democratic governments in peril. Levitsky and Mainwaring focus on labor's self-interest in maintaining power and benefits as their primary goal in the latter half of the twentieth century (1945). They also point to the distance, or "autonomy", of union leaders from their rank and file membership. Unions supporting political parties would satisfy their self-interest (especially union leaders) in continuing to exist and maintaining power rather than the main principle of democracy and democratic governance. Latin American labor movements were contingent democrats, a term borrowed from Bellin's research and writings.¹⁴⁷ In the Latin America cases, two factors determined labor's role. In the Latin American cases, the nature of partisan alliances and perceived regime alternatives determined labor's role.¹⁴⁸ The contention here is that if labor witnesses an alternative to democracy that would still guarantee its privileges and benefits, it would lend its support to the alternative. This is a view that needs to be considered when examining the Egyptian situation. However, I do contend that independent and democratic trade unions need the respect and institutionalization of freedom of association, and that can only exist in a system of governance that respects and practices a form democracy. Independent and democratic trade unions cease to exist without freedom of association, and only those that are controlled or co-opted by the regime can exist.

¹⁴⁷ Bellin, Eva. "Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor and Democratization in Late Developing Countries," *World Politics*, vol. 52, January 2000, 175-205.

¹⁴⁸ Levitsky 2006:21

In the Egyptian case study, workers played an important role as a catalyst to the 2011 uprising to bring down the Mubarak regime, yet they rarely made the international headlines. Their contentious voice only became “a national” voice starting in 2010, while before it was mainly focused on local workplace issues. Beinín points to how “strikes played a major role in delegitimizing the regime and popularizing a culture of protest.”¹⁴⁹ Still today, there are those in the daily media who believe that the independent workers movement in Egypt, for example, came late to the scene and did not throw its full support for the uprising until later. Mostafa Bassiouni, a labor expert journalist who writes for El Nahar and El Tahrir newspapers, and Khaled Ali, former presidential candidate and labor lawyer, communicated this “myth” to me during field research interviews. They also told me that the “myth” claimed that the disparate groups of independent workers announced a general national strike on February 8 or 9, 2011, supporting the January uprising. Again that is incorrect; “one of the less noticed events of the popular uprising was the formation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) — the first new institution to emerge from the revolt. Its existence was announced on January 30, 2011, at a press conference in Cairo’s Tahrir Square.”¹⁵⁰ It was a revolutionary act since it violated the law that gave the official government organization, ETUF the legal monopoly. Those who still contend that the workers arrived late to protest have fallen for the banal theory that “social media” was the main cause of the uprising, and they have not taken heed of historical and empirical facts starting ten years before January 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Beinín, Joel. “The Rise of Egypt’s Workers,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report, June 2012:3.

¹⁵⁰ Beinín, 2012:7

There continues to be a debate on the role of the intellectual elite versus the mass-based workers' organizations, the trade unions, in pushing for political reform and democratization. In Egypt, this continues to be a heated debate among intellectuals and media journalists; it has not subsided and the workers' collective action is taking the back seat, sometimes even discredited. Collier and Mahoney argue that "union-led protest in South America and Southern Europe [Peru 1980, Argentina 1983, Uruguay 1984, Brazil 1985 and Spain 1977] was much more central to the democratization process than implied by an elite-centric perspective, which sees labor's role primarily as altering the strategic environment of elite negotiators and theoretically underrates the role of mass opposition, labor protest, and collective actors generally."¹⁵¹ The role of mass collective social actors (workers) is effective at pushing for political transition despite being underrated by the elites and the scholars who write about political transition. Collier and Mahoney studied several countries and concluded that there were two patterns for political transitions. "Both patterns suggest that the labor movement was more central to the politics of democratization than has been recognized, and that its role often began earlier and continued to the end."¹⁵² This supports the events in Egypt leading up to January 2011 because their protests were consistently taking place for several years prior. The Egyptian independent workers' movement destabilized the regime and highlighted its weaknesses, paving the way for the upheaval of January 2011. There was then a forced retreat by the regime instead of a negotiated settlement for transition. It is undeniable that Egyptian workers' continued repertoires of contention lasting for several years prior to 2011 was one of several factors that

¹⁵¹ Collier and Mahoney 1997:286

¹⁵² Ibid.

pressured the regime to retreat. Shadid wrote on February 17, 2012, in the *New York Times*, “The labor unrest this week at textile mills, pharmaceutical plants, chemical industries, the Cairo airport, the transportation sector and banks has emerged as one of the most powerful dynamics in a country navigating the military-led transition that followed an 18-day popular uprising and the end of Mr. Mubarak’s three decades of rule.”¹⁵³ However, “As Khalid Ali explained, the workers did not start the January 25 uprising because they had no central organizing structure [...] but one of the important steps of this [uprising] was taken when they began to protest, giving the [uprising] an economic and social slant besides the political demands.”¹⁵⁴

“The Egyptian opposition: from protestors to revolutionaries?” is the title of an article that was published on an online website journal, *Open Democracy*, on April 22, 2013² by Abdelrahman¹⁵⁵, a lecturer at the University of Cambridge. Its title and subject matter is apropos to the question at hand: the role of trade unions in revolutions. Abdelrahman asks many questions primarily focused on why there has not been a continuing momentum from protest to revolution in Egypt. There has not been a sustained revolutionary movement that transformed from those intoxicating, and inspiring eighteen days of protest in Tahrir Square starting in January 2011. She writes that simply these protesters were not equipped or skilled in becoming revolutionaries to overthrow and take over the state apparatus. “Their focus was on perfecting tools and tactics to change the nature of traditional politics. Along this journey, they did not

¹⁵³ Shadid, Anthony. “Suez Canal Workers Join Broad Strikes in Egypt,” *New York Times* newspaper, Published on: February 17, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18egypt.html>

¹⁵⁴ Kempf, Raphael. “Egypt: First Democracy, Then a pay rise,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1st, 2011

¹⁵⁵ Abdelrahman, Maha, “The Egyptian Opposition: from protestors to revolutionaries?” *Open Democracy*, 22 April 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/maha-abdelrahman/egyptian-opposition-from-protestors-to-revolutionaries>

develop the kinds of skills, including organizational ones, that could one day equip them to match the might of the military establishment or the iron discipline and mass base of the Muslim Brotherhood.”¹⁵⁶ Al-Aswany, a prominent Egyptian novelist (most famous for *The Yacoubian Building* novel), journalist, and commentator, wrote that the problem with the Egyptian revolution is that even if you cut off the "head of the snake" the body continues to be alive. The removal of Mubarak was only the "head of the snake" and the entrenched state bureaucracy still continues to function for better or worse.

Abdelrahman quotes Wallerstein's article in *The New Left* (1972) on anti-systemic movements where activists reach stage one, achieve control of the state, and then those activists become part of the problem. They become part of the state they are trying to change and therefore are never able to reach stage two of the revolution. The anti-systemic movements, a version of social movements according to Wallerstein, are not interested in taking over the state. Wallerstein wrote that from 1968 to the World Social Movement Porto Alegre conferences starting in 2000, there have been many changes in outlook on how change takes place and how effective social movement protest can be.¹⁵⁷ In Egypt, Abdelrahman believes that the protesters were not equipped, trained, or interested in taking over the state, thus the dismal state of affairs today. The only ones who were and remain well equipped and organized are the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928; they were waiting for this moment in history.

There are two groups of protestors with the potential to be revolutionaries in

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Wallerstein, Immanuel, "NEW REVOLTS AGAINST THE SYSTEM," *New Left Review* 18, November-December 2002, <http://newleftreview.org/II/18/immanuel-wallerstein-new-revolts-against-the-system>

Egypt according to Abdelrahman,¹⁵⁸ the independent workers/labor movement and the pro-democracy human rights movement. The Egyptian workers have been protesting in a variety of ways since 2004 with over 3 million workers participating in hundreds of protests, strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations from 2004 to January 2011. Primarily, the workers had socio-economic demands, yet these evolved into political demands, especially with the issue of the minimum wage surfacing in the political arena in 2010. Then the workers' discourse became, "Well, if this government is not willing to set a minimum national 'living' wage, then this government needs to go home!" Abdel Rahman outlines the achievements of the Egyptian independent workers using creative social movement mechanisms and processes but still being hampered by state security, arcane laws forbidding freedom of association, and the government-controlled ETUF, which still exists today. Within days of the beginning of the revolt in January 2011, the independent workers' movement and trade unions formed an independent federation of trade unions. It was established in Tahrir Square among the protesters. Despite this development and others, the workers have not been able to effectively exert their pressure for serious systemic changes in Egypt. Despite the pessimistic tone of Abdelrahman's article, immediately post-2011 there was still hope and potential for civil society organizations, including trade unions, to be respected

¹⁵⁸ Abdelrahman's upcoming book is: *Egypt's Long Revolution Protest Movements and Uprisings* By [Maha Abdelrahman](#), Routledge2015, 224 pages. This book intends to throw light on the Arab Spring of 2011 by investigating the specific experience of Egypt. To this end, the revolution in Egypt and its subsequent development are situated within a historical framework of a decade long of protest movements and new forms of opposition politics. The book's main argument is that the proliferation of protest movements and groups since 2000 played a significant role in creating a context in which the 2011 mass revolt and the ousting of Mubarak was possible. The book examines a new generation of political activists that arose in response to ever-increasing grievances against authoritarian politics, deteriorating living conditions for the majority of Egyptians as a consequence of neo-liberal policies, the machinery of crony capitalism, and an almost total abandoning by the state of its responsibilities to society at large.

and allowed to freely associate and operate in order to truly achieve a more legitimate, credible, and respected state.¹⁵⁹ At that time, the consensus was that the only avenue forward for Egypt is to initiate the transition to democratic rule.

According to Lynch, author of *Arab Uprising – The Unfinished Revolutions?* In Egypt's case, the literature gives many reasons for the desperate need for a true revolution to change of culture of political behavior from autocratic to democratic, but the reality on the ground left much to be accomplished. The only well-organized opposition was the religious Muslim Brotherhood, and the secular opposition continues to be in disarray without a vision for the future to galvanize and bring Egyptians together for a full revolution, or a grassroots change in the state and its institutions.

Stepping back to in the early twentieth century with the 1917 Russian revolution and the rise of the proletariat, the working class was the hero implementing Lenin's *State and Revolution* with the proposed dictatorship of the proletariat and eventual withering away of the state apparatus, which in Lenin's writings, was considered a tool of control. We learned quickly that the Communist rule in the Soviet Union did not eventually lead to a withering away for the state and a paradise for the workers. We are presented with Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" signaling hope compared to de Tocqueville's "rule of the majority" signifying disaster. Trade unions as movements regained their place as a poignant, reform-oriented, and vital force in the late twentieth century with the protest against Solidarnosc in Poland after ten years of struggle and then the "pact negotiations" overthrow of the communist regime led by General Jaruzelski in 1989.

¹⁵⁹ Dabashi, Hamid. *The Arab Spring: The End of Post-colonialism*. London: Zed Books, 2012. Print.

As the working class organized into trade unions, their structure and organization must be fully understood to fully comprehend the establishment of democracy, write Rueschmeyer, Stephens, and Stephens.¹⁶⁰ Customarily, such a statement or an analysis from a working class/trade union perspective is given the label of Marxist analysis. Such analysis is accepted in limited political circles in the West and carries a more popular stigma. In the developing world, this statement would not at all befuddle or upset academe or political forces since Marxist analysis is much more widely accepted and considered an important part of the discourse and narrative. Rueschmeyer, Stephens, and Stephens' work with other scholars is important and gives my research the underlying essential framing that the study and role of trade unions are fundamental to the examination of society, especially a society that is in transition from authoritarian to democratic (or at least the hope of a more open system).

One cannot discuss trade unions and revolution without having to present the theories on the reasons for revolution so well articulated by Brinton, Dunn, Lipset, Moore, and Goldstone (just to name a few). In addition, there are scholars who have spent their life work on the socio-economic reasons for revolution and criteria for democratization, particularly linking wealth and democracy (Lipset, Linz, Stepan, and Przeworski). Brinton, in his 1934 *Anatomy of Revolution*,¹⁶¹ presented the uniformities between the four "great" revolutions: British, 1640; French, 1789; American, 1776; and Russian, 1917. He later revised his book in the early 1960s and it became the bible for later U.S. administrations' view of Vietnam, Cambodia, and other

¹⁶⁰ Rueschmeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne Huber, and John D. Stephens. *Capitalist development and democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Print.

¹⁶¹ Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1965 (reprint).

conflicts. Goldstone wrote that revolutions have a distinctive role in history because they combine “all the elements of forcible overthrow of the government, mass mobilization, the pursuit of a vision of social justice, and the creation of new political institutions.”¹⁶² It is the combination of revolts, strikes, social movements, coups, and civil wars that Goldstone considers a process by which leaders with vision harness the power of the people, the masses, to forcibly bring a new political system.¹⁶³ In Egypt, there were a few of these elements in play, yet the crucial one missing was the will or intent to create a new political order. Therefore, the 2011 uprising was not a revolution.

Moore¹⁶⁴ would emphasize the change from agrarian society to modern industrialized society and how peasant revolutions generally led to communist regimes and bourgeois revolutions led to fascist regimes. His student, Skocpol,¹⁶⁵ emphasized state rules’ actions over human agency in her analysis of revolutions and their results. Dunn wrote that post-revolutionary states are even more brutal and incompetent than what preceded.¹⁶⁶ Scott agrees with Dunn that post-revolutionary government can be even worse than what was removed. Dunn’s writing also parallel with Scott,¹⁶⁷ who wrote that there is an important need to listen and understand citizens’ needs in order to develop coherent and legible policies. Scott wrote that the hubris of not attempting to understand people’s needs is detrimental to any democratic project. Scott also

¹⁶² Goldstone, Jack A. *Revolutions, A Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2014:9

¹⁶³ Goldstone, 2014:9

¹⁶⁴ Moore, Barrington. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. Print.

¹⁶⁵ Skocpol, Theda. *States and social revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Print.

¹⁶⁶ Dunn, John, *Modern Revolutions – an introduction to the analysis of a political phenomenon*, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

¹⁶⁷ Scott, James C. *Two cheers for anarchism six easy pieces on autonomy, dignity, and meaningful work and play*. Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012. Print.

believes, like Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, in the importance of understanding trade unions and their role. Trade unions have an important role: to diffuse the anger and frustration of the workers and turn it into legible policy recommendations for legislation.

Marshall, in his work on society and citizenship (1950),¹⁶⁸ gave us an important conclusion that the working class has truly earned their right and position in society to participate fully in political life. Millen, in his short monograph published in 1964 titled, *The Political Role of Trade Unions in Developing Countries*,¹⁶⁹ also supported the notion with evidence that trade unions played an important role, particularly in the fight against colonialism and in the rebuilding of these nation-states afterwards. Workers fought alongside militants, freedom fighters, and militias to secure independence from colonial powers such as in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and even in Egypt.

David Collier¹⁷⁰ adds to this literature with a significant body of work about how trade unions found themselves in the nexus between economic and political transformations in Latin America. Collier does not always attribute positive traits to trade unions' role in revolutions. In a survey of 21 countries in Latin America, trade unions often were in collusion with the state authority for power and securing their place in society. Collier has an "elitist" view of labor in the sense that the leaders are those who make the decisions for the workers because the workers themselves do not necessarily know where their interests lie. However, one still cannot deny that in

¹⁶⁸ Marshall, T H. *Citizenship and Social Class: And Other Essays*. Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1950. Print.

¹⁶⁹ Millen, Bruce H. *The Political Role of Labour in Developing Countries*, Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1963, 148 pages, Print.

¹⁷⁰ Collier, Ruth B., and David Collier. *Shaping the political arena : critical junctures, the labor movement, and regime dynamics in Latin America*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Print.

several countries, workers' and their organizations played an important role in uprisings and revolutions in Latin America, such as in Chile, Argentina, and Cuba.

However, Bellin (2000)¹⁷¹ points out an interesting caveat referring to both labor and capital as “reluctant/contingent democrats”, especially in late-developing economies. She explains that in late-developing economies there are developing nations that were colonized or did not have an industrial revolution similar to what took place in the West. The “reluctant democrats” behavior depends on how the state deals with and treats labor and capital. The authoritarian state has two strategies that put labor and capital in this “reluctant” position. If the state adopts a corporatist policy where it provides funds and co-opts the leadership of the trade unions, as is the case in Egypt, and labor finds itself in a privileged, “aristocratic” position, then it has no incentive to promote change or revolt against the status quo. The same goes for the capital (business) class when they are given privileged access to credit, investment, and monopoly of ownership leading to massive profits; then, again, changing to democracy is neither lucrative nor of interest. If the state adopts a “market approach” to both labor and capital, i.e. let the market decide, divide and conquer strategies, or instead of one trade union federation there are 19 (as in the case in Morocco), then the trade unions are so weakened that they have no power or ability to start or support change. They remain under the state’s control.

Bellin makes a cogent argument in her writings with examples from Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, and Tunisia. She writes of the state sponsorship

¹⁷¹ Bellin, Eva. “Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries”. *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jan., 2000), pp. 175-205.

paradox, which can fatally limit class commitment to democracy.¹⁷² In Egypt, the ETUF was dealt with by the state in the corporatist manner (Vitalis and Bianchi wrote a great deal about this situation), so the ETUF had absolutely no incentive to promote change or even advocate for workers' rights. This was an institution that was part and parcel of the state apparatus and benefitted greatly from the state's patronage and largess. ETUF and its leaders were co-opted to carry out the state's bidding, which was to keep the workers in check, under control, and definitely not revolt against their employer, which in most cases was the government itself. With the increase in privatization and loss of jobs and benefits under the Mubarak regime, Egyptian workers took to the streets with more and more "wildcat strikes" against the employer and the ETUF.

O'Donnell and Schmitter's work has spanned 25 years and gives us informative theories on revolution, transition from authoritarian to democratization states, and the concept of liberalization. It is noteworthy to emphasize the difference between liberalization and democratization — one does not necessarily lead to the other. Liberalization was implemented in Egypt during certain times under the Mubarak regime, yet it was a calculated opportunity to give the opposition venting space without necessarily leading to significant, real democratization. Twenty-five years after their magnum opus work, Schmitter wrote a retrospective in the *Journal of Democracy* (2010).¹⁷³ In this, he notes that civil society organizations (including trade unions) was given way too much attention (including funding and international support) and did

¹⁷² Bellin, Eva R. *Stalled democracy: capital, labor, and the paradox of state-sponsored development*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. Print.

¹⁷³ Schmitter, Philippe C. "Twenty-Five Years, Fifteen Findings". *Journal of Democracy*, [Volume 21, Number 1, January 2010](#) pp. 17-28 | 10.1353/jod.0.0144

not deliver as much as it was hoped for. There were many revolutions without “democrats” and many transitions (more than fifty) that serendipitously took place without much fanfare. Tilly has also given us much to ponder in his book, *Democracy*, regarding regression, or de-democratization.

Goldstone¹⁷⁴ presented several important reasons for revolution and the need for changes, which are indeed applicable to Egypt. Soliman’s book published in English, *The Autumn of Authoritarian Rule in Egypt* (2011), adopted arguments similar to Goldstone. First, a decline in the revenue of the authoritarian state leads to revolt. In Egypt’s case, this meant a decline in funding for the basic services that affected people’s welfare and future, including education, health services, vocational training, and certain subsidies for consumer goods. These changes were in accordance with the neo-liberal economic restructuring policies implemented in earnest with the appointment of al-Nazif in 2004. Second, an increase in the fissures between elites leads to revolt. This did indeed take place in Egypt, especially in the business class, where the Mubarak regime, particularly the sons Gamal and Ala’a, orchestrated several “business coups” of large successful businesses and would favor one businessman over another (e.g. the Aboul Foutouh BMW dealership incident or the incident involving Ahmed Ezz, the steel magnate; the list continues). Third, a significant increase in the level of poverty leads to revolt. In Egypt, this is a result of neo-liberal economic restructuring policies; the decline in employment opportunities; more privatization of the public sector, leaving many workers without work and pensions; and early retirement schemes that were not in the workers’ favor, just to

¹⁷⁴ Goldstone, Jack A. *Revolution and rebellion in the early modern world*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print.

name a few causes. Fourth, an increase in the security crackdowns by various security apparatuses leads to revolt. In Egypt, there was jailing of human rights activists and journalists and a curbing of civil society organizations' ability to function freely and receive international funding to carry out their programs. An additional reason for revolt in Egypt was the parliamentary elections in 2010 that were fraught with corruption and outright fraud. These reasons outlined parallel with Goldstone's research, theories, and writings.

The insights this literature offers in the case of Egypt, and its limitations

Its limitations up to this point are that the historical accounts and theories have not yet fully encompassed the neo-liberal economic restructuring experiment in developing countries such as Egypt and the role of trade unions. Trade unions are not generally considered, and there are only a handful of scholars who focus on trade unions and their role in society overall. The lack of equity and social justice in neo-liberal economic restructuring literature is a harbinger for revolution and for the active role of trade unions. Most of the contemporary theoretical literature that I have reviewed thus far starts with revolts against communist regimes, particularly in the contexts of Europe, or authoritarian regimes in Latin America, which are not fully comparable to Egypt. Independent political parties are not the norm in post-1952 Egypt, so labor's alliance with political parties is not a cognizant force that can impact politics. Both labor and political parties have been neutered over the years. While the nature of authoritarian rule is a common point and the context is similar, the mechanics/tools of societal forces, such as mature and independent political parties and labor movements, are not.

Trade unions are naturally suited to play an important role in society, including

when society is in an upheaval. Trade unions are grassroots organizations based locally and nationally that can organize significant numbers of persons to act, revolt, and demand change. Trade unions bring workers, both men and women, from all sectors of the economy, including professionals and blue-collar factory workers. They can be a force to be reckoned with, and that is precisely why when one revisits history and looks at communist and fascist regimes in the early twentieth century, one of their first actions is to neutralize the democratic nature of trade unions immediately through violent means and control them.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this dissertation is to add to the body of knowledge and scholarship about the causes and factors leading up to the January 25, 2011 uprising in Egypt. The purpose is to further explain and add to our understanding the important causal variable of the independent workers with other facets of civil society and how they served as a tipping point for the January 25 uprising. In addition, a critical review of the “lost opportunities” because these workers were organized in their varying groups without a central coordinating organization and their contentious protest actions. The workers took many courageous steps yet there were also critical missteps. In order to understand lessons learned and best practices, one needs to examine, for example, the leadership characteristics of these disparate workers’ groups using Weber’s “routinization” of charisma. Gramsci wrote of a “crisis of authority” when in the short-run the ruling classes are able to reorganize quickly and regain the control that had slipped from their grasp. “At a certain point, social classes become detached from their traditional parties [...]. When such a crisis occurs, the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities

of unknown forces, represented by charismatic ‘men of destiny’.”¹⁷⁵ He wrote about when the ruling class loses the consent of the broad masses, it is a crisis of authority and hegemony. Over seventy-six years ago, Gramsci gave a most appropriate description of the Egyptian situation pre-January 2011. Post-February 2011 and leading to the first presidential elections in May 2012 (when this research endeavor ends), we witness a reassertion of the authority of the “deep state” through the strong-arm tactics of the military.

There were several other smaller groups of independent workers who took the lead from these two case studies and joined the growing social movement of labor protests. These workers came from the following blue- and white-collar professions: bakery, cement, steel, mechanical engineers, Suez Canal and port workers, professors, health technicians, and sugar processing plants workers. The width and breadth of types of workers shows how deeply entrenched the grievances were in terms of touching many, if not all, professions and workers in Egypt.

Social movements use repeated repertoires of activities, events, and brokers while framing their claims into a clear discourse with the goal of appealing to more and more people – to the masses. The independent Egyptian workers employed these mechanisms and also took advantage of political opportunity structures. They consciously examined the political power of the Mubarak regime and assessed its strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities available to them. They repeatedly tested the regime, bringing confrontation to the brink of violence; thankfully the state’s security apparatus and the regime retreated and sought negotiations. Then it was clear

¹⁷⁵ Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Smith (editors and translators). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers, New York, 2010, page 210

to see how the character of the workers' contentious political and economic actions interacted, or more correctly collided, with the regime. They succeeded to get their claims heard and in getting their claims partially resolved. They partially succeeded in politically influencing the process of reform in Egypt. It was an incomplete, limited, and qualified victory within constraints. The reasons are varied and many and will be examined in more detail in the chapters to follow.

Using the theoretical lenses of social movements and social movement unionism and with the comparative case studies methodology, I will examine the "mixed contribution" of Egyptian workers toward political reform leading up to the 2011 uprising. Undoubtedly, the millions of workers who participated in repeated forms of protests had an impact on several trends contributing to the downfall of the Mubarak regime. This was a movement that had been building and growing in earnest over the years since the early 2000s and before. There was a continuum of protest events, each breaking down bit by bit the wall of fear. The fear of retribution by an authoritarian regime waned thanks to the workers. Egyptian workers stepped out into the streets to demand dignity and universally respected rights when it was not "en vogue". At times, they were simply asking to get paid their wages and other such fundamental demands. I will examine the theories of democratization and the process of change and democratic transition as well as the role of trade unions. The role of workers' organizations in this transition has many precedents, with Poland coming first to mind and then in Latin America.

In 2013-14, three years later, Egyptian workers are still struggling for respect and dignity. They are still demanding respect for freedom of association, a fundamental

human and worker rights. Indeed, it was an incomplete, qualified, elusive victory for workers who are still the victims of undemocratic policies.

Chapter Three: An Overview of The Egyptian Labor Movement’s History (Pre- and Post-1952) and Shaping the Current Labor Movement

“In fact, history is written and rewritten by each successive generation of historians. What makes this writing and rewriting possible and, arguably, necessary, is not the discovery of once hidden documents or the refinement of the historian’s analytical frameworks. What makes this writing and rewriting necessary is the changing context in which the historian lives and works. At the end of the day, historians are interpreters of the past. Their role is to help people make sense of the past. And in order to accomplish this, they need to “translate” the past into a language people in the present can understand. They need to use today’s priorities and reference points as tools to liken the past to the present, and thus make the past relevant in the present.”¹⁷⁶
Paul Sedra

Introduction

First in this chapter, I will review the highlights of Egyptian workers’ history pre- and post-1952 leading up to the last decade of Mubarak’s rule. Second, there will be a presentation of “who is the Egyptian worker”; and third, there will be a brief overview of the garment and textile industry, particularly the role of cotton in Egyptian history, and the infamous Misr Spinning and Weaving Company factory. This factory is a key figure in Egyptian workers’ history, and it encompasses one of the major workers’ struggles in contemporary Egypt. The reason for the special focus on the garment and textile workers is that this particular group of workers is one of the subjects of this research enquiry (see case study in Chapter 5 for details), and they have exhibited early-on leadership within Egypt’s labor movement.

I will focus on workers’ history as the development or evolution of a social movement, including the successes, failures, and challenges they faced. One cannot

¹⁷⁶ Sedra, Paul. “Revolution and History” January 25th 2013, Jadaliyya website magazine. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9764/the-revolution-and-history>

research the recent past (2006-2012) without going back to the history of their establishment as institutions and their struggles over the decades before 2006.

Historical Highlights of the Egyptian Labor Movement

The Egyptian labor movement began in the late 1880s with formal organizations, mainly in the railroad and sugar production industries. By 1919, the labor movement had an important role in supporting the Wafd¹⁷⁷ political party and the uprising led by Ahmed Orabi, which led to Egypt becoming nominally (on paper) independent from the British in 1922. The workers marched under Wafd banners and protested publicly in the major cities against British colonial rule in addition to poor economic conditions. The Banque Misr group, as discussed in Vitalis' book, was one of the main groups to begin investing in Egypt's economy, despite the British's objections. Marxist and communist influences travelled across the seas to make some inroads into the labor movement. By the early 1950s, Egypt's blue-collar workforce had increased, and formal trade unions were established.

The Banque Misr group was “the centerpiece of both triumphalist (nationalist) and exceptionalist (neo-Marxist) accounts of Egyptian economic history ... and the industrial investment group was led by its outspoken nationalist chairman, Tal'at Harb.”¹⁷⁸ Harb and his associates symbolized the partnership of an aspiring Egyptian industrial bourgeoisie whose mission was to create a purely Egyptian-owned industrial sector,¹⁷⁹ quite to the dismay of the British, who wanted to keep Egypt primarily an agricultural country with resources to boost British industrial needs. This nationalist

¹⁷⁷ Wafd means Delegation in Arabic referring to the delegation sent to the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference.

¹⁷⁸ Vitalis, Robert. *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995:7.

¹⁷⁹ Beinín, Joel and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882-1954*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987. Print. 10-11

group of investors had an ever-lasting impact on local nationalist fervor, even in the 1960s and 1970s. This concept collided headlong in conflict with the privatization efforts that began in the mid-1970s and later on into Mubarak's era. However, the Misr group had to engage in partnerships with foreign capital, primarily British corporations, in order to survive in the late 1930s, at which point "Misr group ceased to be 'national in character'".¹⁸⁰ Vitalis helps give context to the writings regarding the radical opposition, currents, and discourses of the late 1940s and early 1950s, "including the writings of al-Barrawi and Maza 'Ulaysh (1945) and 'Atiya al-Shafi' (1957), among others."¹⁸¹ Until 1952, the business community held a privileged position within Egyptian government policies and society. "The power of capitalists as a class in the decades before the 1952 free officers' coup d'état resembles Gramsci's concept of hegemony, [it] is centrally concerned with the contemporary functioning of advanced capitalist democracies, systems where a stable, highly nondemocratic relationship of shared authority between corporate capitalists and government officials is not an issue around which political forces struggle."¹⁸² Egypt, by contrast, had difficulties reconciling business privileges after the 1952 coup; however, government always had the option to refuse such privileges if it was dissatisfied with the business performance.¹⁸³ That is precisely what then took place by the Nasser regime beginning in 1954, when the new government elites began to challenge the main institutions of the private, and market-based economy.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Vitalis, page 8

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Vitalis, page 11-12

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 12

Who is the Egyptian worker?

This is a critical question that must be explored to put this research project into context and perspective. We need to return to the past to review the development of the Egyptian worker starting from the nineteenth century to the present. So we need to return to 1805 and to Muhammed Ali, the ruler of Egypt under the Ottoman Empire and considered the father of modern Egypt. Industrialization began under his rule, moving Egypt from having a primarily feudal-crafts workforce to factory capitalism in one leap. “His foundries turned out arms, machine tools, and even steam engines. His factories produced several consumer goods including cloth, paper, glass, oil, and sugar. However, these industries were mainly developed for the military’s consumption. They were not protected from the onslaught by foreign products encouraged by the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention of 1838. So Egyptian industry fell into ruin and had to wait until around the 1920s for another industrial renaissance with the end of both the Ottoman Empire and British colonial rule.”¹⁸⁵ The limited focus of these industries for military’s consumption laid the groundwork for its demise. The state’s development of the consumers’ purchasing power did not come till the twentieth century in order to support a more sustainable Egyptian industry.

Who was an Egyptian worker during the nineteenth century? According to Goldberg’s *Tinker, Tailor and Textile Worker*, “four main characteristics defined a person as a worker socially and culturally, with a significant bifurcation within a single category”¹⁸⁶ : urban male Egyptians who spoke Egyptian Arabic dialect, worked with their hands, and got them dirty versus those who worked with machines and those who

¹⁸⁵ Issawi, Charles. *Egypt an economic and social analysis*, Oxford University Press, 1947, page 16.

¹⁸⁶ Goldberg, Ellis. *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930-1952*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print. Page 19

did not work with machines. In the 1930s and 1940s, workers who spoke Egyptian Arabic dialect confirmed their national outlook and were not international in their outlook. In the early part of the century, many of the skilled workers in Egypt were foreigners, Europeans as well as Turks and Arabs from the Levant who spoke Arabic but in a different dialect that was easy to recognize as not Egyptian. Europeans, in particular, had more experience and authority since they tended to hold management positions or have skilled positions at the workplace.¹⁸⁷ Workers used popular culture in the form of songs and poetry, called *zajal*, which is informal or the classical poetry called “*qasidah*” to express the challenges they faced at the workplace and solidarity. Fathallah Mahrous, a retired garment and textile worker in Alexandria, recounted during our 12-hour meeting (June 22 and 23, 2013) several of these poems and songs that workers used to recite or sing. “Hardly a major union function or an issue of a union newspaper failed to include at least one poem from a worker in this form.”¹⁸⁸ This tradition continues in the present day and shows expressions of workers’ nationalist tendency and fervor. Poetry in the folk form of “*zajal*” told of workers’ daily lives and hardships, so it was translated into nationalist fervor against the colonial rulers and owners. “The textile workers union had a poet laureate in Fathi al Magrabi, who published an entire volume of *zajal* under the title *I am a Worker*.”¹⁸⁹ This type of poetry is quite informative for learning about workers’ political and social beliefs and convictions. In addition, it reflects the difference among workers’ in terms of class, status, and their economic conditions, distinguishing between those who work with their hands and those who do

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 21

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 22

¹⁸⁹ Goldberg 1986:22

not.¹⁹⁰ Such zajal poetry by Al-Magrabi, Bayram Al-Tunis, and Sayyid Darwish reflected the workers' political beliefs. You will note that being a Muslim was not a readily used characteristic by workers since many workers, like many Egyptians, were Copts. To be Arabic speaking and Egyptian was paramount in the pre-1952 era, particularly in the 1930s when unions began to be formed.

According to Lockman, in 1911, Jean Vallet published *Contribution a l'etude de la condition des ouvriers de la grande industrie au Caire*,¹⁹¹ where he insists that workers in big industry need to be differentiated from artisans and craft workers in small workshops. On this, Lockman writes, "Vallet's contribution is a detailed and invaluable study of wage workers in large enterprises. He insists that the state must take this 'new class' seriously by promptly enacting labor and social legislation that will ameliorate the terrible conditions these workers endure. For the moment this class is still relatively quiescent and timid; but the strikes and unions that Egypt has witnessed in the previous decade suggest to Vallet that, 'if the critical period drags on, who knows of what destructive energy such a mass of workers is capable?'" Lockman sums this up by explaining collective action, combined with a sort of holy war struggle, gives social struggle that may take place in Egypt an extra violent character.¹⁹² Collective action with a mission of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (WUNC)¹⁹³ is distinctively a social movement per Tilly's definition.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Vallet, Jean. *Contribution a L'etude De La Condition Des Ouvriers De La Grande Industrie Au Caire*. Valence: Impr. Valentinoise, 1911. Print.

¹⁹² Lockman, Zachary. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York, 1994:99

¹⁹³ Tilly, Charles. *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder, Colorado, USA: Paradigm Publishers, 2004, p. 54.

The transition to the urban wagedworkers in the early twentieth century, as discussed in Nahas'¹⁹⁴ book, comes about as less lucrative work is found in the fields and more industrial factory jobs become available. Yet for Nahas, Egypt essentially was still an agricultural land, and was likely to remain so. Hence, it confirmed for Nahas the importance of studying the economic and social situation of the “fallahs” (peasants) and of seeking ways to ameliorate their condition. For Nahas, however, the term “fallah” applies not only to the agricultural population (the peasants in the villages), “but also to the artisans and the lowly [bas people] in the cities and [...] equally to Muslims and Copts.”¹⁹⁵ However, “Nahas cites the Egyptian worker’s ‘marvelous’ capacity for emulation, his endurance, and his strength; this would soon make him a serious competitor for the European worker.”¹⁹⁶ There continues to be a disagreement on who the Egyptian worker is since the “fallah” characteristics also apply to the urban wage-worker since many, if not all, were and still are “fallaheen” peasants in their mindset, outlook on life, and psyche.

The nature and character of the Egyptian worker evolved as the country’s economy developed. It developed from being primarily an agricultural producer to a more industrialized economy starting in the nineteenth century, and not just for local consumption. Egypt was primarily an agricultural nation for such a long period of time that its main workforce was composed of peasants living off the land in rural areas growing agricultural crops primarily for their own use. A conversion took place among peasants and factory workers due to economic development policies. “Mohammad Ali (1805-1849) attempted to effect a transition from the subsistence economy prevailing at

¹⁹⁴ Nahas, Joseph F. *Situation économique Et Sociale Du Fellaah égyptien*. Paris: A. Rousseau, 1901. Print.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 95

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

the beginning of the 19th century to a 'modern' complex economy. In this he failed, but instead started Egypt on the road leading to an export-oriented economy."¹⁹⁷ He implemented several policy changes, including taxes, land ownership, communication networks, irrigation, and trade under a monopolistic system, and planting of the long-staple cotton. Cotton planting started on a commercial scale in 1821, and it found ready markets in Europe. By 1824, over 200,000 kantars of cotton¹⁹⁸ were being exported, and in 1845 the figure of 345,000 was reached.¹⁹⁹ Cotton became synonymous with Egypt, particularly the highly prized long-thread cotton.

A Personal Accounting of Restrictions on Trade Unions and Eventual Government Control: Interview with Fathallah Mahrous in Alexandria, Egypt

The history of the Egyptian workers' movement is intertwined with the history of the Egyptian Communist Party and the role of the leftist intellectuals. Included in this history are the restrictions on trade union freedoms and the eventual role of the state in controlling workers. The history is full of heroes and martyrs, including Khamis and el Baqari (executed in August 1952 after the infamous Kafr al Dawwar events²⁰⁰), who sacrificed their lives for the right of workers to organize independent unions. Leftist leaders continued to influence the broader labor movement, yet it was always a constant battle, especially in the post-colonial and Nasserist periods. The belief in the tool of strikes has been part of the workers' consciousness early on. Marx's explanation is that

¹⁹⁷ Issawi, Charles. "Egypt Since 1800: A Study in Lop-sided Development" *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1961), pp. 1-25; p. 5

¹⁹⁸ A kantar is the official Egyptian weight unit for measuring cotton. It corresponds to the US hundredweight, and is roughly equal to 99.05 pounds, or 45.02 kilograms. It is equal to either 157 kilograms of seed cotton or 50 kilograms of lint cotton. Schanz, Moritz. *Cotton in Egypt and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*. Manchester: Taylor, Garnett, Evans &, 1912. Print.

¹⁹⁹ Issawi 1961:5

²⁰⁰ Beinun and Lockman document the details of the post-coup regime's response to a violent strike and demonstration at Kafr al-Dawwar, a textile center 15 miles south of Alexandria in their book, *Workers on the Nile*, 1989, pages 421-426.

there is no way to stop or limit this power; it is the sociology of how workers function. If wages decline or jobs are lost, it is a matter of life or death, so there is no other choice but to strike and demand improvements from the employer.

1918 through the 1940s was the zenith of the Communist Party in Egypt. There were three distinct societal classes according to Lockman, Beinun and Mahrous (during an interview): capitalists, workers and peasants. The class struggle developed during that time, and workers began to form trade unions to defend their rights. Foreign workers and Egyptians struggled for these unions, and in many cases foreigners and Christians became the union leaders. Unions became places where tolerance was practiced and there was representation for all no, matter what ethnicity, origin, or religion people had. Starting in 1946, the labor movement joined with political and student forces in the struggle against the government, the King, and the British influence on him. They demanded the Wafd party end the 1936 agreement with the British. Major strikes took place in 1948 with the police interfering to end them; strife continued until 1952's Free Officers' coup d'état.

Fathallah Mahrous was born in the province of Qena in 1936 (78 years old) and started working as a garment and textile worker in Alexandria when he was 16 years old to support his mother and siblings after his father's death. He was imprisoned five times for his political and trade union activism. King Farouk, President Nasser, President Sadat, and President Mubarak all imprisoned him. Fathallah was an active member of the Egyptian Community Party. The following are his insights about the Egyptian labor movement, highlights of its pre-1952 history, and relationship with politics.



Figure 2: Fathallah Mahrous surrounded by his books at his home in the working class neighborhood of Baqoos in Alexandria.

Mahrous was openly critical of the left opposition currently and its historic weak role, actually referring to the left as “retarded” or behind the times. To clarify, he is a dedicated leftist, yet he is disappointed in the how the leadership failed to assert itself and have a stronger influence over the Egyptian labor movement. The history of the communists in Egypt is associated with the rise of industry and capitalism during the 1930s, but they ultimately failed to maintain their influence in the working class. The left, namely the communists, basically fought with Nasserist/socialist philosophy and were ultimately jailed and killed by Nasser’s security forces. Nasser and his policies managed to control labor fully, and therein lay the modern-day struggle and burden that labor still carries. Starting in 1953 Nasser and the military arrested workers for their collective actions, which effectively ended the activist, independent workers’ spirit. Mahrous referred to labor’s burden to Sisyphus pushing up the mountain the massive rock and then as he reaches the top, it rolls back, again, and again. He quoted from

Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* pointing out the feeling of futility in the search for meaning and unity of the working class.

Labor's association with political parties, according to Mahrous, was always problematic and rocky. Political party leaders wanted to control labor without giving them the respect and access to the decision-making process. However, workers starting in the 1900s recognized that alliances with political parties were necessary to reach policy-makers in government. So there were off and on alliances with various parties, most notably with the El-Watani and socialist political parties. It was clear from his recounting of significant events from World War I to 1952 that workers have been fighting for social justice. There were moments of harmony though, with the political forces/parties when there was a national struggle against British colonial power. In 1939, the campaign for legal recognition of trade unions and independence from political parties began. It was not till 1942 that the Law #85 was promulgated governing trade unions and their legal existence. This law is actually the basis for Law #36, which was in effect until 2003 and controlled every aspect of the trade unions.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a large part of labor still worked in small craft workshops, and they could not react and organize in the same way as workers in big factories. The urban Egyptians engaged in production, commerce, and service activities were organized into small guilds.²⁰¹ They were spread out geographically, thus getting information and organizing workers into collective action was more arduous. In addition, the skilled, upper-stratum, natural leaders were foreigners and so it was not always easy to cooperate with Egyptian workers. Different language, customs, and traditions got in the way. These foreign workers were mainly

²⁰¹ Beinin 1987:32

Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and Levantine Arabs. Another difficulty was illiteracy; in 1911, it was estimated that more than 90% of the workforce was illiterate. Foreign workers came to Egypt as technicians for the new factory machinery and also to be supervisors. They usually had higher wages than the Egyptian workers. However, these foreign workers brought ideas of socialism and workers' right to improve their wages through collective action. As a result, many of the initial leaders of Egypt's independent unions were foreigners. A Greek led the first trade union organized in December 1899 at the Eastern Cigarette Company, and he led a major strike for three months starting in December 1899. Greek workers taught Egyptians the details of what a strike was and how to use this tool to get their rights.²⁰²

After 1890, trade unions began to form with friendly societies and associations in the cigarette, transport, and metallurgy industries. WWI (1914-1918) stimulated labor activity, and by 1919 labor was very active in the nationalist Orabi movement against British colonial power. Then labor went into a "quiet mode" until the 1930s when labor, for about six to seven years, was politically active. The number of trade unions increased and established closer relations with each other²⁰³ and more solidarity developed. A Federation of Trade Unions was established but was not legally recognized until 1942 with the help of the Wafd political party and Prince Halim Abbas. This political involvement with labor was not a positive experience. After 1937, the union reorganized — this time without politicians' assistance.

²⁰² Interview with Fathallah Mahrous, 22-23 June 2013, Alexandria, Egypt. Another excellent source of information is Raouf Abbas' *Al-Harakat-ul-Ummalieya fi Masr 1899-1952* [Labor Movement in Egypt 1899-1952] Darul-Katib, Cairo, Egypt, 1968.

²⁰³ Issawi 1961:96

The year 1938 witnessed violent strikes due to an increase in wheat prices, and El-Mahalla Misr Spinning and Weaving Company's 1,100 workers went on strike occupying the factory. Trade unions were not initially legally recognized but the government tolerated them. However, the lack of funds available to these unions limited their activities to primarily passing resolutions. In 1942, more strikes took place again due to an increase in the cost of living. The government reacted to worker activism and protests with imprisonment of the workers' leaders, but they did ultimately give them raises in wages.

In 1942, trade unions were legalized, excluding state employees and agricultural workers. Yet, unions were forbidden by law to engage in political or religious activities.²⁰⁴ Issawi's prescriptive conclusions written in 1947 were truly prophetic and are still relevant in 2013: "(C)learly the struggle of the workers to obtain recognition of their rights is far from ended. And unless the government shows much more wisdom than in the past in its dealings with the working class there is a great danger of this struggle taking a violent form."²⁰⁵

1952 - Nasser and the Transition to a Public Sector Economy and the Establishment of the ETUF, Official Trade Union Federation

Egyptian workers have a history for contentious collective action. They were not averse to protesting for their rights and to protect their jobs. There was already a developed working class movement in Egypt by the early 1900s. The first strike by cigarette rollers at the Eastern Cigarette Company in Alexandria started in December 1899 and lasted for three months into 1900. "It was probably the first in any Muslim country. And the first actual trade union to be formed was in the tobacco industry in

²⁰⁴ Issawi 1961:97

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

1903. In 1908 these workers went on strike again to protest the introduction of new equipment.

“By 1914, there was an alliance between the Watani (Nationalist) political party and working-class organizations. It was not uncommon to find avant-garde intellectuals cooperating with the workers.’ By WWI, there were 11 unions in Egypt with a total membership of 7,000. This encouraged the growth of working class militancy and thus played an important role in 1919 revolution. Trade unions [existed] in 1920s and 1930s [and] by 1930 there were 38 unions in Egypt with a membership of 15,000 workers, [and] three unions having over a 1,000 members each.”²⁰⁶

By the time of the 1952 coup d’état that peacefully overthrew King Farouq and the beginning of the post-colonial period, there was already an active, independent, organized labor movement.

July 1952 marks the beginning of the Revolutionary Free Officers’ Movement’s rule led by Naguib, Nasser, and Sadat among several other officers. Nasser formally became president in 1954 and took over from Naguib, Egypt’s first president for two years. In addition to the comprehensive land reform legislation that he enacted, in July 1956, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal in a stirring, fiery speech in Alexandria on the fourth anniversary of the coup d’état. He announced to the world in no uncertain terms that Egypt will not be dominated by any foreign power, and it can manage its affairs, including the management of the Suez Canal. This sent a signal that Egypt was embarking on a post-colonial, self-sustaining journey of national development.

²⁰⁶Bianchi, Robert. *Unruly Corporatism: associational life in 20th century Egypt* by, Oxford University Press, 1989:491

The Official Trade Union Federation, ETUF

President Nasser established the official trade union movement in 1957 under the banner of the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (ETUF) with its twenty-eight affiliated unions. It was not an overwhelming grassroots initiative growing from the rank and file members. It was Nasser's idea, and it was implemented – plain and simple. “The ETUF was founded on January 30, 1957, by a meeting of 101 union leaders who affirmed Anwar Salama, the regime's choice, as president. Salama's federation had little independence of the government from the beginning, and it had to engage in bureaucratic battles with the government as well as with employers, administrators, and insurgent workers. The federation had nearly 1,300 local unions in 28 industrial sub-federations with over 310,000 members in 1957”.²⁰⁷ ETUF continued as a transmission belt of the ruling regime from its foundation until the present day. Its role was to implement government policy regarding workers and their wages and benefits. The ETUF was not an independent advocacy trade union organization committed to defending worker rights.

The unions within ETUF represented the blue-collar factory workers and civil servants of every aspect of the economy – the largest being in the garment and textile industry, which was based in El-Mahalla al Kubra in the delta region. ETUF “was essentially an arm of the government that required all trade unions to be members to be legal organizations. The president of the federation [who] ... served concurrently as the Minister of Manpower until 1986.”²⁰⁸ Governmental control over the terms and conditions of employment and labor organizations crippled efforts to establish an

²⁰⁷ Goldberg, Ellis. “Reading from Left to Right: The Social History of Egyptian Labor,” in Ellis Goldberg (editor), *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996. Print. page 180

²⁰⁸ After 1986, there was a separate head of the ETUF and another person was the Minister of Manpower (Labor)

independent labor movement.”²⁰⁹ In essence the workers made a pact with the devil, surrendering their fundamental rights. “The labor movement (...) exchange(d) worker restraint for essential material and organizational benefits from the state. Both sorts of benefits spelled aristocracy and dependence for organized labor, and this politically-mediated privilege wedded the trade union movement to the authoritarian status quo, making it unreceptive to democratic reform.”²¹⁰ It was an autocratic trade union federation with a thin veneer of “pretend” democratic practices. ETUF’s practices continued with an increase in its subordination to the state while its “mandatory” membership grew. “In 1964 [its membership grew] to almost 1.1 million – [while] workers and leaders became more passive.... Posusney argued that this passivity occurred as a function of the regime’s attack on political opposition (including the left), the entry of more peasants into the workforce, and company unionism.”²¹¹

The ETUF and its leaders operated within the “social contract” norms and led a comfortable, privileged life style. Its mission was to respond to the state, carry out state controlled economic plans, and to pretend to negotiate with the relevant ministries over wages and benefits. But, everything was already approved and set by the Ministry of Planning and Economy’s five-year plans. The parliament, called the People’s Assembly, was the mirage by which labor and the peasants “legislated” the laws for Egypt. Two Egyptian social scientists, Mustafa Kamel el Sayyid and Amani Qandil, both argued convincingly that while Egypt’s union movement had been subservient to the state on

²⁰⁹ Totonchi, E. P. (2011), *LABORING A DEMOCRATIC SPRING: THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF FREE TRADE UNIONS IN EGYPT*. WorkingUSA, 14: 259–283.

²¹⁰ Bellin, Eva, “Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries, *World Politics*,” Vol. 52, no. 2 (January 2000), pp. 175–205.

²¹¹ Goldberg, Ellis Jay, “Reading from Left to Right: The Social History of Egyptian Labor,” in Ellis Goldberg (editor), *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East*, Westview Press, 1996, page 180

political issues, it has been oppositional regarding economic policies.²¹² Bianchi, drawing on their work, found that labor was quite successful in resisting public-sector reform in Egypt through the mid-1980s.²¹³ At the national level, the corporatist union leaders could influence and have the greatest potential to influence government policy, since centralization granted the greatest freedom of maneuvering to unionists at the top of the organizational hierarchy.²¹⁴ ETUF's leaders worked to keep the status quo, particularly the large, public-sector factories and workplaces from which they gained their political and economic power. These leaders were also quite connected to the ruling party's apparatus and maintained their political power by ensuring "social harmony". The deal maintained that workers would not strike, protest, or conduct sit-ins in exchange for perks from the party and the government.

The social contract between the state and its citizens was born in the post-colonial era in most of the Arab countries. A "social contract" in Egypt was understood as composed of national laws, outlook, and discourse. The social contract was a commitment by the state to provide its citizens with permanent jobs, affordable consumer goods, free education and health care, and defense. In return, citizens, especially workers, made a "pact with the devil", where basic liberties were legislated away, as seen in the labor movement.²¹⁵ The notion of a social contract was a response to the substantial inequalities within society that these newly independent nations found themselves facing. The landed aristocracy was in decline and brought down from

²¹² Posusney, Marsha P. *Labor and the State in Egypt – Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring*, Columbia University Press, 1997:12

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Soliman page 157

its privileged position through land reform. There was strong nationalist fervor in response to the fight against colonialism throughout the Arab world.

Until 1986, ETUF's president was the Minister of Manpower and Emigration, and so nothing more needs to be said to show the subservient role that ETUF played to the state; independence to advocate for workers' and their rights was just not in the vocabulary, let alone the function of leaders. ETUF's leaders were also high-ranking leaders within the ruling party, the National Democratic Party's (NDP) various committees and in the People's Assembly. However, Egypt has been a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) since its founding in 1946. Egypt had ratified its major core conventions of 1987 and '98 covering the rights to freely of associate, organize independent trade unions, and bargain collectively with the employers. Throughout the subsequent years, the Egyptian "tripartite" delegation was not in any way tripartite since all three representatives (government, business, and labor) all came from the state institutions. In 1998, the ILO overwhelmingly adopted the Declaration of Principles, which covers all of its members, whether they had ratified the core conventions or not. The core conventions include the right to freely organize trade unions without state interference, the right to bargain collectively, ban on child labor, ban no discrimination, and the right to health and safety at the workplace. Egypt's tripartite delegation voted against this historic declaration.

With the establishment of ETUF came the mandatory membership of workers into one of the 23 national trade unions, which were blue-collar workers' trade unions only. Bianchi wrote that associational life in Egypt was controlled "top down" by the state, including the trade unions with mandatory membership and dues. The 1959 labor code, the 1964 trade union law, and the obligation of trade unionists to belong to the

ruling party completed the building of corporatist regulations of labor relations (Bianchi 1989). “In Nasserist Egypt, as in several Latin American countries, a revolutionary elite use corporatism to strengthen working class organizations as junior partners in a multiclass ruling coalition that benefited briefly from ambitious efforts to combine redistributive reforms with import substitution. Moreover, post-Nasserist governments have sought to refashion inherited corporatist structures into more effective instruments for controlling a powerful working class movement that now is perceived as a major obstacle to a more advanced stage of industrialization, requiring greater reliance on imported capital and technology”.²¹⁶ The Nasserist view of controlling workers and trade unions was considered part of a national development project to move toward self-sufficiency and out of the colonial period. So to oppose this or call for independent, democratic trade unions would have been considered anti-nation building and ant-development. During the post-Nasserist era, government’s policies adopted economic re-structuring through neo-liberal economic policies imposed by the IFIs. This put ETUF in a most awkward position since it was a “cheerleader” for the Nasserist view and could not stop supporting the government without losing its privileges.

The ETUF and its member trade unions became part of a “privileged” class that Bellin would even call “aristocratic”, reluctant, or contingent democrats.²¹⁷ They had no interest in defending workers’ rights because it meant biting the hand that feeds them, the state. ETUF is an example of an organization that was created by the state and not by the workers themselves, thus in this case it is not a democratic entity that truly

²¹⁶ Bianchi, Robert. *Unruly Corporatism: associational life in 20th century Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 1989, page 28.

²¹⁷ Bellin, Eva. “Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor and Democratization in Late Developing Countries,” *World Politics*, vol. 52, January 2000

represents workers' needs and aspirations. It represents the will of the state and its ruling party, the NDP. Posusney argues "that since 1960s, Egyptian workers have viewed themselves in a patron-client relationship with the state. The latter is expected to guarantee workers a living wage through regulation of their paychecks as well as by controlling prices on basic necessities; the government should also ensure equal treatment of workers performing similar jobs. Workers, for their part, provide the state with political support and contribute to the postcolonial national development project through their labor."²¹⁸ The ETUF's role was to keep every worker and keep production going without disruptions. The state apparatus gave lavish benefits, money, housing, cars, and political access to the ETUF's top leaders, which trickled down to some members or leaders at the local level. No one in leadership would agitate for trade union independence or freedom of association. The rank and file and local leaders (on the level of factories: local and regional areas) were more interested in democratic trade unionism and in advocating for basic rights. At the local level, union elections were generally free and fair. The local leaders are closer to the rank and file members, and it is much more difficult to ignore their needs. "Until 1967, worker protests disappeared, partly because most communist trade unionists were jailed until 1965. State security, factory security, the trade union and the Socialist Union strongly controlled the workers and channeled their claims. The workers accepted this partly because the system provided an increase in their welfare and social position. Real wages increased by 60% between 1952 and 1966 (Posusney 1997)".²¹⁹ Starting in the 1980s and continuing into

²¹⁸ Lockman, Zachary (editor), *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East, Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*. State University of New York Press, 1994, page 215.

²¹⁹ Clement, Françoise, "Workers Protest under Economic Liberalization in Egypt", *Political and Social Protest in Egypt*, edited by Nicholas S. Hopkins (2009) 103

the 1990s the situation changed due the implementation of Law #203 (1991), which called for privatization of public sector enterprises that ETUF leadership (per instruction of the NDP ruling party) endorsed. This step severely strained the state corporatist mechanisms of control in Egypt, as workers resisted the privatization policies that their national leadership adopted.²²⁰

In the early twenty-first century, ETUF, with help from the state security apparatus, stepped up their activities to control internal elections of union committees held in 2006. The ETUF held elections for its local/regional leaders every five years, and the 2006 union elections were determined to be the worst in ETUF's history. The Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) in Egypt conducted an in-depth election-monitoring program and published a comprehensive report. The report documented the widespread irregularities that characterized the elections and the role played by the ETUF and the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration to "manage" the election results. As a result, in 2007, the government forcefully closed the CTUWS offices in Helwan and around the country and accused the director of the center of several charges that he had to defend in court.

The attacks against the CTUWS offices were linked to the center's active role in informing workers of their rights, including during the trade union elections in October 2006, and in reporting on the widespread irregularities that characterized those elections. For example, the election date was declared less than fifty days before the designated date, which is in violation of the trade union law; the government imposed restrictions for being a candidate not stipulated by the law; there were violations of the

²²⁰ King, Stephen J. *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009:97.

candidates' right to communicate with voters and distribute their programs freely; and there was unequal treatment of candidates and violating trade union freedoms.²²¹ It is important at this point to describe O'Donnell's "populist" vs. "bureaucratic" authoritarianism. O'Donnell's "elaboration of these [two] concepts were criticized by Alfred Stepan and David Collier ... The crux of O'Donnell's argument is that populist authoritarianism and bureaucratic authoritarianism are distinct responses to different kind of crises that emerge at different stages of delayed, dependent development. Populist relies on 'inclusionary'", co-optive form of corporatism, while bureaucratic relies upon 'exclusionary' repressive form of corporatism."²²² Populist authoritarianism mobilizes and strengthens the working-class organizations in order to break the power of the traditional landed oligarchy. Bureaucratic authoritarianism deactivates and "conquers" working-class organizations to insure the political "predictability" that is necessary to consolidate alliances with foreign capital.²²³ O'Donnell sees a clear causal relationship between the two — populist sows the seeds of bureaucratic by unleashing political forces that encourage industrialization at an early phase of development but that then become an obstacle to industrialization at a more advanced stage.²²⁴ This is a perfect description of the Egyptian case.

The first trade union law was passed in 1942 as Law #85, which became the basis of the Nasserist labor policies of corporatism and paternalism. Most of the members of the Revolutionary Command Council of Free Officers (RCC) and then Nasser afterwards exhibited strong hostility towards independent action by the working class, even when

²²¹ These are all documented in a full report: <http://www.ctuws.com/uploads/Books/THE-TRADE-UNION-ELECTIONS/English/FACTSs.pdf>

²²² Bianchi, Robert, *Unruly Corporatism: associational life in 20th century Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 1989:26

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

in support of the army.²²⁵ There were RCC members such as Khaled Muhyi Al-Din, who were sympathetic to workers and argued for free trade unions and the right to strike yet the majority of the RCC members dismissed them.²²⁶ The official slogan of the new regime was “Unity, Order, and Labor”, which also signaled labor’s role and such a vision did not include initiatives outside the regime’s control.²²⁷ “The successful implementation of this corporatism and paternalism required not only that the RCC eliminate the communists from positions of influence in the working class, but also that it establish a significant base of active support for the regime within the trade union movement.”²²⁸ All labor legislation was revamped, and three new laws were introduced in December 1952 without consultation of the labor movement leaders. These three laws gave workers many benefits within the public sector, including higher wages, pensions, health care, free transportation to factories in remote areas, and much more. However, the workers paid a steep price for these improvements in benefits and wages; the military issued an order banning all strikes.²²⁹ On January 17, 1953, all political parties were banned, and numerous political activists, including many communists, were arrested.²³⁰ “By January 1953 many of the forces favoring a trade union movement independent of the regime had been stripped of their positions in the unions, and by the end of the year virtually all of the most important communist leaders were in jail.”²³¹

The crisis of March 1954 set the stage for the years to follow. The political standoff between members of the RCC and General Naguib, Egypt’s first president,

²²⁵ Beinín, Joel, and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882-1954*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987:431

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 431

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.* 432

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.* 433

²³¹ *Ibid.* 435

brought Nasser to power and took down parliamentary democracy and trade union independence. “It is certainly true that the Free Officers broke the economic and political hegemony of the large landowners, the dominant class in Egypt since the era of Muhammad Ali, through the land reform, the dissolution of the political parties of the old regime ...”²³² The labor leaders supported Nasser and made a bargain to support a military dictatorship that was absolutely opposed to a free trade union movement, the right to strike, and any independent labor action or initiative. In return, the regime confirmed the trade union leaders in their positions and agreed to preserve and extend the economic gains that had been achieved so far, particularly the guarantee of job security.²³³ This supported the strong nationalist sentiments within the labor movement and that Nasser’s leadership that could deliver these economic gains. The RCC was able to completely remove the British troops (an important nationalist demand) and was able to establish a socialist economic agenda to revamp Egypt’s economy and industrialize.²³⁴

The consequences of those early years post-1952 determined the fate of the labor movement for the next fifty-six years until the first independent trade union was formed in 2008. However, the culture of alliance with the state, or entitlement, was still ingrained within those advocating for independent unions. This was apparent in the type of demands they called for, such as that the state continue to provide certain benefits such as housing, access to government-owned holiday resorts, etc. They were willing to accept a “trade union movement dominated by the government and shorn of the right to strike and a political system which stripped workers of their right to

²³² Beinin and Lockman 1987:443

²³³ Ibid. 1987: 444

²³⁴ Ibid. 444

organize independently of government control. This was, in essence, a development of the patron-client model of trade union organization with the state in as the guise of patron. A few years later this would lead to the institutionalization of the corporate conception of society when the trade unions were absorbed into the apparatus of the state.”²³⁵ They gave up independence for perceived economic gains and political power under a system that created a bloated, large public sector, which in many cases was not well funded and inefficient. As a result, there was a decline in worker class-consciousness, revolutionary political parties, and the destruction of trade union freedoms. These are essential in the maintenance of a social movement that can monitor government and advocate for change. Egypt became an authoritarian-ruled nation with a veneer of “democratic” practices. The regime was clever in co-opting all essential social actors, including the labor movement.

In Nasser’s era, free market capitalism was effectively ended, and a mixed system was adopted beginning in the late 1950s. Nasser brought the large factories under state control and established a system of profit sharing and workers’ representation in management. This new economic system is state socialism, or state capitalism, because “private enterprise continued to exist in Egypt, the market remained the main means of distribution of goods, and ... state ownership signified little in the way of actual workers’ control over the means of production.”²³⁶ Workers then had a strong interest in collective action against the state, and this increased after the July 1961 socialist decrees reflecting increasing hostility toward the state. “The evidence for a moral economy in

²³⁵ Ibid. 447

²³⁶ Posusney, Marsha Pripstein. “Collective Action and Worker’s Consciousness in Contemporary Egypt”, chapter 8 in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:239

Egypt would be collective action by workers that follow a ‘stability-disruption-protest’ pattern, with demands that are restorative or exhibit notions of fairness and patron-client relationships.”²³⁷ Since the 1960s, Posusney argues that workers have viewed themselves in a patron-client relationship with the state. The state is supposed to guarantee workers a decent living wage by regulating their wages and controlling prices of consumer goods. Workers would in return provide the state with political support and contribute to the post-colonial national development project through their labor.²³⁸

To counter the rational choice theory, “Egyptian workers’ ability to act collectively at all under severe repression by government should give rational choice proponents pause. Evidence shows that collective actions had an emotional rather than a dispassionate trigger: anger provided the impetus. And this anger was caused by the violation of workers’ sense of justice, by the denial of something to which they felt entitled.”²³⁹ The anger was focused on socio-economic apprehensions and concerns. It was understood by workers that the social contract would take care of all their needs in return for their full support of the government’s policies in the parliament and public life.

1970s - Infitah (Open Door Policy) under Sadat and Economic Liberalization

Nasser died in 1970 and was succeeded by his vice president, Mohamed Anwar el Sadat, as Egypt’s third president. Sadat embarked on a different approach to the economy, especially after the October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur war with Israel and the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979. In the meantime, blue-collar workers pretended to

²³⁷ Ibid. 214

²³⁸ Ibid. 215

²³⁹ Ibid. 1994:213

be paid for pretending to work, and the white-collar workers (journalists, doctors, judges, engineers, and lawyers) organized in professional syndicates (associations) that operated with a little more autonomy and a sense of serving their membership. These were organizations that promoted the profession. Through them, for example, a journalist would get press credentials. They were primarily professional sanctioning organizations, and secondarily they were protecting the profession's position in society. These professional syndicates are where the Muslim Brotherhood first got their political training. It is also where they were able to infiltrate the membership and achieve some limited power and even credibility. "The Brotherhood's growing influence in the professional syndicates can be largely credited to the age cohort of the Brotherhood activists known as the 'middle generation.' [...] Within less than a decade the Brotherhood had gained controlling majorities on the boards of several of the largest and most influential associations in the country and converted them into ... the most active and dynamic sector of Egyptian civil society."²⁴⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood (founded in 1928 and banned during Nasser's tenure) was never able to function or gain acceptance within the blue-collar workers unions. "Historically, the Muslim Brotherhood has focused on Egypt's professional syndicates, interest in their working-class cousins sharply rose after the revolution."²⁴¹ Throughout Egypt's blue-collar workers' movement history, workers were by enlarge influenced by leftist socialist working class ideology which left little room for Brotherhood rhetoric and influence.

²⁴⁰ Wickham, Carrie R. *The Muslim Brotherhood – Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, Princeton University Press, 2013:59

²⁴¹ Hartshorn, Ian, "Labor Unions under attack in Morsi's Egypt," *Muftah* e-zine, November 30, 2012 <http://muftah.org/labor-unions-under-attack-in-morsis-egypt/- .VJOKW7jo8>

The change in the economic system crept in slowly at first with the bold policy announcement by Sadat in 1974 calling for the Infitah (the economic opening) of the economy to global markets. After the moral “victory” of the October 6 war, which significantly buoyed Egyptians, and then the Camp David accords in 1979, Sadat became more emboldened to take Egypt out of its economic, political, and social isolation and onto the world’s stage – prepared or not. The first shock to the system was when the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) insisted that Egypt must remove or drastically reduce state subsidies on consumer goods; first on the list was bread. Bread is significant in the Egyptian lexicon and in the daily life of every Egyptian. The Egyptian Arabic dialect word for “bread” is “life”. On January 18 and 19, 1977, in Cairo, which is considered as essentially all of Egypt, witnessed massive protests that shook the country, the state, and Sadat. These changes were rescinded immediately and from there on started the slow, steady decline of the so-called social contract between the state and its people. The workers participated fully in those “bread-life” protests.

The labor movement official institution, the ETUF, became an enforcement tool of the state under the so-called social contract. However, the events of January 1977 Beinín argues were a culmination of several workers’ collective action events from 1971-1976.²⁴² “The strong undercurrent of popular indignation over the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the conspicuous consumption of imported luxury goods, and similar phenomena of the [Sadat] open door era flowed into the demonstrations initiated by these workers to produce the explosive outburst of January 1977.”²⁴³ January 1977 marked a transition point in Egypt’s labor movement’s advocacy for their

²⁴² Beinín, Joel in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:251

²⁴³ *Ibid.* 259

rights and possibly the beginning of a slow-simmering revolt against the state institutions, namely the ETUF.

Mubarak's Era: 1980s, 1990s and 2000s

Sadat was assassinated in 1981, and Mohamed Hosni Mubarak became Egypt's fourth president since 1952. He ruled from October 7, 1981, until February 11, 2011, thirty years. In the 1980s and 1990s, Mubarak and his regime slowly worked on restructuring Egypt's economy, moving away from a "centrally planned" economy to a more market-based economy. The labor movement still under the state's ETUF control and functioned under the myth of the social contract and in continued support of the NDP. There were several strikes in the late 1980s; the most significant was in the Helwan (industrial area south of Cairo) iron and steel factories where several union leaders were fired and/or imprisoned. One of them was a welder named Kamal Abbas, who later in 1990 became the founder and director of the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS). Abbas and his followers worked closely with a respected labor advocate lawyer named Yusuf Darwich, who died in 2006. It was under Darwich's tutelage, as well as others from the small Egyptian Communist Party and leftist intellectuals, that the independent labor movement began its long journey. "From 1984 on, as workers returned from high-paying jobs in the oil-producing countries, unemployment increased, prices rose relentlessly, and concerns about the security of employment spread due to fears that the government was preparing to sell off public-sector enterprises ... Workers resorted to strikes, protests, and other forms of contentious collective action. There were at least 50 strikes during 1985 and the first

third of 1986.”²⁴⁴ The following were the most notable strikes in the late 1980s: “the strike at Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in El-Mahalla al-Kubra in February 1986, and the exceptionally militant strike of railroad engineers and stokers in July 1986. The strike and protests at the Egyptian Iron and Steel Company in Helwan in July-August 1989 were also part of this protest movement. Once again, unionized workers in large-scale public-sector enterprises, especially those located in major industrial centers were most prominent in this upsurge of workers’ collective action.”²⁴⁵ Interestingly, local activists led these protests and labor struggles, and they were not necessarily members of the left opposition parties.

There was strong worker dissatisfaction with government policies. The results of the open door economic policy, which encouraged capitalist investments and opened Egypt’s markets to the world, were becoming more disastrous for the workers. In addition, the ineptitude of the ETUF and their failure to defend workers’ interests became well known publicly and ridiculed. The ETUF publicly supported the government privatization policies despite the negative impact on their rank and file union members. I agree with Beinín and Lockman’s rejection of mechanistic Marxism, which states “if the consciousness and organizational capacity of Egyptian workers were increasingly enhanced by the spread of capitalist relations of production and growth of large-scale transport and industry, [so] why was the organized working class so easily integrated into the corporatist structure of the Nasserist state after 1954”²⁴⁶ Economic determinism is being rejected in favor of class formation as a continual process. Beinín

²⁴⁴ Beinín, Joel, “Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand up?” in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:262

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 1994:263

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 266

wrote that he and Lockman rejected E.P. Thompson's notion "that the working class made itself and the structuralism of Althusser and his adherents, (and) adopting instead as our guide Adam Przeworski's proposition according to Beinín that "class formation is a perpetual process.... Classes as historical actors are thus the 'effects' of struggles which are structured by the totality of economic, political and ideological-cultural relations."²⁴⁷ The historical experience of workers was diverse and the political cultural contest persisted. It is thus important to include the voice of Egyptian workers into the historical and class narrative since Gramsci allows one to be a Marxist and also to be sensitive to culture.²⁴⁸

Concluding Remarks

The Egyptian labor movement had an auspicious history of struggle and political participation in the affairs of the nation. Egypt's labor movement, which had its origins in the late 1880s railway industry and public services, was active and militant, participating fully in the 1919 revolution against the British that led to Egypt's independence (at least on paper) in 1922.

However, as the state consolidated its power after the 1952 coup d'état, the labor movement saw a period of distinct co-optation and corporatist state policies. A social contract was put in place that defined the state's duties and responsibilities vis à vis the workers and in return guaranteed their allegiance to the state's policies. Nasser proposed that the People's Assembly seats would be divided between peasants and

²⁴⁷ Beinín, Joel, "Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?," in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:262.

²⁴⁸ Burke III, Edmund, "The History of the Working Classes in the Middle East: Some Methodological Considerations," in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:311.

workers, giving them legislative powers, prerogatives, and political immunity. This is indeed what took place and in return, labor gave up its rights to strike, negotiate living wages, and benefits. They were sold a bill of goods – *a social contract* – that maintained the autocratic manner of rule while convincing them that they are still a part of the ruling class.

In the 1970s, the “Infitah” (open door) economic policy and the opening the economy to the free market were introduced. With the beginning of privatization of the public sector industries, we witness that the social contract began to unravel, and the commitments by the government were going unmet. Initially, the influx of rentier oil incomes from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s allowed the regime to manage resources so that it could satisfy the public sector working class. Therefore, as the country made the transition to the market economy the government could adhere to the social contract Nasser had struck with this class.²⁴⁹ The social contract provided for job security and a living, and in return the members of this class would remain loyal to the regime, or at least not to rebel.

When facing the severe strains of the fiscal crisis of the mid-1980s, the regime knew it would have to terminate the contract or at least amend some of its provisions. Above all, it realized that it would have to drastically cut the public sector labor force. This was an action it would never have dared to do until it obtained another huge injection of income following the outbreak of the Persian Gulf War and the signed an economic reform deal with the IMF and World Bank.²⁵⁰ The government was saved

²⁴⁹ Beinon, Joel, “Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand up?” in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and working classes in the Middle East struggles, histories, historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:261-262

²⁵⁰ Soliman, Samer, and Peter Daniel (translator). *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2011:157.

financially from ruin by much welcomed infusions of funds and loan forgiveness. These funds came as a result of the American military interventions in the region and due to Egypt's assistance and support.

The decade beginning in 2000 saw an increasingly active independent workers' movement rebelling against the state and its institutions, including the ETUF. The political allegiances interestingly remained with the Mubarak regime's National Democratic Party (NDP) but in name only. Egyptian workers acted against the state from a "moral economy stance" and not necessarily from a rational choice or Marxist principles, according to Posusney's research. The opposition political parties were weak and disorganized, and they had an "elitist" attitude, especially the traditional Wafd (center-right) political party, and they could not relate to or incorporate into their platforms the workers' needs. There were several Nasserist/socialist labor parties with differing names, but they were small and had minimal influence.

From 1998-2010, there were over 3 million Egyptian workers who participated in 3,500 to 4,000 strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations, and protests — approximately 600 per year in 2007 and 2008. The first major strike in 2004 took place in the garment textile industry in Kafr el Dawar (near Alexandria), and since then workers' strikes and protests have not stopped. In 2004, the political national Kefaya (Enough) movement began its peaceful demonstrations. In December 2006 and then again in September 2007, the 27,000 workers of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in El-Mahalla and its affiliated factories went on a one-week strike for economic grievances, including low wages and a decrease in benefits like profit sharing. This shook the labor movement to its core since the ETUF was a target of the workers' ire in addition to incompetent management. The workers demanded improvements in "bread and butter" issues like

making ends meet with the constant hike in prices of consumer goods. From 2004 until the present, the list of collective job actions is long with strikes in practically every sector of the blue-collar and white-collar work world – chemical workers, health workers, cement workers, garment workers, public school teachers, Al-Azhar University professors, pharmacists, journalists, and others all participated in some form of contentious action.

The Egyptian labor movement's history has been that of militant activism throughout the 20th and 21st centuries with periods of acquiescence due to the social contract initially drawn up post the 1952 coup d'état. This social contract unraveled and the state was unable to sustain the status quo particularly due to the neo-liberal economic liberalization policies adopted to reportedly save the economy. Workers had no choice but to agitate for reforms on all fronts: socio-economic and ultimately political.

Chapter Four: Case Study – The Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors

The independent labor movement was an important catalyst for mass-based organizing against the former Mubarak authoritarian regime. Within the independent labor movement, the Independent Union of Municipal Real Estate Tax Authority (RETA) workers was created in 2008 from the “womb of our strike [starting in December 2007],”²⁵¹ said Kamal Abu Eita, the union’s president. “Our model has inspired other groups of workers who are in the process of establishing their own independent unions, such as the teachers and many others.”²⁵²
Kamal Abu Eita

Introduction

Several internal and external factors contributed towards labor’s role as a significant social movement within Egypt’s contentious opposition against the regime. The Municipal Real Estate Tax Authority (RETA) workers developed this social movement. This protest social movement then became the first independent trade union with support from international, bilateral, and regional groups. In this chapter, I will examine the various forces that contributed to the creation of the social movement leading to the first independent trade union since the 1957 and its political role. I will evaluate this trade union rights social movement and their collective contentious action through the lenses of social movement theory and practices.

This chapter will examine: 1) the mechanisms, repertoires, brokers, inducements, and frames used by the RETA workers to establish their social movement; 2) the differing efforts (internal and external of Egypt) that supported RETA as a result of the protest social movement by the RETA workers; 3) how all of these factors contributed to

²⁵¹ “Egyptian labor activists assess their achievements”, interview with Kamal Abu Eita on August 3rd, 2010, *Middle East Report*, no. 256, fall 2010, page 35.

²⁵² Interview with Kamal Abu Eita, August 3, 2010 in *Middle East Report*, Fall 2010, page 35

the success of this social movement; 4) and its important political role leading up to the January 2011 uprising.

History and Organization of the Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors' Movement

The creation of an independent workers' movement in Egypt set the stage for a new style of collective action, contentious politics, and leadership. These protests beginning in the 2000s where the next step in the continuum of protests against the Mubarak regime; they officially challenged the official trade union federation, ETUF. Then the creation of the first independent trade union since the 1957 was the next step in this continuum of protests. "The mechanisms, processes, events, and episodes provide a flexible explanatory framework for dealing with such questions as how political actors form, how political identities change, and how streams of contention sometimes congeal into sustained social movements."²⁵³ The review of the mechanisms and processes used by RETA workers and their leaders help us understand how they became a sustained social movement leading to an independent trade union.

The first independent trade union organized in Egypt since 1957, said Gamal Oweida, the secretary-general of IGURETA, was an act of rebellion against the regime. He was eager to share his thoughts and stories leading to the creation of the first independent union since 1957. Gamal was very proud to share a small booklet that he authored with the history of his profession and its struggle for an independent union. He said, "Originally, within the official ETUF union for finance and banking workers, there were nine local committees for RETA employees. ETUF wanted to keep it this way

²⁵³ Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G. Tarrow. *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2007, page 43

since they did not want them to grow or increase in membership numbers. Also, (remaining) at nine committees would keep them weak without bargaining or political power within the larger union. So when RETA activists began to organize and the ETUF rejected them, it was a big blow to the heart. Why? There was still the feeling that ETUF was their “labor home”, even though everyone really knew it was a sham. ETUF never really truly defended their rights; it was a tool of the state.”²⁵⁴ The organizing within the RETA government agency began in the Giza province (a few miles south of the capital city of Cairo) and then on to additional provinces: Ismailia, Menoufiyya, El Behera, El Sharqiyya, and El Daqahliyah. On the October 21, 2007, there was a protest in front of Ministry of Finance with about 3,000 people present. A State security official called Oweida and chided him for not informing them in advance. So Oweida wrote an open letter with all the details: who, why, when, what, and where and he sent it to the State Security representative in his tax district. “It was important to be in the open and we had nothing to hide,” he said. Oweida’s open response to the state security official was a mark of transparency and courage that continued throughout these workers’ campaign for better working conditions and improved salaries.

The mechanisms that these protesters generally used were that of large gatherings in front of public buildings to gain the attention of the general public and of government officials. For example, on 21 October 2007, the protesters came from differing provinces from all over the country via public transportation. They were intent on not being stopped before they reached their destination – the Council of Ministers headquarters building. So they came from various points in the city, then walked to the Ministry headquarters building, and then from there they walked as a large group to

²⁵⁴ Interview with Gamal Oweida June 8th 2013 at the IGURETA union headquarters in Cairo, Egypt

Council of Ministers building on Hussein Hegazy Street with now the police following. The police and the security forces complained that they were getting tired of all the walking— they were not used to walking a lot and they were not physically fit – an irony of note.

Another important event in the series of collective contentious actions was from November 13-15, 2007, the RETA employees held a protest in front of the ETUF headquarters on Gala'a Street in downtown Cairo.²⁵⁵ ETUF officials would not let them inside the building, and they closed the toilets and water access to them – another blow. They slept outside the building and they woke up to find their faces and hands covered in black exhaust soot and nowhere to clean up. Oweida said, “We had not yet learned or implemented the idea of taking shifts to protest, so we were all very tired and felt a sense of doom, gloom and defeat. This experience felt worse than on October 21 for some reason. Our silence enabled ETUF to continue in the charade.”²⁵⁶ Oweida was keen to share how their social movement of protests made mistakes, learned from those mistakes, and how they used various brokers and repertoires to improve their opportunities for success. For example, they used the independent media well, particularly the newspapers: *El Masry el Youm*, *Al-Badeel*, *Al-Shorouk*, *El Youm 7*, and others. The role of cell phones (known in Egypt as mobile phones) was important and indispensable for organizing purposes. Oweida and many other union members reiterated the value of cell phones; these phones more valuable than computers and social media to a majority of workers. Mobile phones were one of the tools used for the

²⁵⁵ Gala'a street is a very busy main thoroughfare in Cairo with many hubs for public transportation

²⁵⁶ Interview with Gamal Oweida on 8th June 2013 at the union headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

diffusion of their message, and in getting members and potential members to participate in protests and other acts of defiance.

The Role of Independent Media²⁵⁷ and Workers

The role of independent media outlets, particularly newspapers, was critical in shedding light on the plight of workers and their protests. The media was an important tool in keeping the independent workers' issues alive in the public eye. During an interview with Mohammed Azzouz, head of the news desk (he covered labor news full-time from 2005 to 2011) at *El Masry el Youm* newspaper, he expressed the following views about how independent newspapers supported the independent workers' movement. "The mission of the newspaper, *El Masry El Youm*, as one of the first serious independent newspapers in Egypt, has been devoted to the news/issues of civil society, democracy, progressive issues, and to the defense of fundamental freedoms and liberty. It was established by a group of investors/businessmen who wanted an independent news outlet. They were not necessarily interested in managing the day-to-day operations of the newspaper and did not impose their political views. The newspaper also has an independent and balanced editorial board that attempts to present each side of a story. Workers' stories tended to be quite obvious, i.e. present each side, and it was obvious who needed help or who was truly suffering injustice.

In 2005, Azzouz's wrote his first newspaper story about a strike of workers at a yeast and glucose-manufacturing factory in Maadi, a suburb of Cairo. The newspaper supported Azzouz to cover the events and write the story. Yet, when he was also trying to get the owner's side of the events, he was threatened by the owner, and (someone) told him that the owner would call his bosses and get the government to shut them

²⁵⁷ Interview with Mohamed Azzouz on 20th June 2013 at the Cairo headquarters of El-Masry el Youm newspaper

down. He found that the workers were indeed in a bad state of affairs. News reporting and commentary about labor became a regular feature in the newspaper. This added to the improved perception of labor's struggle for decent work, and social justice. It began a societal discourse about the hardships faced by the average citizen in being able to live a decent life and provide for their families.²⁵⁸

The two big events in the independent workers' (non-ETUF aligned) struggle were the RETA employees and the El-Mahalla garment and textile factories' large strikes. It was described as a trial run, a rehearsal for the revolution of what would take place in Tahrir in January 2011. In our interview, Azzouz stated that he believes that these repertoires of protest and contention by workers had an important influence on societal discourse, the opposition and on the rest of the working class in Egypt. He also thinks that the priority of news reporting should be that of human interest, the worries of the people, and the workers' stories and protests exemplified these issues and the high level of injustice. Actually, *el Masry el Youm* received a prize in 2007-8 from the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights for their coverage of these types of stories. In 2014, the newspaper will be celebrating ten years of existence and reporting and they hope to publish a retrospective of their history.

Azzouz was clear in his belief that workers are definitely not a special interest – they are a human national interest, he said. And to consider workers' as a special interest thus marginalizes, puts them aside, and makes them unimportant. Azzouz said, “In 2005, another strike by asbestos workers also predicted further upheaval and protests. The workers slept on the street in front of the ETUF headquarters, and they

²⁵⁸ There is evidence of this kind of reporting in several newspapers aforementioned over a period of 5-6 years prior to January 2011 events.

were on strike for a long time. They got their rights and demands, so workers and people got the distinct impression that to get your rights, you have to protest in the streets. This became quite the path to take starting from 2005 to 2011. Also, the government representatives, especially Finance Minister Yousef B. Ghali, spoke with such contempt regarding the workers' state of affairs that it made you want to write headlines about this."²⁵⁹

El Masry El Youm newspaper's staff spent many days reporting on RETA's pivotal twelve-day sit-in protest in December 2007 at the Council of Ministers headquarters. One reporter actually spent the night on the pavement of Hussein Higazy Street with the workers. This was the first time that workers and their families were part of the protest and stayed out on the streets all night. Azzouz said, "There is no distinction or separation between politics, political action and economics - they are all related. So the workers' demands even though the discourse is economic they are speaking politics."²⁶⁰

The post-2011 events and particularly the role of workers did not hold the promise of the pre-2011 period. Azzouz said, "Before the revolution, it was obvious that there was one enemy that everyone was united against; after the revolution, it had become very confused, and thus the unity had not been protected or supported." He continued saying that the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS)²⁶¹ "played a very important role in supporting the independent workers' movement. They wanted and demanded their rights and for social justice so this was a fight between rights and justice, versus injustice. Before the revolution, the MBs were allies of the

²⁵⁹ Interview with Mohamed Azzouz on 20th June 2013 at the Cairo headquarters of El-Masry el Youm newspaper

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ CTUWS – an Egyptian NGO that provides support and training for workers

Marxist Coordinating Committee of Workers (another NGO that supported independent workers) that was sponsored by the Hisham Mubarak Law Center²⁶² and made alliances with the political left opposition parties and organization. After the revolution -- the MB became fiercer in their quest for power; and dropped their alliances with workers' organizations."²⁶³ Azzouz continued to explain, "Before the revolution - the workers' had the loudest voice of discontent in society and they acted on it. After the revolution, the workers' voice got lost in the din of so many voices of discontent so they are not noticeably on the scene." Then military reasserted itself as the center of power through the SCAF's rule post-February 2011 and it seems the workers' voice of contention totally disappeared, despite their continued daily economic hardship and their continued protests said Azzouz.

In concluding our meeting, Azzouz recounted the famous statement made by a revered Egyptian Islamic philosopher, Mohammed Abdou, in the early twentieth century after his travels overseas. "We need to learn from Abdu," Azzouz said. He continued, "Abdou said upon his return to Egypt that he saw nations that were not Muslim yet he saw and found Muslims and now back in Egypt, he saw a Muslim nation without any Muslims. So we need to realize the best practices of other transitioning countries' experiences regarding the challenges faced and the rewards gained. I worry about the Tamarod movement day on June 30, 2013," Azzouz said as we ended our meeting, "there will be blood spilled again in the streets." At this point, one could regard his statements in the summer of 2013 as rather prophetic of the ensuing events.

²⁶² <http://hmlc-egy.org/english> من نحن:

أسس المركز في: مركز حقوقى مصرى يعمل فى مجال حقوق الانسان من خلال التقاضى والحملات والابحاث القانونية داخل مصر متى اسس. غرضون عام 1999 كشركة محاماة خاضعة لقانون المحاماة المصرى، ويمارس المركز نشاطه من خلال فرعى القاهرة وأسوان.

²⁶³ Interview with M. Azzouz, El Masry el Youm newspaper, 20th June 2013 in Cairo, Egypt.

Repertoires of this Social Movement

External efforts of support and internal mechanisms, repertoires, political opportunities, brokers, inducements, mobilizing structures and collective action framing

It can be argued that the Middle East, including Egypt, was a spectator of the global trend of protest mobilizations and social movements particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁶⁴ Egyptians especially the youth were inspired by such movements as Otpor in Serbia²⁶⁵ that managed to lead the movement to remove Milosevic. However, Egypt has been rich in non-violent social contestation movements and mobilizations, particularly in the trade union arena. The labor movement does not initially resemble traditional social movements or necessarily fit within the traditional social movement theory. However, it is a social, economic, and political (collective action) movement, and given the opportunity, it did contribute to the uprising that removed Mubarak from power in January-February 2011.

RETA employees were the next major collective protest action in the series of worker protests. The first RETA employees protest was carried out by one branch located in Giza in September 2007; they were angry over very low salaries and bad working conditions. “They earned 200-400 Egyptian pounds (\$32-64) per month, about one quarter of the pay and sales tax collectors”²⁶⁶ of those at the Ministry of Finance in Cairo. It was a small protest, but it gained considerable attention, enabling

²⁶⁴ Beinin, Joel, and Frédéric Vairel. *Social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011. Print.

²⁶⁵ “A few facts about Otpor. It was a movement that existed in Serbia between late 1998 and early 2004. It played an important role in the fall of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000; it was a laboratory out of which came some new and original organizing concepts and it has inspired social movements worldwide ever since. It doesn’t exist as an organization anymore, but still influences the world. And with every passing year, the criticism of Otpor and its legacy seems to be growing – not just in Serbia, but around the world.” Marovic, Ivan, “In defense of Otpor”, *Open Democracy* e-zine, 6 December 2013 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/civilresistance/ivan-marovic/in-defense-of-otpor>

²⁶⁶ Lachapelle, Jean. “Lessons from Egypt’s Tax Collectors,” *Middle East Report* 264, Fall 2012, p. 38.

other branches to contact those activists and slowly develop a following and leading to a nationwide movement. “Two factors enabled this diffusion: the support of independent media and the core activists’ extensive experience in political and union organizing.”²⁶⁷ The one-day strike was widely covered on the front page by major independent newspapers, *El Masry el Youm* and *Al-Badil*, which reported 5,000 people participating in the strike. The workers chanted: “Our colleagues²⁶⁸ earn ten times our salaries, and I cannot afford to buy bread.”

The next important internal factor was the significant political and union organizing and leadership skills of this movement. Kamal Abu Eita, the head of the office in Giza who then became RETA employees’ union president “was a prominent member of the Kefaya movement, a founder of the new-Nasserist Karama Party and president of the Giza local union before losing his seat in the fraudulent ETUF union 2006 elections. His skills in mobilization, negotiations and public speaking were crucial to the tax collectors’ success”.²⁶⁹ Another important advantage these workers possessed was the ability to temporarily suspend tax collection, directly threatening the government’s revenue from real estate property taxes, which was quite substantial.

Leadership in social movements is essential if not critical to developing solidarity and mobilizing activists even in well-developed collective action type organizations and movements such as trade unions. However, there has been a relative inattention to what leaders actually do? Barker, Colin, Johnson and Lavalette in their study titled: *Leadership and Social Movements* remind us of a few points to keep in mind: 1) Avoid

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ To clarify - Their colleagues were those at the main Ministry of Finance based in Cairo while these workers were under the local municipal councils’ supervision and were paid very low salaries and doing the same work.

²⁶⁹ Lachapelle page 38

the “great man” theories that give little proper weight to both circumstances in which movements develop and the part played by members. 2) No one wants to revive conservative agitator theories, which imply that there would be no strikes, no militant movement activity, were it not for the troublemakers who cause them. We must pay attention to the real grievances that cause and motivate movements; and we must avoid treating members as mindless sheep who just follow. Yet, we still have to recognize that a leader has to take up the cause, explain the details, and articulate solutions. 3) Meyer and Tarrow suggest that thinking about movement leadership was once dominated by older movement forms like the “traditional mass organizations of the European left”, with their permanent presences, bureaucratic structures and centralized leaderships. Looser more decentralized networks of activists, and leaders have replaced these traditional mass organizations.²⁷⁰ 4) Leadership has been associated with a particular type of organization. 5) Underlying patterns of social movement theorizing have tended to divert attention from issues to do with leadership. The collective behavior tradition, stressing irrational movement could never explore leadership questions well. It was displaced by resource mobilization and political process approaches which reveals a strong structuralist bias, paying less attention to actors’ purposive agency and thus about leadership.²⁷¹

There are several kinds or types of leadership: unavoidable leadership, leadership as an activity, as a dialogical relationship, and with leadership purpose as guiding force. There are the contexts and resources of leadership: personal and structural resources. Several questions to be asked: Who actually leads? Can leadership be democratic?

²⁷⁰ Barker, Colin, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette. *Leadership and social movements*. Manchester England New York: Manchester University Press Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2001:1-2

²⁷¹ Ibid. 2

Democratic and inclusive leadership, bureaucratic leadership, exclusivist leadership, leadership forms and protest cycles.... Leadership does matter.²⁷² It is important to recognize for this research endeavor that charismatic leadership in the Egyptian case was present, and played a critical role as indicated previously.

Differing views of Effective Mobilizing Structures: Crowds and Masses

In terms of how crowds and masses are viewed as effective or not; there are “two main competing theoretical-political interpretations those of Marx and Weber. Weber tended to view crowds and masses with trepidation rather than expectation. They were seen as aspects of social transition, perhaps necessary, but at best temporary. His studies of charismatic authority and styles of leadership point more to the dangers of collective behavior than to any positive potential (Weber 1978:241ff. and 1376-7).

Regarding the labor movement, Weber preferred the “mature” politics of organized trade unions and political parties to the mass politics of social movements (Mommsen and Osterhammel 1987).²⁷³ Weber also put a lot of emphasis on the role of organization and leadership play in affecting the effectiveness of social movements as strategic actors. “Focusing on the relations between types of leadership and forms of organizations, [Roberto] Michels argued that the routinization of charismatic leadership flowed from the establishment of bureaucratic structures. Both were seen as necessary aspects of the maturation of social movements in modern society, by which dynamic social forces were transformed into stagnant, top-heavy institutions, where an oligarchy of pragmatic “petty bourgeois” leaders concerned themselves more with reproducing their own power

²⁷² Ibid. 1-23

²⁷³ Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Social movements: a cognitive approach*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991:15

than with changing society. This particular outcome of the institutionalization of mass movements has come to be called the “Weber-Michels model” (see Zald and McCarthy 1987).”²⁷⁴

While on the other hand Marxists have tended to view social movements as signs of the eminent decline or even collapse of the repressive capitalist system. “Marxists have tended to view social movements with expectations and anticipation, signs of an impending collapse of an existing (repressive) capitalist order and as the potential source of its replacement by socialism. Movements for Marxists were thus taken as collective expressions of discontent and potential bases for social change (Eyerman 1984). The model of the collective actor here was that of the “self-activating class” rather than the faceless mass [...] what they represent in terms of their social basis, their class composition. This in turn is related to their political potential [...] What mass movements require, for Marxists, is not so much explanation as evaluation and fundamental social change and about the possibilities for influencing them in those directions.”²⁷⁵ The connection between social democracy, labor movements and social movements – “the existence of a strong, institutionalized, reformist social democratic labor movement in all the countries of Western Europe affected the way social movements were conceived by social scientists and perhaps more importantly, the very possibility for “new” social movements to take form.”²⁷⁶ Tilly explains “the collective action typical of social movements as moving from “organization to mobilization” of resources around shared interests and, finally, to the realization of effective action in

²⁷⁴ Eyerman 1991:16

²⁷⁵ Eyerman 1991:16-7

²⁷⁶ Ibid.17

specific opportunity structures.”²⁷⁷ The labor movement precisely coincides with Tilly’s definition as a collective action/movement moving from organization to mobilization with shared interests, resources, and the recognition that they can effectively affect certain opportunity structures that present themselves.

Another internal factor of their success as a social movement was solidarity. There was a strong group identity among the RETA workers – they were aware and conscious of belonging to the same group with the same grievances. This group identity provided the strength to confront their employer (the government) and make demands. However, group identity is not sufficient for mobilization to take place. “Group solidarity provides the motivation for collective action by linking the welfare of the group to a program of political or social change, and by creating the expectation that the group will act cohesively to bring about that change”.²⁷⁸ The RETA workers believed that they could succeed using collective action because they had a legitimate grievance, a reasonable remedy, and a strong show of solidarity. So collective action with solidarity and strong group identity are the markers on the road to success.

Diffusion was the next factor that turned the relatively small protest in Giza into a national movement. Leaders in RETA offices in the Delta region, Mr. Abdallah and Mr. Labib, travelled to Giza to meet with Abu Eita and other leaders to learn more about the protest and its goals. Abdallah and Labib became “brokers” after being thoroughly convinced of the mission and goals of the protest movement. Brokers are people who help the dissemination of ideas to collective action.²⁷⁹ They were both enthusiastic, and their local branch offices held protest strikes shortly thereafter. These protests then

²⁷⁷ Ibid.25

²⁷⁸ Rochon, Thomas R. *Culture Moves – ideas, activism, and changing values*. Princeton University Press, 1998:101

²⁷⁹ Lachapelle, page 39

encouraged offices in Fayoum and Minya provinces to contact the main Giza activists. They actively used the independent media to get their message out and to frame their issues of contention. The official Bank and Finance Workers Union, an affiliate of the ETUF, fought them every step of the way and tried to use tactics of fear with threats of firings to dissuade the rank and file workers from participating in these protests.

Next, the RETA employees activist leadership, which now took on the name of the Higher Committee for the General Strike, issued a press release threatening the government if their demands were not met, saying RETA would go on strike in all the municipalities and would gather in front of the Ministry of Finance in downtown Cairo. The nationwide strike took place on October 21, 2007, and a large crowd demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Finance with hundreds shouting, “Hey ya (you) Ghali (minister of finance), come down from your ivory tower.” Once they were told that the minister was out of the country, they decided to march to the headquarters of the Cabinet of Ministers to get more publicity for their cause. Both Al Jazeera and the private Egyptian satellite station “Dream”, broadcast images of hundreds of RETA employees marching boldly down Cairo boulevards.²⁸⁰ The media exposure further added to the diffusion and framing of their message, and it increased participation of many more employees who believed in the cause. They felt that they could legitimately succeed in achieving their goal of significantly increasing their salaries.

Another mechanism that the RETA Higher Committee used was the establishment of a regular newsletter that they called: ²⁸¹نوبة صحيان a moment/time of

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ نشرة تصدرها النقابة العامة للعاملين بالضرائب العقارية (المستقلة) بمصر، والتي تعد أول نقابة مستقلة منذ ما يقرب من 50 عام شهدت هيمنة وتسلب اتحاد عمال موالى للدولة على النقابات العمالية. وتعد النقابة الجديدة المستقلة الأداة التي اكتشف 55 ألف موظف بالضرائب العقارية حاجتهم إليها عبر نضال طويل خاضوه للمطالبة بحقوقهم .

awakening. This newsletter²⁸² was very helpful for diffusing information, news, and updates on the negotiations or lack thereof with the government. This established an open, democratic form of communication with members and future members. Through its distribution the activists were able to organize and bring in more supporters.

The RETA Higher Committee then attempted to negotiate with Minister of Finance Youssef Boutros Ghali. They were repeatedly dismissed by security officers and told that the minister was busy negotiating with the IMF. The leadership tested the resolve of their followers several times by holding sit-ins in front of the ETUF headquarters, and hundreds came. In early December 2007, after failure of direct negotiations and the ETUF's refusal to support their grievances and fight on their behalf, the leadership called for the large national strike and "sit-in", yet with a slight deception on the location. This deception was done so as to not alert the security forces of the actual location of the intended strike and to not scare off the rank and file. The brokers in each of the RETA branch offices around the country ensured that everyone participating in the large strike was prepared to spend several days in Cairo.

Slogans and chants used by the protesting RETA employees clearly defined their cause and framed their demands. The most commonly used words were "Justice عدالة and Parity تكافؤ" in addition to "Equality مساواة", referring to their demand for wage equality with the other employees who do the same work at the Ministry of Finance in Cairo and are not associated with the local municipal councils. "We are sitting here, not leaving, and we have with justice on our side." Another major theme in the framing of their message and demands was the use of the word "Poverty" and how they were not

²⁸² Copy of newsletter is included in Appendix 1

able to meet their children's needs (which is debilitating to the pride of any Egyptian father and mother). "حرام يا حكومة، الشعب كله جعان" shame on you government; the people are all hungry" was another chant that was repeatedly used invoking poverty and hunger.

Another chant was "we divorce you thrice", which refers to their quest for a free and independent union divorced from the control of government, ministry of manpower, and the ETUF – three. RETA leaders also invoked Allah (God) despite their strong, secular-leftist political ideology and views. This was not a religious versus non-religious debate – it was a matter of culture and appealing to all. "الله أكبر" and Swearing in the Name of Allah "نقسم بالله العظيم" that "we will not return to our homes or our workplaces until our demands are met. We will sit here and not collect taxes until you recognize our demands and fulfill them. We want our rights only and not more or less. That is the will of the people," they would say. When RETA leaders were trying to meet with the minister and he was refusing in December 2007, they chanted: "The minister meets with investors in the "Smart Village", so show some intelligence/smarts and meet with us too – or do we smell bad?"²⁸³ In the RETA employees protests, they often used a mix of economic and political themes: "Free Unions = Free Nation", "Justice and Equity", and "The government is challenging us and we are staying not leaving". They even invoked former President Mubarak by saying: "Ye President, the one who carried out the first air strike, see the mess with your tax authority!", "Long Live Egypt", and "We are not begging for anything". It is interesting to note the connection between the economic and political themes; these are workers who still

²⁸³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByObGdGeV9k&feature=related>

believed in the political system, and even in Mubarak, but were calling for economic relief and improvements in their daily lives. The implications of these statements are that the workers were indeed challenging the regime by holding such protests calling for decent work²⁸⁴ with decent wages, yet not necessarily challenging the regime's existence – at least not at this moment in time. However, this discourse begins to change in 2010 leading to the uprising in 2011.

In reviewing this social movement's discourse and framing of demands, one has to discuss one of Egypt's influential colloquial poets and icons – Ahmed Fouad Negm. The RETA protesting workers regularly used his work, for example:

*Who are they and who are we? هما مين وإحنا مين ؟ (An excerpt)
by Ahmed Fouad Negm, translated by Walaa Quisay*

*Who are they and who are we?
They are the princes and the Sultans
They are the ones with wealth and power
And we are the impoverished and deprived
Use your mind, guess...
Guess who is governing whom?
Who are they and who are we?
We are the constructing, we are the workers
We are Al-Sunna, We are Al-Fard
We are the people both height and breadth
From our health, the land raises
And by our sweat, the meadows turn green
Use your mind, guess...
Guess who serves whom?
Who are they and who are we?
They are the princes and the Sultans²⁸⁵*

²⁸⁴ According to the ILO: Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

²⁸⁵ <http://arablit.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/ahmed-fouad-negm-who-are-they-and-who-are-we/>

A representative of the people's discontent and joy (at times) was the popular poet Ahmed Fouad Negm (1929-2013). He was the people's poet, satirist and their consciousness. He wrote what was in the people's hearts and minds that they could not say out loud. Negm was jailed for several years and spoke irreverently through his poetry written in colloquial Arabic for the impoverished underclass. "Over four decades, Mr. Negm wrote verse in colloquial Arabic that channeled the privations and grim humor that were part of working-class life. His fearless and often mocking critiques of power made him a folk hero, but also earned him a total of 18 years in jail."²⁸⁶ The quote from Negm's poem aforementioned is indicative of Egyptian society's view of who ruled them: the sultans and the princes. This poem was regularly recited in the protest in Hussein Higazy Street in 2007 and then again in Tahrir Square in January 2011.

Galal Amin, emeritus professor of economics at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and a well-respected commentator, was trying to identify what happened to Egypt and its people. He wrote that sociologists were complaining about the increase in corruption and disrespect for the law with an obvious lack of work ethic. Violence was increasing and material values are establishing themselves over socially useful labor that was losing its social status and prestige. The quality of life in the city was declining with an increase in air pollution, overcrowding, and deteriorating health services and education while the villages were becoming units of consumption not production. Economists noted the severe imbalances and distortions – a severe deficit, a growing external debt, an imbalance in state budget, high unemployment, an inefficient large

²⁸⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/07/world/middleeast/ahmed-fouad-negm-dissident-poet-of-egypts-underclass-dies-at-84.html?_r=0

public sector and a too much investment by the government in unproductive areas such as luxury housing and import trade. Political observers have noted that Egyptians' sense of loyalty and belonging to their native land has weakened with a high understandable pre-occupation with daily life needs rather than larger vision of Arab nationalism or a commitment to national development. There is also a strong condemnation of increased political and economic dependence on the U.S. and Europe.²⁸⁷ While those who monitor intellectual life and national culture point to a decline in societal mores, values and ethics with the spread of "low culture" and the growth of religious extremism. However, "cultures are limited, time-specific constructs that are learned and constantly in a state of flux"²⁸⁸ – culture changes or is influenced as a result of the introduction of new forms of mass media, and communication. So to pinpoint specific cultural impact is difficult since it is ever changing particularly popular culture.

Fahmy has documented many changes in the Egyptian cultural landscape. He confirms that while the literacy rate is quite low; "it was newspapers (especially the satirical press), [that] recorded and performed colloquial Egyptian songs, and the vernacular theater that were the principal and most effective mediators and broadcasters of cultural ideologies, including the idea of a collective Egyptian identity."²⁸⁹ Workers were in the heart of this endeavor and used authentic Egyptian cultural icons for cementing solidarity and protest purposes. Their use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic solidifies the local Egyptian patriotism – *wataniyya*. Colloquial

²⁸⁷ Amin 2000:7-8

²⁸⁸ Fahmy, Z. *Ordinary Egyptians: creating the modern nation through popular culture*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2011:3.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 167

Egyptian is typically Egyptian and thus nationally exclusive. “As Joel Beinin notes the mere decision to write in colloquial has often been perceived as a political act associated with a nationalist program of populism, anticlericalism (not irreligion), and local Egyptian *wataniyya* as opposed to Pan-Arabism – *qawmiyya*.”²⁹⁰ Workers embody the heart and soul of colloquial Egyptian Arabic – ‘*ammiyya* which comes from the Arabic word for public. Workers used leaflets, slogans, and with their demands written on hand-held signs used during protests, songs, chants, and music such as drums and *el oud* (the lute). Workers used the daily vernacular and even jokes to communicate their grievances in a clever and catchy (at times even funny) manner. They also used props such as coffins, black armbands, and empty pots and pans to demonstrate a particular point. The workers used the average person’s language to communicate grievances and to challenge the regime.

In December 2007, “ten thousand municipal real estate municipal tax collectors and their family members held a ‘sit-in’ for eleven days in front of the Ministry of Finance in downtown Cairo. The strike ended when the minister agreed to a bonus equal to two months’ pay and raised the wages of the municipal tax collectors by 325%, giving them parity with those employed by the General Tax Authority”²⁹¹ in Cairo. Men and women RETA workers held this “sit-in” for eleven days and for many of the women, it was the first time they had spent the night outside of their homes. Beinin points out that this case was exceptional because these workers were considered white-collar civil servants that were part of the government service apparatus and not blue-collar factory workers. Also, they had forged a national movement linked with labor-supporting

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 173

²⁹¹ Beinin, 2011:198

NGOs such as the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS), opposition political parties such as the Karama Party, and with the media. Their leader, Kamal Abu Eita, had many years of practical organizing and political experience and was able to recruit many local activists around the country. In addition, his charisma was infectious, and his ability to listen, organize, and lead was impeccable.

The Egyptian government security apparatus' response was generally measured and different than its dealing with overtly political movements calling for political reforms. "Strict security measures have always been adopted in Egypt when dealing with any demonstrations seeking political reform. But with striking workers the government has, instead, followed a more careful and tactful strategy. The security approach has been replaced with the intervention of executive officials to meet workers' demands."²⁹² Adopting a hard line against workers may backfire, and they are still trying to hold together the myth of workers and peasants together governing or legislating thorough the People's Assembly.

Despite the economically heavyweight El-Mahalla Al-Kubra garment and textile workers going on strike earlier in 2006/7 and making some wage gains, it was the RETA workers that ultimately created an effective social movement leading to an independent union. The El-Mahalla strike committee's leadership became divided, and they were not able to sustain their gains and grow them into a national movement to lead Egyptian workers to massive collective action against the government. "So contrary to McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald's assertions (1996),²⁹³ it was not necessary and in most cases not

²⁹² Shukri, Muhammad, "Backgrounder: Wave of strikes rolls through Egypt", 10 July 2007, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*

²⁹³ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald. *Comparative perspectives on social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge England New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

possible to create an enduring organizational structure to sustain collective action.”²⁹⁴ I concur with Beinin’s conclusion that a class-based (worker) social movement had successfully asserted its public presence in an authoritarian state that had imposed severe restrictions on freedom of association.

From December 2007 to December 2008, the RETA workers’ social movement had to deal with many legal and verbal attacks in the media leveled at them by the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Manpower and the officially sanctioned ETUF. The contentious workers’ social movement continued to be active.

In 2008, one year later, the 55,000 member independent trade union of the workers in the Municipal Real Estate Tax Authority was created. After the successful increase in wages, the activists around the country after the major took the initiative to begin a petition drive to see if there was an interest to convert the High Committee for General Strike an organizing committee to create an independent union. The results were overwhelmingly in support of creating an independent union. So on December 20, 2008, drawing from its newly acquired strength, the Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Authority Workers (IGURETA) was officially formed. It was the first independent union in Egypt since 1957. “IGURETA lawyer Hisham Muhammadayn was not shy about challenging the ETUF’s monopoly over labor representation, arguing that ‘the Egyptian constitution and the international treaties ratified by Egypt give workers the right to create independent organizations.’ ”²⁹⁵ Why was this movement successful? Internally, clever and tested political expertise and wisdom; supportive internal networks among Egyptian civil society organizations, such as human rights

²⁹⁴ Beinin, 2011, page 200-201

²⁹⁵ Lachappelle p. 41

organizations, lawyers groups, and others; consistent reporting by the media and external international labor support led to its success. The combination and coordination of both the internal and external capabilities worked well in addition to the pressure created by USAID-funded democracy and governance programs. “Once the workers start organizing collectively in a structure that can voice their plight, frustrations, exploitation and oppression, and channel these into a striking force ... then nothing can stand in the face of the labor movement”.²⁹⁶

After the creation of the first independent union at RETA, several other independent unions were established, inspired by the RETA employees. “By the time of the uprising that toppled Mubarak, two other independent unions – one of the health care workers and one of teachers – had been established”.²⁹⁷ In the midst of the January 2011 uprising, Abu Eita with several other independent unions formed the first independent trade union federation to rival the officially sanctioned ETUF. The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) at its founding claimed an affiliated membership of around 1.4 million workers with a membership of one hundred independent unions. In addition, it has an affiliate of an 8.5 million-member retirees’ association, and EIFTU’s president is Kamal Abu Eita. By August 2011, the number of independent unions had reached around 200, representing about 2 million workers.²⁹⁸ First-hand accounts from RETA’s union members²⁹⁹

Members of the first independent trade union in Egypt exude a great sense of pride and accomplishment. Mahmoud³⁰⁰, one of the many members interviewed, spoke

²⁹⁶ Blog posting, *Arabawy*, August 15, 2008, http://www.arabawy.org/2008/08/15/towards_free_unions/

²⁹⁷ Lachappelle, p. 41

²⁹⁸ *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (English), August 31, 2011

²⁹⁹ Interviews conducted at the Independent General Union of RETA workers headquarters in June 2013 in Cairo, Egypt

a lot about “tarabot” ترابط , which in English means “bonding, connection, solidarity” among workers and people. This connection that binds them, he said, is the common grievance or worry that we share brings us even closer together and garners deeper solidarity. So repression is another binding factor that they all shared, he said. “First, we felt alone and then we found that first, we are bound together in one mission, we are connected; and we share many of the worries, troubles, and grievances. At the beginning, we felt that there was no hope for real change, or to change the regime – maybe we could change one law or one policy at a time. It was small-scale thinking, nothing big since we were not after substantial change all at once ... one step at a time. We just could not imagine a large massive change. We just wanted to eat, feed our families, and live a decent life.”³⁰¹ Mahmoud continues to recount the union’s history and their feelings: “At the beginning in 2007, it was the RETA employees who were orphans and left out of the system in the Ministry of Finance. We were relegated to the provinces and with very low salaries. So our first battle was putting us against the Ministry of Finance. In 2007, we discovered the connection (the tarabot) between us, and (it was) that spirit of tarabot that led us to 2011 with many stops along the way. We were working, fighting, and doing all of this for our children and their future. We were missing ‘dignity’, tarabot i.e. togetherness and connection with each other. Banding together as a social movement to fight for our principled cause brought us that missing tarabot. During this time from 2007 to 2011, every sector of Egyptian society was present on the protest scene and active, driven by the need for dignity and tarabot with each other.” Mahmoud spoke carefully describing their search for, or the re-

³⁰⁰ Those interviewed requested that I use their first names only

³⁰¹ Interview with Mahmoud, RETA union member, union headquarters, Midan Lazghouly, Cairo on 12th June 2013.

establishment, of their dignity as a people and as a nation created this connection, tarabot, or solidarity.

Another issue of concern was how workers felt that they were constantly being insulted. Let us focus on insult for a moment since it is an important part of the workers' discourse in fighting for their rights – in Arabic: أذى, شتيمة, مسبة, تحقير, إهانة; and/or an affront إهانة, مذلة; an offense جريمة, إساءة, جنحة, إهانة, هجوم, إثم; an umbrage استياء, إهانة, إغصان, ظل, ظلييلة أغصان, إهانة, امتعاض, استياء; and an indignity إهانة, إذلال, معاملة مهينة. These are all sentiments expressed to me by Mahmoud and other union members gathered in the room at the union headquarters, and we talked about those feelings and how they motivated their protests. Mahmoud said, “When you felt that your own country and its leader (referred to as the father of the nation) treats you with such indignity, in Egypt and outside (stories about bad treatment overseas by others and Embassy), then there is a huge loss of confidence in the ability to get rights.” However, this changed with small steps leading to larger ones of protest and demanding rights until they were able to take the big leap and establish the first independent trade union of workers. This can represent a transition from economic grievances to political ones. Mahmoud continued to recount their story; he outlined the series of protests (see text box below), which contributed to cracks deterioration, and weakness in the ruling government of Mubarak: “We had the following aspects that helped our cause or contributed to our need to protest,” said Mahmoud. “First, privatization that was conducted in a corrupt manner also played a big role in influencing and inciting the above series of protests. Second, there was the influential leadership under Kamal Abu Eita whose charisma is infectious and his leadership skills

are excellent. Third, there was the weakening of the state control mechanisms over us

2004 - 2005: the Kefaya movement
2006: El-Mahalla protests and strikes
2007: RETA workers protests
2008: More El-Mahalla garment & textile workers protests
2009-2010: many more worker protests/strikes in practically every sector of the economy
2011: Revolution (uprising)

Figure 3: List of Protests 2004-2011

such as the state security (or at least the perception) and that of the police; and we began not to be afraid as much. Fourth, the military would not accept Mubarak's son, Gamal, to take over and inherit the presidency."³⁰² It is possible to infer that this knowledge that the military was slowly becoming anti-Mubarak and his family contributed to their diminishing fear of the regime and its retribution.

The state security mechanisms that Mahmoud was referring to had indeed not practiced the brutal norm of repression, and this was viewed as a "weakness" of the state starting in 2006 and through their sit-in in 2008. As for his comment regarding the military's non-acceptance of Mubarak's son Gamal as the next president of Egypt, this has been the word on the streets for several years. Gamal was not a military man, and the talk in the coffee shops, or "qahwas", where many political discussions take place, was that the military establishment would never accept him. Since 1952, a military man

³⁰² Interview with Mahmoud, RETA union member, IURETA union headquarters, Midan Lazghouly, Cairo on 12th June 2013.

has always ruled Egypt. An article by Roll,³⁰³ highlighted how the military would have great difficulty with a Gamal Mubarak presidency, especially with his neo-liberal economic ideas. Roll explains that the “new guard” promoted by Gamal and his businessmen allies “stands for an economic course that benefits the business elite and restricts the role of the state within the economy. This hurts the interests of the old guard, whose most important source of power has been the state, including the inflated public sector and bureaucracy.”³⁰⁴ The military remained neutral in this battle between the new and old guard and was concerned about protecting its economic power and political position.

“There are several reasons for this neutrality. First, President Mubarak has worked assiduously at cultivating political neutrality and absolute loyalty to the president in the military for 30 years, and it has become an ingrained habit. Second, many officers might share the concerns of the old guard regarding the new guard agenda, which would lead logically to eventual limits on the power of the military and its many economic and other perquisites. Third, there are many personal connections between the old guard and the military leadership. Zakaria Azmi and Safwat al-Sharif, for example, have military backgrounds and are from the same generation as Director of General Intelligence Omar Suleiman, with whom they have worked for decades. Finally, there might well be individual ambitions within the military regarding the presidency; the name most often raised in this context is Air Marshal Ahmed Muhammad Shafiq, the former Egyptian Air Force commander and current Minister for Civil Aviation.”³⁰⁵

A conversation for several hours with Wael Mohamed Abu Bakr, Mohamed Sayed Ahmed (from Sharqiyya province), Salwa Ahmed Abdel Mageed (from Ismailia) and Ashraf Abdel Aziz Gehad (from Giza) highlighted the following topics: 1) rights and a belief in getting ones’ rights was a statement often repeated; 2) knowledge was the basis

³⁰³ A researcher with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin

³⁰⁴ Roll, Stephan. “Gamal Mubarak and the Discord in Egypt’s Ruling Elite,” Sada Journal, Washington, D.C. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 1st, 2010

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/01/gamal-mubarak-and-discord-in-egypt-s-ruling-elite/6bcv>

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

for every action to get rights and fight for rights; 3) the leadership and charisma of Kamal Abu Eita and was important to the movement; 3) they had no fear in fighting for our rights because it was for our children; 4) what was the worst that could happen? They were already in a bad situation; 5) the independent media played a very good and important role; and 6) the naysayers would say that state security will come after you, no one will hear you from jail, you will not change anything, and here is no hope for change.

The RETA union members mentioned above spent the rest of the time describing the details of the December 2007 sit-in that lasted twelve days in front of the Council of Ministers building on Hussein Hegazi Street in downtown Cairo – the following is a description of this turning point event in December 2007. They started to recount many details about how they organized themselves and how they got to Cairo for the twelve-day sit-in. Starting on December 3, 2007, “We went to the Council of Ministers and began our sit-in for twelve days, slowly building up our courage in phases until Hussein Higazy Street was full of people chanting, singing, and protesting,” said Ashraf.

In the Sharqiyya province, they started with fifty-three people who boarded mini-vans and buses, and on the road they picked up more and more people on the way to Cairo. There were hundreds of other workers doing the same thing in other provinces around the country. Abu Eita role’s was critical, especially when he was negotiating with the authorities during the sit-in. He would always say he needed to check with my members before an agreement was reached. Wael quoted that a “one-thousand-mile journey begins with one step”, and in unity there is strength. Wael continued with saying, “When we die, Allah will ask us, ‘How come you did not fight for your rights and demand your rights?’ We would be judged poorly if we did not advocate for our rights.”

They further elaborated on the strategy of getting protesters to the Hussein Higazy Street in downtown Cairo. Taking a large bus to Cairo would get attention, so using mini-buses was the best way to move people, plus the bus driver of a large bus would be afraid of being stopped by police checkpoints along the road. They were dropped off several blocks away from the Council of Ministers headquarters and walked the rest of the way. Each group coming from outside of Cairo took a different path to get to Hussein Higazy Street. They came as small groups, which grew and grew in numbers over a few hours.

An interesting anecdote they shared with me was that in the early morning hours when they were conducting their sit-in, fresh flowers would be delivered to the Council of Minister's building to be displayed in the ministers' offices. They said that in Egypt there are "people who smell the flowers and there are people who are sitting on the ground".³⁰⁶ In the early morning they watched as fresh flowers were delivered to the ministers' offices while they were sleeping on the street. There were tremendous differences between workers sleeping, eating, and sitting in the street and the Cabinet Ministers' getting their fresh flowers for their offices delivered, despite what was going on outside their headquarters. The optics of this did not look good at all and further incensed the protesting workers whose salaries could not afford daily fresh flowers.

"We want our rights! We are not leaving without our rights! We will not be sold" Salwa said, "I would lose my voice from loudly shouting slogans for a long period of time so I would write them down on paper so others would chant when I no longer had a voice able to speak let alone chant; we would sing the national anthem daily and wave the flag." Salwa continued, "With each day, more and more (people) came to join us,

³⁰⁶ In Arabic it is such a statement especially in Egyptian colloquial

bringing the keys to their offices, which meant the office was closed and no taxes were being collected!” The police surrounded the protesters; however, they did not attack them, and there was even a tacit bit of support. People living in the apartment buildings on the street willingly opened their homes and offered their bathrooms for the protesters. The inhabitants of the many apartment buildings on Hussein Higazy Street were cheering on the protesters. After the sit-in was concluded, the RETA workers went to each apartment in every building on the street and presented them with a rose and a deep sentiment of gratitude.

These are the chants (discourse) that the protesters regularly used: “Made of steel/iron, and with each day we increase in numbers. Here are the keys, we are closed and no more taxes being collected.” The protesters also used role-playing mechanism as part of their protest repertoire. They role-played the death of RETA by pretending to have a body wrapped in a shroud and then carried (Ahmed played the role of the dead body, and he was very proud to do so) it in a funeral procession. RETA is a very old government institution; it was established during the rule of Mohamed Ali in the nineteenth century.

These protesters were well aware of the international obligations that Egypt had committed to when signing international agreements and conventions at the United Nations’ International Labor Organization (ILO). Wael said that, “the ILO Conventions³⁰⁷ that Egypt signed have to be respected, and that includes the freedom to create and establish independent trade unions. So we became a role model for many

³⁰⁷ According to the ILO website - Egypt has ratified **64 Conventions** Fundamental Conventions: **8 of 8** Governance Conventions (Priority): **3 of 4** Technical Conventions: **53 of 177**. Out of **64** Conventions ratified by Egypt, of which **63** are in force, **1** Convention has been denounced; **none** have been ratified in the past 12 months. Convention 98: the right to organize and bargain collectively was signed in 1954.
http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:102915

others in Egypt. This is a responsibility I carry for me, for my children, and for the future generations, to sustain this action and fight corruption in the government.”³⁰⁸ Salwa added, “Transparency is needed. There were 42,000 versions of Kamal Abu Eita in the new RETA union (in) all of us. I have become a new, different human being with a feeling of being more powerful- (it’s) an increase in faith that translates into an increase in power. We demand, we ask politely for our rights, and I have faith that our demands moved from a specific demand for just one group to a larger demand for all and for more people.”

The culminating event of this social movement that paved the way for the creation of an independent union was the twelve-day sit-in. “We started small, and then by end of the twelve days we had 13,000 persons on the Hussein Higazy Street. Slowly but surely we were building for the big confrontation in Tahrir Square starting on January 28, 2011; we set the stage ... We had a tradition that we do not raise our voice to our father (Mubarak), and initially we did not want to remove him, but we just wanted reform and what was owed us, our rights. But that changed, we should have had a new and better constitution before the elections for president in 2012; that was the SCAF’s mistake.”³⁰⁹

In the RETA protests, they decided to stay outside in the street because they were afraid that if they were inside an office building, a mischievous person could and would set a light to a stack of papers and then it would be blamed on the RETA protesters. The use of cell phones was a double-edged sword. First, the authorities and security forces used cell phones to take photos to intimidate union members and leaders. Second, it

³⁰⁸ Interview with Wael on 8th June 2013 at the IGURETA union headquarters

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

was an amazing organizing tool that RETA organizers and workers used regularly to send messages, check on each other, and take videos and photos for social media and blog-sites.

The union members I met with told me that RETA management used the technique of moving union activists and leaders to other offices far away from the person's home. "Death is preferable to living as a coward" was the motto for one of the RETA union leaders who was formerly in the army as a ranger. The concept of the individual versus the group or the collective came up again in our conversation. They reaffirmed the need and importance of unifying large numbers of workers, so when you have a large group, the employer will agree to the demands and needs of workers. Many workers were encouraged when they saw others around them who started talking; they developed the inside energy to overcome being forced down, or the concept of "El Kabt" in Arabic. "We started small and then slowly but surely started to grow while state security was present in each tax collection district. It did not deter or stop us. There are about 350 tax districts in Egypt. The number of tax districts differs per population and amount of real estate property, including agricultural land per province. It is not a uniform number."

Traditionally, social movements function within the sphere of NGOs, political parties, interest groups, and lobbyists. The independent labor movement in Egypt used different tools. It was not allied or associated with a political party per se and was not a savvy adherent to traditional lobbying methods. Its history and social class hamper the labor movement in Egypt. Despite using different mechanisms, brokers, and frames, the independent labor movement succeeded in galvanizing support and attracting student organizations and other civil protest movements to support their cause. The

independent labor movement was known to be weak and not well connected to the echelons of traditional social oppositional movements in Egypt.

Traditional social opposition movements included a few political parties with historic roots, such as the Wafd party, professional syndicates, human rights and legal aid organizations such as the Hisham Mubarak Center, and labor-NGOs that supported workers such as CTUWS and the Land Center. “Political parties often played a minor role in a popular upsurge, mobilizations, and pressures. Most of the effort is often borne by unions, professional associations, human rights organizations, religious groups, intellectuals and artists.”³¹⁰ Opposition political parties were in disarray and too weak thanks to the policies of the ruling party, the NDP. Popular mobilization and pressure against economic and political reform has been often centered at the base of unions where their members were at odds with the leadership.³¹¹ However, the independent labor movement was often viewed by the opposition elites with derision and as being inept while also ideologically in the Nasserist-leftist camp. These opposition elites included the traditional opposition parties such as the Wafd, whose members were based at university and research think tanks, and the neo-liberal businessmen with newfound power in allying with Gamal Mubarak. The contentious movement that led to the creation of the IGURETA was one strong *spark* to ignite more protests. This *spark* led the way for broader and larger worker protests, which led to the mass protests starting on January 25, 2011. It was a social movement in the timeline, or a continuum, of several movements and events starting in 2004 and lasting until 2011. It is indeed the time to take the Egyptian independent labor movement seriously as a political force

³¹⁰ King, Stephen J. *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009: 97

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

and socio-economic force. This is a movement calling for positive political change and for democracy. The labor movement is an important stakeholder with significant interest in democratic political change.

Factors that Determined the Outcome

There were several factors (internal and external) that all came together in a serendipitous manner and not necessarily coordinated or planned. For example, there was the Kefaya movement that began in 2004 with, “dozens of people gathered outside the attorney general’s office, making demands far beyond the established boundaries of free expression for the time. Their banners read, ‘No to power inheritance,’ ‘Down with Hosni Mubarak’ and ‘The Egyptian Movement for Change... Kefaya’. That was the first public appearance of Kefaya, the group that went on to organize a series of protests pressuring the regime to make concessions. Although the protesters in those days were few, their protests were remarkable because they garnered heavy media coverage outside Egypt. It was the first time since the 1970s that Egyptians had raised banners demanding the resignation of a president.”³¹²

Kefaya means “Enough” in Egyptian Arabic, and it represented the fundamental sentiments of many Egyptians – enough and the Mubarak regime must end. Roberts describes Kefaya as “essentially an agitation conducted by a dissident wing of the Egyptian elite against Mubarak’s monopoly of power and the prospect of this son succeeding him. It attracted a range of reformist viewpoints and published a lengthy shopping list of democratic-sounding aims and demands.”³¹³ Kefaya became a rallying

³¹² “Kefaya: The Origins of Mubarak’s Downfall”, Al Masry El Youm newspaper, English edition, published on 12/12/2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/545211>

³¹³ Roberts, Hugh. “The Revolution that Wasn’t”, London Review of Books, vol. 35, no. 17, 12 September 2013, pages 3-9:6.

call for opposition to the regime, yet the protests were mostly negative in nature, i.e. they protested without presenting a positive demand or proposal. Roberts believes that this was the reason for Kefaya's eventual demise and failure to gain a broad audience. I would also add that they were fundamentally a group of elites who did not address the average worker-citizen.

The creation of independent trade unions was illegal under labor legislation, emphasized by the monopoly of government-controlled ETUF. Labor-supporting NGOs and committees developed and became more and more active in the Egyptian labor scene. "Among them are the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS) and its general director, Kamal 'Abbas, veteran trade union organizers like Saber Barakat and labor lawyer Khalid 'Ali 'Umar of the Workers' Coordinating Committee for Trade Union Rights, 'Abd al-Ghaffar Shukr, a leader of the Socialist Alliance, which seeks to forge a coalition among all the Egyptian socialist forces, Socialist Horizons, the labor studies center affiliated with the Communist Party of Egypt, and Workers for Change, an offshoot of the Kefaya movement for democracy".³¹⁴ In 2010, they were joined by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR). These organizations had strong relations with counter-part organizations overseas in Europe, Asia, and the U.S. In addition, the CTUWS, in particular, began to regularly attend Middle East committee meetings held by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) based in Brussels to the chagrin of ETUF. These relationships became useful when the time was needed to mount a campaign, wage a labor protest, hold a sit-in, and

³¹⁴ "Strikes in Egypt Spread from Center of Gravity" by Joel Beinin, Hossam El-Hamalawy | published May 9, 2007 For background on the ongoing strike wave, see Joel Beinin and Hossam el-Hamalawy, "Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order," Middle East Report Online, March 25, 2007. See also Joel Beinin, "Popular Social Movements and the Future of Egyptian Politics," Middle East Report Online, March 10, 2005. For more on Islamist-leftist cooperation, see Hossam el-Hamalawy, "Comrades and Brothers," Middle East Report 242 (Spring 2007).

lead a major strike. These local Egyptian organizations could easily send emails and press releases to national and international labor organizations. Then these external organizations would in turn immediately diffuse the information to all their members and request them to send letters of support or condemnation.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a tri-partite organization of business, labor, and government representatives based in Geneva with several regional offices in the Middle East and around the world. It played an important role in forcing the Egyptian government to face the realities and accept the creation of the first independent union in fifty years. The ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) routinely questioned the Egyptian government about its blatant contravention of the ILO's conventions protecting the fundamental rights of workers. In 2008, Egypt was placed on the ILO's black list of countries in violation of universal worker rights. The CEACR criticized several aspects of the Egyptian Unified Labor Law of 2003. It critiqued the limits on freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. The CEACR repeatedly requested that the Egyptian government modify the law.³¹⁵ Since the Egyptian government failed to uphold its commitments regarding the ILO's Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association, Egypt was placed under scrutiny.

This condemnation by the ILO placed the Egyptian government on the defensive. In April 2009, an ILO delegation came to further investigate the government's promises of reforms in the labor sector. During the visit, several hundred members of the newly-formed independent union of RETA gathered in the lobby and outside the Ministry of

³¹⁵ Beinín, Joel. *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt* published by the Solidarity Center, AFL-CIO, February 2010, page 28.

Manpower with bullhorns, pots, and pans.³¹⁶ They were chanting for Minister of Manpower Aisha Abdel Hady to come downstairs and accept their official registration papers. Under such circumstances with the ILO delegation hearing all this commotion, the minister had no choice but to personally accept their registration papers. Another political opportunity that worked in favor of the RETA employees was the public feud between the Abd el Hady and the president of the ETUF, Hussein Megawer. In April 2009, Minister Abd el Hady “recognized the tax collectors’ union, an astounding decision that may be explained by her personal rivalry with the ETUF head as well as a timely visit from the ILO committee”.³¹⁷

International trade union organizations also played an important role in mounting an international campaign to support the RETA workers. Their support was particularly crucial after December 2008 and the establishment of the union. These organizations were sectorial, such as the Public Services International (PSI), a global union federation, which is an international federation of national and regional trade unions organizing in specific industry sectors or occupational groups. PSI is a trade union federation of over 500 public sector unions in 140 countries based in France. PSI immediately accepted the RETA union’s application for membership at a special executive board meeting. PSI’s certification of the new independent union was an important step in recognition and protection against potential threats by the Egyptian security services. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) also strongly supported the RETA workers. The ITUC is a confederation of independent trade union federations. It represents 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has

³¹⁶ A short YouTube video clip of the actual protest:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=992BLRSTnRA&list=UUIQi8R5ra2_GbUO0mM8wcrQ&index=47&feature=plcp

³¹⁷ Lachapelle p. 41

308 national affiliates. During that time, the ITUC's General Secretary (who is currently the director-general of the ILO, Guy Ryder) regularly sent letters of support for RETA workers and letters condemning the Egyptian government's blatant violation of freedom of association.³¹⁸

Individual country trade unions and federation in the U.S., U.K., and Europe also played a "certifying", supportive role to the nascent independence of the Egyptian trade union. The American labor movement along with the international labor movement mentioned above sent letters of support to the RETA organizers during their protests. In addition, members of PSI in Europe and ETUC sent letters of support in addition to petitions to the Ministry of Finance supporting RETA workers' demands. Additional certification came on March 3, 2010, when the AFL-CIO's³¹⁹ Executive Council announced that they would be awarding their annual 2009 Meany-Kirkland Award for Human Rights to the independent union of RETA employees. This was the first time in the history of this award that an Arab labor movement was recognized for its achievements and sacrifices. CTUWS was also honored for their role in support of the independent labor movement. Here is a portion of the statement:

March 3, 2010

In recognition of its extraordinary courage and perseverance in the face of substantial state repression, the AFL-CIO is proud to grant the Egyptian workers' movement the 2009 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award.

Angered by severe economic pressures and frustrated by the inadequate response of "labor" representation in Egypt, workers started to take to the streets in a wave of strikes and other public protests in the early 2000s. More than 3,000 strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins since 2004 have involved more than 2 million workers. The Egyptian government's

³¹⁸ Letters from PSI and ITUC can be found in Appendix 1 for this chapter.

³¹⁹ The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

response to these protests has ranged from attempts to strangle the movement through bureaucratic red tape to more violent responses that have included billy clubs, tear gas, imprisonment and even torture for many of the movement's leaders. Yet Egyptian workers haven't backed down: They are leading the most significant social movement in the Arab world since World War II, and the largest labor unrest in Egypt since the late 19th century. Egyptian workers are continuing to challenge their employers, their unions and their nation's government.

In the fall of 2007, in an effort to achieve wage parity with counterparts employed directly by the national Ministry of Finance, municipal tax collectors organized public demonstrations to publicize their demands. In December of that year, about 3,000 municipal real estate tax collectors held an 11-day sit-in strike in front of the Egyptian Ministry of Finance. The strike ended with the municipal tax collectors being granted a bonus equal to two months' pay and a pay raise of approximately 325 percent. The first nationally coordinated mobilization of public employees in the country, the strike had been organized by democratically elected representatives of the tax collectors.

Buoyed by their success, that strike committee and its supporters—led by Kamal Abu 'Eita—decided to build a new organization that would continue to advocate forcefully for the needs of its members. They gathered 30,000 signatures endorsing a new, independent union and elected local union committees in the governorates (provinces). On December 20, 2008, more than 1,000 municipal tax collectors from all over Egypt met in Cairo and declared the establishment of the Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Authority Workers (IGURETA).

IGURETA's democratically elected Constituent Council, supported by 300 union members loudly demonstrating in front of the Ministry of Manpower's headquarters in Cairo, submitted an application to form a new union to the Minister of Manpower and Migration that was finally accepted after tense negotiations. The first independent Egyptian trade union in more than half a century had been established. Unfortunately, the 55,000 municipal real estate tax collectors are the only workers so far to have succeeded in winning recognition of their own autonomous workers' organization.³²⁰

Social and traditional media outlets also played an important role in publicizing the Egyptian workers' activities. They reported on every aspect of their strikes, protests,

³²⁰ <http://www.aflcio.org/About/Exec-Council/EC-Statements/The-George-Meany-Lane-Kirkland-2009-Human-Rights-Award>

sit-ins, and celebrations. Overseas, the web-based media outlet based in the U.K., *LabourStart*,³²¹ played an essential role in publicizing all independent Egyptian workers' actions and protests, including the RETA protests. In addition, it posted stories and news under the section titled: "Act Now", wrote letters, and signed petitions appeals that were circulated all over the world. Messages of support came pouring in, especially from labor movements in the Arab World from Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Yemen. Traditionally, some of these "official labor movements" were generally considered allies of the ETUF. The most notable newspapers that consistently reported on the workers' protests were *Al-Masry el Youm*, *El Youm el Sabe'a*, and *Al-Badil*. In addition, Al-Jazeera and the Egyptian Dream satellite channel regularly reported on the events held by RETA workers. Egyptian blogs regularly reported on the RETA workers' protests, such as The Arabist and 'Arabawy among others.

There was also the US government and International Financial Institutions (IFI) pressure that needs to be taken into consideration. The U.S. government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), mission in Egypt was implementing a twenty-five-year-long good governance and democracy promotion program. This program began in 1989 and lasted until 2009 with an estimated total cost of \$80 million. Its goal was to provide technical assistance, materials, equipment, facilities, and training. The areas of assistance covered the following: 1) tax and general economic policy analysis and forecasting, 2) tax administration, 3) pension reform, 4)

³²¹ <http://www.labourstart.org/> LabourStart is an online news service maintained by a global network of volunteers which aims to serve the international trade union movement by collecting and disseminating information -- and by assisting unions in campaigning and other ways. Its features include daily labour news links in more than 20 languages and a news syndication service used by more than over 700 trade union websites. News is collected from mainstream, trade union, and alternative news sources by a network of over 500 volunteer correspondents based on every continent.

debt management, 5) treasury and budget reform, and 6) institutional and organizational development.³²² The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were also pressuring the Egyptian government, and the regime was complying with proposed significant economic restructuring and neo-liberal programs. “Although the government exerted tight control over political and social life, it privatized the economy. In 1991, Egypt signed an Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The government canceled progressive income taxes that year, privatized nearly 200 firms during the decade.”³²³

From 2004 to 2008, Egypt was deeply involved in negotiations with the IMF to regarding new loans and programs. These programs were in the realm of fiscal and monetary policy and improving governance. According to the IMF’s annual economic check report in February 2008, “The reforms have started to tackle critical impediments to private business and investment including: personal and corporate income tax rates were slashed, and tax administration is being modernized, with a move to self-assessment of personal income taxes”.³²⁴ This was an additional pressure that the Egyptian government had to contend with in their dealings with the 55,000 employees in the RETA who at one point had stopped collecting real estate taxes. This could also be seen as an added bonus for RETA leaders to fulfill their demands of an increase in wages.

³²² USAID report, 2008, USAID ASSISTANCE IN FISCAL REFORM: COMPREHENSIVE TAX REFORM IN EGYPT

³²³ Lesch, Ann M. “Egypt's Spring: Causes of the Revolution”, Article first published online: 15 SEP 2011, DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.2011.00496.x, Volume 18, Issue 3, pages 35–48, Fall 2011

³²⁴ <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2008/car021308a.htm>

Both the IMF and the World Bank, considered Egypt's Finance Minister Ghali as a "poster child" for his efforts in creating a good business and investment environment in Egypt. Bob Davis wrote in the Wall Street Journal: "Egypt has become a Washington economic favorite. In 2007, the World Bank's "Doing Business" report listed Egypt as the world's top reformer because it had hacked apart a regulatory web impeding business. The head of the International Monetary Fund's policy making committee is Egypt's personable finance minister, Youssef Boutros Ghali, who would be on the short list to become IMF chief should Dominique Strauss-Kahn step down".³²⁵ So another political opportunity in RETA workers' favor was the high profile of the Minister Ghali, as well as PSI's connections to the World Bank and the IMF through their participation as a member of the organized consultations processes with civil society and the labor movement.³²⁶

All the above-mentioned factors, actions, and supportive stances are a collective effort that put pressure on the regime. These factors supported the workers' social movement and then the new independent trade union. Those overseas were vocal and strategic in their support, mirroring the actions of the Egyptians on the ground. These actions all came together and culminated in the establishment and de-facto recognition of the new independent trade union. In addition, this social movement galvanized the

³²⁵ Davis, Bob. "Egypt: Critical Take on a Model Reformer", Wall Street Journal, August 3, 2010

<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2010/08/03/egypt-critical-take-on-a-model-reformer/>

³²⁶ The World Bank engages with trade unions in numerous ways: consultations with union members who are stakeholders in Bank projects; national consultation with unions as members of civil society; international policy dialogue on economic and social issues; research on the economic effects of collective bargaining, and training programs for both Bank staff and trade unions. This site includes reports and other materials from regular, ongoing dialogue between the World Bank, IMF, and the international labor movement.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALPROTECTION/EXTLM/0,,contentMDK:20223840~menuPK:390633~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:390615,00.html>

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2011/pol030411a.htm> Vienna Meeting Reaffirms Cooperation of IMF, ILO, Trade Unions

support of the student movement and other social/civic local movements in Egypt. Initially, the creation of the April 6th Student movement³²⁷ was attributed to the workers' protests and strikes. However, while the April 6th Movement took its name from the workers' mass protest in El-Mahalla al-Kubra, the movement "had no direct relationship to Mahalla workers or the massive demonstrations that broke out in Mahalla in lieu of the April 6th strike."³²⁸ Initially, according to Mohammed Adel, a leading activist within the movement,³²⁹ they were interested in advocating for the workers' issues, and they took a local event and turned it into a national movement based on a broader political discourse. The April 6th Movement as a social movement, using social media as one of its main tools and prescribed to non-violence, continued to support workers, yet they became more focused on political, economic, and social reform and challenges especially those affecting the youth population.

IGURETA January 2011 Activism

The Cairo RETA local union was the first to participate on January 25, 2011, according to Mohamed Abou Ayyash from Belbees. He said, "We were concerned with the group welfare versus just the individual. With the garment and textile workers, state security tried to break the workers' cohesion and lured and bribed (them) to ... feed the individual interest ... divide and conquer was the theme. Feed us and we will not

³²⁷ April 6th Youth Movement is an Egyptian Activists group started in spring 2008 to support the workers in El-Mahalla al-Kubra, an industrial town, who were planning to strike on April 6. On March 23, 2008, a small group of young Egyptian activists -- calling themselves the April 6 Youth Movement -- launched a Facebook page in support of a planned textile workers' strike in the city of Mahalla al-Kobra to protest low wages and high food prices. The group's leaders included 27-year-old Esraa Abdel Fattah Ahmed Rashid and 27-year-old Ahmed Maher. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>

³²⁸ Beinlin, Joel. "Civil Society, NGOs, and Egypt's 2011 Popular Uprising," *South Atlantic Quarterly* **2014** Volume 113, Number 2: 396-406, page 402.

³²⁹ See interview notes with M. Adel in Chapter 4 starting on page 51

complain.”³³⁰ So collective welfare led to the need for collective action in face of repressive regime tactics.

Mohamed began to recount events immediately before January 25, 2011, starting on January 18, when there were protests at the journalists’ syndicate building. It was much later that the MB came down to Tahrir Square organized as a group, he said. At the beginning, there were a few activists present in various protests around Cairo and immediately they were accused of being members of the MB. “First, I felt that I was just a body they (could) cut up with no feelings or spirit and could not breathe. Jail me, and I will not feel anything. I gave up my fate to Allah and appealed to Allah to save us. Allah is with us because he is always with what is just, and what is right. Jews, Christians, and Muslims have belief and faith, so they will succeed. I am talking about jihad within the self to make oneself a better person and far away from taking any bribes.” The interviews conducted during my field research in June-July 2013 further support and highlight the events, mechanisms, and repertoires for collective action used by these workers as a social movement.

In our interview, Mahmoud (another IGURETA member) explained: “Then Tunisia gave us the needed push to go forward. Tunis made our revolution come faster. The important events in our revolution were: January 25-27, 2011, with no violence in Tahrir by the government; then came 28 January, a big day with protests all over the country, especially in Ismailiya and Suez, the cities along the Suez canal. The protests started outside of the center Cairo and marched to the center. So it was decentralized and then became centralized. First, starting in Suez, Ismailia, El-Mahalla and then onto Cairo where there were clashes in these secondary cities first. Please note that from

³³⁰ Notes from interview with RETA workers on 8th and 12th June 2013 at their union headquarters in Cairo

January 25 to 27 there were no MBs to be found anywhere, and then on January 28, the MB members decided to join in and thus made their large appearance.”³³¹

There was a political role by the independent labor movement in Egypt. Their political role initially used socio-economic arguments that rang true to all Egyptians. However, this RETA workers movement did not achieve the desired political reform of a transition to democracy; their victory was elusive. Indeed, they were a catalyst leading up to the mass uprising, but it is after the fall of the Mubarak regime that things fell apart. The Mubarak regime fell, the military took over, and then there was a Morsi presidency for one year, during which time workers’ rights were still not fully recognized and the political power of the independent workers’ movement to affect reform was still weak.

Concluding Remarks and Lessons Learned

In this chapter, using the case study of the RETA workers, the detailed response was presented to this dissertation’s first question: *what was the political role of the independent Egyptian labor movement leading up to the 2011 uprisings, and how did the workers use repeated contentious collective actions to challenge the regime?* In this chapter, we examined why were the real estate tax collectors successful, what were the ingredients of their success, and how did they contribute to overall Egyptian protest movement to inspire other workers to organize independent unions. These workers contributed to the continuum of events that led to the massive uprising in January 2011. They did play a political role yet they were not able bring about the desired positive political change using socio-economic and political arguments with other civil society actors.

³³¹ Interview with Mahmoud, RETA union member, union headquarters, Midan Lazghouly, Cairo on 12th June 2013.

It is clear that workers movements and their organizations, trade unions, have an important political role to play in Egypt. This political role is in addition to their already significant socio-economic role. This role is particularly essential in developing countries, particularly those transitioning from authoritarian to democratic governance or attempting to make that transition. Workers' protest social movements can play a catalyst role in an overall larger protest contentious movement as we have seen in Egypt. The RETA workers' social movement was part of a continuum of several protest events taking place one after another over a period of ten years or more.

The combination of internal and external factors was a political opportunity strategically and successfully used by the RETA workers and their leaders. The RETA workers were successful using various mechanisms and processes in starting an effective, contentious social movement making demands from the government. This movement then led to the establishment of the first independent trade union since 1957 in Egypt. The ingredients of their success were varied, organized, as well as spontaneous. However, the main goal was a commitment to independent democratic practices.

Their claims (demands) were clear, and they had suffered for many years from these grievances that affected everyone. They had strong group identity and solidarity for collective action. While their protests started small, these protests grew progressively with more workers joining their ranks. The activist leaders of the branch offices located in every Egyptian governorate (state/county) played an important role as brokers organized more RETA employees to join the protests. The issues were clear – their wages had not increased over a period of several years and remained low in comparison to others doing similar work in the Ministry of Finance. It was a simple

message: increase our wages to achieve equity, and improve our quality of life. In addition, the RETA workers had done their homework. They produced facts and figures to support that the revenue they collect is important for the Egyptian government and that the government could afford the increase in wages. The leadership (primarily the movement president, Abu Eita) was a main factor in this movement's success. His charisma, commitment, straightforward attitude, and well-developed network within Egypt's political and social arenas all contributed to the movement's success.

The regular independent media and social media (blogs, and websites) played important roles in keeping the RETA workers' claims alive and by regularly reporting on their events. RETA workers also reached outside of Egypt and received considerable support from various legitimate and certifying international labor and human rights organizations.

The RETA workers contributed to the overall protest social movements against the Mubarak regime. They were in a continuum of events and protests that sustained their social movement until the major uprising in January 2011. The RETA workers were one spark among many that ignited the larger explosion. Workers are the backbone of any society, especially one that is striving for democratic practices, so their contribution was important.

Chapter Five: Case Study - The Garment & Textile workers at the Misr³³²

Company for Spinning and Weaving in El-Mahalla al-Kubra

*“The strike movement of El-Mahalla al-Kubra (2006-2008) became a catalyst for the development of the Egyptian working class as a whole. Using strikes as a unit of analysis to highlight collective learning and instruction.”³³³ **Brecht DeSmet***

“A veteran labour activist, El-Mahalla-based Kamal Fayoumi, declared when we met him late last year, “El-Mahalla is the mother of Tahrir. On April 6, 2008, they said the whole country was in El-Mahalla. On January 25, 2011, they said everyone was in Tahrir. Strikes have been a feature of Egyptian life for well over a century, with unions achieving a major place in the country's life in the years leading up to the end of the monarchy. The Nasser years saw an authoritarian populist regime dramatically increase wages and living standards for workers, even as it banned all but government-controlled unions.”³³⁴

History of the El-Mahalla al-Kubra’s Workers’ Movement

Introduction and Background

The history of the garment and textile workers in Egypt begins in the late nineteenth century. It became even more instrumental in Egypt’s economy and workers’ history and activism during the 20th century. In this chapter, I will give an overview of the relevant modern history of the garment and textile workers in Egypt and especially the Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving (MCSW) in El-Mahalla al-Kubra. I will review the workers’ actions at the company and the series of wildcat strikes³³⁵ that took place starting in 2006 and leading up to 2011. There will be an examination of how the government responded to these protests and the role of external

³³² The word “Misr” in Arabic means Egypt

³³³ DeSmet, Brecht, “Egyptian Workers and their Intellectuals. The Dialectical Pedagogy of the Mahalla Strike Movement.” *Mind, Culture and Activity: An International Journal*, 04/2012; 19(2):139-155. Page 140.

³³⁴ “The Labour Movement and the Future of Democracy in Egypt.” - *Opinion*. Al Jazeera, Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/04/20124117523568936.html>

³³⁵ Wildcat strikes are not officially sanctioned by the official ETUF union

forces. There will be a brief review of the role of women workers in this factory since it is of note. Then I will present the 6th April Youth Movement and its connection with the workers in El-Mahalla and their significant protest strike on 6th April 2008. The collective contentious actions and politics carried out by these garment and textile workers with the students' youth movement of 6th April was a catalyst for the uprising to take place in January 2011. They broke down barriers and challenged the regime by heralding fundamental political, social and economic grievances. While these workers were a significant social movement yet they were not able to establish a sustainable national institution as an independent trade union for garment and textile workers. This chapter will highlight the reasons why this did not happen while the previous chapter showed the reader how the civil servant workers in RETA were able to establish the first independent union since 1957. These two case studies contribute to our understanding of the workers' social movement's activities in challenging the regime several years before the January 2011 uprising.

This case study will outline the repertoire of protests that the workers conducted in building a social movement. Yet, it was a contentious protest movement limited to this factory and to the city, El-Mahalla in the province of Gharbiyya, which gave impetus to several social movements around the country. One example was the Tanta Kitan (Linen) Company located in the city of Tanta, the capital of the governorate of El Gharbiyya (see **Appendix B** for more details). They had a mixed national impact of motivating the protest movement to get organized and mobilize. "Meanwhile, research on textile factory workers [...] has found that these supposedly paradigmatic proletarians were by no means the regimented and uniformly exploited masses posited by the classic account; they formed tightly knit, kin-based communities, they prized

their skills, maintained remarkable workplace autonomy.”³³⁶ These observations can be applied to the workers in this case study.

How Egypt handled workers’ grievances and their struggle for recognition in 1947 is not much different from present-day policies. Issawi wrote in 1947, that it was clear that “The struggle of the workers to obtain recognition of their rights is far from ended. And unless the government shows much more wisdom than in the past in its dealings with the working class there is a great danger of this struggle taking a violent form.”³³⁷ Issawi’s statement was prophetic of the years to follow and the government has fulfilled the prophecy of not acting wisely with regard to respecting workers’ rights. In addition, he wrote that in 1947 Egypt’s main problems were a fall in income and steady population growth, making the decrease in government revenue even more acute.³³⁸ This clearly reflected Mubarak’s from the 1980s to 2011. Thus, Egypt has been on a similar trajectory (path) since the early 20th century and well into the twentieth century, despite British colonial rule, monarchical rule, socialist Nasserist rule, and pseudo-capitalist (crony capitalism) open economy (Infitah) Sadat and Mubarak rule.

Perception of Workers in Egypt: A “Fi’a” – A Group or Special Interest Group

Some background explanation of how workers’ are viewed and regarded in Egypt is needed at this point. Workers are referred to as a “fi’a” in Arabic. These workers led a movement that contributed to the downfall of the regime, yet they were generally perceived as a special interest with no real power. “The Arabic term *fi’a* simply means group, but has acquired negative connotations and might be compared with how the

³³⁶ Sewell, W. H. Jr. “Uneven Development, the Autonomy of Politics, and the Dockworkers of Nineteenth-Century Marseille.” *The American Historical Review*, 1988, 93 (3): 604-637.

³³⁷ Issawi, Charles. *Egypt: an economic and social analysis*. Oxford University Press, 1947: 97

³³⁸ *Ibid.* page 194

term “special interest” is used to disparage American labor. In post-Mubarak Egypt, officials have used its adjectival form *fi’awi* in reference to any demonstration, strike or sit-in advancing demands related to distribution of wealth, whether the protesters are blue- or white-collar employees, and whether they are calling for higher wages, greater benefits, improved working conditions or replacement of corrupt management personnel. The term’s recent usage seems to encompass the public and private sectors and to apply to collective action as limited as a protest in a single state-owned enterprise and as broad as a national strike by disgruntled members of a professional syndicate.”³³⁹ The use of the term by the media, opposition elites and the general public was meant to belittle or diminish demands and grievances by workers. By placing the workers into a special interest group, they were not representative of the larger whole, the masses, and the people.

Further explanation of the use and proliferation of the term *fi’awi* was well explained by Sallam,

“The proliferation of the term “*fi’awi*” to describe Egyptian workers’ demands and reduce them to parochial, even counter-revolutionary interests is more than just a denial of the right to a humane living standard. There is more at stake than just the absurdity of the assumptions on which the usage of this term is based. The ubiquity of the term signifies a mounting elite consensus that is rewriting the history of the ongoing Egyptian revolution, its meaning and its goals -- with the purpose of sidelining pressing socio-economic problems and the millions of Egyptians who suffer from them. While many believe that Egyptians revolted largely out of socio-economic discontent, the speed with which influential figures clung to the derogatory term *fi’awi* indicates that addressing these grievances in post-Mubarak Egypt -- let alone putting them on the national political agenda -- may not be as easy as one would have

³³⁹ Sallam, Hisham. “Striking Back at Egyptian Workers” published in [MER259](#), Volume: 41, Summer 2011 ME Report (MERIP)

thought. It remains to be seen whether the emergence of new parties and independent unions and syndicates will give workers and their allies among advocates of distributive justice a shot at countering this wave of unreflective elitism. But, in any event, the trends suggest that what awaits Egyptian workers after the end of a decades-long bad romance with Mubarak's authoritarianism is not a happy ending, but new challenges and greater uncertainty."³⁴⁰

Sellam points to the difficulty of the workers affecting the political agenda or getting their demands met in post-Mubarak Egypt especially in an environment of weak political parties that can champion the workers' cause.

The wildcat strikes³⁴¹ that took place in many economic sectors were influenced greatly by El-Mahalla al-Kubra workers and RETA employees. They gave them the needed push of support to make their grievances heard and the needed dose of courage. The garment and textile workers and the RETA employees helped the rest of the workers shed away their fear of reprisal by the regime. These workers were protesting not only the ETUF, which was interested in protecting the status quo, but against the economic measures and changes in their benefits that were taking place as a result of widespread neo-liberal economic reforms. Shokr wrote:

"The ETUF counts nearly 4 million members, mostly in public-sector companies and civil service, and until the 2011 uprising, it held a virtual monopoly on worker representation. From its inception in 1957, the federation regularly undermined independent worker strikes and ensured that regime loyalists filled top union positions. But the mounting pressures of the last 20 years -- low wages, inflation and the loss of job security -- triggered a wave of wildcat labor protest, the largest and most sustained social movement Egypt had witnessed in over half a century. Between 1998 and 2010, well over 2 million workers participated in strikes, sit-ins and other

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ A wildcat strike is a strike action undertaken by unionized workers without union leadership's authorization, support, or approval; this is sometimes termed, as an unofficial industrial action.

collective actions. These mobilizations operated on two fronts: The majority protested for improved living conditions and against privatization, while a smaller group of activists fought to establish more lasting forms of independent worker organization.”³⁴²

The workers’ social movement used an economic discourse, which quickly evolved into a political one. The tsunami of labor protests and mobilization has touched a wide range of economic activities, including textile, cement, railway, shipyard, poultry, mill, postal, and public utility workers; train, truck, tram, and minibus drivers; tax collectors, justice and education ministry employees, and other civil servants; doctors, nurses, pharmacists, professors, students; and other professionals. Even Cairo circus workers staged sit-ins to protest low salaries and the proposed privatization of the National Circus.³⁴³

The government from 2005 until the end of 2010 faced an uphill battle of contentious mobilization of millions of Egyptian workers. The protests were not particularly political, yet they formed a social movement that made regular claims and demands, while political parties and the MB were relatively silent. “Labor protests have been locally organized and executed and there has been limited contact or coordination between workers across factories. There has also been virtually no involvement by the established political parties or the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the regime's allegations otherwise.”³⁴⁴ Egypt’s political economic conditions were changing and deteriorating thus were directly felt by workers and their families — accelerating neoliberal economic reforms, rapidly rising inflation, and stagnant wages contributed to these feelings. This

³⁴² Shokr, Ahmad. “Reflections on Two Revolutions” published in *Middle East Report*, MER265, Winter 2012 Number 265 pp. 2-12

³⁴³ Shehata, Samer. *Shop Floor Culture and Politics in Egypt*, New revised afterword for the AUC publication in 2010, page 253

³⁴⁴ Shehata 268

forced workers to use their only weapon against the employers, which were still primarily the public sector.

The wave of workers' protests that erupted was the largest social movement Egypt witnessed in more than half a century. These labor actions were amplified politically because they coincided with a campaign for democracy organized by Kefaya (Enough), The Egyptian Movement for Change, and other groups composed mainly of the urban middle classes and intellectual workers. However, there are only weak links between the workers and these movements.³⁴⁵ The regime considered large worker protests to be of great concern and regularly used their official organ, the ETUF, to quell workers' discontent and stop these protests from gaining momentum.

“From the regime's perspective, hundreds of thousands of protesting workers are potentially more destabilizing than the existing opposition parties or the Muslim Brotherhood. The prospect of independent unions is also threatening for a regime accustomed to tightly controlling labor. These are some of the reasons why the government has responded to workers' protests with a mix of accommodation and repression rather than exclusively through force. Moreover, it is likely that some government officials believe they can simply "buy off" workers, unlike groups that are opposed to the regime's very existence, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or *Kefaya*.”³⁴⁶

The strike movement started in the center and heart of Egypt's prized El-Mahalla al-Kubra factory and spread into practically every sector of the economy, including professional white collar professions such as teachers, higher education professors, doctors, etc. Even though civil servants (government employees) such as the real estate collectors and teachers behaved in a militant manner, they were still not considered as “militant workers”. Despite the perception, these civil servants still were able to force

³⁴⁵ Beinun, *Struggle for Workers Rights in Egypt*, 2010:14

³⁴⁶ Shehata 268

the government's hand by their position within the apparatus. They were able to use their position to make their demands on a national level and thus to be heard. However, the increase in workers' protests was not organized on a national or regional level. They were first initiated on a local level with some copycat actions following large nationally publicized strikes. The Egyptian government was facing a serious legitimacy and credibility crisis. It was unable to deliver its promise of improved benefits to a great majority of the people, and at the same time, the much-advertised democratic reforms were mostly "window dressing". In 2010, "the workers movement offers the government an opportunity to listen to the voice of its people and implement long-overdue political and economic policy changes. Failure to do so may well undermine Egypt's internal security, prosperity, and regional influence."³⁴⁷ This was quite a prophetic statement in 2010, which foretold the unfolding events starting in January 2011. The workers were becoming a social and political social movement force in Egyptian society gaining national headlines and making endorsements for the need for political and economic policy changes.

In further support for my question regarding the political role of the workers' social movement, some observers of the labor movement such as blogger and labor activist, Hossam El-Hamalawy wrote,

"I believe that labor strikes in the last week of the uprising [2011] were the tipping point that forced Mubarak's resignation. There is no credible account as yet of the exact chain of events that pushed Mubarak out of office. Yet the fact that one of the first things the Supreme Council (of Armed Forces (SCAF)) tried to do after taking power was to bring an end to strikes suggests that work stoppages were a source of deep concern for the

³⁴⁷ Beinun, *Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, 2010, page 15

generals who surrounded Mubarak in his last days. The claim that these activities hastened Mubarak’s ouster is, therefore, quite plausible.”³⁴⁸

The post-Mubarak government has struggled with and against the labor movement. One of the benefits of the January 2011 uprising was the creation of two independent trade union federations and a de-facto acceptance of independent unions. “The ETUF will remain a crucial element in the struggle to redefine labor relations in post-Mubarak Egypt. But just as the burgeoning labor movement was a thorn in the side of the previous administration — and, by some accounts, a factor in its ultimate downfall — it will likely remain so for Egypt’s new leadership. Strikes, protests, and workplace mobilizations have only increased since Mubarak’s ouster and seem poised to continue.”³⁴⁹ As mentioned in previous chapters, there have been more egregious government behavior against workers in the post-Mubarak government, giving credence to the theory by Crane Brinton³⁵⁰ that post-revolution does not initially engender a more enlightened regime. A reminder of Jacques Mallet du Pan’s statement that “the revolution devours its children.”³⁵¹

The Egyptian Textile Worker and Bank Misr’s El-Mahalla al-Kubra Centerpiece Factory

The Egyptian textile industry was created out of a nationalist fervor to develop the country with Egyptian capital, raw materials, equipment and workers. In Egypt’s

³⁴⁸ Sallam, Hisham. “Striking Back at Egyptian Workers” published in *Middle East Report*, [MER259](#), Volume: 41, Summer 2011 ME Report (MERIP)

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Prentice Hall, 1965 (revised & expanded edition)

³⁵¹ French journalist Jacques Mallet du Pan’s (1749 – 10 May 1800) remark during the French Revolution. He is known for coining the adage “the Revolution devours its children”, which originally appeared as “A l’exemple de Saturne, la révolution dévore ses enfants” in his 1793 essay *Considérations sur la nature de la Révolution de France, et sur les causes qui en prolongent la durée*.

history (and present), cotton and the textile industry cannot be separated from each other. “Under the banner of nationalism and opposition to British occupation and foreign economic domination, Bank Misr established the largest Egyptian-owned textile factories in several locations during the interwar period [WWI & WWII]. Bank Misr itself was established in 1920 to finance Egyptian-owned, large-scale industrial enterprises under the slogan, ‘An Egyptian bank for Egyptians only.’ Thousands of male and female agricultural labourers and landless and near-landless peasants of all ages were brought from their villages to work in those factories, thus becoming industrial labourers and urban dwellers.”³⁵² Thus is the beginning of this industry and the urban working class.

Business and politics are the pursuit of Vitalis’ book *When Capitalists Collide* by focusing on investors as economic and political agents, particularly focusing on post-WWI events and opportunities that shaped Egyptian investors’ strategies. Vitalis uses the concepts of interest aggregation, conflict, and the building of industry in the developing world.³⁵³ This model centers on rival coalitions of local investors, or business groups, which are a combination of big landlords, bankers and manufacturers — a business oligarchy. It is conflict between these oligarchs that is central to understanding Egypt’s early industrial development.³⁵⁴ The outcome of WWI among rival investor coalitions became the politics of business and industrial development in Egypt, which cannot just be reduced to imperialism versus the nation according to

³⁵² Hammad, Hanan. "Making and Breaking the Working Class: Worker Recruitment in the National Textile Industry in Interwar Egypt." *International Review of Social History* 57 (2012): 73-96, pages 73-74

³⁵³ Vitalis, Robert. *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, Print 1995:4

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 5

Vitalis.³⁵⁵ Bank Misr is the story of an investment group led by the infamous outspoken nationalist chairman, Tal'at Harb. He is “the centerpiece of both triumphalist (nationalist) and exceptionalist (neo-Marxist) accounts of Egyptian economic history,”³⁵⁶ as historians of the Egyptian labor movement Beinin and Lockman summarize the story, the Bank Misr group “symbolized the organizational consolidation of an aspiring Egyptian industrial bourgeoisie,” which allegedly “took on itself the task of creating a purely Egyptian-owned industrial sector.”³⁵⁷ It was a departure from the mostly foreign-owned large, medium, and small business enterprises that had existed and thrived in Egypt.

Egypt's development model was based on joint cooperation between Bank Misr group and foreign investors, but after 1922, Egyptian capitalists made inroads into local finance, trade, manufacturing, and services. Tignor sees the history of the political economy after 1918 as an attempt by “a dynamic and farsighted” group of industrialists to “create a vibrant and autonomous Egyptian capitalism.”³⁵⁸ The account of Bank Misr is the colonial-exceptionalist narrative in miniature. “It is the account of an alleged failure of a single institution representing a class — an aspiring Egyptian industrial bourgeoisie.”³⁵⁹ It was more complicated than a tug-of-war over economic development with one side pulling the economy toward independent industrialization, the other straining to keep the economy locked in the grips of foreign capital.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Vitalis 5

³⁵⁶ Beinin, Joel, and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987:10-11

³⁵⁷ Vitalis 1995:7

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 10

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 28

The most notable investment by Bank Misr, particularly in its first years of operation, was in the cotton production business. Bank Misr was a symbol for local capitalist organization from 1880 to 1960. Under Harb's leadership and guidance: "The Misr Groups' reliance [was] on state business and subsidies in its initial 1920 commercial-banking venture and all subsequent enterprises is well documented. The group's largest sectoral investments during the first years of operation were in cotton trading and textile manufacture."³⁶¹ Harb and his associates had a strong commitment to not only creating and developing but also strengthening Egypt's ties to the world cotton market.³⁶²

How did cotton become such a dominant feature of Egyptian economic activity?

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century – cotton was the main source of income for almost every landowner in the Delta region.³⁶³ As a result, cotton's effect on Egypt's overall economy was profound – land prices tripled; income into the state coffers increased dramatically and became about 70% of the state's income; it attracted more foreign merchants and bankers to Egypt; it transformed agricultural and irrigation practices throughout the country; it improved the system of irrigation in the form of the construction and maintenance of many irrigation canals; it employed many peasants and workers in the whole process; the government erected thousands of telegraph miles; it provided opportunities for several young Egyptians to be sent overseas to learn technical skills; the government upgraded Alexandria's port infrastructure; the government increase railroad tracks ; and

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Vitalis 1995:57

³⁶³ Owen, E.R.J. *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy 1820-1914 – a study in trade and development*. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1969.

much more.³⁶⁴ Prior to WWI, there was an abundance of capital in Egypt, with local foreign entrepreneurs bringing expertise and energy and delving into other sectors of the economy. This cash crop improved Egypt's trade accounts by attracting foreign investment. A market for manufactured consumer goods and a need for improved city infrastructure clearly contributed to the need for workers – skilled and unskilled. So Egypt saw an increase in demand for workers to fill those jobs.³⁶⁵

However, Owen wrote that the cultivation and export of cotton “did not lead to the development of a modern sector in the economy. Progress of this kind was inhibited, in part by the unresponsive nature of the traditional [small workshop] sector, in part by certain physical and political obstacles.”³⁶⁶ Another inhibitor was the presence of a successful and prosperous export sector but Owen concludes in the final analysis there were many more advantages that Egypt gained from cotton; however, after 1914 this situation changed.

Between 1954 and 1956, Nasser and his revolutionary comrades ended the 70-year-old regime that had governed capital in Egypt. Nasser successfully got rid of monopolistic capitalism. Starting in 1954, in Nasser's strategy with Argentina's Peronist undertones, he noted how “organized labor has been deliberately and effectively used for political purposes on a nation-wide scale for first time in Egyptian history.”³⁶⁷ Nasser subsequently organized workers (top down) into the one labor federation ETUF in 1957. This effort was not a grassroots (bottom up) organizing of workers into the ETUF because it was a top down decision; Nasser did this because he saw other

³⁶⁴ Owen, E.R.J. *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy 1820-1914 – a study in trade and development*. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1969, introduction

³⁶⁵ Interview with Fathallah Mahrous in Alexandria, Egypt 22-23 June, 2013

³⁶⁶ Owen p. 375

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 208

countries within his milieu that had national federations for their unions and workers. Then, legislation was passed to include workers into the legislative branch, neutralizing their ability to strike and bargain collectively as organized workers would in a privately held economy. Nasser rid Egypt of most major private investment and replaced it with state-owned public enterprises. He also rid Egypt of independent trade unions and an activist labor movement. Nasser was successful in creating a corporatist style of trade unionism in Egypt.

Why was there a focus on Egyptian textile workers in academic scholarship?

Beinin and Lockman's research focused on the Egyptian "textile workers who assumed the leading role in the labor movement before and after the Second World War, respectively."³⁶⁸ They focused on textile workers in their study of the emergence of a new group of urban wageworkers from the end of nineteenth century onward. These workers earned their wages solely based on their daily labor. Due to Egypt's social composition, rural working class also has to be considered since many peasants worked on a casual or seasonal basis in industry and became part of the urban working class.³⁶⁹ The character of the textile worker is that "the textile worker exemplified the most complete mechanization of industry in Egypt at the time. Among the textile workers we find large, and even extremely large, concentrations of workers in forms of production requiring heavy capital investment and up-to-date bureaucratic technical structures."³⁷⁰ This is an example of Egypt's version of a mini-industrial revolution.

³⁶⁸ Beinin and Lockman 1987:5

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Goldberg, Ellis. *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930-1952*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986:140.

From the nineteenth century onward, initially the town of El-Mahalla al-Kubra, about two hours north from Cairo in the middle of the Nile Delta, emerged as an important textile industry center in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. In 1927, Harb chose the town as the site for the Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving (MCSW). This is the first large, wholly Egyptian-owned textile factory in Egypt, and it remains one of the biggest today. The MCSW became Bank Misr's flagship company and most successful enterprise, employing the largest number of industrial workers in the country. By the end of the 1930, the factory's products had successfully gone to market, which encouraged the owner of Bank Misr to continue to expand production. The workforce rapidly increased from approx. 2,000 workers in 1930 to 10,000 in 1938, and then to 27,000 in 1945. Such rapid expansion helped construct the company within Egyptian nationalist discourse as an emblem of national success and progress in the face of foreign political and economic domination.³⁷¹ The most famous saying at the time around was that every dress worn in Egypt is made by the MCSW. This was associated with the feeling that Egypt's nationalism and freedom was associated with this company.³⁷²

Harb expressed great admiration for the people of El-Mahalla and their commitment to education and industry, particularly the textile industry. He pointed out that 57% of El-Mahalla's population worked in industry, and almost one-third of the population worked in the textile industry. The theory was that the textile industry had become so much of a part of the culture of the town that its children were effortlessly predisposed to acquire its skills and traditions, and that consequently the shift from

³⁷¹ Hammad 2012:76

³⁷² *Ibid.*77

handloom to mechanical weaving should not be difficult.³⁷³ The opportunity to learn new skills helped recruit workers, including landless peasants, affanddiyya (middle class professionals), umda (local leaders/mayors) in addition to spreading the nationalist discourse.³⁷⁴

Beinin and Lockman wrote that:

“The decision of the Misr company to locate its principal textile mills in the Nile Delta and to rely on untrained workers was a direct response to the history of working class organization and collective action in Cairo and Alexandria, where the textile mills would normally have been located on the basis of economic considerations other than the need to control the labor force. The Misr Company’s adoption of paternalism as a strategy of labor control was likewise related to its fear of labor militancy. While this strategy was successful for a limited time, the violence and intensity of the strikes at Mahalla al-Kubra in 1947 and Kafr al-Dawwar in 1952 demonstrated the workers’ rejection of paternalism and contributed to the adoption of a new industrial strategy after 1952.”³⁷⁵

The working class consciousness developed and bonded despite the origin of the workers. It is clear that the strategy adopted above was successful for a short time. Then workers’ solidarity took over in the face of workplace challenges and the need to advocate for rights.

In the 1930s, the early years of the factory, there was a high level of worker absenteeism and greater interest in working the land even though the income was even more meager than working at the factory. “Returning to agricultural work whenever it was available was in effect a form of resistance against the company’s injustices in the manner that James C. Scott describes as ‘everyday forms of resistance’ among oppressed

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Beinin and Lockman 1987:453

peasants, and that Asef Bayat calls ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’³⁷⁶ among the urban poor. In addition, managers were not trained, treated workers with disrespect, and had no patience for training these new skills. Working conditions in the MCSW were quite bad. “So quitting work was one way of resisting the unjust work relationship with the MCSW, and it exposed the dire lack of a systematic company policy for recruiting and retaining workers”.³⁷⁷ Hammad’s research further shows how workers were divided into competing groups. Geographic origin played a divisive role among the factory workers of El-Mahalla in a manner similar to racial divisions among American workers in the early twentieth century. Kinship was also a significant factor in the creation of a violent atmosphere at the factory and in workers’ slums,³⁷⁸ taking precedence over other bonds over the factory workers. In Egyptian society, geographic solidarity was helpful and important, yet kinship always prevailed.³⁷⁹

Urban industrial life developed in Egypt despite strong family, tribal, and, at times, geographic solidarity. “Although familial and communal groupings served to divide workers, these groupings also facilitated their transformation and adaptation to urban industrial life and shaped their social consciousness as a distinctive urban group.”³⁸⁰ Through these natural groupings workers shared knowledge regarding skills on how to operate machinery safely and reducing alienation by giving them a sense of familiarity in their new lives in El-Mahalla. These groupings also became a job-bank for finding jobs for their kin. ³⁸¹ During the major strikes of 1938 and 1947, workers living in slums survived on a system of credit. Worker mediation in the company hiring

³⁷⁶ Hammad 2012:81

³⁷⁷ Hammad 2012:82

³⁷⁸ Ibid. 93

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 94

³⁸⁰ Ibid. 96

³⁸¹ Hammad 96

process to secure employment for others empowered laborers in the face of the capitalist factory management, but also created divisions among the workers. Worker empowerment and division formed their consciousness as a distinct community — much like a separate class — in relation to the local capitalist system and their new urban surroundings.³⁸²

In the 1930s Egypt, high recruitment levels and high turnover marked the labor market for factory workers. “High levels of ignorance about exactly how the machines worked also often led to fatalities, and the textile mills were no exception. Workers were injured and killed by machines throwing off shuttles, gears, or other pieces and piercing the eyes, heads or extremities of workers. Associated with plants managed like Mahalla were the relatively high costs borne by workers in terms of training, job search, and the risk to life and limb as well as long and arduous day in generally very unpleasant conditions.”³⁸³ Poorly trained managers regularly assaulted workers’ dignity, and the workers were not organized to act collectively to assert their presence. “Egyptian firms in the textile industry, especially in El-Mahalla, suffered from low productivity due at least in part to high levels of turnover and absenteeism and the associated costs of an open labor market in the firm, given the low level of qualified workers.”³⁸⁴ The history of worker/management relations in the industry and especially in El-Mahalla was not positive.

Kafr al Dawwar in 1952 was a significant signpost in the history of the garment and textile workers in Egypt according to labor historians. I had the opportunity to

³⁸² Hammad 2012:96

³⁸³ Ellis Goldberg in Lockman (editor), Zachary. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:117.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.125.

discuss this with Fathallah Mahrous, a retired trade union leader and activist in the industry.³⁸⁵ He described in great detail the incident of the workers' demands, strike, and the punitive role played by the military. The workers protested for the following reasons: 1) the removal of the much disliked, deposed king's men who were in the management and accused of corruption; 2) recognition of a freely-elected union representation; 3) reinstatement of several dismissed workers; 4) wage increase and an increase in the annual bonus; 5) amnesty for the strikers; and 6) the establishment of the headquarters of their local union outside of the factory. "On the night of August 12 [1952], some 500 workers at Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving began a sit-down strike and locked themselves inside the mill. Shortly thereafter fires were set to some of the auxiliary buildings inside the complex [...] At 3:00 am on August 13, troops arrived from Alexandria and were met with demonstrations by the workers. The demonstrators supported the revolution and Najib, the leader of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Shots of disputed origin were fired in the vicinity of the demonstration [...] The army returned the fire, and in the exchange two soldiers, one policeman, and four workers were killed and many others wounded."³⁸⁶ The military moved quickly to contain the strike and demonstrations, arrested many workers, and began a military trial to deal with the three principal defendants: Khamis, and al-Baqari (rumored to be members of the banned communist party) and Shihab (a Muslim Brother). Musa Sabri, a journalist with a law degree, defended them, and the proceedings progressed so quickly that by August 18, Al-Baqari and Khamis were sentenced to death while Shihab got a 13-year sentence of hard labor in prison. Khamis and al-Baqari were hanged on

³⁸⁵ Interview on 23 June 2013 at his home in Baqoos, a working class neighborhood in the city of Alexandria, Egypt

³⁸⁶ Beinín & Lockman 1987:422

September 7.³⁸⁷ The speed of the trial; the severe, harsh military response; and the dismissal of much evidence that would have exonerated both defendants were all done in the name of “fear of the political effects of the strike rather than their personal responsibility for acts of arson or other violence.”³⁸⁸ The new ruling regime feared communist-led collective uprisings by workers and a political challenge to the military. This was purely a political decision and not one based on facts of the case, but it left a schism between the regime and workers. It began the slow, step-by-step control of the workers and the elimination of independent trade unionism and collective action.

Over a period of several years starting in 1952, the new regime consolidated its power, and Nasser took over the presidency from the more amenable Mohammed Najib, who was supported by many workers and the MB. From 1952 to 1959, there were several strikes and protests by workers that were quickly put down; of course, the establishment of the ETUF, further cemented the subservient role of the trade unions and workers to the state and its centralized policies. Nasser pushed new legislation to control the creation of trade unions; the “notify and accept” علم و خبر method of establishing free unions ended, and arguments broke out between nationalists and leftist/communist supporters, which further weakened the independent labor movement. By the early 1960s, many leftist/communist trade union activists were rounded up, arrested, and many killed. The new law #91 was the final blow after the Kafr al-Dawwar incident, and that put the final nail in the coffin of independent trade unionism in Egypt. Law #91 cancelled local union committees in each workplace, expropriated funds, and mandated one trade union for each type of work with branches

³⁸⁷ Information from the interview and supported by Beinin and Lockman 1987:423

³⁸⁸ Beinin and Lockman 1987:423

in each factory. “So now we need only 26 general trade unions to control the workers — the end of the free independent labor movement as we knew it,”³⁸⁹ said Fathallah Mahrous with lament. Mahrous had been in and out of prison during that time period. He was a known activist and member of the Egyptian Communist party. In 1967, he was officially prevented from trade union or community work and his campaign for a seat in Maglis el Shaab — the Peoples’ Assembly was ended by the authorities. He gave me several fliers with his platform and campaign slogans. In 1973, he went to prison for twenty-two months accused of being an active communist. “We have been greatly missing real trade union structure organizing since 1952,” he said. “Real political, cultural, and worker consciousness were missing and not being taught so workers learned to survive the hardships without class consciousness. Trade unions lost their political awareness,” he continued saying. He said that during Nasser’s rule there was “the carrot and stick” approach, but during Sadat’s era it was just the “stick”.³⁹⁰

It is well established that collective action in the form of workers’ trade union has positive impacts on the workplace, the workers, and their relation with managers. “There is good statistical evidence, admittedly drawn from the U.S., that quit rates are lowered more due to union voice than to union monopoly power over wages: that ‘unionized workers quit less and accrue more tenure than otherwise comparable nonunion workers has more to do with the fact that unionism transforms the working places through voice than with the fact that it raises pay.’³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Interview on 23 June 2013 in Alexandria, Egypt

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ellis Goldberg in Lockman, Zachary (editor). *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994:125

Organization

Who are the Egyptian Garment and Textile Workers, Their Union, and Its leadership?

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Egyptian workers have been attempting to improve their situation. They were unrepresented in the People's Assembly and faced indifferent or hostile public opinion, so the only open course of action to highlight their grievances was through strikes.³⁹² As early as 1938, there was record of violent strikes by El-Mahalla workers over the increase in wheat prices with more strikes in 1942 again due to a rise in the cost of living. Human beings engage in activities to satisfy needs, whereas capitalist exploitation, domination, and alienation replace the development of workers as human beings. Gramsci explains that the working class faces its predicament as a subject of the economic corporate level. The dominant capitalist class will exploit and divide and conquer in order to control the workers, thus atomizing the proletarian forms of organization and consciousness.³⁹³ Gramsci would point out that the only form of organization is the trade union and trade unionist consciousness. Trade unionism organizes the workers for the first time as a class and opens up a new evolving phase "in which consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class — but still in the purely economic field."³⁹⁴ Workers recognize themselves as a political actor through the acquiescence to agreements with the bourgeois state. The will and desire of the proletariat to overcome its subaltern position leads to the workers' movement transcending its economic outlook and developing into a political force.³⁹⁵ In order to

³⁹² Issawi, Charles. *Egypt: an economic and social analysis*, Oxford University Press, 1947. page 95

³⁹³ Thomas, P.D. *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

³⁹⁴ Gramsci, A. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York, International Publishers, 1971, page 181

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

understand how and why workers engage in collective action, one needs to understand leadership in unions and broader worker movements.³⁹⁶

The garment and textile workers adopted the democratic leadership model. “In the democratic model, the ‘magical frontier’ (Fairbrother, 2005: 259)³⁹⁷ between union members and leaders is highly permeable: there are many opportunities for members to become leaders (and vice versa), regular dialogue between members and leaders and frequent opportunities for members to hold leaders to account. In the bureaucratic model, communication tends to be one-way: from the top to the bottom.”³⁹⁸ During the several strikes that took place from 2006 to 2011, it was clear that the workers’ had adopted the democratic leadership model.

Militancy of the Textile Workers’ Starting in 1930s to the Present

There have been many accounts written about El-Mahalla’s MCSW, and a particularly interesting one is by Carson in the 1957 edition of *The Middle East Journal*. Carson used pseudonyms to protect confidences. The mill (factory) produced more than 20% of all cotton cloth production in Egypt and was an economic pillar in Bank Misr’s investment portfolio. “The mill has had serious disturbances about every six years. By ‘serious’ is meant, for instance, an attempt to murder the General Manager, which took place in 1937.”³⁹⁹ These disturbances were generally a result of poor management exploiting kinship relationships/groupings. In addition, management preferred to hire

³⁹⁶ Alexander, Anne. “Leadership and collective action in the Egyptian trade unions”

³⁹⁷ Fairbrother, P. (2005) ‘Book Review of G. Gall (ed.) Union Organising: Campaigning for Trade Union Recognition’, *Capital and Class* 87(Autumn): 257– 63, page 259.

³⁹⁸ Alexander, Anne. “Leadership and collective action in the Egyptian trade unions”. *Work Employment Society* 2010 24: 241, page 242.

³⁹⁹ Carson, William Morris. “The Social History of an Egyptian Factory” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Autumn, 1957), pp. 361-370 Published by: Middle East Institute. Page 361

illiterate peasants rather than workers from urban areas who would demand more wages and benefits.

Beinin and El Hamalawy wrote an account of the pertinent history of the MCSW as it relates to workers' militancy, activism, and protest. The company had:

“A long history of working-class militancy dating back to the 1930s, including a ferocious strike in September-October 1947 demanding an independent trade union. Workers' victories won there have often sent ripples far beyond Mahalla. Since it was established in 1927, the Misr mill has been considered a cornerstone of Egypt's industrialization effort. It has recruited generations of peasants from the surrounding villages, and transformed them into 'modern' workers as they turned Egypt's principal agricultural product, cotton, into finished cloth. It is no accident that the Misr conglomerate, of which the Spinning and Weaving mill was the flagship enterprise, was the first industrial firm to be nationalized by the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1960 as it began to embrace 'Arab socialism'. Some of the current strikers draw upon an activist heritage in their own families.”⁴⁰⁰

In 1927 “Sayyid Habib's father came from the village of Tala⁴⁰¹ to work in the dyeing department shortly after he was married. His initial monthly wage was 90 piasters (a piaster is a hundredth of a pound). In 1975 he retired with a pension of ten pounds and 80 piasters a month. After the mill was nationalized, pensions were made subject to a cost-of-living increase, so his final monthly pension when he passed away in 1996 was 182 pounds. Habib's father would regale his little son with stories of the workers' battles of yesteryear. 'He did a good job,' said 'Attar with a wink. Soon after the Misr firm was nationalized, all textile mills with over 200 workers were brought into the

⁴⁰⁰ Beinin, Joel and Hossam El-Hamalawy, “Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order” Middle East Report, MERIP, published March 25, 2007 <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032507>

⁴⁰¹ Tala is in El Menoufiyya province (governorate) and by the way it is also where my father was born and grew up until he left for Cairo to attend university in 1942.

public sector. Nationalization resulted in an immediate wage increase. Workers at the top of the scale earned seven and a half [Egyptian] pounds⁴⁰² a month.”⁴⁰³

Repertoires of this social movement and what factors determined the outcome

The Mahalla Strike Movement — The Development of Workers into a Social Movement, Its repertoires, and Its Mechanisms from 2006 to 2011

Two workers, Attar and Habib, were leaders in the El-Mahalla Misr Company of Spinning and Weaving when the workers challenged the regime (the owners of this factory) with a significant message through the December 2006 strike. Beinín and Hamalawy describe below the essence of this most “militant and politically significant” collective contentious action:

Muhammad ‘Attar and Sayyid Habib were among the leaders of a December 2006 strike at Misr Spinning and Weaving, one of the most militant and politically significant in the current strike wave. This upsurge of labor collective action has occurred amidst the broader political ferment that began in December 2004 with taboo-breaking demonstrations targeting President Husni Mubarak personally, demanding that he not run for reelection in 2005 (he did) and that his son, Gamal, not succeed him as president. An amendment to the constitution permitting the first-ever multi-candidate presidential election generated expectations that the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections would be fair and democratic. These hopes were frustrated. Nonetheless, a wide swathe of the public, which is mostly engrossed in trying to earn a living, began to take notice of politics.⁴⁰⁴

In essence this strike in 2006 was political in nature since workers who were dealing with mainly economic issues were now taking note of the political environment around them. This strike was significant in the march towards the January 2011 uprising.

⁴⁰² About one US dollar

⁴⁰³ Beinín, Joel and Hossam Hamalawy, “Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order,” *Middle East Research and Information Report*, March 25, 2007 <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032507>

⁴⁰⁴ Beinín, Joel and Hossam Hamalawy, “Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order,” *Middle East Research and Information Report*, March 25, 2007 <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032507>

It has been a difficult and long road for Egyptian workers to make the stark realization that the moral economy, the public sector in which they are stakeholders, are failing them. Posusney discusses the “moral economy” of the 1980s in which the Egyptian workers were deeply embedded or even complicit in this arrangement – an ethical political arrangement that called on workers and the state to respect their reciprocal rights and duties. It was an era where workers respected the corporatist nature of the relationship between their government unions and the state.⁴⁰⁵ There was little solidarity among the factories in the same sector due to the nature of the ETUF’s “vertical” mediation, style dealing with each factory as a single unit. Solidarity amongst workers would have created a movement and that is the last thing that ETUF would have wanted or needed. This would have been a movement that would then unite around similar workplace grievances.

The workers used the mechanism of a “work-in” which meant work-in-place and according to the rules (without any creative increase in production) – it is referred to as work to rule. The workers adopted a “work-in” instead of a “work-stoppage” due to this adherence to the moral economy where workers were part owners of the public sector; they could not harm the production of these factories since they saw the act as harming themselves. Representatives of the workers would leave the factory and to make their demands to the management while the remaining workers in the factory continued to work. Kamal Abbas, head of the CTUWS, told me in a conversation⁴⁰⁶ that in the famous 1989 “strike” in the Helwan steel factory, they actually increased production during the strike. The “strike” was not a stoppage of production but a continuation of

⁴⁰⁵ Posusney 1993

⁴⁰⁶ 22 June 2013 in Helwan (outside of Cairo) at the CTUWS headquarters office

work in combination with a sit-in. Workers stayed at the work place after hours, asserting their role as productive loyal actors (part owners/stakeholders in the public sector economy) within the patronage activity-system.⁴⁰⁷ Beginning with Sadat's Infitah policy in the late 1970s and thereafter, the state gradually and unilaterally withdrew from the moral economy, thereby leaving the workers with diminished bargaining power and the threat of privatization.

The workers initially called on the government to resume its responsibility in the moral economy not realizing that this model was now defunct. The economic crisis at the end of the 1980s forced the Mubarak regime to turn to the IMF and World Bank to save the economy from bankruptcy.⁴⁰⁸ The Egyptian government implemented the neo-liberal economic restructuring reforms by cutting state subsidies on consumer goods, privatizing public companies, liberalizing markets and prices, and freezing wages, all to lower foreign debt and inflation.⁴⁰⁹ These new economic policies came into effect in coordination with the increased State Security apparatus' crackdown on Islamist groups, especially the MB, as well as opposition political parties and workers.

Strikes at El-Mahalla al-Kubra began in earnest after the decline of the Kefaya movement by 2006 (see chapter one for more details on Kefaya). There was a general mood of labor unrest, especially with the economic restructuring being implemented. So in order to calm the workers, the newly appointed Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif promised that in 2006 all public sector manufacturing workers would get a raise of their annual bonus equal to a two-month wage. When it came time for the Mahalla workers

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Mahdi, Rabab. "Labour as a Pro-democracy Actor in Egypt and Brazil", paper presented at the APSA 2009 Toronto meeting, revised September 23 2011.

⁴⁰⁸ Farah, Nadia. *Egypt's Political Economy. Power relations in development*, Cairo American University Press, 2009.

⁴⁰⁹ DeSmet page 8

to claim their raise, they only received their old bonus. This led to a spontaneous demonstration of at least 10,000 workers on December 7, 2006, in front of the factory gates. “A fighting spirit was in the air. Over the following two days, groups of workers refused to accept their salaries in protest. Then, on December 7, thousands of workers from the morning shift started assembling in Mahalla’s Tal‘at Harb Square, facing the entrance to the mill. The pace of factory work was already slowing, but production ground to a halt when around 3,000 female garment workers left their stations, and marched over to the spinning and weaving sections, where their male colleagues had not yet stopped their machines. The female workers stormed in chanting, ‘Where are the men? Here are the women!’ Ashamed, the men joined the strike.”⁴¹⁰ When the security guards tried to shut down the factory on December 8, many others from the community at large joined the approximately 20,000 workers, including students, women, and others.⁴¹¹

The El-Mahalla workers began a “horizontal” action across factory sections and into the community. They were breaking with the “vertical” tradition employed by the ETUF and by creating alliances and organizing workers across sections in the factory was much more effective.

“More than 20,000 workers showed up,’ said [Mohammed] ‘Attar. ‘We had a massive demonstration, and staged mock funerals for our bosses. The women brought us food and cigarettes and joined the march. Security did not dare to step in. Elementary school pupils and students from the nearby high schools took to the streets in support of the strikers.’ On the fourth day of the mill occupation, panicking government officials offered a 45-day bonus and gave assurances the company would not be privatized. The strike was suspended,

⁴¹⁰ Beinín, Joel and Hossam el-Hamalawy, “Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order, *Middle East Research and Information Project*, March 2007. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032507>

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

with the government-controlled trade union federation humiliated by the success of the Misr Spinning and Weaving [company] workers' unauthorized action."⁴¹²

In the process, the workers created their own organizational structures to counter the ETUF's discredited local union. The ETUF's local union was actually working against the majority of the workers' demands and against the strike. The strike committee leaders were then recognized as the true leaders of the workers and not the ETUF. What took place next was of great embarrassment to the government and to the ETUF. The Mahalla workers demanded the resignation of local ETUF union leader and its dissolution and for a new fair trade union election. "By the end of January [2007], around 12,800 workers had signed a petition addressed to the ETUF's General Union of Textile Workers, demanding impeachment of the El-Mahalla local union committee and the holding of new elections. The MCSW workers gave the ETUF's General Union of Textile Workers a February 15 deadline, by which they would need to sack the local union officials or face mass resignations from the General Federation [ETUF], the workers' first step toward building an independent labor union."⁴¹³

The El-Mahalla workers continued with more strikes in September 2007 and then again in February 2008. The protesters demanded a national minimum wage and also raised political slogans against Mubarak.⁴¹⁴ There were reverberations throughout Egypt's working class and workplaces as a result of the El-Mahalla strike actions.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Beinin and Hamalawy, 2007

⁴¹⁴ Hamalawy, Hossam. "Revolt in Mahalla. As Food Prices Rise in Egypt, Class Struggle is heating up." *International Socialist Review* 59, May-June, 2008

Field Research Findings and Meetings with the Garment and Textile Workers in El-Mahalla al-Kubra

On June 9th 2013, during my field research in Egypt, I spent several hours with eight former worker leaders (now retired) and present worker leaders male and female, from the MCSW. We met at the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) office in El-Mahalla. This office is used in lieu of having a local union office in the factory complex.⁴¹⁵

The workers gathered around a small desk, drinking hot tea, and quite animated recounted the story of how the garment and textile workers attempted to set up a transportation bus co-op through setting up an independent organization. It did not work. The reason that they recounted this particular story is they were giving me one of the examples of how it was very difficult to set up an independent union at the factory because there were too many who wanted to be “leaders” and too few followers. There was not an agreement on the central concepts and issues in addition to the issue of the *worker solidarity funds* being managed by the ETUF affiliated garment and textile workers’ union. These “forced savings” funds contain a significant amount of money that a worker would get upon retirement. These funds were taken out of their basic wages and put into a fund that has accrued over their years of service. If they formed an independent union outside of the ETUF umbrella federation, they would not have access to these funds anymore. The law has not changed to allow independent unions’ access

⁴¹⁵ The following workers were present at the meeting/interview: 1) Eman (militant labor leader), 2) Gamal (Old timer; referred to as the “Nelson Mandela of El-Mahalla”), 3) El Sayed Habib (Old timer with over forty years experience), 4) Faisal (very active in the movement, and great organizer), 5) Eman Ibrahim Gomaa (clothing department representative), 6) Essam (40 years of experience), 7) Abdel Ghani (machine operator), and Amm Salah (retired)

to these funds or other ETUF holdings/assets such as hotels, clubs, and resorts. This is seen as a serious deterrent to establishing new independent unions.

They all agreed that workers' political involvement could lead to getting or at least to demanding their rights. Yet, they did not trust the political parties today in Egypt and felt that the ETUF did not represent their interests. Gamal began to recount the history of the militancy of workers at the factory going back to 1975. He said, "El-Mahalla workers were and are the leaders of the protest just like in a train - the engine and the caboose. They also supported other workers in Helwan, and there was solidarity. Mahalla has about 23,000 workers in seven departments but with too many leaders within the factory, making it is hard to find a consensus. There is a fear of creating independent unions since because in each of the factories within the El-Mahalla complex there were several leaders. With so many leaders, he re-iterated is one of the main reasons for a lack of coherent mission, and the worry of being fragmented and not united under one leadership." The plurality of unions within the factory complex troubled many of the people I met with. I asked them: "Why do they think that there will be so many unions?" They responded with: "Too many workers are interested in leadership rather than service."

Main Strike Actions Leading to the January 2011 Uprising

There were a series of strikes and protests that woke up the workers and people all over Egypt. Before meeting with the workers' involved in these social movement actions, I met with a well-known Egyptian labor journalist and activist, Mostafa Bassiouni, on June 4, 2013, in Cairo, and he gave me additional details that were also mentioned and supported by the workers in El-Mahalla during our meeting on 9th June.

Mostafa is a leftist-activist journalist who focuses his reporting and writings on labor. He writes for major Egyptian and Arab newspapers: *Al-Dostour*, *Tahrir* and the Lebanese *Akhbar*. When I met with him, he was working on a report for the Al-Ahram Special Economic-Social Reports series edited by Ahmed el Naggar.⁴¹⁶ The title is: “The Forgotten Partners in the Egyptian Revolution - the situation of workers before, during and after the 2011 revolution.” He also worked with Dr. Anne Alexander, a professor at the University of Cambridge⁴¹⁷ on a book titled: *Bread, Freedom and Social Justice – Workers and the Egyptian Revolution* regarding the significant and fundamental labor’s role in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings that was published in October 2014.⁴¹⁸

In terms of the history and background of the garment and textile workers, Mostafa Bassiouni noted that, “The garment and textile workers affiliated to the ETUF trade union was one of the oldest, toughest, and well organized union organizations. It began before ETUF’s establishment in 1957 starting in the 1930s/40s and the workers in El-Mahalla were the best organized in the independent labor world in Egypt. So we then have the strongest two groups that are going head to head facing/challenging each other – the local union and leaders today and the ETUF-affiliated general union. The ETUF

⁴¹⁶ This report was published in late 2013

⁴¹⁷ Dr. Anne Alexander, Coordinator, Digital Humanities Network, Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), University of Cambridge. Dr. Anne Alexander’s research focuses on leadership, collective action and social movements in the Middle East. She has a particular interest in Egypt, Iraq and Syria post-1945 and labour movements across the region. <http://www.csap.cam.ac.uk/network/anne-alexander/>

⁴¹⁸ Synopsis of the book: “Accounts of the ‘Arab Spring’ have often focused on the role of youth coalitions, the use of social media, and the tactics of the Tahrir Square occupation. This authoritative and original book argues that collective action by organised workers played a fundamental role in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions; which were themselves the inevitable consequence to several years of strikes, including localised revolts in Tunisia’s phosphate mines and Egypt’s textile mills, dress rehearsals for the 2011 revolutions. Strikes in the last few days of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes were a crucial factor in their removal from power and the lack of organised workers in Syria, the authors argue, explains why regime change has taken so much longer and the continuation of these unprecedented workers movements pose a serious challenge to a neo-liberal version of post-revolutionary stability, which will have repercussions across the region.” <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/bread-freedom-social-justice-anne-alexander/?K=9781780324319>

garment and textile union was the most aware and confident compared to the workers at MSWC, and they had the know-how to fight workers and keep them in place. The RETA experience was much different; their counterpart in the ETUF, the Finance and Banking workers union was very weak and young, and they were relatively not known or not a player on the scene.”⁴¹⁹ This points to the political opportunity that was available for the RETA workers that was not possible for the garment and textile workers. RETA workers were able to take advantage of a weak official trade union and then establish an independent union. The garment and textile workers had a much more difficult “political and bureaucratic” mountain to climb and thus were not successful. Their impact on the success of the worker’s contentious social movement was mixed since RETA workers were more in a position of strength.

Bassiouni explained the nature of the culture of strikes before, during, and after the January 2011 revolution. He also said that he prefers to know the number of workers participating since it is more indicative than the number of actual strikes or events. Workers have somewhat innate internal organizational tools when it comes to the logistics of strikes, and organization of details. When you ask workers and leaders how or why they strike, they are sparse on the details and emphasize that it was the correct and just thing to do. They assume that the listener knows the details of the how and why. They are more interested in the mission and ultimate goal not in the mechanisms that make it a reality. It is not that they have a prepared checklist when it comes to preparing for strikes, for example. He prefers to “live” with the workers during strikes or protests since it captures the gravity of the strikes more than relying on reports after the

⁴¹⁹ Notes from interview with Mostafa Bassiouni, on June 4, 2013, in Cairo

fact. The following are details regarding each of the four major protest events that took place at the factory and in the city of El-Mahalla:

- 1) December 6-8, 2006 Protest Strike — The workers interviewed in El-Mahalla told me that this event chipped away at the fear that had gripped workers in general, but the younger workers acted too quickly by declaring a strike. This was the first of a series of strikes that took place, which woke up all Egyptians. In addition, the workers' actions were able to twist the government's arm, and several demands were fulfilled.

On 7th December 2006, the fighting spirit was high and the 24,000-strong local union members of the MSWC went on strike. They assembled in Tal'at Harb Square facing the entrance to the mill. The strike began with 3,000 women workers, first then they chanted, "We are here, we are here, where are you the men?" and prompting men workers to join, making the numbers swell over a few hours to 10,000 workers. The riot police were dispatched to the site, but they were shocked at the large numbers of workers. Workers quickly got the message out to the others who had gone home, and many workers then rushed back to the factory compound. The local state security and police were spreading rumors that there were just a few hundred workers protesting. The numbers of strikers grew to 20,000 and the strike continued for several days. El-Mahalla is a typical company town, and everyone knew of the strike and everyone involved — each of the protesters had family and friends in town. The strike ended after five days, and the workers won their demands.

However, the women did not sleep in the factory at night to protect the machines because they were afraid of any harm coming to the women through hearsay. They

were worried that the management would spread bad rumors about the perception of women sleeping in the factory and not in their homes. Another indication that the workers were in desperate financial need was the prevalence of the avian flu virus. Many of the workers' and their families still lived in rural areas around the city, and their wives raised chickens and other livestock in addition to growing their vegetables to supplement their income. In 2006-07, the bird flu virus hit Egypt, and the government called for the indiscriminant slaughter of all poultry. This was a catastrophe for many workers' families that decreased their supplementary income. This was another factor in the workers rising up to demand increase in wages and benefits.

Habib succinctly summarizes the situation of the independent garment and textile workers, he said during the interview on June 9th, 2013:

“The December 2006 Mahalla strike was a significant first step and then the workers at the Real Estate Tax Authority continued the job and created the first independent union in December 2008 since 1957. Unfortunately, there is the perception that workers are simple minded and thus easy to influence, while at the same time, ETUF is a very entrenched state institution, especially its garment and textile workers' affiliate under leadership of its president Saeed El Gohary (now retired). They did try to organize an independent union yet they had to fight state security, management, in addition to the “system” and rumors which can all be a deadly combination.”⁴²⁰

Bassiouni believes that the 2006 the demands of the workers were very practical, realizable, and goal-oriented. Their wages were very low, so that was the main reason that 25,000 workers went on strike. They initially asked for a bonus of two months wages, and as we know demands are like an ascending ladder — you start with one that is doable and realizable that you can achieve, and succeed in getting then once you have

⁴²⁰ Interview with workers in El-Mahalla on 9th June 2013

that you move on to the next item on the list.⁴²¹ “25,000 workers asked for a simple demand of two months profit sharing wages; their wages were so low that this extra money was much needed.”⁴²² This strike was political under the social guise (i.e. with social repercussions), and it was a strike and not a sit-in. “In arabic ‘إعتصام’ is a protest/sit-in where the workers still work and they protest in place so the production continues, and it is meant to put political pressure on the government.”⁴²³

Bassiouni continued saying: “In Arabic ‘إضراب’ is a strike and it is putting economic pressure and literally means to stop work. Workers chose to immediately strike instead of holding a “sit-in” because privatization had begun in 1991 in agreement with the IMF/World Bank, and fifteen years or so had passed and “killed” the nationalistic, paternal culture that workers had vis a vis the public sector. It was becoming non-existent.”⁴²⁴ With that turning point, the government was forced to negotiate, and prompted hundreds of strikes to take place thereafter.

2) The September 2007 Strike – this is the next strike that took place at the El-Mahalla factory where according to one of the workers interviewed: “everything happened in El-Mahalla first and then continued on to Tahrir in 2011 – the same repertoires and mechanisms such as tents, posters, chants, and discourse and this is also where the older generation met with the younger generation at El-Mahalla and later on in Tahrir square.” There were similarities between the organizers of the 2007 strike and the events in Tahrir Square in 2011.

⁴²¹ Interview with M. Bassiouni in Cairo on 4th June 2013

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ A note — workers in the Egyptian public sector have a culture of nationalism regarding working in the public sector and it is part of their legacy. Sit-ins were more prevalent since they worried and cared about the public sector as if they owned it. They did not want to put any economic pressure by stopping the production so political pressure was the best path to take.”

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

Bassiouni explained, “By September 2007, the group or bundle (hizma in Arabic) of demands grew with the needs by the workers, which encompassed working conditions, meal allowance, etc. They were able to achieve some successes. The Mahalla workers then began the process of removing the confidence in the local ETUF union committee; they gathered 13,000 signatures for a petition to remove the local union committee from representing them. The ETUF bureaucracy killed this move just like the dreaded bureaucracy (deep state) killed the January 2011 revolution. Egypt is a very bureaucratic state. The El-Mahalla workers went to the ETUF union headed by Saeed el Gohari, a trade unionist skilled in bureaucratic machinations and delay tactics. The workers took the 13,000 signatures to Saeed el Gohari and he said, ‘Ok, time for the local ETUF to go.’ His El-Mahalla brothers and sisters⁴²⁵ welcomed his response. He said, ‘We are at your service, you are the masters,’ blah, blah, blah, ‘but we will need to review all 13,000 signatures to ensure that everyone’s rights are protected.’ So of course, the petition went nowhere but into a drawer to gather dust, and that is where the petition died (ended).”⁴²⁶

3) 17th February 2008: An important turning point took place on February 17, 2008, when the workers in El-Mahalla stole the government’s thunder. 12,000 workers protested and began the first important step to put “class demand” on the national agenda, calling for a national minimum wage of LE 1,200 per month. The call for a minimum wage was also the national and not a special interest demand. This took place one day before the meeting of the National Wages Council on February 18, 2008.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Common usage by workers referring to each other as brothers and sisters in solidarity

⁴²⁶ Interview with M. Bassiouni in Cairo on 4th June 2013

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

4) 6th April 2008 – This protest was the first time a large billboard with Mubarak’s face was brought down, stepped on, and destroyed. This is significant because no one would have dared to do this before this event – the anger at this regime had reached a crescendo. The 5th April was the last day in the pay period and payday, so they decided to protest on 6th April, and on 8th April, there were the municipal elections to be held. On 30th March, leaders from El-Mahalla called on ETUF with their demands. ETUF leaders “whispered in their ears” telling them to go ahead and protest. In hindsight they realized that ETUF leadership was trying to get them caught into a trap of blame for setting the factory ablaze or something like that. About ten workers met with Abbas, the general coordinator of the CTUWS, about ten days before 6th April to prepare for the event, predict various scenarios, and plan on how to deal with each. They met at a public park near el Sayyida Zeinab mosque. There was the distinct possibility that management and State Security would set fire to the factory, so the leaders agreed to protest outside the factory gates in the El-Shon Midan (square) away from the factory and in the city center. When they arrived that morning of 6th April to work, they saw many unfamiliar faces within the factory complex. The leaders wondered with much concern about who they were since they felt that this was going to cause trouble. “On the day of the strike,” El-Fayumi said, “State Security agents in plain clothes filled the premises of the company that spans over almost 600 *feddans*.⁴²⁸ They stood at the gates of the company and escorted whoever finished their shifts to a vehicle that drove them home and escorted any worker standing outside the gates inside,” El-Fayoumi said, preventing

⁴²⁸ Feddan definition, an Egyptian unit of area equivalent to 1.038 acres

workers from assembling outside where they were supposed to demonstrate.”⁴²⁹ El Sayid Habib and Gamal outlined the critical factors that the workers’ leaders focused on for this strike: public opinion, awareness, opportunity, and the media.

Bassiouni concluded with the following comments: as a result of the 6th April 2008 event, worker elections in El-Mahalla took place for an independent union exploratory planning committee, and there was a greater emphasis on involving the society at-large; it became a rallying political power tool and a model for general strikes/protests in many other sectors of the economy. It was a huge uprising where for the first time large billboards of Mubarak were torn down. Unfortunately, the labor bureaucracy ended the possibility of a national and even a local garment and textile union starting with El-Mahalla workers. They were not able to organize an independent national union like RETA employees because of the strength and entrenchment of the ETUF garment and textile affiliate union. The labor and state bureaucracy killed that idea.⁴³⁰

In the *El-Ahram* newspaper, a retrospective account written on the 8th April 2013, stated of El Mahalla workers’ strike in 2008, “A workers strike planned morphed into popular struggle following clashes with the police who used — according to eyewitnesses — rubber bullets, birdshot and live ammunition to disperse crowds. While such unrest is now common in post-2011 Egypt, it was unprecedented at the time, the open defiance of a city to the regime, sending shockwaves across the country. For the first time, images of a tarnished, trampled upon poster of Mubarak circulated on the

⁴²⁹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/68543/Egypt/Politics-/Revolutionary-history-relived-The-Mahalla-strike-o.aspx>

⁴³⁰ Interview with Bassiouni in Cairo on 4th June 2013

internet, signaling the beginning of the fall of Egypt's then-feared dictator."⁴³¹ This was significant since it was a challenge to the regime's power and control without fear of retribution. It was the first time since labor's strike in Helwan's steel complex in 1989 that the public saw such open defiance, which became a popular struggle with the government security forces reacting harshly. It seemed "war" had been declared after many years of acquiescence and the average citizen's (in this case thousands of workers) anger was focused on Mubarak and his regime. In 2008, a worker's social movement was further solidified and poised in El-Mahalla and was met with violence by the regime. El-Mahalla's garment and textile workers despite their inability to form an independent trade union were able to galvanize public opinion and bring Mubarak down to their feet (not literally but figuratively). The 6th-8th April 2008 events were the beginning of the slow simmering dissent and rising anger - the not so quiet encroachment of the ordinary i.e. the rise of dissent and discontent by ordinary people in a quest for survival and improvement of their lives as Bayat⁴³² has described in his writings.

The Art of Presence or Active Citizenry

Let us first discuss the "art of presence or active citizenry", as explained by Bayat, and then apply this concept to the Egyptian independent labor movement. Bayat describes the "art of presence or active citizenry as the skill and stamina to assert collective will in spite of all odds by circumventing constraints, utilizing what is possible and discovering new spaces within which to make themselves heard, seen, felt and

⁴³¹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/68543/Egypt/Politics-/Revolutionary-history-relived-The-Mahalla-strike-o.aspx>

⁴³² Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics, How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, CA, 2010:43-66

realized.”⁴³³ Authoritarian governments can clamp down and end movements of contention, but they cannot silence or stifle the entire society or community.

Workers over a period of a decade prior to 2011 had been utilizing the “art of presence”, yet their big shortfall was not taking it to the street protests. Why is taking it to the streets important and how can it have an effective impact? Bayat refers to the “streets of discontent” and how millions work in their daily lives and workplaces can bring to fruition these highly complex revolutions.⁴³⁴ The streets of discontent are where these collective challenges against the invincible power holders are stimulated and where the destiny of political movements is often determined.⁴³⁵

The streets today leading to major squares such as Tahrir Square in Cairo, with their location and mass transit, are spaces where people can easily gather and disperse if needed from policy brutality and which hold historic memories and significance of protests.⁴³⁶ Streets represent the modern urban stage where protesters voice discontent, march, and encourage others to join in. It becomes an epidemic that grows and swells with high numbers of people wanting to raise their voices. Those voices are those that have been marginalized for so long under authoritarian rule. The beauty of these streets is that they become the central focal point of politics for ordinary persons, “those who are structurally absent from the centers of institutional powers ... The Street is the physical space where collective dissent may be both expressed and produced.”⁴³⁷ This space element distinguished street politics from strikes or sit-ins because “streets are not only where people protest, but also where they extend their protest beyond their

⁴³³ Ibid. 249

⁴³⁴ Bayat 165

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.168-9

⁴³⁷ Bayat 167

immediate circle.”⁴³⁸ In the case of Egyptian workers, protests were often limited to the workplace itself, which in the case of the MSWC factory is practically a large town in itself surrounded with walls so the inside is not seen by passers-by.

There is a tradition of workers to stay at their workplace to protest and protect the machines at the same time, especially from vandals sent by the company. This strategy would help the workers avoid arrest and accusation of destruction of public company property. In 2006, 2007, and again in 2008, El-Mahalla al-Kubra witnessed several large strikes and protests. The workers intentionally stayed in the factory compound and they would occupy the large Tal’at Harb Square within the factory compound, by the entrance gate. It was only on 6th April 2008, that the workers went outside the factory to the main square in the city of El-Mahalla al-Kubra.

The textile mill in El-Mahalla al-Kubra witnessed a spate of strikes starting in December 2006, another strike in September 2007 and then another in April 2008 for a second time in less than a year. The workers went on strike occupying the factory and its surrounding space within the compound and won. “Yet this last strike was even more militant than December 2006 ... Workers established a security force to protect factory premises and threatened to occupy the company’s administration headquarters as well.”⁴³⁹ They received support from the city’s townspeople and other textile mills of Kafr al Dawwar and Shibin al Kom railway workers and urban intellectuals.

Egyptian workers did take their protests out of their workplaces into the streets and to the seat of the state’s power. The garment and textile workers in El-Mahalla al-

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Beinun, Joel. “Militancy of the Mallah el Kubra workers”, Sept. 29 2007, MERIP

Kubra went on strike again in April 2008, and this time they took it to the streets.⁴⁴⁰ Violence erupted in the city with repressive measures of arrests, tear gas, volleys of rocks, and beatings of workers by hired thugs of the regime. The crowd burned NDP banners with candidate photos for municipal elections scheduled for April 8. “Thousands of demonstrators were out in the streets, throwing stones, chanting anti-government slogans and defying the batons of the riot police, tear gas, and bullets.”⁴⁴¹ Dozens of middle class activists and workers were detained for weeks without charge; some credibly claimed they were tortured (Human Rights Watch 2008).

The price of basic foodstuffs rose at rates of at least 33 per cent [for meat], and as much as 146 per cent [for chicken], from 2005 to 2008. The official annual rate of inflation for January 2008 was over 11 per cent, and over 12 per cent for February," says Egyptian labour historian Joel Beinin. The demonstrations at Mahalla Al-Kubra erupted against this backdrop of deteriorating living conditions for the working class and Egyptian poor. "This is a popular Intifada, a scene of street battles for subsistence," said El-Attar on Monday. Hence the demonstrators' chant: "Ye pasha, Ye bey, a loaf of bread now costs a quarter of a pound."⁴⁴²

These events gave rise to a student youth movement that was initially created on Facebook, the 6th April Youth Movement.

Background: The 6th April Youth Movement

A decrepit, hostile, environment for NGOs existed in Egypt and with internal corruption and a lack of civility, transparency, and accountability was the rule of the day when the 6th April Movement was established. It was an organization of young people that was motivated and tactically adaptive. So important questions to be explored are:

⁴⁴⁰ Beinin, Joel. "Egyptian workers Jan 25 A social movement in historical context", *Social Research*, vol. 79, no. 2 Summer 2012, page 13

⁴⁴¹ Beinin 335

⁴⁴² Rady, Faiza, "A victory for workers" *Ahram newspaper*, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/892/eg7.htm>

what is the 6th April Movement? How long had they been organizing? What were the effective tools that they used? And how did the often-maligned civil society organizations contribute successfully despite the odds against them?

The 6th April movement received assistance and support from abroad, but it was in the form of opportunities for training in and outside of Egypt. 6th April Movement has a connection with Serbia's Otpor student movement, and they benefitted from the contact.⁴⁴³ It adopted many of its tactics, mechanism, symbols (the clenched fist and black and white attire), and strategies of opposition to the regime while rallying public support. By 2009, it boasted a membership of 70,000 people. The movement was "part of a diverse gaggle of opposition campaigners in a nation whose size, security apparatus, and strategic importance to the west all complicate efforts to repeat this month's popular uprising in neighboring Tunisia. The group — dubbed April 6 after the date of a strike it was set up to support in 2008 — is a social media network of dissenters, coordinated by Ahmad Maher, an engineer."⁴⁴⁴ It was a mismatched group of individuals who boldly took advantage of opportunity and worked at down-to-earth community grassroots organizing. As widely reported, the group effectively employed social media tools. "The group's prominence in ... protests is partly down to chance: it co-ordinates an annual January 25 demonstration, which this year fell less than a fortnight after the overthrow of Tunisia's president Zein al-Abidine Ben Ali. That helped the protests gather a broad base of support from other activist groups, opposition politicians, and Islamists — the last of whom, according to Ms. Sharaf [one of the

⁴⁴³ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>

⁴⁴⁴ Michael Peel, "Egypt's activists see chance to drive reforms", FT.com 27 Jan. 2011

leaders], was ‘very strong but [was] not using their strength’.”⁴⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the famed, well organized, and established opposition, the MB, jumped onto the protest bandwagon several days later.

The leaders and activists within the 6th April Movement were younger and more at ease with cyber networking, and using social media tools to create alliances and build a movement. They were college students, recent graduates, young professionals, and young workers who were savvy about the use of social media. The simple decision to make the textile workers’ protests at El-Mahalla al -Kubra a broad call for a demonstration on April 6, 2008, and to begin an alliance in support of workers proved to be a stroke of genius that evoked nostalgia from the 1980s Polish anti-Solidarnosc movement, which encompassed workers and civil society.

The traditional NGO scene reflected the feebleness of the official political arena. Weak political parties and election fraud were hallmarks of the political scene. It was no longer an entity that could contest the entrenched Mubarak political power. NGOs, despite the potential for becoming active politically, remained largely divided and fragmented.⁴⁴⁶ In addition, there was a “caste system” of the secular elites and intellectuals who claimed to know best, and they would not associate with the lower classes. There was virtually no solidarity between the established civil society NGOs and the growing independent labor movement. A study by Beinín about the struggle for worker rights in Egypt details this lack of solidarity.⁴⁴⁷ This study confirms disconnect among the civil society actors and the workers, despite the workers’ regular protests and

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Maha M. Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed – The Politics of NGOs in Egypt*, Tauris Academic Studies, London and New York, 2004, p. 148.

⁴⁴⁷ Beinín, Joel, *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*. Solidarity Center, Washington, DC. 2010.
[http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The Struggle for Workers rights.pdf](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/The%20Struggle%20for%20Workers%20rights.pdf)

strikes for fundamental socio-economic rights and against the regime. The saga of the Egyptian 2011 uprising continues, since a revolution, in the truest sense of the word, has not yet taken place in Egypt.

The Mubarak regime had a relatively easy time manipulating its political opposition. The secular leftists were rendered toothless and the more conservative MB was outlawed. It is common knowledge that the Mubarak regime used the “divide, conquer, and rule” theory of politics to cleverly thwart a political alliance where the two rivals: secular intellectual elites and the MB could cooperate to challenge his rule. It was also commonly believed that Mubarak and his family would continue to rule for the next thirty to forty years, reinforcing the concept of stability at the price of political freedom. However, the Mubarak regime did not count on several other emerging factors that will be discussed in detail later: the resurgence of civil society in the Arab world and its relation to democracy reform efforts; hegemony, consent, and the crisis of the state in Egypt; neo-liberal policies and increased economic hardship of daily life for Egyptians; serious financial shortage in the state’s budget, and the growing youth movement. Reports on the scene captured the political irony being played out, “but this enduring and, many here say, all too comfortable relationship was upended this week [January 25, 2011] by the emergence of an unpredictable third force, the leaderless tens of thousands of young Egyptians who turned out to demand an end to Mr. Mubarak's 30-year rule. Now the older opponents are rushing to catch up.”⁴⁴⁸

An interesting and almost accidental alliance was formed between the independent workers’ movement and the youth of Egypt. This came after several

⁴⁴⁸ David D. Kirkpatrick and Michael Slackman, “In New Role, Egypt Youths Drive Revolt”, Mona El-Naggar contributed reporting from Cairo. January 27, 2011 Thursday, Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com>

unsuccessful strikes led by the workers in Egypt's largest and most important public sector industry located in the delta city of al Mahalla el Kubra.

“On April 6, 2008, the Egyptian government crushed a strike by a group of textile workers in the industrial city of Mahalla, and in response a group of young activists who connected through Facebook and other social networking Web sites formed the 6th April Youth Movement in solidarity with the strikers.”⁴⁴⁹

The early efforts to strike were not successful, but it gave birth to an online network that initially could not be stopped or strategically monitored by the Egyptian security police. “It was an online rallying cry for a show of opposition to tyranny, corruption, and torture that brought so many to the streets.”⁴⁵⁰ So, the 6th April Movement adopted a local event, the workers' strike in El-Mahalla, and then turned it into a national event⁴⁵¹ (see interview details below). This is significant because normally it would have stayed localized, yet 6th April Movement's adoption of the workers' strike turned it into a national event. The idea was to call for a general strike throughout Egypt based on the workers' local protest. The movement asked everyone to stay at home and not go to work via social media, local organizers, and word of mouth. The Ministry of Interior promised that they would use violence to counter any and all protests – these statements further assisted the by 6th April Movement's call. It was a perfect gift for their campaign. For the first six months, the 6th April Movement stayed focused on worker issues, but they found as an organization they were not growing in membership. They wanted to grow and highlight additional socio-economic, even political issues, which young people were concerned with. Also, a movement needs numbers in addition

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Information from interview with 6th April Movement leader, Mohamed Adel in June 2013

to worthy cause, unity of purpose, and commitment in order to be a viable social movement. The following is an interview conducted during my field research in June 2013 with Mohamed Adel, one of the main leaders and activists in the 6th April Movement.

Mohamed Adel⁴⁵² is a leader and activist within the 6th April Movement,⁴⁵³ who as of this writing was arrested in December 2013 and remains in an Egyptian jail.⁴⁵⁴ “Ahmed Maher, Ahmed Douma and Mohamed Adel, all senior members of the 6 April youth movement that stirred dissent during the final years of the Mubarak era, were also fined for flouting a new law that severely curtails the right to protest. They were accused of organizing an unsanctioned street protest deemed illegitimate by a [controversial new law](#) and of assaulting a police officer.”⁴⁵⁵ In a meeting with Adel on June 20, 2013, he shared with me his views on the Egyptian labor movement, their role, the 6th April Movement’s birth, and its and support of the workers. Astonishingly, their leaders never coordinated or discussed with the MSWC workers activities and actions instead they coordinated with the Revolutionary Socialist Movement (as if they were spokesmen for the labor movement). The following is my transcript of notes from my

⁴⁵² “During that period April 6 members also studied the nonviolent tactics of Serbian and Ukrainian youth movements. In the summer of 2009, blogger and April 6 activist **Mohammed Adel** [traveled to Serbia](#) to take a course on strategies for nonviolent revolutions. It was taught by people who had organized the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s.” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>

⁴⁵³ Interview with 6th April Movement activist and leader, Mohammed Adel, in Cairo, on 20th June 2013:

⁴⁵⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/22/egypt-court-jails-three-leaders-2011-uprising-6th-april-youth-movement>

⁴⁵⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/22/egypt-court-jails-three-leaders-2011-uprising-6th-april-youth-movement>

interview with Adel in downtown Cairo at the offices of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Research (ECESR):⁴⁵⁶

“Initially, the 6th April Youth Movement (6AYM) leaders and members were not interested in the Marxist view in the workers’ movement — that was not what motivated their involvement or support. This movement started from the fruits of the IGURETA strikes/sit-ins (2007-08) and the Kefaya movement that started in 2004. 6AYM began with a stand in solidarity with the Mahalla workers’ protest on April 6, 2008. These youth leaders came out of the Kefaya movement and the Youth for Reform and Change organization. They were intent on involving workers or associating the workers’ movement with the political reform movement. There were many workers’ protests, such as in Kafr Soul, Sarando, El-Mahalla, and in Damietta. The idea was to support and call for a general strike throughout Egypt based on the Mahalla protest. We wanted to take a local event and turn it into a national event. A good idea! The 6th April Movement asked everyone to stay at home and not to go to work. They used the Internet and activated all social media tools (particularly Facebook) to call for a day at home. The 6AYM also reached out to teachers, private sector workers, and particularly the “couch party” adherents to ask them to stay at home in protest. The Ministry of the Interior announced that there would be violence and attacks on cars on April 6, so it was a perfect gift to further promote and encourage people to stay at home.”

Adel continued to say: “For the first six months of 6AYM activism in 2008, it was focused on supporting the workers’ strikes and demonstrations. After the first six months, 6AYM moved from just focusing on support for workers to other issues, why? They found that they were not growing in membership; actually they were losing members. They needed to grow as an organization. There was a division within the

⁴⁵⁶ <http://ecesar.com/en/> Egyptian Centre for economic and social rights is an Egyptian non-governmental legal & research entity, stems from the values of justice, freedom, and equality, abiding to all treaties, declarations and international conventions concerning human rights, particularly the international charters for economic, social, cultural rights, and all the treaties and recommendations of the International Labour Organisation as a reference on the level of vision and practice

6AYM organization on whether to focus on economic or political challenges/reforms. They moved to address more of a social movement, minimum wage, employment, and challenges facing youth, which was a larger scope for the movement. You need members to become a viable, effective organization able to affect decision makers. So we needed to do widen our scope to organize and include more university students. The 6AYM began to encourage members to enter elections of unions/professional associations where they work.”⁴⁵⁷

According to Adel, the 6AYM activists and leaders are centrists politically; they are not leftists/Marxists. This alliance was important to show that the workers’ were able to align themselves with centrists and not just ideological leftists and Marxists. The center-right wait until the workers come to them, making them the true “couch party”. Mohamed explained that they are a version of “American liberal capitalists”. He works as a researcher at the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)⁴⁵⁸. When I interviewed him, they had just gathered one million Tamarod signed petitions and held a press conference to announce this.

The 6th April Movement led the overall Egyptian youth movement to the forefront, and it became an effective political independence force in Egypt. The

⁴⁵⁷ Notes from interview with Mohamed Adel on 20th June in Cairo

⁴⁵⁸ <http://ecesr.com/en/> "In an escalatory and unjustified step, police forces have raided the premises of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) at around 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday December 18, 2013, in which they violently assaulted and arrested six of the staff and volunteers: Mostafa Eissa, the Head of the Documentaries Unit; Mahmoud Belal, Lawyer in the Criminal Justice Unit; and Hossam Mohamed Nasr, Mahmoud El-Sayed, Mohamed Adel and Sherif Mansour, volunteers in the Media Unit. The police forces arrested them without legal basis, abducting them to an unknown detention location. Moreover, the police officers destroyed the Media Unit’s equipment, its furniture, as well as stealing computers. Lawyers failed to reach the abductees mentioned above as a result of the abstinence and refusal of police officials in Abdeen and Kasr El Nile Police Stations and the Cairo Security Administration to provide them with any information on fate of the detainees. Consequently, a police report was made outlining details and information describing the raid, the arrest and abduction of the Center’s staff and volunteers, including the damage of the Center’s furniture and robbery of its equipment. All abductees and detainees were released this morning except for **Mohamed Adel**, the volunteer in the Media Unit, and his place of detention remains unknown."

Mubarak regime could not derail it. In January 2011, after eighteen days of intense protests at the heart of the capital, in Tahrir Square, and all over the country, the regime's figurehead stepped down.

Concluding remarks

The garment and textile industry and its workers were and continue to be a significant force in civil society activism and as a social movement. They have an important historic presence within the Egyptian labor movement. This case study presented many of the factors that explain the role of these workers in paving the way and being a catalyst for the January 2011 uprising to take place. Their militant history and actions have continued from the late-nineteenth century through to the twenty-first century and contributed to their active presence in civil society. In addition, the garment and textile industry is one of the most important sectors of the Egyptian economy and thus garners scrutiny by the regime in addition to domestic and international financial institutions. It has an independent workers' movement that bravely took on the massive challenge of protesting against the ETUF's strongest and most established union. However, an independent union was not formed, which did not necessarily undermine the overall role that these workers' played for the rest of Egypt's workers starting in 2006 to the present. An independent union for garment and textile workers outside of the ETUF umbrella was not formed. The reason is because of the oppressive and controlling state bureaucracy. The current laws governing trade unions' ability to collect and maintain savings and severance funds were still in the hands of the

official government sanctioned unions. In addition, independent unions would not have access to the patrimony (services, hotels, resorts and other such social services) that is still under the control of the ETUF and its affiliated unions. Workers still depend on these services for their family's good and welfare. So bureaucratic machinations by the oldest and still the strongest ETUF affiliate controls many of the benefits and services for workers. The possibility of establishing an independent union was not practical. In addition, union leadership in the independent movement was muddled, inexperienced, and not focused on one vision of leadership while the officially sanctioned ETUF union had wily, experienced, and clever hand at manipulating the rules to his/their advantage. However, as a movement, the independent garment and textile workers of El-Mahalla was a significant social movement gaining national prominence that provided leadership to the rest of Egypt's workers to agitate and demand their rights.

The April 6th Youth Movement was an example of how other members of civil society, in this case, the students and youth leaders (the twenty-something generation) joined in with the workers of El-Mahalla. Students and workers in Egypt had not effectively supported each other since the 1946⁴⁵⁹ fight against the monarchy and British influence and then in 1967-1968 period post Egypt's humiliating defeat in 1967 by

⁴⁵⁹ 1946 uprising: "The uprising began November 1945 when a group of students announced they were on strike in solidarity with Palestine and Indonesia. The violent events of this uprising began on February 9, 1946, when a large crowd consisting of several thousands of high school students stormed the university campus. The demands of this uprising were to end negotiations with the British, cancel the 1936 treaty and reject any defence treaty with Britain. The initial result was the deposition of King Nuqrashi Pasha as prime minister on February 15 and the appointment of Ismail Sidqi in his place. However, this was not a good choice because Sidqi was not popular and did not have a great reputation. The student movement starting coordinating with worker committees and were successful in forming a front made up of workers and students, calling it the National Committee of Workers and Students. The Committee called for a general strike on February 21, 1946, and since then commemorated it as National Students' Day." <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/14792-the-student-movement-in-egypt-over-the-last-century>

Israel.⁴⁶⁰ So it had been a long time since these two important civil society groups supported each other for a common national goal. During the Sadat and Mubarak eras there was an active policy by these regimes adopting the policy of divide and conquer to keep major civil society groups separate and not cooperating to challenge the regime. The workers and the students met again since the 1967 era with the protests in El-Mahalla on the 6th April 2008.

The El-Mahalla garment and textile workers contentious protest movement was a social movement that ultimately did not develop into an institution (a trade union organization) similar to the RETA workers. It followed a similar path or trajectory yet the movement did not become an institution, an independent trade union representing all garment and textile workers. However, this did not detract from its ability to have several very large manifestations of discontent and collective contentious protests that captured the nation's attention as well as the international labor movement arena. Concurrently, the ETUF's official union for garment and textile workers is still relatively strong and has control of the assets, pension funds, and retirement bonuses (severance funds) that workers have been paying into for many years. It is a difficult choice for the workers to leave their long-term work-life investments and begin an independent union without these benefits. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the political role these workers' played or how they became a role model for other workers in Egypt to stand up

⁴⁶⁰ This uprising broke out after the June 1967 defeat at the hands of Helwan workers immediately after the announcement of the military court's ruling in the case of the military aviation officers accused of negligence during the June war. The demonstrators believed that the rulings were too lenient. Thousands of students from major universities in Cairo and Alexandria participated in the uprising and it coincided with February 21, which is Egyptian Student Day, adopted during the 1946 uprising. The Cairo uprising alone resulted in the death of two workers and the wounding of 77 citizens, as well as 146 police officers. Some 635 people were also arrested and some vehicles and buildings were destroyed in the capital. In total, approximately 100,000 Egyptian university students participated in this uprising. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/14792-the-student-movement-in-egypt-over-the-last-century>

and challenge their employers, which in many cases meant effectively challenging the regime and its state institutions.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

“The only promise that remains is the one that depends solely on Egyptian initiative, the promise of democracy. Probably the only way that Mubarak can expect to elicit consent and support for painful and unpopular economic policies is to devolve greater responsibility for making and implementing those policies to the organized interests that have the most at stake. Naturally, they do not relish in sharing power ... but this could be the only card that they have left to play. Repression is far more costly and risky than expanding modest experiments with “corporatist democracy” that were initiated and then abandoned by Sadat.”⁴⁶¹ **Robert Bianchi**

The quote above cited from Bianchi’s book, *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in 20th Century Egypt*, published in 1989, yet it could have been written in 2014. The concept of “Egyptian initiative” is again at the focus of the promise for democracy in which independent trade unions can organize and flourish. A democratic system is fundamental for workers let alone all citizens to be able to exercise freedom of association, which is critical for their survival as an independent, activist social movement and as an active part of civil society. Egyptian workers were not simply bystanders; they were one of several catalysts leading up to the January 2011 uprising events. Labor was part of the story demanding a new democratic society, and this was not a new role for them to play. However, their role and impact was not as decisive as many had hoped including myself.

The workers led the challenge against the regime prior to January 2011, but their victory was elusive due to several factors, including: the weak political opposition elite and their lack of foresight to include labor into their ranks, the entrenched nature of the

⁴⁶¹ Bianchi, Robert. *Unruly Corporatism: associational life in 20th century Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 1989, page 32

authoritarian regime, the “soft state”⁴⁶² and its failing financial responsibilities toward its citizens, the legal obstacles still present that shackle workers’ abilities to form independent unions (particularly in the garment and textile industry’s case), and society’s negative perceptions of the working class. Labor’s own disparate organizational nature and informal networks without central organization and leadership hindered their political efforts and made them an expendable player on the national political scene, especially after February 2011. However, that disparate organizational nature was not a hindrance in developing an effective social movement; one can argue that it protected them from the authoritarian regime. Workers were indeed present in Tahrir Square and elsewhere around the country in the January 2011 uprising but as individuals and not under the organized banner of a large independent workers’ social movement. In the Post-February 2011 period, the deep state bureaucracy, military rule, and lack of legal reform, as well as several other factors, all hampered the new independent labor movement’s ability to continue its pioneering, activist role with political influence.

Reflection on Workers’ Organization and the Egyptian Uprising

This dissertation’s goal is to add to the available scholarship to further explain the causes and factors leading to the January 2011 uprising. The main questions of this research endeavor are: First, what was the political role of the independent Egyptian labor movement leading up to the 2011 uprisings, and how did the workers use repeated contentious collective actions to challenge the regime? Second, regarding the two case studies, why did one group of civil servants succeed in establishing the first independent

⁴⁶² Reference to inability to enforce the law per Waterbury, J. (1985). "The "Soft State" and the Open Door: Egypt's Experience with Economic Liberalization, 1974-1984." *Comparative Politics* 18(1): 65-83.

union since 1957, while the other more numerous and influential garment and textile workers were unable to do so? These two questions are interrelated since the inability of the garment and textile workers to establish an independent trade union raises the question regarding their leverage over the regime thus their ability to effectively challenge the regime, and their ultimate effectiveness as a social movement for change. I have shown that despite their inability to form an independent trade union; these workers still had an impact particularly with the events of April 2008 on the national discourse.

The focus of this research is to further explain an important contributing variable: the independent workers and their interaction with other facets of civil society leading to what ultimately became the tipping point of the January 25 uprising events. In the quest to understand the role of Egyptian workers leading up to the January 2011 events, there was a critical review of workers' collective action as a social movement including the "lost opportunities". Workers were organized in their different groups without a central coordinating organization, and they carried out contentious actions to challenge the socio-economic — and ultimately political — policies of the regime. The workers had influence, but they did not achieve the desired political reform, i.e. transition to democratization and respect for freedom of association. It was an elusive impact, which is difficult to accurately measure using qualitative social science research methodology. In this research endeavor the theoretical lenses of social movement theory (SMT) and social movement unionism (SMU) with the comparative case studies methodology were used to further clarify that Egyptian workers had a "mixed contribution" toward political reform leading up to the 2011 uprising.

Egyptian workers took courageous steps, but there were also critical mistakes and miscalculations. The nature of leadership of these independent movements caused divisive behavior thus did not foster solidarity. The leaders were charismatic, but they were not able to routinize their charisma into sustainable organizations in the garment and textile industry case study. While in the RETA workers case study, the strength of the leadership working in consensus with the workers helped establish an independent trade union. In order to provide lessons learned and best practices, the leadership characteristics of these disparate workers' groups were examined according to Weber's "routinization" of charisma. The independent labor movement was not able to frame its discourse in a manner to garner the greatest amount of popular support and turn their immediate grievances into those for all Egyptians. Its "entitlement" heritage and perceptions of its image were a hindrance. They were not able to create effective, sustainable coalitions with other civil society groups and opposition political elites. However, in an authoritarian environment that did not promote effective opposition political parties, the workers' efforts were destined to failure.

This dissertation presented in detail two case studies of workers' contentious collective action. There were several other smaller groups of independent workers who took the lead from these two case studies and joined the growing social movement of labor protests (see **Appendix 2** for details of other workers' protests). These workers came from various blue-collar and white-collar industries such as: baking, cement, steel, mechanical engineering, the Suez Canal, academia, health, sugar processing, food processing and canning, and electrical appliances manufacturing. The broad and varied types of workers show how the grievances were deeply entrenched and touched many if not all professions and workers in Egypt.

How does this research inform social movement theory?

Social movements are generally understood as challenges to “existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.”⁴⁶³ Irrespective of their immediate short-term demands these social movements needed wide-ranging political changes as the requirement for their success.⁴⁶⁴ Workers’ contentious social movements used repertoires of activities and events as well as brokers while framing their claims into a clear discourse to appeal to the masses and motivate them to act. The independent Egyptian workers employed these mechanisms and also took advantage of political opportunity structures. They consciously examined the political power of the Mubarak regime and assessed strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities available to them. They repeatedly tested the regime, bringing confrontation to the brink of violence, but the state and its security apparatus retreated to seek negotiations. Then it was clear to see how the character of the workers’ contentious political and economic actions interacted or collided with the regime and thus challenged the regime. The workers did succeed in some cases in getting their grievances heard. Their grievances regarding working conditions and wages were partially resolved. However, their political influence on the process of reform in Egypt was elusive, limited, and a qualified victory within constraints. The varied reasons were examined in detail in the various chapters of this dissertation.

⁴⁶³ Meyer, David S., and Sidney G. Tarrow, “A Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century.” In *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, edited by Meyer and Tarrow, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1998:1-28.

⁴⁶⁴ Grodsky, Brian K., 2012:3

The two groups of workers in my comparative case studies are the municipal real estate tax collectors who formed a national independent trade union in 2008 and the garment and textile workers in El-Mahalla's largest factory. Their political allegiances "on paper" were with the National Democratic Party (NDP), but in reality there were no other effective political choices available. The leader of the Independent General Union of Real Estate Tax Collectors (IGURETA), Kamal Abu Eita, is a member of the Nasserist socialist party, and his charismatic leadership led the effort with effective mechanisms of diffusion, brokerage, and framing of the issues and grievances. While the garment and textile workers of El-Mahalla were a significant contentious social movement, they were unable to create a formal independent trade union for all garment and textile workers in Egypt.

The workers were very creative in their protest repertoires that captured the rest of the population's attention. These peaceful, worker-led protests also became the training ground for democratic behavior and practices; consequently these protests were a prelude to the events that took place in Tahrir Square from January to February 2011. Workers organized themselves in a peaceful and democratic manner to oppose government policies, thus challenging the regime. These types of protests spread to workers in different geographic locations from a wide variety of economic sectors and professions; even others outside of the labor movement imitated them. Some of the ways that workers protested included mock funerals for "shut down/dead factories" and laid off workers; carrying empty pots and pans to signify no food and therefore going hungry; peaceful sit-ins for many days (similar to IGURETA's twelve days in front of the Cabinet of Ministers' headquarters building); clever and humorous discourse used on placards, slogans, press releases, and interviews, in Egyptian dialect so it would be

understandable to all; making protests and demonstrations family events where the whole family would participate in support of the strikers, have a picnic, carry signs; and at times strikers would write on their bodies the demands that they were seeking. A turning point for Egyptian workers was in 2010 when they moved from calling for bread and butter issues only to political demands with the call for a national minimum wage. The negative attitudes vis-à-vis the state's institutions became more overt in their slogans and press releases, such as: "If this government is not going to institute a national minimum wage; then it is time for it to go home." Another slogan used was: "This government and money interests are too married to each other; it is time for a divorce."⁴⁶⁵ This describes the close relationship (crony capitalism) between Mubarak's regime and a small group of wealthy businessmen such as the iron and steel magnate, Ahmed Ezz, that formed a coterie in the top echelons of government and the ruling party, the National Democratic Party (NDP).

Shehata's⁴⁶⁶ ethnographic research on the politics and culture in the Egyptian shop floor (factory), showed how the power relations among workers, managers, and owners still resembled the days of master and servant. This relationship of master/slave dialectic is reminiscent of Hegel's allegory, which identifies contemporary conceptions of recognition and behavior. This dynamic can be taken from the shop floor and equated with the higher-level relations between the state and its citizens.

Currently, the independent labor movement is in disarray with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) still in existence and behaving undemocratically. ETUF continues its practice of implementing government policies first while not

⁴⁶⁵ Notes from interviews held in Egypt from May-July 2013

⁴⁶⁶ Shehata, Samer. *Shop floor culture and politics in Egypt*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009.

advocating for Egyptian workers. It is still an obstacle to freedom of association and the formation of independent trade unions. ETUF maintains and continues to promote the master/slave dialectic. The independent labor movement is suffering from leaders' personality clashes and egos, which interferes with trade unionists trying to unite unions under one new, independent federation, despite the initial founding of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) on January 19, 2011, in Tahrir Square. Another federation was formed about one year later in October 2012 led by Kamal Abbas from the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) called the Egyptian Democratic Labor Confederation (EDLC). The EFITU and EDLC do not communicate or coordinate their activities, though there are rumors signaling a change in that behavior, which is encouraging. The opposition political parties are also still weak and unorganized without a credible vision for Egypt's future. This is all a tribute to the legacy and heritage of autocratic rule since 1952.

I examined two congruent case studies going beyond the classical definition to a more dynamic mobilization model in order to fully understand their movements and impact. I used McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's proposal to employ "a new path to the analysis of contentious politics: neither through the stamping of the same general laws onto all the world's contention, [...] but through the comparison of episodes of contention in light of the processes that animate their dynamics"⁴⁶⁷ while including the historical and social context. This model led to a much broader set of interpretative processes and more innovative collective action.⁴⁶⁸ Classical SMT focuses on mobilizing structures, framing processes, opportunities and threats, and repertoires of

⁴⁶⁷ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, 2001:314

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 48

contention – a structuralist approach.⁴⁶⁹ I ventured beyond the classical structuralist SMT toward an interactive dynamic model, and I reviewed the interaction between mechanisms and processes, or “actions, actors, identities, trajectories, or outcomes”.⁴⁷⁰ This research investigated the repertoires of collective action within these two case studies: the shared values, interests, and goals that led to mobilization; workers’ protest repertoires and actions; the frame of their grievances and demands; the internal structures of these formal and informal organizations and networks of workers; the decision-making processes; the leaders and how they (positively or negatively) influenced the movement; and the differing roles of men and women workers in these repertoires of collective action. “Analyzing repertoires allows us to examine the anticipations, perceptions, and self-definitions of contentious actors and how they take up a position in the political field”.⁴⁷¹ I also examined the nature and role of these “informal” networks created by workers, because in authoritarian regimes, such as Egypt, with high levels of poverty and lack of essential services, networks become vital for survival and collective action.

The Egyptian independent workers’ movement highlights the following:

“ 1) The importance of perceived threats, as opposed to opportunities, in motivating collective action; 2) possibilities for collective action and movement-building in a resource-poor, authoritarian environment; 3) local networks’ capacity simultaneously to enable local mobilization while disabling mobilization on a national scale; 4) the differential effects of political change (‘opportunities’) on the urban intelligentsia compared to workers; 5) the continuing relevance of class;

⁴⁶⁹ McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.37

⁴⁷¹ Beinin, Joel and Frederic Vairel (editors), *Social movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, CA, 2011:14

and 6) the agency of insurgent workers in expanding their repertoire of contention.”⁴⁷²

This explains sustained action and protest without the formation of a strong, national organization, although working class-consciousness is still strong in Egypt. Therein lies the puzzle: despite the lack of a strong, national labor organization, these disparate worker groups and networks were able to hold successful protests and increase the political pressure on the Mubarak regime, thus they challenged the regime leading up to the January 2011 uprising. Several “dress rehearsals” for the January 2011 uprising took place, such as the massive strike by workers on April 6, 2008, in El-Mahalla al-Kubra when several thousand workers protested the low wages and high cost of food. Yet, Egyptian workers’ independent organizations were unable to form coalitions with other civil society organizations and activists to bring about a complete victory. A complete victory would be a revolution instead of an uprising against the authoritarian regime.

Workers’ protest social movements can play a catalyst role in an overall larger protest contentious movement as we have seen in Egypt. The first case study of the RETA workers’ social movement was part of a continuum of several protest events taking place one after another over a period of ten years or more. The combination of internal and external factors was a political opportunity strategically and successfully used by the RETA workers and their leaders. They successfully used various mechanisms and processes in starting an effective contentious social movement making claims to the government. This movement then led to the establishment of the first independent trade union since 1957 in Egypt. The ingredients of their success were

⁴⁷² Beinín, Joel. “Workers and Egypt’s January 25 Revolution”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 80, Fall 2011:182.

varied, strategic, organized, as well as spontaneous. However, the main factor that led to success was a commitment to independent trade unionism, and democratic practices.

The RETA workers' demands were clear, and they had suffered for many years from these all-encompassing grievances that affected everyone. They had a strong group identity and solidarity for collective action. While their protests started small, they grew progressively with more workers joining the ranks. The activist leaders of the branch offices located in every Egyptian governorate played an important role as brokers to organize more RETA employees to join the protests. The issues were clear – their wages had not increased over a period of several years and remained low in comparison to others doing similar work in the Ministry of Finance. It was a simple message: increase wages to achieve equity and improve quality of life. In addition, the RETA workers had done their homework. They produced facts and figures to support that the revenue they collected was important for the Egyptian government, and the government could afford the increase in wages. The leadership (primarily the movement president, Abu Eita) was a main factor in this movement's success. His charisma, commitment, clarity of purpose, straightforward attitude, and well-developed network within Egypt's political and social arenas all contributed to the movement's success.

The traditional independent media and social media tools both played an important role in keeping the RETA workers' claims alive by regularly reporting on their events. RETA workers also reached outside of Egypt and received considerable support i.e. certification from various national, regional and international labor and human rights organizations.

RETA workers contributed greatly to the overall protest social movements against the Mubarak regime. They were in a continuum of several events and protests that continued until the major uprising in January 2011. The RETA workers were one spark in addition to many other sparks that ignited the larger explosion. The workers are the backbone of any society, especially one that is striving for democratic practices, so their contribution was important. The political role of the independent labor movement in Egypt is indisputable. Their political role used socio-economic arguments that rang true to the heart and soul of all Egyptians. However, this movement of RETA workers did not achieve the desired political reform; their victory was elusive. They were definitely a catalyst leading up to the mass uprising, but it was after the fall of the Mubarak regime that things fell apart. The Mubarak regime collapsed, the military took over, and a Muslim Brotherhood member led presidency for one year. During that time, workers' rights were still not fully recognized, and the political power of the independent workers' movement was still weak.

Gramsci wrote of a “crisis of authority”: in the short-run, the ruling classes are able to reorganize quickly and regain control that slips from their grasp. “At a certain point, social classes become detached from their traditional parties. ... When such a crisis occurs, the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic ‘men of destiny’.”⁴⁷³ He writes that when the ruling class loses the consent of the broad masses, then a crisis of authority develops, leading to a crisis of hegemony (consensus), or the crisis of the state over those it governs. More than seventy-six years

⁴⁷³ Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Smith (editors and translators). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers, New York, 2010, page 210

ago, Gramsci gave a most appropriate description of the Egyptian situation pre-January 2011. Post-February 2011 and leading to the first presidential elections in May 2012 (when this research endeavor ends), we witness a reassertion of the deep state's authority through the strong-arm tactics of the military and security apparatus.

The second case study of the garment and textile workers showed that they were indeed a significant political and economic force and a role model in the Egyptian labor movement. Their militant history and action have continued from the late nineteenth century through to the twenty-first century. This was one of the most important sectors of the economy with an independent movement that faced the challenge of standing up to the ETUF's strongest and most established union. Thus, an independent union was not formed; however, that did not necessarily undermine the "role model" part the workers' played for the rest of Egypt's workers starting in 2006 through the present. This was, and still is, a social movement that ultimately did not develop into a formal institution similar to the RETA workers. Why? The ETUF's official union for garment and textile workers is still relatively strong and has control of assets, pension funds, and retirement bonus funds that workers have been paying into for many years. For the workers to leave their investments and begin as an independent union without these benefits and savings is a very difficult choice to make. This does not diminish the political role that these workers' played or how they became a role model for other workers in Egypt to stand up and challenge their employers and in many cases effectively challenge the regime.

The labor movement achieved with limited success through contentious social movement advocacy the implementation of trade union freedoms and the right to

organize. The workers came very close to achieving these goals, and they considered the government's offer of simply reorganizing the ETUF executive board, for example, an insult. One has to recognize that building a trade union or a federation or tearing it down has to be done by the workers themselves and not by the government. The government's role is to set the overall legal framework and then to protect and implement the legal framework to enable the workers to form independent democratic trade unions. Mostafa Bassouini, a noted labor advocate and journalist, said in an interview with him, "The official trade union, ETUF, is the one that supported Nasser's nationalization project in the 1950s and 1960s and his wars; ETUF supported Mubarak's privatization, and ETUF's representatives traveled with Sadat to Jerusalem and for the signing of the 1979 Camp David peace agreement with Israel. The only way for a real, honest trade union organization to be created is by the workers themselves, and that is the road upon which the workers today are traveling."⁴⁷⁴ It is a hard and difficult road yet it must be traveled for an independent democratic trade union movement to be established in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.

How Does This Research Inform Understanding of Egyptian and Arab Politics of Transition?

Undoubtedly, the millions of workers who participated in repeated protests for more than a decade did contribute to the downfall of the Mubarak regime. This was a movement that had been organizing and growing in earnest over the years since 2000 and earlier. Egyptian workers stepped out into the streets to demand dignity and universally respected rights when it was not "en vogue". At times, they were simply asking to get paid their wages and other such fundamental necessities. There was a

⁴⁷⁴ Notes from interviews conducted in Cairo, Egypt in June-July 2013

continuum of protest events, each breaking down bit by bit the wall of fear. My research showed that fear of retribution by an authoritarian regime waned for the rest of Egyptians thanks to the workers (please see Appendix 2 for several examples of other workers' protests and contentious collective action). This was also a role model for workers in other Arab countries who are living under authoritarian rule.

Democratization theories, processes of change and transition toward democracy, and the political roles of trade unions were examined in this research. Poland and Latin America set the precedent for the role of workers' organizations in this transition. In Egypt's case, there were several factors that hampered labor's political role to influence positive change. These factors include the historical baggage that the Egyptian labor movement carries; cleavages in leadership and lack of strong alliances with political opposition elites; and Egyptian society and the "deep authoritarian state" views on labor, thus undercutting their efforts. No matter how many millions rose up against the authoritarian Mubarak regime, grassroots movements such as labor could not stand up to the entrenched, deep state apparatus; the military; and the most organized social-political group, the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, it is clear that even if labor was very well organized, if it did not carry the historic baggage of perception and image, and even if there was no leadership crisis and division into several labor federations, they would not have been able to galvanize the rest of civil society to defeat the deep authoritarian regime with the military as its vanguard.

However, the Egyptian labor movement has a long tenacious activist history. The Egyptian labor movement prior to 1952 played an important role as a social movement expressing the desires and needs of average citizens, including workers. Their advocacy

for social justice and decent wages was the driving force, and they fought colonialism. The labor movement also had a political role in supporting uprisings against the colonial British forces, the governments that came in and out of rule, the monarchy, and finally the ousting of the British troops with the Free Officers' coup in 1952. The 1952 coup d'état began a nationalist-socialist era lasting about thirty years.

Before 1952, the labor movement began as a diverse, pluralist, organized, and independent movement that advocated as effectively as possible for workers' rights. However, "the evolving structure of the working class reflected the uneven development of Egyptian capitalism."⁴⁷⁵ Workers participated in trade unions, including those who were employed in small non-mechanized work places. Workers in the large, mechanized industries such as transportation and manufacturing eventually became the most active in the labor movement. "The early concentration of large numbers of workers in transport, public utilities, and service enterprises was largely the result of European capital's primary interest in the extraction of cotton from Egypt."⁴⁷⁶ As the mechanized industry grew thanks to investment by locally owned Bank Misr in the large El-Mahalla El-Kubra spinning and weaving company, workers in the textile sector became quite the militant leaders.

By the advent of World War II, the number of industrial workers increased, including the industries of oil production, tobacco production, and the Suez Canal. "It is impossible to deny the leading role of the textile workers in shaping the political character of the postwar workers' movement."⁴⁷⁷ It is this political activist history that is

⁴⁷⁵ Bein, Joel and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882-1954*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987:449

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Bein and Lockman 450

still being carried on by the older leaders in Egypt's independent labor movement. This history of struggle and activism needs to be preserved and referred to in order to support today's independent workers' organizations and network.

The role of labor movements in the Arab world, including Egypt, was mainly co-opted, and then overtaken and controlled by the state apparatus through a so-called "social contract". The goal of the "social contract" was to maintain the state's autocratic rule in the region. In Egypt, this social contract is now defunct; it is a new wild world of unbridled "crony" capitalism and without the checks and balances of a democratic system in place.

"From the late 1950s onward three successive presidents — Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak - have sought to manipulate and control the behavior of Egyptian workers while claiming to represent them and enjoy their unqualified support. The nature of the three regimes in regard to labor has been different, however. Nasser built an etatist economy enshrined in populist rhetoric, which encouraged workers to believe in a system of reciprocal rights and responsibilities between themselves and the government. Sadat and Mubarak launched efforts to retract the state's commitments to labor established under this Nasserist moral economy, while endeavoring to convince workers that orthodox economic reforms are in their best interests."⁴⁷⁸

ETUF, the state-controlled trade union federation, repressed workers and did not advocate for their rights. Interestingly, however, the lower cadres and committees could exercise limited democratic practices and independence. There is a debate on the utility of one single federation since the communist/leftist forces did advocate for one central trade union federation, i.e. a centralized structure, as the best way to advocate for workers' interests and needs. At the same time, opponents of this view were able to

⁴⁷⁸ Posusney 1997:245

interact with regime elites and attempt to delay this corporatization with limited success.⁴⁷⁹

The decline in the state's finances, and thus the power to control social actors such as workers, had a direct impact and strengthened the ability of an independent labor movement to develop. Egypt was heading towards both a fiscal and political disaster, hence empowering political and social opposition to demand reform. The unfortunate element is the lack of effective alliance building and missed political opportunities between labor and the political opposition elite. The conditions were ripe for such an alliance, but that did not materialize, therefore obstructing labor's efforts in demanding political reform. Labor was not able to effectively influence the political process and contribute to the democratization process due to the lack of strong organized political opposition parties to advocate for democratic principles and to the historic baggage that labor carried, which included weak organizational structures. Again, this does not deny the important role labor played, but it was elusive. Despite the labor critics who contend workers' organizations are only self-interested (a fi'awi group), and criticize labor as being only interested in democracy if it helps their cause then the labor movement's leaders will support democratization. I still contend that the independent labor movement was, and is still, a champion of democracy, but it was organizationally weak as a result of government policies and laws specifically written to achieve such a result. Independent and democratic trade unions fundamentally need freedom of association, which can only exist in and be respected by a democratic government.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

Western and Egyptian media have focused over the decades prior to January 2011 on various demonstrations especially when Kefaya was active with a focus on Mubarak's grooming of his son, Gamal, to take over power. By doing so, these opinion makers, missed the big picture and thus the bigger story – they missed the workers' manifestations of discontent and consistent repertoires of protest.

“A rising labor force has become the country's most effective political force. Since the massive strikes of 27,000 Ghazl el-Mahalla Textile Company workers in 2006 and 2007, Egyptian workers have started to shift their demands from strictly economic—salaries, bonuses, and industrial safety—to the more political question of re-configuring their relation to the state. For half a century, the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Unions Federation (ETUF) has monopolized workers' representation. The Ghazl el-Mahalla workers called for dissolving their factory's union committee, which they deemed undemocratic and unrepresentative.”⁴⁸⁰

Egyptian workers became a political force yet still invisible in the media's eyes.

The case studies of workers' protests presented in this dissertation highlight labor's decisive role in putting pressure on the authoritarian regime that ultimately brought an end to Mubarak's rule. However, the opposition political elite did not necessarily consider labor at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement. Labor was also not directly using the democracy and political discourse. They used a socio-economic discourse through their demands for increased wages, improved benefits, better working conditions, wage parity, and desire to create an independent trade union. I would argue that these were very political actions; any form of opposition made under an authoritarian regime is inherently political. These cases also show that large, organized grassroots groups or organizations such as trade unions need not have central

⁴⁸⁰ Nasrawi, Saif. “The Political Edge of Egyptian Labor Protests” November 2009
<http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2009/11/10/political-edge-of-labor-protests-in-egypt/95fi>

mobilization coordination to be effective. “Egypt had maintained a tight grip on workers through state-controlled labor organizations, which led to a growing discontent between rank-and-file workers and union leaders (...) Egypt nonetheless witnessed a great deal of sustained workers’ mobilization, organized independently of the official union structure.”⁴⁸¹ The question examined is how these mobilizations took place despite their disparate and fragmented nature, i.e. not all coordinated by one umbrella trade union organization. The role of independent NGOs concerned with labor issues is critical in responding to this question. These NGOs played an important coordinating role. In addition, these workers’ protests further added to the breaking down of the barriers of fear and were considered “training grounds” for repertoires, mechanisms, and brokers of contention. They used the independent media to further bring their cause into the home of every Egyptian. These workers took many brave first steps for several years on the road to the January 2011 uprising. They created an effective social movement to highlight many issues that concerned the overall population, and not just for an “interest group”. However, it was initially effective but not necessarily sustainable for the long-term – for the long road ahead.

Egypt was ready for an uprising, but a full-fledged revolution was not possible under the circumstances. The deep state apparatus with the military’s full support did not allow for a full-fledged revolution and change in the political system, which is the requirement for a revolution. Egyptian culture and society had been evolving and becoming more and more aggressive toward the ineptitudes of the regime and its lack of respect for bread (life) and freedom, or more accurately the lack of social justice. The

⁴⁸¹ Bishara, Dina. “The Power of Workers in Egypt’s 2011 Uprising,” *Arab Spring in Egypt – Revolution and Beyond*, Korany and El Mahdi (editors), American University Press, Cairo, 2012, page 101.

workers played a role in this societal evolution and change — they pushed back the barriers of fear of the regime’s brutality. However, Egypt has become a “soft state”,⁴⁸² or a state that passes laws but does not enforce them. Unless the soft state is dismantled and replaced by a state that respects the rule of law and other universal, fundamental principles of human rights, the workers and any other organized social movement will have little impact in achieving serious and sustainable positive political change.

Amin wrote that in Myrdal’s⁴⁸³ view, many developing countries suffer from being under the control of the soft state, and one of the main reasons for the continued poverty and under-development.⁴⁸⁴ Waterbury⁴⁸⁵ makes an assessment of the Sadat-initiated open-door economic liberation called “infitah”. He concludes that the infitah policies fell short in many ways due to Egypt’s soft state per Myrdal’s definition. The soft state further added to the negative perception and actual liberalization and with a reference to democracy since that was the “packaging” in which it was presented. The notion that democracy brings economic liberalization yet in a system of a “soft state” brings further inequality, injustice and added cementing of corruption.

Egypt’s Infitah (open door) liberalization policies were supposed to save the initial socialist experiment under Nasser while further progressing and developing economically. There were positive aspects, but the social implications, particularly its impact on the working class, were the most harmful. Waterbury writes, “Egypt’s turn to the open door has produced some positive results: remarkable aggregate growth in the

⁴⁸² Reference to Waterbury’s writings

⁴⁸³ Karl Gunnar Myrdal was a Swedish Nobel laureate economist, sociologist, and politician.

⁴⁸⁴ Amin, Galal A. *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak 1981-2011*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2012:8

⁴⁸⁵ Waterbury, J. (1985). "The "Soft State" and the Open Door: Egypt's Experience with Economic Liberalization, 1974-1984." *Comparative Politics* 18(1): 65-83.

economy, an unfettering of individual initiative with all sorts of possibilities for upward mobility, and the resurgence of the private sector.”⁴⁸⁶ However, the social contract and the state’s financial commitments to welfare programs and consumer subsidies has since been reduced, wrecking havoc on those depending on the services and those working in the public sector. The problem is that the soft state, politically with all its components, still continues with no reforms in sight. The infitah liberalization policies further enriched the elites and impoverished the working and middle classes. There were no provisions made to soften the impact on those who depend on the public sector for employment and survival. There cannot be economic growth without political reform; justice for the masses is not achieved, and the growth further adds to their misery. Egypt ultimately was unable to afford paying for the soft state, and as Samer Soliman⁴⁸⁷ stressed, it was vital to reform the Egyptian state, but the authoritarian regime’s priority was to use public money to impose and maintain political stability.

After Mubarak stepped down, there was much hope that Egypt would be on a new trajectory toward democracy. However, that “hope” was purely elusive without a real basis in terms of the reality of the conditions and situation in Egypt. The authoritarian regime was not dismantled; the January 2011 events were an uprising and not a revolution. Political parties and civil society were hampered by years of control, divisions, and inability to properly organize and develop grassroots support. As Vickie Langhor⁴⁸⁸ stated, there was too much civil society and too little politics taking place in

⁴⁸⁶ Waterbury, J. (1985). "The "Soft State" and the Open Door: Egypt's Experience with Economic Liberalization, 1974-1984." *Comparative Politics* 18(1): 65-83.

⁴⁸⁷ Soliman (Sulaymān), Samer. *The Autumn of Dictatorship - Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

⁴⁸⁸ Langohr, Vickie, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jan., 2004), pp. 181-204

Egypt. “With effective opposition parties all but nonexistent, advocacy non-governmental organizations have become the most vocal secular opposition in several Arab countries,”⁴⁸⁹ including Egypt. Civil society organizations, including trade unions, cannot replace the role of opposition political parties.

Workers were able to break out from under the statist-corporatist control and develop independent organizations and networks. But, these organizations were also not able to become that needed social and political driving force within the political arena to influence new policies. There was a dire need for strong political opposition parties to fully participate in the opened political arena. The head of the regime was removed, yet the body continued; the deep state was alive and well. The collective action and social capital workers developed in this case were not sufficient to bring about the needed positive political reform.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) immediately outlawed protests, but workers’ protests from March 2011 until and after the first election in May 2012 increased due to continued daily economic hardships. Independent labor organizations were unable to “get out the vote” and organize voters for independent, socially minded progressive candidates like Khalid Ali or Hamdeen Sabahi. The military and Muslim Brotherhood candidates were the only two with the necessary organization, funding, and networks to compete in an election after so many years of authoritarian rule. The weakness of the political parties and the system overall became painfully clear. The two independent labor federations were not united, and internal factions with leadership egos took over to further undermine workers’ potential. Once Morsi

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. 182

became president, conditions continued to deteriorate on all levels – economically, politically, and socially. Morsi’s presidency was marred with many missteps and legislative disasters in to attempt to control labor and undermine freedom of association such as the decree to control appointments to the ETUF’s executive board and not through elections by the rank and file members. “The Egyptian president quietly consolidated power over institutions affecting the lives of millions of workers, namely, Egypt’s labor unions. A day after giving himself vast new constitutional powers on November 22, Morsi amended the country’s 46-year-old trade union law. The decree represents a major shift in a fundamental Egyptian institution. It also suggests the continuation of the Muslim Brotherhood’s growing influence on a movement it has long ignored.”⁴⁹⁰ Egypt was sinking into a political abyss leading to the military coup disguised in a popular uprising on June 30, 2013 (beyond the scope of this research). “When the Tamarod Campaign began in April 2013, petitioning for the resignation of Mohamed Morsi, the independent labor movement eagerly signed on. Why were the workers so eager to sign onto this campaign? They had endured a difficult year of daily violations of worker rights. There had been no progress on a new trade union law that guaranteed freedom of association, and the right to organize and to negotiate and bargain collectively. Unemployment was on the rise, with no plan in sight for job creation projects. Strikes were condemned by the government and workers were [attacked figuratively and literally](#).”⁴⁹¹ The workers actively supported the overthrow of

⁴⁹⁰ Hartshorn, Ian, “Labor Unions under attack in Morsi’s Egypt,” *Muftah* e-zine, November 30, 2012 <http://muftah.org/labor-unions-under-attack-in-morsis-egypt/- .VJOKW7jo8>

⁴⁹¹ El-Shazli, Heba F. “Where were the Egyptian Workers in the June 2013’s People’s Coup Revolution?” *Jadaliyya* e-zine, July 23, 2013 <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13125/where-were-the-egyptian-workers-in-the-june-2013-p>

Morsi's rule, but they were still not strong enough to assert their needs to relieve serious grievances.

In 2014, three years after the initial uprising in January 2011, Egyptian workers are still struggling for respect of their fundamental human rights and dignity. They are still calling for the respect for and implementation of freedom of association. Egyptian workers challenged the regime for more than a decade prior to the January 2011 uprising, but they continue to be the victims of undemocratic regime implementing repressive policies and laws. They were a significant social movement contributing to the contentious politics and collective action leading up to the uprising, but their victory was elusive.

The Epilogue: The Role of the Independent Labor Movement – Post the January 2011 Uprising and Leading to the May 2012 Elections

Democratic Transition: Political and Economic Lessons

Collective action of workers in a social movement can be an effective mechanism in the quest for democratic transition. Social capital is the main condition to promote social change through collective action. Edwards, the civil society expert, commentator, and author notes, “(S)ocial capital is seen as the crucial ingredient in promoting collective action for the common good.”⁴⁹² To relate this to the labor movement, workers are social capital and can be interpreted as the collective action of workers.

Democracy experts and scholars write and raise the debate about prevalence of a “democratic recession.” Yet, between 2010 and 2013, we have witnessed millions of oppressed people stand up against authoritarian regimes and demand justice through reform of the political system with the goal of establishing a substantive representative democracy. The call for freedom, equality, sustenance, and social justice are at the heart of these mobilizations. These movements for positive political change are coming at a time when democracy appears to be receding as noted by Diamond in *The Spirit of Democracy* and Kurlantzick in *Democracy in Retreat*. Diamond wrote, “The democratic boom has given way to recession. Its start may be traced to the 1999 military coup in Pakistan, which symbolized the failure of many of the new democracies to perform decently in delivering development, social peace, and good governance.”⁴⁹³ However, despite the more realist analysis of the state of democracy there is renewed

⁴⁹² Edwards, Michael. *Civil Society*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013, page 14

⁴⁹³ Diamond, Larry J. *The spirit of democracy: the struggle to build free societies throughout the world*. New York, Times Books/Henry Holt and Co. 2008:12

sense of hope but with pitfalls. There is an increase in the universal demand for democratic values and aspirations. The recession is receding and opening the door to revitalization, but the main challenge is whether these new “fragile” governments can deliver what the people need and want. Will the recession sink into a depression while hopes and dreams remain unfulfilled, and will more entrenched authoritarian rulers take over after these uprisings?

Since 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, we witnessed various “color revolutions” in the former Soviet bloc countries until the early 2000s. But, economics and fragile institutions in these countries have challenged these ventures into democratic rule. As Freedom House reports in its *Freedom in the World 2013* report,⁴⁹⁴ global levels of freedom have declined, thus the continued talk of a democratic recession. “This is the seventh consecutive year that *Freedom in the World* [report] has shown more declines than gains worldwide. Furthermore, the report data reflected a stepped-up campaign of persecution by dictators that specifically targeted civil society organizations and independent media.”⁴⁹⁵ The nascent democratic openings in the Middle East, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, are being watched carefully since it could mean a reversal in the recession. Yet, there are many hurdles along the way, and “many countries that once seemed budding with democratic promise now appear mired in political infighting and power grabs by ousted elites, or trapped in downward spirals of poverty and unemployment. History suggests that many transitioning countries will move [very] slowly toward substantive democracy.”⁴⁹⁶ These countries face tremendous

⁴⁹⁴ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2013>

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Coleman, Isobel and Terra Remer, editors, *Pathways to freedom: political and economic lessons from democratic transitions*. New York, NY, Council on Foreign Relations. 2013

challenges such as fragile institutions, weak civil society organizations, lack of respect for the rule of law, high levels of unemployment particularly among the youth, and weak economic indicators and performance in addition to the decline in investment in human resources by means of decent education, security, and health care.

It is critical that nascent democracies consolidate and withstand the significant challenges. Diamond argues that they must become more deeply democratic—more liberal, accountable, and responsive to their citizens. In his book, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (1999), he draws on extensive public opinion research in developing and post-communist states, and he demonstrates the importance of freedom, transparency, and the rule of law for generating the broad legitimacy that is the essence of democratic consolidation. The book concludes with a hopeful view of the prospects for a fourth wave of global democratization.⁴⁹⁷ Optimistically, we could conjecture that the Arab Spring is ushering in a “fourth wave of democratization”. It is a mixed picture with varying positive and negative results and much skepticism.

The January 2011 uprising was not a surprise since Egyptians on all levels were suffering economically and there was not a national vision that could unite everyone. The surprise was possibly in the intensity and how quickly the head of the regime buckled. The surprise can also be seen in how the masses were not afraid to stand up to the entrenched state security apparatuses. The gradual withdrawal of the state from providing basic services heavily affected the poor and middle classes. The state decreased expenditures on education, health care, social welfare, culture, and the media, and these areas became privatized so they were not easily available to the masses and

⁴⁹⁷ Diamond, L. J. *Developing democracy: toward consolidation*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press. 1999.

were instead only available to those who could pay. Corruption continued to thrive in all aspects of society and institutions throughout Egypt.

“During the past twenty years a number of powerful elements have thus gathered together to produce a degree of corruption among various sections of Egyptian society, the like of which has never been seen in the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s, nor even in pre-revolutionary Egypt. There was now a weak state that lost both the power and will to punish those transgressing the law, with no commitment to a national project which could unite the people.”⁴⁹⁸

Consumerism and material possessions became more valuable than respect for learning and acquiring academic credentials. Pressure by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in the early 1990s to quickly privatize state-owned lands and factories resulted in shady deals to sell these assets cheaply to foreigners and locals. Workers in these public-sector jobs found themselves in a difficult predicament. Many lost their jobs and had to resort to the volatile private sector. The job security of the public sector was not assured anymore. Others found themselves in workplaces where the state has reduced investments and the factories were operating on shoestring budgets with antiquated equipment, thus not able to compete in a global economy. There was a significant decline in the number of public sector jobs due to the slow-but-certain privatization program and the lack of re-investment in the public sector. Another issue was low wages.

“(Wages) remain standard for both public and private sector workers. A 2009 report by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights found that average monthly wages for public sector employees were LE684 compared with LE576 in the private sector (\$125 and \$105 respectively). The report attributed ‘the crisis in wages and salaries to the government's

⁴⁹⁸ Amin 2011:41

disregard for social policies that balance between wages and prices.”⁴⁹⁹

The large labor mobilization was a result of the significant changes in Egypt's domestic political economy: the speeding up the neoliberal economic reforms, rapidly rising inflation, dramatic increasing in daily consumer goods (especially fruits and vegetables), and wages remaining stagnant.⁵⁰⁰

There was a significant decline in the availability of public sector jobs. These jobs had been the backbone of Egypt's economy (and social status) since 1952.

“The deepening of neo-liberal policies in the 1990s stripped the Nasserist state of its social role: privatisation transferred hundreds of thousands of workers to private sector employers who did not provide the same kind of workplace-based benefits and job security as their public sector counterparts, while those who remained employed by the state saw the relentless deterioration of their pay and conditions. All that remained of the Faustian pact between workers and the Nasserist state was the authoritarian apparatus of coercion.”⁵⁰¹

Results of the 2006 ETUF trade union elections removed the leaders who commanded respect at the local level, which in turn made them leaders who would lead the revolt, and some would establish new trade unions such as RETA. According to many conversations that I had with labor leaders over the last eight years, the 2006 elections for ETUF local leaders exceeded all expectations in terms of violations and infringements. The ETUF had become so weak due to the decline in the public sector jobs that the official structures had to resort to extreme measures to keep the organization somewhat functioning.

⁴⁹⁹ Shehata, Samer, *Afterword, Shop Floor Culture and Politics*, AUC Press, 2013:255

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 254

⁵⁰¹ Alexander, Anne, “The Egyptian workers’ movement and the 25 January Revolution” [Issue: 133](http://www.isj.org.uk/?s=contents&issue=133)

Posted: 9 January 2012 International Socialism – A quarterly journal of socialist theory
<http://www.isj.org.uk/?s=contents&issue=133>

These trade union elections came on the heels of the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, which saw fewer violations than usual and greater turnout, and voters elected eighty-two members of the banned MB as independents. A public report issued by the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) showed that the ETUF was lacking vibrancy and democratic practices. These elections were marred by imposing restrictions not stipulated in the law on who could run for office, violating of the candidates' right to openly communicate with his/her constituency to discuss the candidate's trade union mission, treating candidates who were close to the ETUF leadership and good NDP members more favorably, and violating of trade union freedom of choice and decision-making.

However, these economic grievances were not the only impetus for collective action, according to Shehata, who examines the connections workers have on the shop floor (at the workplace) in the public sector. He wrote, "These ties were, in part, the outcome of lifetime public sector employment and limited employment opportunities elsewhere. The trust, familiarity, and repertoire of quotidian practices that marked class boundaries and developed as a result of long years of working together, arguably provided the social capital necessary for effective collective action."⁵⁰² The economy was increasingly becoming a servant for the elite's enrichment and not for the collective good. The poor were getting poorer standing in lines in front of bakeries to buy more expensive, smaller-sized bread. "The middle class in Egypt today is a defeated and humiliated class. No wonder it also has little enthusiasm for national issues and its productivity is low in both the economic and cultural spheres."⁵⁰³ The deterioration of

⁵⁰² Ibid. 255

⁵⁰³ Amin 2011:85

the middle class is apparent in the obvious decline of living conditions upon which their hopes are usually pinned for a national economic revival, since the poor do not have the means and the rich do not have the inclination or motivation for such a revival.

Globally, the middle class plays an important role in the support of democratic practices. It tends to play a much more important role in its country's economic, political, and cultural development than played by the lower and rich classes. Today the poor and the middle classes in Egypt share the same daily living frustrations.⁵⁰⁴ The rest of Egyptian society was not spared. The consistent attacks on intellectuals; the increase in religious discourse fanaticism; and the increase in marginal independence of the press, while losing its moral compass, added to the alienation of Egyptians. The reasons for disillusionment came from being in one's own country yet not recognizing the surroundings. "This was just what one would expect from a regime with no political vision and, even if it did have such a vision, no power to implement it; a regime devoid of both talent and vitality, that confines its role to implementing the directives coming from IFIs and super powers like the US. All of this was bound to strengthen the feeling of alienation among Egyptians, in general."⁵⁰⁵ Egypt was a gloomy climate of great alienation, wrote Amin. He compares the different natures of the jokes during the Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak eras and how they reflected the different types of discontent: "The discontent in the Nasser era was closely associated with fear; in the Sadat era, with anger; and in the Mubarak era, with depression,"⁵⁰⁶ particularly with the absence of a national project, talent, ability, and, most detrimental, hope for a better future.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. 100

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. 145

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

The Mubarak regime and all its tentacles lived in fear of a serious opposition. It worked very hard to provide attractive window dressing for a façade of democracy. This was for public consumption to the point that some Egyptians began to believe the charade. It was also for the international consumption, particularly to those Western nations that continued to provide Egypt with aid in the form of cash, educational and training programs, technical assistance, and military assistance. “Fear was embodied in local proverbs, such as ‘Walk quietly by the wall (where you cannot be noticed),’ ‘Mind your own business and focus on your livelihood,’ and ‘whosoever is afraid stays unharmed.’”⁵⁰⁷ The regime’s uncompromising control also covered workers and all state institutions, including civil society organizations.

The previous chapters have outlined the details of the independent workers’ movement of protest starting in earnest from 2006 onward. The events of January 2011 should not be a surprise — a mass uprising against the regime was the result of the accumulation of many years of anger, fear, and depression since the 1960s. “From 1998 to 2010, well over two million workers participated in at least 3,400 strikes and other collective actions — the largest social movement in the Arab world in six decades, except for the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). These collective actions were largely motivated by the threat or actual loss of jobs or social benefits after privatization of public sector enterprises, low wages, and delays or nonpayment of bonuses, incentive pay, and other wage supplements critical to bringing income to a level that can sustain

⁵⁰⁷ Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0 – A memoir*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, page 3

survival.”⁵⁰⁸ The workers had the motivation and organization to challenge the regime, but they carried historical and political baggage that weakened their effectiveness.

The Establishment of Independent Labor Federations in Egypt Post-January 2011

After those heady days starting on January 25, 2011, the workers’ independent movement and networks, i.e. a social movement, began to organize into institutions while still carrying the baggage of the past. The first independent trade union federation was founded in Tahrir Square. Egyptian workers united to form the Egyptian Federation for Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), effectively not literally destroying the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF).

“Its existence was announced at a press conference on January 30, 2011, in Cairo’s Tahrir Square — the epicenter of the popular movement. The independent unions of Real Estate Tax Authority workers, healthcare technicians, and teachers established since 2008 initiated the new federation. They were joined by the 8.5 million-member retirees’ association, which [had] just received permission to reorganize itself as a professional syndicate, as well as representatives of textile, pharmaceutical, chemical, iron and steel, and automotive workers from industrial zones in Cairo, Helwan, Mahalla al-Kubra, Tenth of Ramadan, and Sadat City.”⁵⁰⁹

When the regime gave all the public sector workers in Egypt the first week of February 2011 as time off, more workers protested in the main squares and streets around the country, and many traveled to Cairo to be in Tahrir Square. Tactically, giving the workers time off was not the most strategic decision and actually added to the protesting masses.

⁵⁰⁸ Beinin, J. (2011). "Workers and Egypt's January 25 Revolution." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 80(01): 189-196. Page 191

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 189

Two independent labor federations of several unions were established within days and months of the January 2011 uprising. While the state-controlled ETUF ordered workers to stay at their jobs, the first new federation led its workers to strike and join the protests that ultimately brought about Mubarak's downfall. "The *Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU)* was founded in March 2011 within days of the end of the Mubarak regime. It claims an affiliated membership of around 1.4 million workers with a membership of 200 independent unions. Its president is Kamal Abu Eita, the leader of the [Real Estate] Tax Collectors' Union, the first independent union to emerge [in 2008] before the revolution."⁵¹⁰ The second independent trade union federation is the smaller *Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC)*. "(EDLC) claims the affiliation of 246 unions with 149 present during the founding press conference on 16th October 2011. Leading figures in the EDLC are affiliated to an NGO, the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) established by former steelworker and welder, Kamal Abbas. Abbas with his allies withdrew from the EFITU in the summer of 2011 after a bitter controversy over the role over NGO employees in the democratic decision-making bodies of the new federation."⁵¹¹ Therein continues the historic baggage that divides workers' leaders and organizations leading to less-effective behavior and ability to truly influence national policies.

Within eight months of the downfall of the Mubarak regime, two independent trade union federations were established, bringing together about one thousand new independent unions from various sectors of the economy and different professions. Forming these umbrella federations to bring hundreds of independent unions together

⁵¹⁰ <http://socialistworker.org/blog/critical-reading/2012/03/09/where-egyptian-revolution-goin>

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

had been an idea that independent labor-focused NGOs contemplated for many years. The establishment of these federations broke the effective monopoly on labor activity and representation for over fifty years by the government-controlled ETUF. However, post- January 2011, the government still charters ETUF; it continues to exist and attempts to exert pressure on and control the workers.

After February 2011, workers and their leaders believed and hoped for the coming of a new era with respect for fundamental, internationally recognized freedoms and rights for workers. It was a time when everything seemed optimistically possible: there was hope and change in the air, and everyone believed in a new Egypt brought about by a “revolution”. Wael Ghonim wrote: “The power of the people is greater than the people in power [...] the revolution successfully achieved its first objective, removing the key regime figures from power; thus paving the way for opportunity and hope.”⁵¹² However, revolutions are a process and not just events, and the path to a democracy is long and full of many challenges. Nevertheless, something has deeply changed within the Egyptian psyche and presence. Egyptians are more connected to each other, whether it is via social media in and of itself or the opportunity to engage in social media without the barrier of fear.

The “Egyptian Spring”: Dashed Hopes?

The revolution, or more correctly the uprising, in January 2011 was unique in that there was not one charismatic leader. Ghonim referred to it as the “Revolution 2.0” model since it did not follow the revolutions of the past that have usually had

⁵¹² Ghonim 2012:292

charismatic leaders.⁵¹³ He believed that the revolution was truly spontaneous and led by the wisdom of the crowd. I contest this assertion since this was the peak of an accumulation of protests fueled by serious grievances leading up to January 2011. The previous chapters have made this point in a variety of different ways. Also, it was a revolt against a political system that was inherited by Mubarak, a system that began more than fifty years ago. Egyptians revolted against Mubarak: “that is true, but not entirely accurate. They revolted against a regime — a political order — that he led, but that Mubarak inherited from Sadat who inherited it from Nasser.”⁵¹⁴ Cook writes that Egyptians cracked open the regime and ushered Mubarak out of power. They now have the opportunity for the first time in many years to determine what kind of government they want and to define Egypt as they wish and not how those in power want to define Egypt.⁵¹⁵ Those were assessments made within months of the January 2011 uprising when hopes and expectations for change were high. However, three years later, Egypt continues to be in a state of turmoil with a deeply polarized and divided populace. The hope of constructing a new political system seems now to be even more ephemeral.

Let us return to the labor movement and its role between February 2011 and May 2012. After Mubarak stepped down on February 11, 2011, the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) became the caretaker government until elections for president were held in May 2012. A spate of protests took place soon after February 11, where “thousands of workers, including ambulance drivers, airport and public transport workers, and even police took to the streets, demanding higher pay, three days after

⁵¹³ Ghonim 2012:293

⁵¹⁴ Cook, S. A. *The struggle for Egypt: from Nasser to Tahrir Square*. New York, Oxford University Press 2012:306.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Mubarak's resignation."⁵¹⁶ Street protests became the only way that workers could influence the decision-makers since they were not being represented by "recognized" unions or part of the negotiations with the military.

The SCAF banned demonstrations and strikes that disrupted production and called for calm. "Only three days after Mubarak's resignation, the Supreme Council released Communiqué 5, which outlines the negative impact of continuing protests on the economy and calls on labor and professional syndicates to help bring about a return to normalcy in everyday life. A few days later, an army statement described 'fi'awi⁵¹⁷ demands' as illegitimate, pledging to deal with the agitators through legal means in the name of 'protecting the security of the nation and its citizens.' (On) March 23, 2011, the government of Prime Minister 'Isam Sharaf approved a law banning protests, assemblies and strikes that impede private and public business, and rendering such actions punishable with up to a year in prison and a fine that could reach a half-million Egyptian pounds."⁵¹⁸ The workers have long been relegated to the "fi'awi", i.e. group or the more maligned term "special interest", which is used in American politics that allegedly seek gains for a small group at the expense of the general population. These are not just "groups" that are removed from society — they are workers who encompass civil society and are a vast majority of the population.

⁵¹⁶ Sowers, J. L. and Toesing, Chris J. *The journey to Tahrir: revolution, protest, and social change in Egypt*. London; New York, Verso. 2012:106

⁵¹⁷ Special interest

⁵¹⁸ Sellam, Hesham. "Striking Back at Egyptian Workers." MERIP report #259, vol. 41, Summer 2011.

<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers> The SCAF communique no. 5 can be found on the State Information Service website:

<http://www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=44125>

On March 24, 2011, Military Decree 34, which became Law 34, set a fine of up to L.E. 50,000 (about \$8,333) for anyone participating in or encouraging others to join a sit-in or any other activity that “prevents, delays or disrupts the work of public institutions or public authorities.” The penalty increases to L.E. 500,000 (about \$83,333) and a minimum one-year imprisonment in the event of violence or property damage that may lead to “destruction of means of production” or harm “national unity and public security and order.”⁵¹⁹

Alexander distinguishes three phases in the development of these workers’ protests between February 2011 and October 2011. “Between February and early March (phase one) the revolution entered the workplaces on a mass scale. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of workers took strike action, and organized sit-ins and demonstrations against the ‘little Mubaraks’ in their workplaces.”⁵²⁰ There was a drop in March due to the SCAF’s banning of public protests, so “from March the number of workers’ strikes and protests dropped in comparison to the explosion of February, and steadied at roughly 65,000 participants per month in all forms of workers’ protests.”⁵²¹ The second phase was March to August 2011 and the third phase was September and October 2011.

Alexander clearly outlines the details of the three phases with an analysis of the shift in the workers’ consciousness and demands. There was an atmosphere of freedom

⁵¹⁹ Amnesty International, “Egyptian Authorities Must Allow Peaceful Protest and the Right to Strike.” April 30, 2011, www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/egyptian-authorities-must-allow-peaceful-protest-and-right-strike-2011-04-30

⁵²⁰ Alexander, Anne. “The Egyptian workers’ movement and the 25 January Revolution” *Issue: 133* *Posted: 9 January 12* International Socialism – A quarterly journal of socialist theory <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=778>

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

after the revolution/uprising and the removal of the barriers of fear that had been built and bolstered for over 60 years.

“The growth and consolidation of workers’ organisations both within and [among] individual workplaces during March to August laid the foundations for the mass strikes of September and October. The same period also saw important shifts in workers’ consciousness, as the focus of their protests shifted from the ‘little Mubarak’ in their workplace, to higher up the institutions of the state. September’s strike wave marked a seismic shift in both independent organisation and consciousness among Egyptian workers. Around 500,000 workers participated in strikes and protests that month alone, a significantly higher figure than the entire previous six months. While the numbers of participants were probably lower than February, the significance of September’s strikes lay in the qualitative shift towards coordinated national and sector-wide strikes.”⁵²²

National and sector-wide strikes were indeed a shift from the past five years since the strikes that took place were mostly factory/workplace based. During that time period, there was a nation-wide teachers strike, a sector-wide strike of sugar refinery workers, and nationally coordinated postal workers strikes and protests. The coordination within sectors for national or sector-wide protests was a major change tactics with a change in demands. “(T)hese were mass strikes articulating generalised social demands with a degree of common purpose which in itself constituted a formidable political challenge to the ruling military council. Moreover, the teachers’ strike, which mobilised 250,000 to 500,000 strikers, explicitly demanded the resignation of the minister of education, a Mubarak appointee, and other strikes, such as the Cairo Public Transport Authority workers’ strike, began to raise similar demands.”⁵²³ The disparate network nature of the oppositional labor movement began to coalesce into nation-wide strikes. This was a

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

positive development, which has potential to further unite the independent labor movement.

Alexander used data from the Awlad el Ard (Sons of the Land Association for Human Rights⁵²⁴) NGO in addition to other labor-oriented NGOs. The strikes prior to January 2011 contributed to an overall malaise and expressed the challenges being faced by average Egyptians. Workers brought social justice issues to the forefront of the national stage with the help of the independent media that regularly reported on these incidents of social movement repertoires. The regime dealt with these strikes and protests in a strategic manner and tried to avoid completely alienating the working class. In addition, there were professional classes of workers that also joined this wave and went on strike protesting working conditions, wages, and the decline in basic benefits. It was difficult to continue the practice of “insulation” of the workers from the rest of the society. It was impossible to consider workers as just a special interest, particularly as their discourse of grievances touched the daily lives of so many Egyptians.

The strikes and protests after January 2011 continued,

“(The) broadening of this strike wave still served to ‘disorganise’ the regime, dispelling the illusion of a rapid return to ‘normality’, and forcibly placing the social demands of the working class and wider layers of the poor on the political agenda. The inability of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to re-impose normal labour relations in the workplace (or more accurately, the generals’ helplessness as workers dramatically shifted the ‘frontier of

⁵²⁴ <http://www.anhri.net/egypt/ae/> Description of Awlad el Ard
في خطوة في جادة على طريق تحسين وتعزيز أوضاع حقوق الإنسان في مصر بسائر أنواعها وأخصها الحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية تعلن مؤسسة أولاد الأرض لحقوق الإنسان عن بدء نشاطها في كافة مجالات عملها وذلك بعد التغلب على كافة الصعاب التي واكبتها منذ ظهور فكرة تأسيسها باعتبارها الامتداد الطبيعي والقانوني لمركز الأرض لحقوق الإنسان في إطار توفيق أوضاعه وفقاً لأحكام قانون الجمعيات والمؤسسات الأهلية

control' between workers and bosses in their favour) was all the more politically important as it coincided with a lull in the mass street mobilisations, and preceded the constitutional referendum, which represented the first serious attempt by the reconfigured regime to use the electoral process to create a new veneer of legitimacy.”⁵²⁵

Alexander believes, and I concur, that these episodes of contention did indeed “disorganize” the regime where it could not respond as harshly as it had in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, post-January 2011, there was a change in the political opportunity structures, and it was possible for the workers to focus the national debate on freedom to organize, establish independent unions legally, and bargain collectively for public-sector wages to keep up with inflation and rising consumer goods’ prices; a minimum wage; the end of casual temporary work contracts; improvement of healthcare; legalization of protests and strikes; dismantlement of the ETUF; and re-nationalization of privatized companies.

The following data from Awlad el Ard NGO that Alexander used and explained in her article showed that after February 2011, the same number of protest episodes took place in September 2011 as in all of 2008.

Table 1: Estimated number of workers involved in collective action

Source: Reports by Awlad al-Ard NGO and press reports (2011)

March	82,000
April	65,000
May	57,000
June	57,000

⁵²⁵ Alexander 2012:3

July	33,000
August	65,000
September	500,000-750,000

“Compared to the pre-revolutionary strike wave, September 2011 also marks a dramatic shift: around the same number of workers took part in collective action that month as did during the whole of 2008. Coordination of strikes and protests also increased sharply in September compared not only to previous months, but also to the pre-revolutionary strike wave. The overall number of episodes was significantly fewer but the increased numbers participating points to the consolidation of the strike wave into fewer, coordinated disputes.”⁵²⁶

Table 2: Number of episodes of collective action

Source: Awlad al-Ard NGO 2011

March	123
April	90
May	107
June	96
July	76
August	89
September	56

“September’s strike wave was dominated by the national teachers’ strike, which was itself the single largest episode of coordinated strike action in Egypt since the 1940s. Estimating the number of striking teachers is extremely difficult. The

⁵²⁶ Alexander 2012:4-5

Ministry of Education claimed that only 1,400 schools, or 4.3 percent of the total, were affected by the strike, but reports in the independent media suggested a far wider impact, with possibly half of Egyptian schools shut down. However, if the teachers' strike is discounted, September still shows a significant shift towards large, coordinated strikes. Seven strikes and workers' protests involving more than 10,000 workers have been reported since March, with five of these occurring in September."⁵²⁷

According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2012 Report* on Egypt, "In March (2011), the SCAF instituted a ban on strikes and demonstrations, and repeatedly used excessive force, including live ammunition, in attempts to disperse protests. Security forces, and in some cases pro-government thugs, engaged in prolonged street battles with demonstrators in June, October, November, and December."⁵²⁸ The tide turned quickly against the rule by the military, and in the summer of 2011, Egypt witnessed many large protests against Field Marshall Mohammed H. Tantawi and the SCAF in defiance of the new anti-protest law. Egyptians, including workers, defied the restriction on large, mass protest. "Yet workers' collective defiance of new laws criminalising strikes and protests, the continued ferment in the workplaces and the hundreds of workers' demonstrations during this period played a vital role in keeping open spaces to organise from below."⁵²⁹ The spaces to organize have indeed expanded despite SCAF restrictions followed by the Morsi-Muslim Brotherhood rule, which continued the same restrictions.

The workers continued to put pressure on the authorities and did not back down on social justice demands, which expanded to the notion of "tathir", or the cleansing of

⁵²⁷ Alexander 2012:3-4 and Ali, M, 2011, "Egypt teachers strike for the first time since 1951" (19 September), <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/21568/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-teachers-strike-for-the-first-time-since-.aspx>

⁵²⁸ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/egypt-0>

⁵²⁹ Alexander 2012

corrupt factory managers leading up to corrupt government bureaucrats. The Freedom House report concurs with my thesis in terms of the labor movement's important contributions, especially during and after the 2011 uprising. "The labor movement made important advances during and after the 2011 uprising, as workers and strikes played a significant role in increasing pressure on Mubarak to step down. Workers were granted the right to establish independent unions and formed an independent trade union federation, ending the long-standing monopoly of the state-run federation. However, the government criminalized protests that disrupt the economy, a clear effort to limit the power of strikes, and initial investigations into corruption at the state-dominated labor movement foundered."⁵³⁰ This was a return to the practices of the previous regimes of Sadat, and Mubarak.

In the post-January 2011 period there was a rapid growth of independent trade unions, which came as a result of open, grassroots organizing at the workplaces without the restrictions of the pre-January 2011 era. Immediately after the end of the Mubarak rule, many of the ETUF leadership was either under house arrest, in prison, or in a very precarious position due to their unrelenting support for Mubarak and alleged organizing of the camel attack on the people in Tahrir Square during the January-February 2011 protests. The organization that already was discredited in the eyes of average Egyptians, particularly workers, was further being marginalized but was not disbanded yet. In addition to this incredible feeling of freedom to operate within open, independent trade unionism, there were additional elements that contributed to the increase in independent trade unions and the formation of federation organizations such as EFITU

⁵³⁰ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/egypt-0>

and EDLC. “A number of other factors have shaped the development of workers’ organisation so far. They include the actions of different sections of the state, from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to the minister of [manpower], Ahmad al-Borai, to regional governors and the heads of the large public sector combines. Al-Borai’s policies have been important in creating a legal space in which the independent unions have been able to operate.”⁵³¹ He was appointed minister of manpower on February 11, 2011 shortly after Mubarak stepped down, and the SCAF became the caretaker government. “Al-Borai was popular with both activists and the international community, as a former member of the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) Committee of Experts and lawyer for the independent union movement, newly organized unions outside the ETUF structure that had been agitating for official recognition since 2008.”⁵³² In March 2011, al-Borai, after consultations with leaders of the independent unions, hosted in Egypt the former Director General of the ILO Juan Somavia⁵³³, and together they publicly unveiled [the declaration of trade union freedoms](#)⁵³⁴ that gave life to the creation of independent trade unions in Egypt. This declaration was a first step in putting Egypt back on track in terms of respecting the fundamental international labor standards of freedom of association, the right to organize, and collective bargaining.

Since that declaration, Egyptian workers have been forming hundreds of independent trade unions, though not without resistance. Employers have not always welcomed them with open arms nor recognized the validity of the 2011 declaration in

⁵³¹ Alexander 2012:10

⁵³² <http://muftah.org/labor-unions-under-attack-in-morsis-egypt/>

⁵³³ http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_153044/lang--en/index.htm

⁵³⁴ <http://www.ctuws.com/results.aspx?item=1266>

spite of a December [2012 State Council ruling](#).⁵³⁵ The test case was in the electrical workers' independent union, which petitioned the State Council for their union dues to be deducted legally from their wages by the employers and then given to their new independent union. The State Council ruled to the validity of this action and the recognition of the independent union. In fact, there have been more strikes in the post-2011 period up through June 2013 than in the several prior years combined, according to Kamal Abbas, Coordinator of CTUWS.

The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights' 2013 report to the United Nations Committee on Economic and Social Rights highlights the increasing need for trade unions in Egypt "because it is becoming ever more difficult for workers to advocate for their rights. It is not uncommon for both the owners of private businesses and the government to resort to violence in dealing with the demands of workers." The report details several examples of violations of worker rights from 2012: "For instance, the workers of Faragello, a food and beverages company, and of Titan, a cement company, were assaulted by police and were cornered inside a mosque to be attacked by police dogs before 18 of them were arrested." The report also criticizes the law passed in early 2011⁵³⁶ banning the right to strike, to which these workers reacted with demonstrations: "The law, ratified by the SCAF on 12 April 2011, has angered many as it stipulates prison sentences and fines of up to LE 500,000 'for anyone who organizes a protest or an activity which may result in preventing or slowing down the work of a state

⁵³⁵ <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=01022013&id=e80637b5-73c9-4613-926e-0b1f6a1b430d> and also

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.554060801271432.126103.152615734749276&type=1>

⁵³⁶ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/17402.aspx>

institution, a general authority or a public or private workplace.”⁵³⁷ The veteran human rights and labor lawyers, “[Lawyers] Ahmed Saif El-Islam and Khaled Ali, on behalf of the plaintiffs: the Real Estate Tax Collectors Union and three other newly-formed, independent unions, told judges that the military council did not have a constitutional right to ban strikes, as it did in Decree 34 of 2011. The lawyers argued that the military council, therefore, could not try workers who decide to strike in military courts as it has done on a number of occasions since it came to power in February 2011.”⁵³⁸

As of 2012, Egypt’s labor force numbered 27 million workers.⁵³⁹ The independent labor movement will need to insist on a role in the next phase of Egypt’s democratic transition. Meanwhile, Egypt has an unemployment rate of 13.2%: this is only the number of people still actively looking for employment as a percentage of the workforce, which can be deceptive⁵⁴⁰ in terms of the actual number of those without the means to earn a living. The actual rate of those not working is much higher, so job creation is an essential first step for the interim government. Next, labor’s representatives need to be included in the drafting of an amended constitution. The right to freedom of association, organize, bargain collectively, and strike will have to be included in the constitution as fundamental socio-economic rights.

⁵³⁷ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/new-labor-day-egypt-independent-unions-plan-celebrations-set-demands>

⁵³⁸ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/17402.aspx>

⁵³⁹ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/egypt/labor-force-total-wb-data.html>

http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/Electronic%20Static%20Book2013/English/labor_force/untitled1/force.aspx

Rising unemployment: The number of unemployed reached 3.5 million in the first quarter of 2013, equal to 13.2 percent of the labor force. Some 77 percent of the unemployed are between 15 and 29 years old. More than 162,000 Egyptians lost their jobs in the last quarter of 2012 alone, according to government statistics. Overall unemployment stood at 12.6 percent in June 2012 when Morsi took office.

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/article/morsi-meter-9427-protests-and-counting-one-year-later>

⁵⁴⁰ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/egypt/unemployment-rate>

A Tale of Two Labor Federations: Tensions in the Labor Movement

In June 2012, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) published a well-documented report by Beinín, “The Rise of Egypt’s Workers”. The report sums up the following: 1) Workers have been trying to bring about change to the Egyptian system for a long time, and the independent labor movement found its national voice post-January 2011. 2) The workers have not gotten the credit they deserve in bringing down the Mubarak regime. 3) The independent trade unions remain the strongest nationally organized force confronting the autocratic tendencies of the old order. If they can solidify and expand their gains, according to Beinín, they could be an important force leading Egypt toward a more democratic future.⁵⁴¹ However, problems and challenges persist, and internal divisions within the independent labor movement are a major obstacle to unity and reaching national political goals. Beinín wrote:

“Discord at the national leadership level admirably did not descend to public name-calling and other unprincipled tactics. Nor did it impede continued labor mobilization. The government reported 335 collective actions in 2011. But according to the monthly surveys of the Sons of the Land Association for Human Rights, which has tallied workers’ contentious actions reported in the press for years, there were over 1,400 collective actions during 2011 involving at least 600,000 workers — two to three times more than any year in the previous decade.”⁵⁴²

On October 15, 2012, the two federations held a press conference with other leftist/progressive political parties to announce a limited alliance to continue the fight for worker rights and against the vicious attacks on the labor movement. “The goals of the front include the cancellation of the restrictive Trade Union Law 35/1976, the

⁵⁴¹ Beinín, Joel. “The rise of Egypt’s workers”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C. June 2012, page 1.

⁵⁴² Beinín, Joel. “The rise of Egypt’s workers”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012, page 16-17

issuing of the draft Trade Union Liberties Law promoting workers' right to free association, protecting unionists and laborers against punitive sackings, confronting labor violations perpetrated by the state and/or employers, and the establishment of a just pay-scale based on a determined minimum and maximum wage (of no more than 15 times the minimum)."⁵⁴³ It was a good step forward, but it was not sustainable and did not last long.

The ultimate weakness of the labor movement to mobilize members for the elections

The independent workers' movement has made strides despite the challenges on the economic and social front, but in terms of its political role, there is still much that needs to take place. The divisions between organizations and leaders do not lend themselves to a united political front. Another point is lack of experience in terms of open electoral politics and the role trade unions can play in that context.

“However, entrenched military and former Mubarak regime forces have attempted, with some success, to maintain their power, reverse the gains of independent trade unions, and block the entry of new and unpredictable forces into the political arena. The democratic labor movement is struggling to present a united front, but is, in fact, divided. And despite their role in over-throwing Mubarak, workers and their interests were not well represented in Egypt's first (and subsequently dissolved) post-Mubarak parliament, nor did they comprise a clearly defined factor in the 2012 presidential election.”⁵⁴⁴

After decades of struggles against an authoritarian regime that paid lip service to worker rights, “the removal of some of the repressive constraints of the Mubarak regime gave

⁵⁴³ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/independent-unions-declare-new-alliance>

⁵⁴⁴ Beinlin, Joel, "The rise of Egypt's workers." from http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt_labor.pdf. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012:3

trade union activists the confidence to assert political demands that they had previously mostly avoided.”⁵⁴⁵ However, still considered a special interest by the young leaders in Tahrir Square, the independent workers’ movement was dismissed as a spokesperson for socio-economic demands during the first few months post-January 2011 when there was much hope for change.

The new independent labor federations did not succeed in mobilizing workers to vote for the one labor candidate, Khaled Ali, or even the progressive candidate, Hamdeen Sabahi. Khaled Ali received 0.58% of the vote and Sabahi received 20% representing the Karama (Dignity) party. Alexander asks, “Can the organised working class in Egypt transform its social leadership into political leadership of the revolutionary movement?”⁵⁴⁶ The answer is still not yet since the revolutionary left, who have traditionally been the vanguard of the movement, are a small group with limited outreach. However, the opening of the grassroots space for workers’ organizations to make social demands during this transitional period has boded well for a proper place at the “national policy” table. Yet, they have been unable to achieve a political role that can elect a candidate that supports workers’ needs.

This statement by Egypt’s former Freedom House Office Director Nancy Okail, sums up the results of the first post-uprising elections: “While Morsi ran on an Islamist platform, his victory does not mean that Egyptians desire an Islamist government. ‘People voted for Morsi to avoid military rule,’ she said, noting that many non-Islamists voted for Morsi (who won 51.7 percent of the vote) because they viewed his opponent, Ahmed Shafik, Mubarak’s final prime minister, as an extension of the ousted political

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.8

⁵⁴⁶ Alexander 2012:15

order. Indeed, Okail said, following his victory leftists who voted for Morsi put him on notice, telling him, ‘Now we go back to the seats of the opposition’.⁵⁴⁷

How to measure workers’ ability to organize and successfully creating new independent unions with political power is the question at hand. “Nevertheless, the lessons of the first ten months of the Egyptian Revolution are of immense significance for the left internationally. The rebuilding of independent workers’ organisation out of the strike wave and the role of the mass strikes of September (2011) in opening the path to November’s second popular uprising provide confirmation once again of the central role played by organised workers in the revolutionary process.”⁵⁴⁸ Tahrir has become a worldwide symbol for a path of change and transition, not just a simple space of gathering. The workers were part of that space and symbol and not just an interest group that causes problems without concern for the nation’s welfare.

Interesting developments took place after the January 2011 uprising, including the overall negative view of workers and their unions intensifying. “By reinforcing the impression that the demands of discontented workers for more humane wages and working conditions are the mere product of parochial employee-management disputes inside various factories and bureaucracies, the term *fi’awi* does more than just stigmatize and de-historicize these demands. Characterizing so-called *fi’awi* claims as the sum of a variety of disjointed narrow interests masks the serious national economic problems that these demonstrations and sit-ins collectively underscore.”⁵⁴⁹ Claims of “fi’awi” and the perception of the workers’ parochial self-interested demands reinforce

⁵⁴⁷ Sprusansky, Dale. "Post-Election Egypt." *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 31.6 (2012): 57-8.

⁵⁴⁸ Alexander 2012:15

⁵⁴⁹ Sellam, Hesham. "Striking Back at Egyptian Workers." MERIP report #259, vol. 41, Summer 2011.
<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers>

the divisions within society. However, many observers, including labor activist and blogger Hossam El-Hamalawy, considered the labor strikes during the last week of Mubarak's rule as the tipping point that forced his resignation. There was a chain of events, and the workers were responsible for many of those events. But, the SCAF's first action after Mubarak stepped down was to stop strikes. This clearly shows the generals took the workers' contentious protests as a serious threat to any ruling regime.⁵⁵⁰

The first round of elections was held May 23-24 with thirteen candidates running for president. The second round of elections was held on June 16-17, 2012, between the two highest vote receivers —Morsi and Shafik. The final results were 51.7% of votes for Morsi and 48.27% for Shafik. Morsi became the first MB President of Egypt. The independent trade union organizations and their members were not supporters of the MB or their candidate. The injustices against workers continued, and the grievances increased during Morsi's presidency.

During Morsi's presidency, it became uncomfortably clear that the strategy of the MB was to take control of many of Egypt's major civil society organizations. While everyone's attention was focused on the assault on the constitution and the judiciary, Morsi strategically revised a trade union law that affected millions of Egyptian workers. This move affected their lives, jobs, and political freedom and renewed the ETUF's longstanding role as an enforcer of government labor policy.⁵⁵¹ On the 26th of November 2012, Morsi approved revisions to the trade union law ensuring that the Muslim

⁵⁵⁰ Sellam, Hesham. "Striking Back at Egyptian Workers." MERIP report #259, vol. 41, Summer 2011. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers> and "Interview with Hossam El-Hamalawy," *Jadaliyya*, April 9, 2011.

⁵⁵¹ El-Shazli, Heba F. "Egypt's Islamist Government Reaches For Control Of The Unions" Albert Shanker Institute Blog, <http://shankerblog.org/?p=7304>

Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) loyalists can be appointed to the ETUF and its affiliated unions' executive boards. This move took place a few days after Morsi's sweeping decree to grant him immunity against any judicial oversight – basically granting him absolute powers.⁵⁵² The MB with Morsi at the helm was trying to consolidate their influence and power within Egypt's large civil society organizations, which was significant and added to the independent workers' rising disapproval and anger of this new government.

ETUF remains in existence despite unsuccessful efforts to dismantle it during the immediate post-Mubarak period.⁵⁵³ It claims a membership of over 4 million workers, mostly in the public sector. Under Mubarak, ETUF was notorious for its failure to protect worker rights. In recent years, a courageous – and illegal – independent trade union movement challenged ETUF's supremacy and dared to press for freedom of association using strikes and protests in all the major sectors of the economy. First established in December 2008, the independent union movement has grown enormously since the January 2011 uprising. Hundreds of independent trade unions have been established, and Egypt now has two independent trade union federations representing almost 2 million workers.

Against this background, on November 26, 2012, Morsi endorsed revisions to the trade union law ensuring that the MB's Freedom and Justice Party loyalists can be appointed to the ETUF and its affiliated unions' executive boards. This move took place a few days after Morsi's sweeping decree to grant him immunity against any judicial

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/05/mubarak-trade-federation-dissolved-egypt>

oversight, basically granting him absolute power. That decree was withdrawn and a hastily called referendum on the new constitution was scheduled for December 15. The context of this decision was that the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) was poised to dissolve the constituent assembly based on some level of electoral legitimacy after having dissolved the elected People's Assembly (parliament).

These political maneuvers have not affected the new labor law, which gives the government the power to fill vacancies on these union-governing boards by forcing all who are older than 60 retire. It also extends by six months the time a union member serves on a trade union's executive board. These changes were made without any consultation with the ETUF's current leadership, which is composed of Mubarak loyalists.

Not surprisingly, the reaction of the ETUF leadership was negative. Chairman Ahmed Abdel Zaher was openly critical of the new law⁵⁵⁴ and, with some irony, now cites the ILO's core principles on union rights. This was unheard of in 2008, when Egypt was placed on the ILO's black list of countries for convention violations. The head of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) said that the attitude of the MB and the new government was "even more hostile" to "workers, trade unions and economic and social rights" than that of the Mubarak regime.⁵⁵⁵

In that light, the new independent unions faced the challenge of a Brotherhood-dominated official trade union structure. The new labor law would have enabled the minister of manpower, a member of the MB's political party, to install Morsi's

⁵⁵⁴ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-issues-law-paving-way-brotherhood-control-trade-federation>

⁵⁵⁵ <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/13151>

supporters in the unions' leadership positions. This change would stop any effort by the old guard to use ETUF as an alternative power center, while, ironically, giving renewed life to the ETUF as an instrument of government policy. It was a shrewd and revealing move by Morsi. His government extended its control over an organization that is mass-based and possesses local and regional structures that reach deeply into many sectors of the Egyptian economy. It also appeared to endorse the Mubarak-era rejection of freedom of association.

During the Mubarak era, the MB was never able to gain a strong foothold within the blue-collar trade unions. Historically, the Brothers focused on Egypt's professional syndicates, although interest in their "working-class cousins sharply rose after the revolution."⁵⁵⁶ Within professional unions, politics and political identity have a high profile, and the MB controls the syndicates representing doctors, engineers, pharmacists, scientists, and lawyers.⁵⁵⁷ There are twenty-two professional syndicates in Egypt with a total of 3.5 million members.

The political implications of Morsi's move were clear. Morsi overreached his power in his attempted usurpation of the right of judicial review (some could argue that the SCC was trying to overstep its power and show its bias against Morsi), but the changes in the labor law triggered even more unrest. Egypt's workers have never hesitated to protest over bread and butter issues. The ETUF takeover confirmed suspicions that the MB was seeking to dominate all aspects of government and civil

⁵⁵⁶ <http://muftah.org/labor-unions-under-attack-in-morsis-egypt/>

⁵⁵⁷ Fahmy, Ninette S. "The Performance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Syndicates: An Alternative Formula for Reform?" *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 551-562

society. It also raised concerns for independent union leaders who continued to occupy very vulnerable political and legal positions. Will they be next?

Finally, this takeover of a major labor organization — however tarnished its past — created much anxiety within broader civil society. It added to the worries that, in Egypt, authoritarianism looks the same, whether it is military or Islamist rule.

Concluding Remarks

After Mubarak stepped down there was hope that Egypt would be on a new trajectory transitioning to democracy. However, that “hope” was purely hope not grounded in Egypt’s reality. Egypt’s authoritarian regime was not dismantled; the January 2011 events were an uprising and not a revolution. Political parties and civil society were hampered by years of control, divisions, and inability to properly organize and develop grassroots support. However, workers were able to break out from the statist corporatist control and develop independent organizations and networks. Yet, these organizations were unable to become the needed social and political driving force within the political arena to influence new policies. The head of the regime was removed, i.e. Mubarak, yet the body (the system) continued; the deep state was alive and well. Collective action and the social capital that workers developed in this case were not sufficient to bring about the needed political reform.

The SCAF immediately outlawed protests, but workers’ protests from March 2011 and after the first election in May 2012 increased due to continued economic hardships. Workers’ independent organizations were unable to “get out the vote” and organize voters to elect independent, socially minded, progressive candidates like Khalid Ali or Hamdeen Sabahi. The military candidate and the Muslim Brotherhood candidate were

the only two that had the necessary organization, funding, and networks to compete in an election after so many years of authoritarian rule. The weakness of the political parties and the system overall became painfully clear. The two independent labor federations were not united, and internal divisions with leadership egos took over to further undermine workers' potential. Once Morsi became president much did not change, the economic, political and social conditions continued to deteriorate. Morsi's presidency was marred with many missteps and legislative disasters in attempts to control labor and undermine freedom of association. Egypt was sinking into a political abyss leading to the military coup disguised as a popular uprising on June 30, 2013, which is beyond the scope of this research. Even though the workers were active in supporting the overthrow of Morsi's rule, they were still not strong enough to assert their needs and address their serious grievances.

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An Elusive Victory – Egyptian Workers Challenge the Regime
(2006-2012)

Heba Fawzi El-Shazli

**Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic
Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Planning, Governance and Globalization**

Joel Peters, Chair

Timothy W. Luke

Rachel M. Scott

Ariel I. Ahram

5th December 2014
Alexandria, Virginia

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January 2011 Uprising

An Elusive Victory – Egyptian Workers Challenge the Regime
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**Appendix: A The Municipal Real Estate Tax Collectors Case
Study Supporting Letters and Documents**

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45, avenue Voltaire, BP 9
01211 Ferney-Voltaire Cedex
FRANCE
+33 4 50 40 64 64
+33 4 50 40 73 20 (Fax)
www.world-psi.org
psi@world-psi.org

President:
Ylva Thörn
General Secretary:
Peter Waldorff

Dr. Ahmed Mahmoud Mohammed Nazif
Prime Minister
Arab Republic of Egypt
Magles El Shaab St.
Cairo
Egypt
Fax: ++2(0)2 735 6449
Email: primemin@idsc.gov.eg

File Reference: PW/CK/SS
Contact Name: Chidi King - Tel: +33 4 50 40 11 70

18 August, 2009

Dear Prime Minister,

Interference in the Affairs of the Real Estate Tax Authority Union

Public Services International (PSI) has been informed by our affiliate the Real Estate Tax Authority Union about serious interference with its independence and autonomy by the President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation.

The Real Estate Tax Authority Union (RETA) was formally constituted on 21 April 2009 in accordance with the Egyptian Constitution and International Labour Organisation Conventions 87 and 98, which have been ratified by the Egyptian government. After protracted negotiations, RETA succeeded in establishing a Social Care Fund, providing retirement benefits for its members. The Minister of Finance's decision No. 425 dated July 2009 approved the establishment of the Fund.

According to our information, considerable pressure is being exerted by Mr Hussein Megawer, President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) on officials, including officials in the Real Estate Tax Authority and Ministry of Finance, to withdraw the recognition of RETA as an independent trade union and to dissolve or seize control of the Social Care Fund.

This pressure has taken the following forms:

- Shortly after RETA was formally recognised, Mr Megawer attempted to form a new general trade union for employees of the Real Estate Tax Authority; an attempt which was overwhelmingly rejected by the employees.
- ETUF and the National Trade Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Affairs have written to your government requesting it not to have any dealings with RETA.
- ETUF has filed corruption charges against the RETA leadership, accusing RETA of collecting union dues without authorisation.
- In July 2009, two RETA officials were physically assaulted in Gharibya Governate and Sharkiya Governate.
- RETA officers have been referred for investigation before administrative prosecutors and the legal departments of their workplaces. These officers include **Mr Tarek Mustafa**, the union treasurer and

chairman of the union committee in Kalubiya Governorate; **Mr Abdel Nasser Sayed Mansour**, chairman of the union committee in Beni Suef Governorate; **Mr Hussein Kilany**, chairman of the union committee in Assiut Governorate; **Mr Ezzat Khaled**, chairman of the union committee in Qena Governorate; and **Mr Khaled Mubarak**, treasurer of the union committee in Aswan Governorate.

- RETA members are often called to the State Security offices where they are intimidated.
- RETA leaders are arbitrarily transferred from their job sites to remote places.
- At the instigation of the ETUF, an amendment to decision No. 425 was signed on 5 August 2009 which replaced RETA with the General Trade Union of Banks and Insurances, an ETUF affiliate, as signatory to the Social Care Fund.
- On 10 August 2009, ETUF filed a report with the Public Prosecutor against the President of RETA, Mr Kamal Abu Eita, and against the decision of the Minister of Finance approving the establishment of RETA's Social Care Fund. The report falsely alleges that Mr Abu Eita's election as President was irregular and that RETA is therefore an illegal entity.

PSI urges your government to take swift measures to ensure that RETA can freely exercise its role as an independent trade union organisation; to condemn all acts of intimidation and harassment against the leadership and members of RETA and to condemn all external interference in RETA's activities. We further call on your government to confirm the establishment of a Social Care Fund for RETA members.

Yours sincerely



Peter Waldorff

General Secretary

Cc: H.E. Dr. Youssef Boutros-Ghali, Minister of Finance; H.E. Mrs. Aesha Abdel Hadi Abdel Ghani, Minister of Manpower and Immigration; PSI Arab countries and PSI Africa; Real Estate Tax Authority Union; Centre for Trade Union & Workers Services; Mr Kacem Afiya; ITUC Geneva and Brussels.

Public Services International (PSI) is a global trade union federation that represents 20 million women and men working in the public services around the world. It has some 600 affiliated unions in more than 150 countries. PSI is an autonomous body, which works in association with federations covering other sectors of the workforce and with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). PSI is an officially recognised non-governmental organisation for the public sector within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and has consultative status with ECOSOC and observer status with other UN bodies such as UNCTAD and UNESCO.



ITUC INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION CSI CONFÉDÉRATION SYNDICALE
INTERNATIONALE
CSI CONFEDERACIÓN SINDICAL INTERNACIONAL IGB INTERNATIONALER
GEWERKSCHAFTSBUND

SHARAN BURROW
PRESIDENT
PRÉSIDENTE
PRÄSIDENTIN
PRESIDENTA

GUY RYDER
GENERAL SECRETARY
SECÉTAIRE GÉNÉRAL
GENERALSEKRETÄR
SECRETARIO GENERAL

His Excellency Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
`Abdin Palace
Cairo
Egypt

Via fax: +202-390-1998

HTUR/NT

20 August 2009

Interference in the Affairs of the Real Estate Tax Authority Union

Dear Mr. President,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 170 million workers through its 312 affiliates in 157 countries throughout the world, protests along with Public Services International (PSI) the interference by the President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation with the independence and autonomy of the PSI affiliate Real Estate Tax Authority Union (RETA).

RETA was formally constituted in April 2009 in accordance with the Egyptian Constitution as well as International Labour Standards ratified by the Egyptian Government. A Social Care Fund, providing retirement benefits for its members was established and then approved by the Minister of Finance (decision No. 425 dated July 2009).

According to our information, since then considerable pressure is being exerted by Mr Hussein Megawer, President of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) on officials, including officials in the Real Estate Tax Authority and Ministry of Finance, to withdraw the recognition of RETA as an independent trade union and to dissolve or seize control of the Social Care Fund. Those pressures include among others: physical assault of two RETA officials, intimidation of RETA members, arbitrary transfers of RETA leaders and public prosecution against the President of RETA, Mr Kamal Abu Eita and against the decision of the Minister of Finance approving the establishment of RETA's Social Care Fund.

In December 2008, the ITUC had expressed its concerns when the RETA was experiencing difficulties while establishing the union. We strongly protest once again against interference with the free and independent functioning of the RETA. This interference is

incompatible with the principle of freedom of association and therefore a violation of ILO convention 87.

Along with PSI, the ITUC urges you to take swift measures to ensure that RETA can freely exercise its role as an independent trade union organisation; to condemn all acts of intimidation and harassment against the leadership and members of RETA and to condemn all external interference in RETA's activities.

Yours sincerely,


General Secretary

Copy:

- Dr. Ahmed Mahmoud Mohammed Nazif, Prime Minister
- Egyptian Embassy, Brussels

نوبة صحيان

صوت النقابة العامة للعاملين بالضرائب العقارية (المستقلة)

العدد الرابع

عضو الإتحاد الدولي للخدمات

مايو ٢٠٠٩

وانتصرنا...

اعتراف دولي ومحلي بأول نقابة مستقلة في مصر
شرعية النقابة بدأت منذ قبول إيداع أوراقها في ٢١ إبريل



بشرى سارة

بشرى سارة لجميع العاملين بالضرائب
العقارية، على مستوى الجمهورية، من
المتوقع أن يتم الإعلان عنها بشكل متزامن
مع بدء أعمال الحصر العام الجديد.

وقريبا: انطلاق صندوق الرعاية الاجتماعية

تؤكد «نوبة صحيان» لكافة العاملين
ن مشروع صندوق الرعاية الصحية
والاجتماعية يسير بشكل مضطرب...
وخلال أيام قليلة ستنتهي الدراسة
مع السادة المسؤولين تمهيدا للعرض
على السيد وزير المالية من أجل توفير
لإعتمادات المالية اللازمة.
طمئنا ما طالبتم به يلقي استجابة



نوبة صحيان

نوبة صحيان ليست مجرد جريدة دورية لأبناء مهنة واحدة تحتوي على بضعة أخبار و بعض المعلومات المهنية بالإضافة إلى بعض الزوايا. فهذه الجريدة تطرحها حركة نضالية منتصرة لتعزيز هذا النجاح و تقوية الحركة و دفعها للأمام بهذا المعنى فهي صوت نضالي لموظفي الضرائب العقارية تطرح فيها نحن الموظفين في كل محافظة و مدينة و مركز الإشكاليات و الظلم و التعسف و القلق الذين نعاني منهم أثناء تأديتنا لوظيفتنا.

و تطرح أشكال النضال و المقاومة و التحرك و الرفض الذين نواجه به هذه العقبات كما تطرح الخبرة التي إكتسبناها. إلى جانب إحتواء الجريدة على هذه الأخبار و التقارير. يجب أن تكون ساحة للحوار بين جموع موظفي الضرائب الذين عملوا سويا طوال أعوام للحصول على مطالبهم حتى حققوا بعض المكاسب. لينوا على هذه المكاسب.

المواقع الإلكترونية الصديقة:

موقع عرباوي:

www.arabawy.org
www.arabawy.org/tax

موقع يساري مصري:

www.gaberism.net

موقع صحوة الضرائب

العقارية:

www.sahwaalalakar-ia-ahlamontada.com

لفتة تستحق التقدير

صرح رئيس مصلحة الضرائب

العقارية طارق فراج لجريدة «الدستور» أن التعاون يسير بشكل جيد مع قيادات النقابة المستقلة لاستكمال البيانات الخاصة والإعداد لإنشاء صندوق الرعاية الاجتماعية والصحية ، على عكس ما ذكره فاروق شحاتة رئيس نقابة البنوك .

كان فاروق شحاتة قد صرح للعديد من الصحف إنه يتبنى إنشاء الصندوق بالرغم من عدم معرفته عن أية معلومات تخصه.

نقابة البنوك «آلة للسقوط» استقالة هيئة مكتب لجنة الدقهلية

تقدمت هيئة مكتب اللجنة النقابية للضرائب العقارية التابعة لنقابة البنوك والتأمينات بالدقهلية باستقالات من

الاتحاد العام لعمال مصر وهم :صلاح محمد عبد السلام نائب رئيس اللجنة، وفؤاد سراج الدين نائب ثان، وجمال محمد عويضة أمين عام اللجنة، وعلى السعيد محمد حسن أمين مساعد، ونجلاء فتحى عبد العزيز عضو اللجنة

وأرسلت الاستقالات لفاروق شحاتة رئيس النقابة العامة للبنوك والتأمينات بالقاهرة.

وجدير بالذكر أن أكثر من ٧٠٠ عضو بالدقهلية قد تقدموا باستقالاتهم من لجنة الدقهلية البالغ عدد أعضائها حوالي ١٠٠٠ عضو ومن المتوقع اتخاذ خطوات مماثلة في محافظات أخرى خلال الأيام القليلة القادمة.

شعاع نور ابيض يهزم «الفريق الأصفر»

أو مفروشا بالورود إلا انه لن يغلب عسر يسر وأن النصر مع الصبر وأن بعد العسر يسرا .

وأول بشارت النصر هو نقابتنا المستقلة وصندوق الرعاية الصحية والاجتماعية للعمالين بالضرائب العقارية .

فأثبتوا يا رفاق الملحمة اثبتوا يا كوكبة الشرفاء الكادحين فأنتم علي الحق و هنيئا لكم النقابة والصندوق و مبروك لكم مجهوداتكم العظيمة و الله ولي التوفيق .

خالد امبارك حامد
نقيب أسوان

النصر فجر جديد ممتليء بنشاط همم عالية و جدية و حيوية و عمل دؤوب علي تحقيق أفضل مكاسب جديدة لصالح كل موظفي الضرائب العقارية زملاؤنا المكافحين الشرفاء من اجل حياة أفضل و أحسن لهم .

جاء هذا الفجر ليشد من العزائم و يشد الهمم للمضي قدما نحو تحقيق مستقبل أفضل لنا جميعا .

جاء بالإصرار و التأكيد علي أن الدرب طويل و بالخطي الثابتة يسهل كل طريق صعب .

جاء ليقول لكم يا رفاق الملحمة أن الطريق رغم انه ليس سهلا أو ممهدا

فجأة في ظل هذا الظلام الدامس ووسط الليل البهيم يأتي شعاع نور الأمل ليشق هذا الليل البهيم ، يأتي ليمأل الدنيا بصوت عال وواضح و كأنه صوت زئير الأسد في الغابة مدويا يزلزل كل إرجاء العمورة ليرهب كل خائب و متهاون و متخاذل وقع فريسة لمغريات فانية كالمنصب و الجاه و المكاسب و الأطماع الشخصية فهذا يا كوكبة الشرفاء هو « الفريق الأصفر » المعارض لكم و الذي يضع العراقيل في محاولة منه لثني العزائم و تقييد الهمم و لكن هيهات هيهات أني لهم هذا .
جاء هذا النور ليعلن عن بزوغ فجر

أساس من شروط النجاح والانتصار.. واعلموا أن كل زميل تتركوه خارج عباءة النقابة سيكون هدفاً سهلاً لأي مؤامرة تحاك ضدكم.

-و الوحدة التي نسعى إليها لها شرطان:

١-الديمقراطية: بحيث يدار كل أمر بديمقراطية وعندما تقيد الديمقراطية يصبح الحل قسرياً مفروضاً.. وعندها لا يمكن الحديث عن الوحدة حيث تصح إجبارية وقصرية.

٢-الاستقلال: ويعني عدم خضوع العمل النقابي لإرادة حزب أي حزب في الحكم أو في المعارضة ولا تنظيم أو جماعة سياسية أو سلطة أو جهة إدارية.

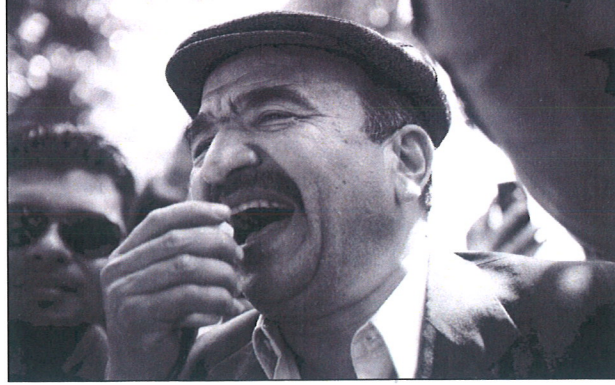
الشرطان السابقان هما شروط للوحدة مع أي نقابة في مصر أو في الوطن العربي أو العالم. ولن نقبل بأقل منها وألا «الاستقلال التام أو الموت الدؤوام»

فيا زملائي يا زميلاتي: أناديكم أناديكم.. أبوس الأرض تحت نعالكم وأقول أفديكم.. فمأساتي التي أحيا نصيبي من مأساكم أناديكم أناديكم

كمال أبو عيطة

النقيب العام

لنقابة الضرائب العقارية المستقلة



قصة نقابتنا!!

قدرة من أعداء الحياة.. وقعت عليكم الجزائر.. ولم تبالوا.. تم تهديدكم في أرزاقكم ولم تبالوا.. هددتم بالنقل ولم تبالوا.. قطعتم الآلاف من الأميال في الريف والحضر وحتى في الصحاري. تجمعون العضوية لنقابتكم تحلمتم من جيوبكم وقوت أولادكم كل مصاريف السفر والانتقال ولم يدفع لكم كائناً من كان مليماً واحداً.. تسلم أيديكم الطاهرة.. وكان النصر جزاء السعي والصبر والمقاومة. وتماماً كما قالها رجل عظيم رحل عن دنيانا فقيراً مثلكم «إن الذين يقاتلون يبحق لهم أن يأملوا في نصر... إما الذين لا يقاتلون فلا ينتظروا شيئاً إلا القتل»

الآن وبعد أن من الله عليكم



إخوتي.. أخواتي.. زملائي زميلاتي الآن أستطيع أن أقول لكل فرد فيكم ألف مبروك.. نقابتكم التي حلمتم بها على أسفلت شارع حسين حجازي أصبحت الآن حقيقة واقعة.. بإصراركم ونضالكم وتعبيكم.. خرجت النقابة وانتزعت الشرعية.. كنتم في الإضراب تشكون من مقاومة النقابة لكم ومحاولاتهم المستميتة إجهاض إضرابكم المشروع.. بعد أن من الله عليكم بالنصر المبين.. لن تجد هذه الشكوى طريقها إليكم فنقابتكم التي صنعتوها بأيديكم ستكون يوماً إلى جواركم.. مدافعة عنكم مطالبة بحقوقكم.. ستكون كجيش الدفاع في أي بلد.. ينصرف الشعب للحياة والعمل والإجهاد.. ويتولى الجيش الدفاع عن الحدود.. ومواجهة أي محتل أو غاصب ستعملون بجد واجتهاد. وتحسنون أداءكم وتزيدوا الإنتاج.. والنقابة جنباً إلى جنب تطالب بالحق.. كنا في الماضي نرفع شعار «يد تبني ويد تحمل سلاح» اليوم سنرفع شعار «يد تبني.. ويد تطالب بالحقوق»..

نقابتكم لم تخرج بقرار سياسي.. أو إداري.. لم تهبط على الناس من أعلى.. نقابتكم صعدت من أسفل.. خرجت من أهم إضراب ناجح حقق جميع مطالبه.. وزاد عليها.. ويزيد كل يوم. فلسفة الإضراب الناجح انه يفتح القنوات المسدودة.. فتندفق عبرها مطالبكم ويتم الاستجابة لها. وأشهد إنكم الآن بدون الإضراب تحققون مكاسب وتطلبون فيجاب لكم. اشهد بأن القنوات مفتوحة مع كافة المسؤولين ولن تسد بإذن الله.. وإذا ما سدت في وجه نقابتكم.. فأنتم جاهزون ومستعدون لفتح هذه القنوات في أي لحظة.

أعلم كم بذلتم من تعب ومشقة.. وانتم تبشرون بحلم النقابة المستقلة التي تجمع أشلاء الضرائب العقارية.. كنتم كإيزيس التي طافت مصر كلها لتجمع أشلاء أوزيريس.. تعرضتم للسخرية والهجوم وإطلاق الإشاعات.. وأعلنت عليكم جميعاً حرب

مشاكل تطبيق الكتاب الدوري رقم (١٩) لسنة ٢٠٠٢



التاريخ حتى لا يقع تحت طائلة الاختلاس او شبه الاختلاس.

لذلك ...

- برجاء اعادة النظر في الكتاب الدوري (١٩) لسنة ٢٠٠٢ حيث انه يعتمد على كتاب وتعليمات من المصلحة منذ عام ١٩٢٤ فكيف يتم تطبيقه عام ٢٠٠٩ وما بعدها.

- رفع نصاب التوريد بحيث لا يقل عن (١٠٠٠) جنيه لصرف النواحي ومبلغ (٢٠٠٠) جنيه لصرف المتنوعة تفاديا لمسالة تخطي النصاب.

جمال محمود عويضة
مأمور ضرائب اول
مديرية الدقهلية

النصاب بعد عمل لجنة الحساب الختامي للصرفيات التي يعملون بها وتنتهي اعمال تلك اللجان في معظم الحالات الى عدم وجود مخالفات او حالات الاختلاس.

ومع ذلك فانه يتم ايقاف هؤلاء الصيارف وعلى الحصيلة وعلى التفتيش والشؤون القانونية والعمل بشكل عام.

- وخصوصا ان حالات تعدي النصاب القانوني للتوريد قد تكون

بضعة جنيهات قليلة جدا وتكون ناتجة عن ضغط العمل في موسم التحصيل او في حالات الظروف الطارئة خاصة للصرلف مثل حالات الوفاة لاحد افراد اسرته او الاقارب او المرض المفاجئ او السهو او التجميع الخطأ او قلب الارقام. ويعمل دراسة حالة على مديرية الضرائب العقارية بمحافظة

الدقهلية يتضح لنا من خلال ذلك نتيجة تطبيق الكتاب الدوري (١٩) لسنة ٢٠٠٢ خلال احد الشهور وجود

بورود الكتاب رقم (١٩)

لسنة ٢٠٠٢ من الادارة العامة للشؤون القانونية «ادارة الصياغة والفتوى» ملف رقم (٤٧/٢-٢٣) بشأن اعتبار الصراف الذي يتاخر عن التوريد في المواعيد المقررة ايام (١٠ و ٢٠ و اخر يوم في الشهر) مختلصة اة خلال تلك الايام متى بلغ النصاب التحصيل (٣٠٠٠) جنيه بالنسبة لصراف النواحي و (٦٠٠٠) جنيه بالنسبة لصراف المتنوعة او انتهى دفتر القسائم واليوم السابق للعطلة الرسمية وفي حالة ما اذا كان يوم التوريد المحدد عطلة رسمية واليوم السابق للعطلات الرسمية التي تتجاوز اليوم الواحد (كعيد الفطر وعيد الاضحى) وفي حالة التأخير عن هذه المواعيد يعتبر مختلصا طبقا لحكم المادة (٣٢٠) من كتاب التعليمات والقوانين والاوامر الصادرة من المصلحة طبقا لسنة ١٩٢٤.

وادى ذلك الى ايقاف

عدد كبير من الصيارف لتخطي

قرارات

قررت مديرية الضرائب العقارية بالجيزة الآتي :

- ١- استمرار سريان تقديرات القيمة الايجارية المتخذة أساسا لحساب الضريبة وفقا لأحكام القانون ٥٦ لسنة ٥٤ علي ربط الضريبة لعام ٢٠٠٩.
- ٢- استمرار نظر طلبات الرفع والخلو.
- ٣- استمرار لجان مجالس المراجعة في نظر الطعون في تقديرات مستجدات ٢٠٠٧ ربط ٢٠٠٨ ، ٢٠٠٨ ربط ٢٠٠٩.
- ٤- تسري أحكام المواد الخامسة و السادسة و السابعة من القانون رقم ١٩٦ لسنة ٢٠٠٨ بإصدار الضريبة علي العقارات المبنية والخاصة بالتصالح في الطعون المقدمة لمجلس المراجعة والدعاوى المقيدة او المنظورة أمام المحاكم.
- ٥- اتخاذ إجراءات حصر وتقدير القيمة الايجارية للعقارات المستجدة عام ٢٠٠٨ ربط ٢٠٠٩ وفق أحكام القانون رقم ٥٦ لسنة ٥٤ و القانون رقم ٦١ لسنة ٢١ لحين البدء في اتخاذ إجراءات الربط وفق أحكام القانون ١٩٦ لسنة ٢٠٠٨.
- الاستمرار بالعمل بقانون ٥٦ لسنة ٥٤: حيث ان تنفيذ أحكام القانون ١٩٦ لسنة ٢٠٠٨ اعتبارا من ٢٤-٦ - ٢٠٠٨ تاريخ العمل به و علي ان تستحق الضريبة من ١-٢٠٠٩.

أرجوك اعطني هذا الدواء

طلب يتماه كل موظف بالضرائب العقارية بالبحيرة بل كل موظفي الجمهورية، فجرعة من هذا الدواء تحيي الشباب و تعيده .
دواء ضمانة بعد فك أغلال الوظيفة الميري، صندوق عظيم خارج من كفاح رجال عظماء صندوق يعطيه مكافأة لعمل دؤوب قضاة في خدمة الضرائب العقارية

سؤالي لكم يا عظماء مصر يا صورة سعد زغلول و مصطفى كامل و احمد عرابي هل من الممكن أن تضعف عزيمتكم بسبب العناصر الهدامة التي تحاربنا لهدم كل شيء شريف و الرد مني بكل تأكيد و إخلاص « لا لا »

و الأعداد بتزيد بتزيد و العزيمة حديد في حديد .. و النقابة العامة حديد في حديد

فتحي علي حسين

مأمورية ضرائب كفر الدوار .. بحيرة

جهاز إداري بدون كوادر



راجل مجند للغزاء
أحمد رجب على
رئيس نقابة العمالية بالضرائب
العقارية - البحيرة

ولي صرخة يارب نسمعها. فقد كنا أعظم عمال إنتاج في العالم، وفي ظل نظام الخصخصة بدأت الدولة في تفرغ مصانعنا من ذوي المرتبات المرتفعة أي تفرغ كياننا الاقتصادي من العمال المهرة والاكثفاء بعمال نص لبة (ياريت أعيش في الصين). ولي قصة في النظام الصيني المطبق في الصين، فالعامل يعين ولا يأخذ أي حافز إلا بعد مرور سنتين وعندما يصبح نوكفاءة يبدأ في أخذ الحافز ولكن على صورة أخرى وذلك بإعطاء ماكينة مثل العدة التي يعمل عليها بالمصنع، وبهذه الطريقة يزداد حجم الاقتصاد لأن

العامل أصبح ينتج في وقت فراغه وبهذه الطريقة يعلم أولاده الممارسة العملية مع توفير المادة الخام من قبل المصنع وتسويق المنتج عن طريق المصنع. أما نحن فننقل عكس ذلك، نعمل بطريقة خلي السلاح صاحي خلي السلاح صاحي في ذلك كل مهارة مصرية وبحبك يابرنيطة الخواجة. ورحمة الله (عزاء واجب) على عمال الغزل والنسيج وأنا لله وأنا إليه راجعون. فقد توفيت المهارة في شركة كفر الزيات للكيماويات وشركة الحرير الصناعي.

في يوم من الأيام طرح في مقر الاتحاد العام لعمال مصر اقتراح بتغيير التعاقد مع المعينين الجدد في الجهاز الحكومي ليكونوا بنظام التعاقد المؤقت، وهذا الاقتراح بالتحديد يعمل على تفرغ الجهاز الحكومي من الكوادر المدربة جيداً وذات القدرة على إصدار القرار السليم والحكيم في الوقت السليم. ورغم أن هذا الاقتراح قد قوبل بالرفض ولكنه تم تطبيقه من الباب الخلفي مما لم يسمح بوجود فترة زمنية كافية لتطبيق دورات إعداد لهذا الموظف.

نقابتنا المستقلة



مجاهد عبد الرحمن مجاهد
أمين عام نقابة البحيرة

وقد تفتحت عيوننا على شرفاء بينما حملوا على عاتقهم امانة بناء نقابة مستقلة لجميع العاملين في كل ربوع مصر. نقابتنا اهدافها الدفاع عن مصالح العاملين عن مصالح العاملين بالضرائب العقارية، السعى لانشاء صندوق رعاية العاملين بالضرائب العقارية (وهو مطلب جرى الاتفاق عليه مع وزير المالية في الاجتماع الشهر

في المصلحة (انشاء صندوق الرعاية الصحية لجميع العاملين بالضرائب العقارية كمرحلة اولى بحيث تشمل المرحلة الثانية اسرهم، وانجزت الاتفاق على بدل انتقال قدرة ١٥ جنية لليوم الواحد بدلا من ٢٢ جنية شهريا. فالى الامام ايها الزميلات والزملاء، لالتفتوا لغرضين يريدون تشييت الانظار وافشال الهدف الذى تسعون لانجازة.

زميلاتي وزملائي رفاق الكفاح فى ملحمة تضرب بها الامثال: اضربنا الشهرير فى ٢ اديسمبر الحى ابدنا فى ذاكرة شرفاء هذا الوطن. ملحمة الحقناها بأخري و جبنا لاجلها انحاء مصر من الاسكندرية لاسوان ومن العريش لمرسى مطروح، ولم ينجزها الا توفيق الله الذى آلف بين قلوبنا فصرنا جمعا على قلب رجل واحد. خرجنا من هذا الجمع العظيم

إيداع الأوراق = اعتراف الدولة بنقابتنا

المدة سقط حقها في التظلم من تأسيس النقابة أمام القضاء.. أما إذا أبدت الجهة الإدارية ملاحظاتها وأخطرت بها النقابة فيكون للنقابة توفيق أوضاعها والرد على تلك الملاحظات فإذا لم تبار النقابة بالرد يجوز للجهة الإدارية خلال ثلاثين يوما من هذا الإخطار التظلم أمام المحكمة الجزئية المختصة من تأسيس النقابة.. ودون أن يترتب على أي من الإجراءات السابقة وقف نشاط النقابة ولا يؤثر على شخصيتها القانونية ولا ينتقص من حقوقها ولا يلغي وجودها وتستمر في مباشرة نشاطها بشكل طبيعي إلى أن يصدر حكم قضائي بات في تظلم الجهة الإدارية.

العمل فيما يتعلق بقرارات العمل التي تمس مصالح أعضائها.. ويجب على صاحب العمل والجهات الإدارية التابعة له معاونة هيئات النقابة وتسهيل أداؤها لعملها ومخاطبتها وحدها باعتبارها الممثل الوحيد لأعضائها.. ويحظر على هذه الجهات تعطيل نشاط هيئات النقابة أو التدخل في شؤونها أو معاقبة أي من أعضائها بسبب نشاطه النقابي، ولم يبق أمام الجهة الإدارية من طريق غير أن تبدي ملاحظاتها على أوراق التأسيس خلال ثلاثين يوما من تاريخ الإيداع، وتخطر النقابة بهذه الملاحظات بخطاب موصي علي بعلم الوصول. فإذا لم تبدي هذه الملاحظات خلال تلك

النقابة تولد منذ هذه اللحظة تولد منذ هذه اللحظة وتصبح شخص قانوني وتمارس نشاطها دون تدخل من الجهة الإدارية، ويترتب على ذلك أن يصبح من حق النقابة فتح مقراتها وتنظيم اجتماعاتها، واتخاذ جميع الإجراءات القانونية نيابة عن أعضائها أمام القضاء والجهات الإدارية الأخرى دون حاجة إلى توكيل خاص- وتمثيل أعضائها في منازعات العمل الفردية والجماعية وعقد اتفاقيات العمل الجماعية.. ولها الحق في أن تعتمد «خاتم» خاص بها تعتمد به وحده أوراقها التي تصح من الأوراق الرسمية، ويكون لهيئات النقابة وحدهم دون غيرهم - الحق في مخاطبة صاحب

النقابة قائمة ومعترف بها، وأصبحت شخصا اعتباريا من لحظة إيداع أوراقها في وزارة القوى العاملة... والشخصية الاعتبارية هي شخصية قانونية مستقلة، وتكون لها الحقوق القانونية والدستورية المقررة للشخصية الطبيعية «الإنسان»... ويضفي القانون الصفة الشرعية اللازمة على تصرفاتها.. فإذا كانت حياة الشخص الطبيعي تبدأ بالاعتراف القانوني بهذا الشخص، وقد حدد القانون طريق هذا الاعتراف في مجال إنشاء النقابات العمالية، بإيداع أوراق التأسيس في الجهة الإدارية المختصة ولم يعلق اكتساب النقابة للشخصية الاعتبارية على قيد أو شرط، وأيترتب على ذلك أن

رجال السويس .. حدث ولا حرج

يسر اللة عليّة». ونحن اهل السويس بالضرائب العقارية من ضمن رعاية، ونتمنى من اللة دوام التوفيق لسيادته والمصلحة الاولى والاخيرة لنا ولة هي خدمة موظفي السويس ولاغير ذلك لي اقتراح اخير: جائزة لأفضل مدير مديرية في معاملات مع موظفية بنشر بوستر نصف صفحة لة ونبذة عن حياة تقديرا لة ولجهوده يا رجال السويس ..يارجال نقابتنا الخير اللي جاي بايديكم وبايدنا

امرہ السيد السويس

الاستاذ عبد المقصود البنا على تلييتة طلبات اعضاء النقابة العامة المستقلة بقولة « انا تحت امركم فى اى حاجة لمصلحة الموظف».

كما ارسل تحيتي للاستاذ مصطفى حسين وكيل المديرية الذى قام بدورة على اكمال وجة اطلعنا على اوراق سامى مباشر ولقنته درسا لا ينساه.

لا تبقى الا بعض التروش البسيطة امام السيد المدير العام، ولو فعل فستصل السويس لمستوى المحافظة المثالية.

واهمس فى اذنة «من شق على رعيته شق اللة عليّة ومن يسر على رعيته

فاطمة مختلر فى حوافز شهر من العام الماضى كان قد اقتطع بسبب اجازة الوضع، وقبول التظلم وتغير صفة جزاء الموقع على .

واقسم ان كان الجزء قد زاد الى خمسة ايام مع طرد المدعو سامى مباشر لعددت الامر انتصارا الى وللحق.

لان الرجل افترى كذبا على بقولة انى دعوتة للسويس بعد خروجة منها بقرار محافظ الاسماعيلية بخضم شهر من راتبة .

ومن منبر «نوبة صحيان ابعث بأرق التحية والتقدير للسيد المدير العام

الاختلاف فى الرأى لا يفسد للود قضية والحق احق ان يتبع ولا يحق المكر السئ الا بأهله.

كلمات ابدأ بها مقالتي تلك حتى انسب الحق لاصحابه، ولا تعرف الرجال الا فى المحن والمواقف، فبعد الشد والجذب والمضايقات من بعض زملاء لى بصفة خاصة - ماثار حفيزة السيد المدير العام ودفعة لمجازاتي بخضم ثلاثة ايام من راتبي قبل ان اتقدم حيال القرار بتظلم -كافأ السيد المدير العام اعضاء النقابة بالسويس ثلاثة مرات :لم يستجب للمدعو سامى مباشر، اعاد حق الزميلة



الظالم .. والمظلوم

وهناك الكثير من هذه النوعية من مديري العموم وكلاء الوزارة يوزعون التخصصات وبعض الأعمال حسب أهوائهم وكأنهم فى عزبة ورثوها عن آبائهم ويضربون بلوائح العمل وقوانينه وقرارات المصلحة عرض الحائط.

فمن ينقذ هؤلاء من الظلم الواقع عليهم.

عبد الناصر سيد بني سويف

الباحثين ولهم خبرة كبيرة فى مجال الضرائب العقارية بجميع أقسامها ويمكن الاستفادة منهم ومن خبراتهم، ففيهم من حصل على شهادات تقديرية من وزير المالية على مجهوده فى مجال الضرائب وعلى أبحاثه التي ساعدت فى حل مشاكل كثيرة كانت تعوق العمل الضريبي فكانت مكافأته من مدير المديرية هي إلغاءه مجهوداته ودفن خبراته بدلاً من الاستفادة منها، وكل ذلك حرصاً وخوفاً على المنصب،

يأخذ مكانه ويبقى هو المميز الوحيد حتى ولو على حساب الآخرين، فمثلاً فى بعض المحافظات يقوم بعض وكلاء الوزارة ومديرين العموم بإلغاء تخصصات وكيل المديرية والاستحوازه على كل المناصب والتخصصات رغم انه بذلك يخالف قانون العمل الوظيفي ويخالف تعليمات المصلحة التي حددت اختصاصات كل منهم، رغم أنه وفي بعض المديريات وكلاء مشهود لهم بالكفاءة والخبرة فى العمل وهم من كبار

يبدأ بعض الموظفين عند تعيينهم فى العمل بداية متواضعة يتقربون إلى زملائهم ويتحسبون إليهم وكأنهم ملائكة نزلوا من السماء إلى الأرض وعندما يصلوا إلى منصب كبير فى العمل تجده وقد انقلب إلى شخص آخر غير الذي كان، وقد ملأه الكبر وحب الظهور، ويأخذ فى محاولة قتل مجهود كل شخص يحاول الاجتهاد فى العمل حتى لا يلفت النظر المسؤولين الكبار إليه خوفاً على منصبه حتى لا

قصة عيد العمال كل أيام السنة الباقية للأغنياء... وللفقراء أول مايو

فقبل لقاء ربة، اعترف مدير البوليس للقسيس بما جنت يده، وخلافاً لشريعة الكنيسة فضح رجل الدين ما حدث لتبرئة ساحة العمال الشهداء .
رفع جيم الصغير ابن سبازير رأسه وعرف العالم فحوى رسالة والدة إليه والتي خطها قبل اعدامه، والتي ودعة فيها مؤكداً براءته ونبل قضيته .
بعدها بعامين تقريبا أعلنت الأممية الاشتراكية الثانية -تجمع الأحزاب الاشتراكية في العالم- الأول من مايو عيداً عالمياً للعمال... وصار للكادحين عيداً.

من مايو عام ١٨٨٦ التي رفعوا فيها راية «ثمانية ساعات للعمل... ثمانية للراحة.. ثمانية للراحة»، بحيث يبدو الأمر وكأن العمال قد فعلوها... مانحاً بذلك الجنود «حق» الدفاع عن أنفسهم بالرصاص الحي الذي أودى بحياة عدد من العمال. وتحولت تظاهراتهم لمذبحة لقت شماتة الصحف الصادرة في اليوم التالي -الملوكة لرأسماليين انحازوا بطبيعة الحال ضد العمال- والتي اتهمت العمال بالعنف والشغب .
مضت إحدى عشر عاماً قبل أن يسمع الضمير حقيقة ما حدث:

لم يكن أوجست سبازير قد اقترب مع الآلاف من زملائه في مصنع ما كورميك للجرارات في شيكاغو في أميركا إلا المطالبة بقسط أوفر من النوم في حقيقة الأمر. دفع مع المقابل مع أربعة من رفاقة حياة لقاء ذلك... قضت محكمة متواطئة مع صاحب المصنع بإعدامهم بخلاف الحكم على ثلاثة آخرين بالسجن مدى الحياة، بتهمة إثارة الشغب والعنف. ومن قبل القاضي تواطئاً مدير البوليس الذي ألقى بيده قنبلة يدوية على جنود الشرطة اللذين واجهوا تظاهرة عمال المصنع في الأول

«سيسمع العالم كلة صوتنا حتى من تحت الأرض» قالها قبل ما يزيد عن ١٢٠ عاماً عامل فقير نافيا الهزيمة عنة وعن عمال في مثل فقره تماماً يوشكون على لقاء الموت خضوعاً لحكم أعدائهم بإعدامهم .
سمع العالم صوتهم بالفعل حتى نظم فؤاد حداد شاعر العامية الأشهر فيهم قصيدة الأول من مايو- عام ١٩٦٣- مردداً رجح الصدى «أنا اللي تحت الثرى ها قلق مضاجعكم.. ماضي وحاضر ومستقبل ها راجعكم... أولها من اولة مايو ومواجعكم»

عيد العمال.. بأي حال عدت يا عيد؟!

القطاعات لميلاد حركة عمالية تقف ضد الظلم والقهر وتجبر رجال الحكم علي حل الأزمة ليس لصالح أصحاب الأعمال الكبار خوفاً علي رأسمالهم ولكن لصالح العمال الذين ينتجوا والذين تقف البلد دون كدهم، لذلك فيعيد العمال سيكون لكل عامل تم فصله تعسفاً وكل عامل تم الأقتطاع من أجره عنوة وكل عامل طالب بحقوقه سيكون الأول من مايو عيد لكل العمال تروي فيه حكايات للأبطال .

أن هذه الشريحة لا تجد عزائها الا في هذا العيد فظروف العمال في العالم كله قاسية وتمر بأسوأ مراحلهم فمنهم من فقد وظيفته وحتى من لم يفقد وظيفته يعمل في ظل ظروف وضغوط صعبة فنعلم أنه أكثر من نصف مليون عامل فقد عمله من قطاعات الغزل والنسيج والبناء والأخشاب والسياحة والكيماويات والصناعات الغذائية وغيرها من القطاعات ولكننا نعلم أن عيد العمال أيضا فرصة لتجميع العمال من جميع

فقط بانتزاع حق صرف العلاوات أو زيادة المرتبات ولكن بدأت تنتهي بإنشاء نقابة مستقلة لم تشم مصر رائحتها منذ ٥٥ عاماً. فأثبتت تجربة موظفي الضرائب العقارية أن مطالب العمال لم تقتصر علي المطالبة بزيادة الحوافز والعلاوات بل أمتدت لتتوسع الدائرة وتخرج نقابة مستقلة ينظر اليها العمال في كل انحاء العالم محاولين الاستفادة منها. فقصص العمال لم تنتهي عند شهداء ماكورمك للجرارات ولن تكون هي

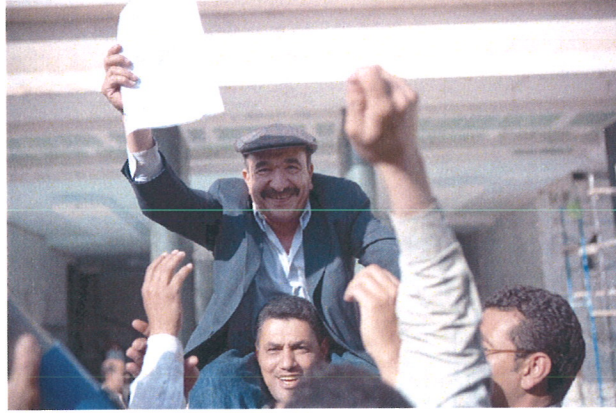
هناك العديد من العمال الذين تم تسريحهم من المصانع والشركات وتشردت أسرهم نتيجة الفشل في ايجاد وظائف أخرى وذلك علي مستوي العالم في عام ٢٠٠٩ وهو العام المشؤوم علي العمال بعد فقدهم للعمل هذا من جانب ومن جانب آخر نجد الاضرابات والاعتصامات، فما أن ينتهي عمال مصنع ما من اضراب الا ونجد عمال مصنع آخر يردون عليهم وينجحوا في انتزاع حقوقهم واجبار المسؤولين الكبار علي الرضوخ والاستجابة لمطالبهم فكيف سيمر هذا اليوم الأول من مايو (عيد العمال) علي عمال يعانوا من ضغوط الحياة بعد تسريحهم وكيف سيشعرون به اذا كانوا يأخذونه اجازة في حين أنهم الآن في اجازة طويلة جميع أيامها تشبه بعضها لا يعلمون أول الشهر من آخره حتي يتذكرون الأول من مايو وقصته الجميلة التي كانت سببا في الأحتفال به، ولكن في نفس الوقت نجد من يستعدون للأحتفال بهذه المناسبة السعيدة، فهم العمال والموظفين الذين انتصروا في معركتهم مع عائشة عبد الهادي وحسين مجاور فهم العمال الذين سيحتفلون ليس فقط بعيد العمال ولكن بانتصارهم أيضا فأذا نظرنا سنجد أن الاضرابات لا تنتهي



أسرار ي

مذكرة فحسب، ولهذا رفض الجميع التحرك من أمام الوزارة إلا بعد مقابلة الوزيرة، وقد كان، حضرت الوزيرة ومعها وفد من خبراء منظمة العمل الدولية ووعدت بلقائنا بعد اجتماعها مع الوفد الدولي، وبالفعل قابلت الوزيرة أعضاء النقابة الذين استقبلوها بالتهنئات المدوية، وتحدثت الوزيرة مؤكدة التزامها بالاتفاقيات الدولية والدستور المصري وهذا ما سعيانا إليه بالفعل، واصطحبت معها وفداً من قيادات النقابة، وخلال الحديث معها والذي استغرق ٢٠ دقيقة أمرت باستلام أوراق الإيداع وتم الاستلام بالفعل وشكر أعضاء الوفد معالي الوزيرة وأخذت الصور التذكارية وسط هتافات التحية للوزيرة، وهذا هو أول حدث في مصر يتم بأيدي أصحابه وأن أعداء النجاح برغم هجومهم لن يؤثر على المسيرة، ولنتذكر جيداً أن هؤلاء هم أنفسهم من كانوا يشكون في الاعتصام بل كانوا ضد الاعتصام بعد ذلك أرادوا أن يتسببوا في إفسال النقابة هؤلاء هم أعداء النجاح فلا تلتفتوا إليهم وإلى الأمام، والهدية القادمة هي الصندوق يازملاء وإلي نجاح آخر...

طارق مصطفى
أمين الصندوق للنقابة العامة
المستقلة للضرائب العقارية.



على النقابة مقولة كاذبة وغير دستورية وغير قانونية، يوجهها أعداء الحقوق في مصر، وبناء عليه زحف موظفوا الضرائب العقارية يوم الثلاثاء، وقد بلغ عددهم ٩٠٠ موظف احتشدوا أمام وزارة القوى العاملة وصعد منهم وفد برئاسة الأستاذ كمال أبو عيطة وعبد القادر ندا ووجدنا بعض التسويف والمماطلة، والحقيقة أن هذه هي المرة الأولى التي يجد موظفوا القوى العاملة أنفسهم في مثل هذه الحالة، ووقعوا في مأزق حول كيفية التصرف في مثل هذا الموقف، وبعد مناقشات وشد وجذب ووسط هتافات مدوية كان هناك الاتصال الذي بين عائشة عبد الهادي وزيرة القوى العاملة وكمال أبو عيطة وطلبت منه تسليم المذكرة وبالفعل سلمها وتم التأشير عليها بالاستلام، وأغلب الظن أن الوزيرة كانت تعتقد أننا جئنا لتسليم

يوم النصر

الثلاثاء ٢٠٠٩/٤/٢١ تذكروا هذا التاريخ جيداً لأنه علامة فارقة في تاريخ الضرائب العقارية وتاريخ الحركة العمالية والنقابية في مصر بأسرها، وما يحمله هذا اليوم في طياته من تبعات على مستقبل الضرائب العقارية خاصة وعلى الوطن بأكمله بصفة عامة، فقد عقد موظفوا الضرائب العقارية العزم على إيداع أوراق أول نقابة مستقلة في تاريخ مصر في مثل هذا اليوم وحضر أعضاء الهيئات النقابية من ٢٦ محافظة من أسوان والأقصر وقنا وسوهاج وكل محافظات الدلتا وخط القناة، من كل ربوع مصرنا العظيمة جاءوا منها وتحملوا مشاق السفر لكي يحفروا بأيديهم تاريخ لن يستطيع أحد أن يمحوه، وقد ظلت هذه الوجوه المكافحة على مدي شهور طويلة تعمل بدأب على نشر الفكرة ظلت على مدي شهور طويلة تعمل بدأب على نشر الفكرة وتجميع العضوية وعمل التشكيلات تحت إشراف لجنة في ٢٦ محافظة لكي يقدموا في النهاية عمل محترم لهذا البلد، فأول مرة في التاريخ يقوم أصحاب الشأن بأنفسهم بعمل تنظيم نقابي لهم دون انتظار أن يعطيهم أي مسئول هذا الحق، والفلسفة التي قامت عليها النقابة المستقلة هي أن العمل النقابي ليس ملك أي مسئول في مصر، وما كان

يحدث فيما سبق من إنشاء النقابات من أعلي وهو ما كان يجعلها غير معبرة عن مصالح أعضائها وليس أكثر من خيال مائة تهدر به حقوق العمال والموظفين، ولكن العمل النقابي يأتي بإرادة أصحاب الشأن، وأن المادة ٥٦ من الدستور المصري تعطي الحق لنا بإنشاء النقابة دون الرجوع لأي جهة إدارية وكذلك اتفاقية العمل الدولية رقم ٨٧ لسنة ٤٨ الموقع عليها من قبل الحكومة المصرية تعطينا الحق في إنشاء النقابة وكذلك القانون المصري في المادة ٤ ينص على أن تنشأ الصفة الاعتبارية للمنظمة النقابية بإيداع الأوراق في الجهة الإدارية المختصة وهي وزارة القوى العاملة، وأن الجهة الإدارية لها حق الاعتراض خلال ثلاثين يوماً إجراءات التأسيس وليس على التأسيس، أي أن مقولة أن هناك جهة لها حق الموافقة

هتافات مناضل... عادل بكري



يا بتوع التنظيم الهرمي... بصراحة انا رافض ضمي يابتوع الوحدة الجبرية... عايزن نقابتنا بحرية تنظيكموا الهرمي البطال... ضد مصالح العمال ضيع أجري و ضيع قوتي... ثلاثين سنة و انا كاتم صوتي ثلاثين الف و فوقهم عشرة... و صاحبهم هيموت بالحصره

يوم النصر

العقارية والتصويت على تحويل اللجنة العليا للإضراب إلى نقابة مستقلة للعاملين تحت التأسيس. النتيجة: الموافقة بالإجماع وبداية إجراءات التأسيس على مستوى جميع المحافظات الجمهورية -والحشد- ومعارك تفتعلها النقابة العامة الرسمية للقضاء على الفكرة.

كلاكيات ثالث رابع و...

أزمة متعددة، وأماكن متعددة الأحدث: تشقيف، زيارات للمحافظات، احتفالات، استمارات، تأسيس وعضوية اجتماعات، استشارات قانونية.

النتيجة: توقعات للعضوية لمواقع الجمهورية بحوالي ٢٢ ألف -تصميم على إنشاء أول نقابة مستقلة بمصر.

كلاكيات قبل الأخير

الزمان: ٢٠ ديسمبر ٢٠٠٨
المكان: نقابة الصحفيين
الحدث: اجتماع أول جمعية عمومية للنقابة العامة المستقلة للبدء في اختيار أعضاء النقابة العامة ثم انتخاب للجان الفرعية بجميع محافظات المحروسة.

كلاكيات الزلزال

الزمان: ٢١ أبريل ٢٠٠٩
المكان: وزارة القوى العاملة.
الحدث: إيداع أوراق النقابة العامة للمستقلة للعاملين بالضرائب العقارية بعد مقابلة وزيرة القوى العاملة.

توابع الزلزال:

الزمان: ٢٤ أبريل ٢٠٠٩
المكان: جنيف
الحدث: الاتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات يقر بعضوية النقابة المستقلة للضرائب العقارية للإتحاد الدولي وتنضم إلى أسرة من ٢٠ مليون عامل عبر العالم. ولسه يا ما أعياد جايه!!..

عبد القادر ندا

الأمين العام

النقابة المستقلة للضرائب العقارية.



سجلناها سجلناها... و اودعناها اودعناها
إعلي و إعلي يا عقارية... قومي نبني أيامنا الجايه
إعلي وإعلي و علي الصوت... نبض ولادك مش هموت
إبني و إبني موظفينك... يا عقارية مش شهيك

كلاكيات آخر مرة:

الزمان: ٢-١٣ ديسمبر ٢٠٠٧
المكان: شارع حسن حجازي في مواجهة مجلس الوزراء
الحدث: التمرس و «يا تساوونا بالصلحة... يا تودونا على المشرحة». و.. «قاعدين.. قاعدين.. قاعدين مش ماشيين».
مفاوضات اليوم السابع لم تنل موافقة المعتمدين التجيش الميري- مساندة الرأي العام- مادة ممتازة نوسائل الإعلام.
مفاوضات ناجحة الليلة الحادية عشر تنال قبول المعتمدين.
النتيجة: انتصار الإرادة وجني الثمار أفراح الضرائب العقارية مع وزير المالية في ١٣، ٢١ ديسمبر ٢٠٠٧.

سنة ثانية بناء واستقلال

كلاكيات أول مرة

الزمان: أول يناير ٢٠٠٨
المكان: سيارة أبو عيطة ومعه ندا.
الحدث: أحلام بنقابة مستقلة ولخلق بيئة وبداية الإعداد والتثقيف والتواصل مع ذوي الخبرة.

كلاكيات ثاني مرة

الزمان: أول مارس ٢٠٠٨
المكان: مقر مؤقت للجنة العليا للإضراب.
الحدث: اجتماع مع ميري الضرائب

أعياد ورا أعياد

سنة أولى عزيمة (٢٠٠٧)

كلاكيات أول مرة خارجي

الزمان: ١١ سبتمبر ٢٠٠٧
المكان: ش ربيع الجيزي أمام مجمع المصالح الحكومية بالجيزة.
الحدث: اختبار عزيمة الموظفين الميري بالضرائب العقارية بالجيزة للتجمع والتظاهر في الشارع حول مطلب المساواة المالية مع المصلحة والضم للمالية ثم تعليق الاعتصام إلى أكتوبر لتلبية المطالب أو معاودة الاعتصام- تلا ذلك اعتصامات بمعظم محافظات الجمهورية.

كلاكيات ثاني مرة:

الزمان: ٢١ أكتوبر ٢٠٠٧
المكان: وزارة المالية في مجلس الوزراء
الحدث: حشد الموظفين الميري بالضرائب العقارية على مستوى مواقع الجمهورية للتظاهر أمام وزارة المالية حول المطالب. النتيجة: وصلت الرسالة وكان الرد مطلبكم في يد رئيس الوزراء.
حرارة الإرادة تسوق موظفي الميري مخترقين شوارع القاهرة مترجلين من الوزارة للعباسية لبعده باشا فالتعبه فشارع حسين حجازي والتمركز أمام مجلس الوزراء «واحد أثنين.. رئيس الوزراء فين؟» ثم القسم والعهد على



شرعي ولا عرفي؟!..



دورات المياه علينا و تقول لنا « انتوا بتحلّموا » و الآن تقول الشرعي لا و ألف لا فنحن رمينا عليك يمين الطلاق و هو طلاق بائن لا رجعة فيه.

عبد الحميد عقل
عضو نقابة الجيزة

علي الرصيف أمام مكتب الدكتور احمد نظيف مطالبا بحقه و انكر في هذه الأيام عبارة رددتها و سمعتها بنفسي هي تهز الأرض وقت أن كنا نهتف « بالروح بالدم ... رزق عيالنا أهم » و لقد خرج كل منا من بيته و هو ينتظر قرار النصر و عاهدنا الله ألا نعود إلي منازلنا إلا به و لقد تحقق بالفعل بحمد الله و الآن نحن نعاهد أنفسنا علي ألا تغمض لنا عين إلا بتحسين الأحوال المادية فأين كنت أنت و أين كنت من ذلك ، فقد كنت تغلق الأبواب في وجوهنا و تغلق

في أي شيء يعود بالنفع علي الموظف الشريف حتى أن كان بسيطاً و عندها سنشكرك جميعاً و ذلك بدلا من أن تنتظر الفرصة للنجاح و تحاول دون فهم أو وعي أن تنسبه لنفسك و اعلم أن عدم فهمك أو علمك سيعود علي الموظف بالخسارة فهناك مثل نسمعه من قديم الزمن و سيكون نتيجة لما تفعله أيها الشخص الذي تعرف نفسك لا ألا وهو « من تدخل فيما لا يعنيه سمع ما لا يرضيه » و ما لا يعينك هو المصلحة للموظف الشريف الذي بات عشرة أيام

ترددت في الفترة الأخيرة بعض الكلمات التي لا معني لها إلا في الزواج رغم أننا بصدد النقابات و المطالبة بالحقوق المسلوقة منذ زمن بعيد فلا تجد أن هذه الكلمات لها معني محدد ، و أقول بدلا من أن نتربص ببعضنا البعض و و نسأل في براءة أنت عرفي و أنا شرعي أو أنا معك و أنا عليك هناك كلمة ساخرة و هي متي يرمي يمين الطلاق علي الضرائب العقارية نصيحتي بدلا من هذا فلتسلك طريقك و راني نتيجة هذا الطريق

كفى يا اعداء النجاح

وانجحة. لا يجب ان يتقدم ركبنا الا من يعمل لاجل الجماعة، مثلا نحتذى به ونطمئن لقيادته . وما الحياة الا صراع بين النجاح واعداة، ولا زال اللة فى عون العبد مادام العبد فى عون اخية .

نوال عبد الرازق عبد العزيز
مديرية الضرائب العقارية بالدقهلية

سبيل انجاز هدفهم وصولا للعدالة التي سهروا لاجلها الليالى الطويلة طوال ايام الاعتصام العظيم الذى جاءنا بنصر فى مثل عظمتة . وما كدنا نصل لتلك النفراجة بعد طول جهاد لنيل المراد ، الاويخرج علينا اعداء النجاح اولئك ، يلوون الحقائق ويزيفون التاريخ ولا يرون فية الانجازات شخصية بعكس لغة الجماعة التي سادت اعتصامنا

منا فى الضرائب العقارية، الا ان هناك من يتربص بمن صعدا بهذا الجمع من نقطة الصفر الى ما وصلنا الية من نتائج هائلة. نسمة هؤلاء و بكل اسف «اعداة النجاح» ولنضع تحت هذا المصطلح الف خط . فاللة اختص النجاح باصحابه الذى الذين ولاهم لتسيير الامر والمصالح لعبادة ، يضحون بأوقات فلراغهم التي هى حق اصيل لعناتهم عليهم، فى

تمت وبمباركة من المولى عز وجل، وابتدينا المشوار وحققنا جزء كبير من مطالبنا التي طال انتظارتنا لها بعون اللة سبحانه وتعالى ،ومازال امامنا الكثير والكثير حتى يرتاح الصغير قبل الكبير ،فما زال الطريق طويل ويحتاج الى تضاطر كل الجهود وتكاتف كل الايدى لأجل هدف واحد نسعى جميعا ليعم الرخاء على جميع الاخوة زملاء وعلى الرغم مما تحقق شعرة كل

ثمار القوة



ويسود إعتقاد بالأمل في بناء جديد وطريقة عمل نقابية جديدة يكون أهم ثمارها هو التواصل الحقيقي بين الجسم النقابي ممثلين للعمال و أعضاء النقابة بحيث يعود في النهاية بعمل عظيم و متواصل يلتمسه الموظفين من القضاء على مشاكلهم و معاناتهم و تقديم خدمات محسوسة و نشاط دؤوب يصب في النهاية في دفع عجلة التنمية و في صالح العمال و الموظفين. وفي النهاية نأمل أن يتكاتف الجميع لحماية هذه النقابة.

حسين قرني أحمد
محافظة بني سويف مركز ببا

أن الإيمان بالله عز وجل ورسوله وكتبه وشريعته هو السبيل الأقوم للحفاظ على هذه القوة بكل معانيها، لذلك يجب أن تكون قوتنا هي الوسيلة التي يجب أن نحافظ عليها من أي عمل خارجي وأن التعاون يجب أن يكون هو الركيزة الأولى لإنشاء هذه النقابة المستقلة.

ويشهد الوقت الحاضر تطورات هائلة ومذهلة في جميع مجالات الحياة صغيرها وكبيرها لذا يجب أن نحافظ على قوة هذه النقابة، والطريق يبدأ بخطوة، وخطوتنا القادمة يجب أن تكون التخطيط الجيد لهذه النقابة حتى تصبح نقابة قوية مستقلة.

شرعيتنا و شرعيتهم

وكلفها بإتمام إجراءات التأسيس وعمل ما تراه مناسباً من أجل إعلان النقابة في حدود ما كلفت به من جمعيتها العمومية. بما في ذلك السعي للانضمام لاتحادات عمالية محلية وإقليمية ودولية تتوافر فيها مبادئ الديمقراطية والشفافية والاستقلال. وقررت اللجنة بناء على هذا التفويض السعي لنيل عضوية الاتحاد الدولي للخدمات واتخذ قرار اللجنة بالإجماع في الاجتماع التالي على انعقاد المؤتمر. وتقدمت اللجنة بالطلب للإتحاد الدولي الذي تلقاها بالترحاب والحفاوة ووافق المكتب العربي والمكتب الإفريقي على طلب العضوية حتى وصل الطلب للمكتب التنفيذي الذي وافق على الطلب بحفاوة واعتبر النقابة المستقلة للضرائب العقارية إضافة للحركة النقابية العالمية. إن النقابة المستقلة لموظفي الضرائب العقارية التي تشكلت بكفاح وصمود أعضائها قد أصبحت اليوم جزءاً لا يتجزأ من الحركة النقابية العالمية لقد كسبنا بصمودنا ووحدةنا ، ونحن ٥٠ ألف موظف وموظفة اليوم توحدنا مع ٢٠ مليون من عمال العالم. لقد رفض الاتحاد الدولي للعمال طلباً من اتحاد نقابات عمال مصر للعضوية لأنه يفتقر للديموقراطية والشفافية والاستقلال وكانت هذه نفس الأسباب التي رفضنا الانضمام لاتحاد العمال الحكومي من أجلها وبعد عضويتنا في الاتحاد الدولي للخدمات عرف كل عمال مصر من هم ممثلو العمال الحقيقيون .

الاتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات
اعتبر نقابتكم إضافة للحركة النقابية العالمية فيما رفض قبول الاتحاد الرسمي بعد أن اتهمه بافتقار الديمقراطية و الشفافية و الاستقلال.

في الرابع والعشرين من أبريل ٢٠٠٩ كانت الضرائب العقارية على موعد جديد مع يوم من أيامها. ففي هذا اليوم قرر المكتب التنفيذي للإتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات قبول عضوية النقابة المستقلة للعمال بالضرائب العقارية لتصبح النقابة عضواً رسمياً في أسرة تضم ٢٠ مليون عامل في شتى أنحاء العالم. لم تكن نسعى بطلب العضوية الذي تقدمنا به إلى اكتساب شرعية أو اعتراف من أحد فشرعيتنا قد انتزعناها من قبل عبر نضالنا على أسفلت شارع حسين حجازي والاعتراف الذي نعتد به هو اعتراف زملائنا وجمعيتنا العمومية. كنا نسعى بطلب العضوية الذي تقدمنا به لأن يأخذ موظفو الضرائب العقارية المناضلون ونقابتهم المستقلة مكانهم الطبيعي في الحركة النقابية العالمية كنقابة تأسست بإرادة العاملين وليس بقرار من أعلى. لقد تعودنا مع بعضنا البعض دائماً علي أعلى درجات الشفافية والصرافة. لذا وجب علينا اليوم أن نتقدم بتقرير تفصيلي عن عضوية الاتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات.

لقد انعقد المؤتمر التأسيسي للنقابة المستقلة في ٢٠ ديسمبر ٢٠٠٨ في نقابة الصحفيين واختار لجنة تأسيسية

ما هو الإتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات؟

يشير انضمام نقابة الضرائب العقارية -بالتأكيد- الى الاتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات التساؤلات حول ماهية الاتحاد وما هو دوره وكل ما يتعلق به، ولن لا يعلم نوجز الحديث حول هذا الاتحاد والتعريف به في كلمات قليلة ولكنها مهمة ليدرك الجميع أهمية ما استطاعوا أن يحققوه في كفاحهم للخروج بنقابتهم ككيان قوى.

والإتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات هو اتحاد لنقابات القطاع العام ويضم نحو ٦٥٠ نقابة واتحاد في ١٥٠ دولة ويصل أعضاؤه من العمال نحو ٢٠ مليون عامل على مستوى العالم من العاملين في قطاعات متعددة مثل عمال القطاع العام والخدمات الصحية والاجتماعية وعمال البلديات والخدمات المجتمعية - ذات الصلة بخدمة الجمهور- العاملين في خدمات المرافق العامة ببلادهم.

وقد وضع الإتحاد الدولي للخدمات منذ تأسيسه عام ١٩٠٧ مصالح العمال والموظفين في أهم أولوياته حيث يقوم عادة بتنسيق الخطوات الكفاحية للعمال لضمان حصولهم على حقوقهم وتوفير العدالة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لهم. وكذلك العمل على توفير الخدمات العامة لهم بشكل كافي ومتكافئ.

ويعرض الإتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات قضايا عمال القطاع العام أمام العديد من المؤسسات والهيئات والمنظمات الدولية مثل منظمة العمل الدولية وغيرها من هيئات الأمم المتحدة والبنك الدولي، وصندوق النقد الدولي، ومنظمة التجارة العالمية ، ومنظمة التعاون الاقتصادي والتنمية وغيرها.

كما يعمل الإتحاد الدولي لعمال الخدمات مع العديد من المنظمات المعنية للدفاع عن حقوق العمال وتوفير مطالبهم بما في ذلك حرية الانضمام الى الاتحاد، والمفاوضة الجماعية وغيرها من الحقوق بما فيها المساواة بين



نقابه العاملين بالضرائب العقارية التشكيل النقابي



- الشرابية
٢٤- عطا الله عيد عطا الله وسط
القاهرة
٢٥- على عبد الواحد على المرج
٢٦- فتحية السيد عيسى م- الحجز
والتحصيل
٢٧- ماجدة نبيه فهمي متنوعة
شمال
٢٨- محمد رجائي رشاد السيدة
زينب
٢٩- محمد سيد محمد بكر السلام
٣٠- محمد عبد الحليم عبد الهادي
خفاجي الخليفة والمقطم
٣١- محمد عطية ذكي النزهة
٣٢- محمد مسلم الشاطر باب
الشعرية
٣٣- محمود عبد العزيز على الأطيان
٣٤- مديحه مرسى حامد المديرية
٣٥- منى محمد علم رمضان م-
شبرا
- محافظة ٦ أكتوبر-عضوية ٢٤٢-
سكرتارية المحافظة :-**
- ١- أدهم شعبان طلبه منشأة القناطر
٢- أكرامي وهبه محمد أوسيم
٣- خالد إبراهيم سيد الحوامديه
٤- رضا عفيفى محمد البدرشين
٥- طه فتحي محمد ذكي العياط
٦- عادل فرج النمر البدرشين
٧- عماد يوسف عواد أوسيم
٨- محمد على عبد الله عبد القادر
كاسب الحوامديه
٩- ناصر بيومى محمود أبوالنمرس
- ١٠- هويدا سمير مكين مأمورية ٦
أكتوبر
١١- هيثم محمود عبد القادر الواحات
البحرية
- محافظة الإسكندرية -العضوية
-٧٧
سكرتارية المحافظة :**
- ١- احمد رجب احمد محروس
العامرية
٢- أحمد محمد متولي نصر برج
العرب
٣- أسامة عبد الحفيظ الكومى
مأمورية شرق
٤- أيمن محمد عبد اللطيف مأمورية
شرق
٥- حسام الدين حافظ مأمورية
شرق

- (أبو كبير)
١- أحمد هندواى خليفة م- بولاق
٢- أشرف أبو اليزيد إبراهيم م- روض
الفرج
٣- إمام فوزي إمام م- ملاهي القاهرة
٤- أمل عبد العال محمد م- متنوعة
غرب
٥- إيمان أحمد موسى دار السلام
والبساتين
٦- أيمن عبد العزيز إبراهيم م-
متنوعة جنوب
٧- بخيت عباس عوض عين
شمس
٨- جمال محمد عبد الله مصر
القديمة
٩- حسن محمد حسان الواليلى
١٠- خالد حسين السيد الساحل
١١- خالد سعد مرزوق الزاوية
١٢- خالد عبد التواب مصر الجديدة
١٣- سامح عبد الفتاح خليفة م- مدينة
نصر شرق
١٤- سعيد عبد المحسن عطية م-
غرب أول
١٥- سعيد محمد إبراهيم م- المطرية
١٦- سيد سيد حامد المديرية
١٧- سيد عبد العزيز رشوان متنوعة
شرق
١٨- شعبان عبد العزيز طلبه م- مدينة
نصر غرب
١٩- صبري مسعد مكي الشرايبة
٢٠- صلاح الدين محمد أبو المعاطي
المديرية
٢١- صلاح الدين محمد عبد المعطي
الموسكي
٢٢- عادل ذكي بشارة حدائق القبة
٢٣- عبد الجليل حسن عبد الجليل
- ٢- أحمد السيد أحمد عبد العال (كفر
صقر)
٣- البهنساوي عبد الحميد (فاقوس)
٤- جمال حسن عبد العال (القنايات)
٥- حسام الدين محمد على (هيهيا)
٦- حسن محمد حسين (الحسينية)
٧- السعيد أحمد عبد الرحمن (ديرب
نجم)
٨- سميح إبراهيم محمد
(الإبراهيمية)
٩- طه راشد (أولاد صقر)
١٠- عبد الرازق محمد عبد السلام (أبو
كبير)
١١- عبد الرحمن محمود الجمل
(الحسينية)
١٢- عبد الناصر عبد الحميد عطية
(المديرية)
١٣- علوان أحمد عثمان (منيا القمح)
١٤- عماد محمود إبراهيم (بلبيس)
١٥- محمود محمد عبد الحميد
(بلبيس)
١٦- ماجدة حسنى جمعة (المديرية)
١٧- محمد الهادي حلمي (ديرب
نجم)
١٨- محمد جوده أحمد موسى (كفر
صقر)
١٩- محمد محمد عبد العليم
(الحسينية)
٢٠- مراد عبد الكريم حسين
(فاقوس)
٢١- هشام سلامه الهوبي (المديرية)
- محافظة القاهرة -العضوية ٢٤٥-
سكرتارية المحافظة :-**

انتخب أعضاء سكرتارية
المحافظات المفوضين من الجمعية
العمومية أعضاء الهيئة العامة
للنقابة (السكرتارية العامة) الأتي
أسمائهم :-

- ١- كمال محمد رفاعي أبو عيطه.
٢- مديحه مرسى حامد.
٣- عبد القادر ندا.
٤- أحمد أبو اليزيد الشافعى.
٥- أحمد رجب على عبد الكريم.
٦- أحمد عبد الصبور محمد إبراهيم.
٧- أحمد محمود الرمسي.
٨- أسامة عبد الحفيظ الكومى.
٩- أمره السيد قط.
١٠- جمال محمود عويضة.
١١- حسن على جمعة.
١٢- حسين كيلاني محمد.
١٣- خالد أمبارك حامد.
١٤- خلف السيد مصطفى عطية.
١٥- السيد منصور جاد.
١٦- صلاح صفوت محمد.
١٧- طارق مصطفى عبد الفتاح.
١٨- طنطاوي شحاتة رجب.
١٩- عبد الناصر سيد منصور.
٢٠- عزت خالد حسين.
٢١- فؤاد حلمي بدوي.
٢٢- محمد جهاد قشقوش.
٢٣- محمد عبد الحي محمد.
٢٤- محمد عبد القادر البدرى.
٢٥- محمد على عبد الله كاسب.
٢٦- مصطفى حامد محمد.
٢٧- يحيى أحمد قطب.
٢٨- إيمان أحمد موسى.
٢٩- عزيزة رشاد
٣٠- فاديه شوقي.
٣١- أحمد محمد مختار محمود.
٣٢- فاطمة النوبية.
٣٣- كريمة جمعة حنفي.
٣٤- منى أنيس.
٣٥- جمال الصادق.
٣٦- ميرفت قاسم جلال.
٣٧- نجوى عبد الحفيظ محمد.
٣٨- صلاح عبد السلام.
٣٩- محمد سالم محمد.
٤٠- هناك ذكى.
٤١- هويدا سمير مكين.
٤٢- محمود حسن عامر.
٤٣- دلال محمد السيد
- محافظة الشرقية -عضويه ١٨٧٣ -
سكرتارية المحافظة :-**
- ١- أحمد عبد الصبور محمد إبراهيم

- ٦- سهام خليل إبراهيم علام مأمورية
وسط
٧- السيد محمد السيد محمود
مأمورية الجمرك
٨- عادل عبد الواحد محمد مأمورية
العامة
٩- فاطمة أحمد السيد مأمورية
المنتزة
١٠- محمد علاء الدين موسي مأمورية
وسط
١١- ممدوح مرسي عليوة مأمورية
غرب
١٢- ميرفت محمد محمد حسن
مأمورية العامة
١٣- نادي محروس جيد مأمورية
غرب
- محافظه كفر الشيخ -العضوية**
١٤٢-
سكرتارية المحافظة :-
١- السيد منصور جاد السيد.
٢- محمد حسين السيد.
٣- محمد أحمد رشدي.
٤- السيد بيومي على منصور.
٥- الباز محمد الباز.
٦- عماد على محمد.
٧- مظهر محمد حجازي.
٨- ماجدة مصطفى محمد.
٩- محمد إسماعيل جابر.
١٠- علاء أحمد عبد العظيم.
١١- محمد السيد عبد الفتاح.
١٢- أحمد عيد أحمد.
١٣- الشحات أحمد عبد الرحمن.
١٤- عبد المحسن أبو شعيشع.
- محافظه حلوان -عضوية ٣٢٤-**
سكرتارية المحافظة :-
١- أحمد نفاذ أحمد حسين مأمورية
الصف
٢- بكار محمد عبد الغنى مصطفى
مأمورية أطفيح
٣- حسن شحاتة أحمد جاد مأمورية
الصف
٤- حمدي طه شلبي علوانى مأمورية
الصف
٥- خالد مصطفى ذكي مأمورية
أطفيح
٦- سيد يوسف سيد سالم مأمورية
أطفيح
٧- فوزي إبراهيم الجوهري مأمورية
حلوان
٨- كمال محمد رفاعي مأمورية
- ٩- مبروك مبروك خليفة مأمورية
أطفيح
١٠- محمد عبد القادر البدرى مأمورية
حلوان
١١- نور الدين مصطفى علوان مأمورية
١٥ مايو
١٢- هشام محمد عبد الحميد مأمورية
المعادي
١٣- وهبي الدسوقي محمد مأمورية
التبين
- محافظه قنا**
انتخبت أعضاء الجمعية العمومية
لنقابة العاملين بالضرائب العقارية
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البندر
٥- صلاح عبد المغنى الفيوم أول
٦- على فاروق إبراهيم بندر أول
الفيوم
٧- عويس محمود أحمد المديرية
٨- قرنى عبد الجليل عثمان الفيوم
أول
٩- مجدى السيد محمود المديرية
١٠- محمد أبو الفتوح محمد مأمورية
سنورس
١١- محمد عبد الوهاب البجيجى
سنوس
١٢- محمد مصطفى سيد الفيوم أول
١٣- محمود سيد الراعى طاميه
١٤- مصطفى عبد العال أحمد
أبشواى
١٥- نور أحمد مسعود إطسا
١٦- ممدوح بشر أحمد إطسا
١٧- يحيى أحمد قطب المديرية
- محافظلة القليوبية - عدد العضوية ٨٤١**
- سكرتارية المحافظلة :-**
١- إبراهيم رمضان مرسى قها
٢- إبراهيم محمود إبراهيم
الخصوص
٣- أبو الريش أحمد على الخانكة
٤- أحمد محمد عوض القناطر
٥- جيهان مصطفى أحمد عوايد بنها
٦- حسام الدين أحمد عبد الحليم
المديرية
٧- حسن محمد محمود قليوب
٨- سامى حلمى إبراهيم طوخ
٩- السيد محمد سالم الخصوص
١٠- طارق مصطفى عبد الفتاح
المديرية
١١- عبد الفتاح السيد عبد الفتاح
القناطر
١٢- محمد زكريا محمد شبرا الخيمة
١٣- محمد زكريا محمد سليمان كفر
شكر
١٤- محمد عبد الحميد عبد اللطيف
كفر شكر
١٥- محمود إسماعيل محمود بنها
١٦- نجوى عبد الحفيظ محمد
المديرية
١٧- ولاء محمد السيد بهتيم
- محافظلة الأسمايلية - عدد
العضوية ٩٨٧**
سكرتارية المحافظلة :
١- أحمد صادق أحمد.
٢- أحمد فاضل محمود حسن.
٣- أشرف كامل محمد.
٤- خالد يوسف محمد.
٥- سعد الدين قاسم.
٦- سعيد عبد الله محمد.
٧- السيد حسان على.
٨- عادل سليم حسن.
٩- عبد الرحمن عبد الرازق رضوان.
١٠- عربى حامد ذكى.
١١- على سليمان على.
١٢- على مصطفى عبد الله.
١٣- عماد فتحى الكاشف.
١٤- ماجد أحمد الشيخ.
١٥- ماجده على السيد.
١٦- محمد عبد الغنى عطية.
١٧- محمد فتحى عبد القوى.
١٨- محمد مصطفى كمال.
١٩- محمد مصطفى عبد الراضى.
٢٠- مريم عبد النور غبريال.
٢١- مصطفى حامد محمد.

أول نقابة مستقلة في مصر تضع نظامها الأساسي

العامة للبنوك واللجان التابعة لها.. حيث تباشر هذه النقابة ما يضعه لها الاتحاد العام من برامج وخطط وتلتزم بالحدود التي يرسمها لها.. الرقابة من الهيئات الأعلى على الهيئات الأدنى فالإتحاد يراقب ويحاسب النقابات العامة والنقابات العامة التي تحاسب اللجان.. وذلك كله في غياب الطرف الأصيل وهو العمال عن ممارسة أي دور في مراقبة أو محاسبة تلك المستويات النقابية. واعتمدوا مبدأ توسيع المشاركة القاعدية في العمل النقابي.. وانعكس ذلك في لائحتهم التي توجب تمثيل كل مواقع العمل الإدارية في هيئات النقابة.. وتمثيل الوظائف النوعية كذلك حتى يكون التنظيم النقابي معبرا عن إرادة

أعضاؤه.. وتأكيدا للمشاركة القاعدية، ومبدأ الرقابة من أسفل ، قروا إنشاء مؤتمر يسمى مؤتمر المفوضين - يتم انتخابهم من مواقع العمل مباشرة لتمثيل الوظائف النوعية المختلفة.. بواقع ٣ أعضاء عن كل موقع في حوالي ٤٠٠ موقع عمل على مستوى الجمهورية يقوم هذا المؤتمر بمتابعة نشاط وهيئات النقابة ويطلب منها وينقل إليها رغبات ومطالب العاملين في مواقع العمل المختلفة ويعقد مؤتمر سنوي قبل انعقاد الجمعية العمومية بشهرين.. يتم خلاله مناقشة أحوال النقابة والعمل النقابي وأداء الهيئات النقابية ويرفع تقريره إلى اجتماع الجمعية العمومية السنوي. وحرصا منهم على التغيير الدوري، وفرز واختيار القيادات النقابية المنتخبة جعلوا مدة الدورة النقابية عامين، يتخللها مؤتمر المفوضين واجتماع الجمعية العمومية بكل ما يعنيه ذلك من مراقبة دائمة من قواعد النقابة لهيئاتها.. باختصار - خرجت لائحة النظام الأساسي لنقابة العاملين بالضرائب العقارية.. تعبيراً عن إرادة الأعضاء وخياراتهم وانعكاساً مباشراً لمطالبهم وحاجاتهم الملحة.. وأعادوا العمل النقابي إلى أصله واضعين الأساس السليم لبناء النقابات المستقلة.



المصري ومقتضيات الاستقلال النقابي - في طريقة آلية ممارسة الديمقراطية الداخلية عند مناقشتهم لائحة النظام الأساسي - التي تمت مناقشتها مادة مادة، وفقرة فقرة.. من قبل أعضاء الجمعية العمومية للنقابة، والذين أظهروا ممارسة ديمقراطية حقيقية للعمل النقابي، ومعرفة قانونية وفهم واسع للمواثيق الدولية- فأكدوا وأقروا إنهم أي الجمعية العمومية للنقابة هم السلطة العليا التي تحدد السياسة العامة للنقابة.. والتي تضع الخطط والبرامج وتنتخب جميع هيئات النقابة في المحافظات وعلى المستوى المركزي، وهم وحدهم أصحاب الحق في محاسبة هذه الهيئات، وسحب الثقة منها.. وأكدوا رفضهم للنظام المعمول به في النقابة يجري العمل في ظل النظام المعمول به في قانون النقابات العمالية رقم ٣٥ لسنة ٧٦ على أن يضع الإتحاد العام للعمال نظاما نموذجيا للمنظمات النقابية المختلفة تتخذ هذه المنظمات أساس لوضع نظامها الأساسية وتلتزم بالهيكل العام الموضوع فيها.. ثم تصدر هذه اللوائح بقرار من الوزير المختص (وزير القوى العاملة، بما يعنيه ذلك من أن اللوائح الداخلية لهذه المنظمات قد تمت مناقشتها وإقرارها بعيدا وبمعزل عن المخاطبين بإحكامها عن العاملين أعضاء تلك النقابات أصحاب المصلحة المباشرة من إنشاء تلك النقابات وأصحاب الحق الأصيل في وضع النظام الأساسي الذي يرتضونه لنقاباتهم، فالقانون ٣٥ تم مناقشته وإقراره بمجلس الشعب دون أن يعرض عليهم، ولم تشير مواد إصداره - حتى - إلى اشتراك اتحاد العمال في إقراره.. ولأن نقابة العاملين بالضرائب العقارية لم تقبل، ولم يكن بإمكانها أن تؤسس لعمل نقابي حقيقي مستقل، ويعبر عن إرادة العاملين ومدافع عن مصالحهم- أن تعتمد هذا القانون أو هذا النظام مرجعيتها، لكون هذا القانون وذلك النظام متناقضا أولا.. مع مبادئ الحرية النقابية وقواعد الديمقراطية العمالية التي ارتضتها لها الجمعية العمومية للنقابة، ومخالفة هذا القانون، وهذا التنظيم النقابي لمبادئ الدستور

عاجل إلى وزير المالية

مقر الأمورية هو شقة من شقق المساكن الشعبية التابعة لمجلس مدينة ملوي بالدور الأرضي و لسوء الصرف في هذه العمارة تكون الدورة بالأمورية مهبا للروائح الكريهة و التي تسبب الأمراض الخطيرة للموظفين فنرجو من معاليكم التدخل الفوري من اجل حل هذه المشكلة الخطيرة حيث ان مواعيد العمل الرسمية تبدأ من الساعة الثامنة صباحا و تنتهي الساعة الرابعة مساء و هذه الفترة ستتوجب استعمال دورات مياه لتكون صالحة للاستعمال الأدمي و ذلك خلاف الفئران و الشعابين و الصراصير المقيمة مع الموظفين بسبب الزراعة المجاورة .

جعلكم الله عوناً للموظفين ووفقكم لما فيه الخير

عنهم : محمد خلف علي

اللجنة الفرعية لنقابة العاملين بالضرائب العقارية بملوي

شكوى عاجلة الي معالي وزير المالية و السيد الأستاذ وكيل أول الوزارة و رئيس مصلحة الضرائب العقارية بالقاهرة يتقدم جميع العاملين بأمورية الضرائب العقارية بمباي و ملاهي ملوي بشكواهم:

أولا : من ضيق الأمورية حيث ان مقر الأمورية لا يتحمل كثرة الدفاتر و المكلفات بالجرائد من عام ١٩٧٩ حتي الآن رغم ان الأمورية تستعد للعمل بالقانون ١٩٦ لسنة ٢٠٠٨ و الذي سيوجب حضور جميع أصحاب العقارات بمدينة ملوي و ما يتبعها من قري لتقديم إقرارات ضريبة العقارات التابعة لهم و لا يوجد مكان للمواطنين من ضيق المكان حني استراحة لهم .

ثانيا : يأمل الموظفون النظر لهذا الموضوع خاصة ان المقر لا يوجد به سوي دورة مياه واحدة لا تصلح للاستعمال الأدمي رغم وجود موظفات حيث ان

نائب الشعب حمدين صباحي يكتب عن: النقابة المستقلة

يعد أغلب المعارضين قادرين على تحمل وطأته ولا قابلين لدفع ثمنه الذي ولا شك سيكون فادحاً.

• إن موظف الضرائب العقارية شارك في الإضراب وساهم في تأسيس أول نقابة مستقلة لن يساق بعد اليوم للتصويت في إنتخابات مزيفة ولن يشارك في مؤتمر هلامي مطالباً بالمنحة السنوية، ولن يطلب فتوى شرعية حول حقة في الإضراب و التنظيم، وموظفة الضرائب العقارية التي باتت ليها على الرصيف مطالبة بحقها لن يمكن إقناعها بعد اليوم بأنها مواطنة ناقصة الأهلية، والمسيحيون و المسلمون الذين ضمتهم نقابة ناضلوا من أجل إنشائها لن يتقاتلوا على الديانة الأفضل. هكذا يضرب الزلزال كل المباني امشوهة.

• تتجسد امام عيني صورة تلاميذ أذكى أصحاب منتبهين مصطفين في فصل نظيف مشرق، في يوم ليس بعيد، يدخل عليهم مدرس التاريخ ويكتب بخط واضح عنوان الدرس: أول نقابة حرة في مصر، تأسست في ٢٠٠٩، ثم يحكي للتلاميذ حكاية أبو عيطة وزملائه صانعي هذا التاريخ، فلا شك لدي أن هذه النقابة حتى لو أجهضت لا قدر الله، قد حجزت مكانها المرموق في صفحات التاريخ.

• حمدين صباحي كتب منذ عام يتساءل متى تعزف الحركة الرابعة في السيمفونية، وأعتقد ان نقابة الضرائب العقارية تحت قيادة المايسترو الأعظم كمال أبو عيطة قد جاوبت عن السؤال، فهي تعزف الحركة الرابعة في السيمفونية، و النغمة الأولى في لم يضعه أعداء الحياة، لحن الجماهير، لحن الخلود.



• هذا الموقف الذي يبدو غير مفهوم لأول وهلة يصبح منطقياً تماماً بعد شئ من التمعن في مغزاه. فالحركات النقابية التي تتبنى مالب الطبقة العاملة هي المحك الفارق الذي سيضطر معه اليمين الإسلامي والليبرالي إلى الإفصاح عملياً عن موقفه الطبقي بلا مواربة أو مراوغة أو شعارات منزوعة المضمون الاجتماعي.

• أما المعارضة اليسارية والقومية بمختلف أطيافها فمن المفترض منطقياً أن تحتفي بالنقابة الوليدة وأن تتبنى الحركة والقائمين عليها بكل ما أوتيت من قوة أو ضعف، غلا أن تشكيل النقابة يواجهها بعجزها ويكشف طبيعة الحركة في المكان الذي أدمنته عبر عقود (وهو ما لا يتناقض مع نبل مقصد الكثيرين من تلك الحركة)، أكثر من ذلك فتشكيل النقابة المستقلة يمثل تحدياً لها إذ يدعوها أن تودع أسلوب «نضال» بالكلمات لا تدفع لقاءه إلا بعض الاضطهاد الذي بدونه لا يستقيم السيناريو، و تتبنى أسلوب نضال بالأفعال ليس له سبيل سوى الإلتحام بالجماهير و الإنصهار في كتلتها وهو نضال لم

«أتحيل جموعاً من المصلين يتوجهون بصلاتهم إلى القبلة الخاطئة ويدومون على صلواتهم المشكوك في صحتها سنوات وسنوات، وحده كمال أبو عيطة يرفع رأسه من سجود ويتلفت حوله ويدرك بيقين أن هذه القبلة خاطئة، ولكنه لا يجادل المصلين حول صحيح القبلة وصحيح الصلاة، في صمت يرفع سجادة الصلاة ويضعها في اتجاه القبلة الحق مستكملاً صلواته في هدوء وخشوع وتواضع المؤمنين».

هذه فاتحة رسالة جعلتني أبكى فرحاً، تلقيتها وأنا أكتب مقالتي عن عيد العمال أحيى فيه انتصار الضرائب العقارية، وانتهاء الاستجداء على طريقة «المنحة يا ريس» لصالح النضال الجاد من أجل «أجر عادل ونقابة مستقلة» ولأعبر لأخي كمال أبو عيطة عن بعض ما يليق به من تقدير مستحق. رسالة الدكتوراة ماجدة غنيم تعبير عميق وصادق عن رؤية مصرية راقية الوعي والوجدان. قد لا تتطابق معي في بعض التفاصيل لكنها جيرة بأن تكملوا قراءتها: «كنت أتحدث مع أحد

المثقفين عن نقابة الضرائب العقارية فرد بخليط من الأسى والعطف والازدراء: لكنها حركة فتوية لا تحمل أهدافاً سياسية واضحة.

هذا الموقف يوضح أصل الداء في معظم حركات المعارضة المصرية، فهي مثلها مثل الحكام لا تؤمن بالقاعدة، وتتصور أن التغيير لا يأتي إلا من أعلى، فترفع الشعارات الفوقية عن الدستور والتوريث والائتلافات والجمعيات الوطنية التي لا تأتي في أفضل الحوال إلا بتعديلات هامشية ومسكنات.

*التغيير الحقيقي يبدأ من أسفل ضيقاً في أهدافه، ثم يتسع



أيمن و سمر - المنوفية



ربيع و رانيا - بني سويف



زواج دنيا - السويس



خالد و ريهام - اسوان



زواج مريم - الفيوم



أمال السعيد - الدقهلية



تامر و ميادة



أحمد و ليلي - الدقهلية

مبروك للزملاء و الزميلات



محمود و منى - بني سويف



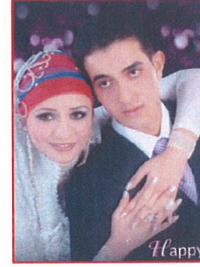
رامي و داليا - الجيزة



زواج ريهام - ابشواي



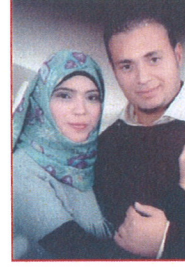
سارة و سالي - السويس



أمير و أميرة - الغربية



مصطفى و رشا - الإسماعيلية



محمود و مي - السويس



سامح و سارة - المنوفية



زواج أحمد أنور - الجيزة



محمد و هبة - قليوبية



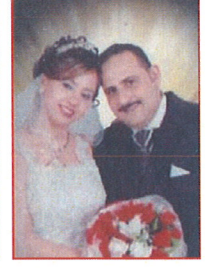
مصطفى و دعاء - بني سويف



محمد و منى - سوهاج



إبنة محمد شحتة - السويس



وائل و ماريان - بني سويف



وليد و أمنية - القاهرة



رمضان و هند - المنوفية



خطوبة شرين - الإسماعيلية



زفاف إبنة الزميلة رضا سليمان - السويس



عبد الرحمن جمال عويضة
الدقهلية



ساره سعد - بني سويف



حسين أحمد - بني سويف



عمر أسامة - الإسكندرية



وليد الإعتصام، زياد تامر - الجيزة



ندى عمرو - الغربية



نديم - الدقهلية



مارينا فاخر - القاهرة



شهد و محمد عقل - الجيزة



منى محمود - الجيزة



أحمد محمد - القاهرة



تهنئة بالدكتوراه د/ محمد علي الفول - الغربية



إيمان صلاح - دمياط



شهد خالد



مريم طارق



محمد أحمد - الفيوم

محافظة شمال سيناء
أسره الضرائب العقارية بشمال سيناء
تهنئ الأستاذ/ عزت السيد النجار على
قيادته الحكيمة
محافظة السويس
تهنئة للزميل/ أحمد مصطفى بنجاح
وتفوق نجله حسين أحمد مصطفى تهنئة
للزميله/ رضا سليمان لزفاف أبتتها
محافظة الشرقية
تهنئة بزواج ابنه الزميل محمد جوده
تهنئ محافظة الشرقية، نورا أحمد بزواج
أبنها محمد من العروسة/ ولاء
محافظة دمياط
تهنئة بالزواج للأستاذ/ محمد نجيب
مشالي الأستاذة/ سوزان فرحات
محافظة سوهاج
أجمل التهاني للعروسين محمد على
شوشه والعروسة منى طلعت مكي زواج
سعيد
محافظة القليوبية
الأخوه الزملاء بأمورية شبرا أول يتمنون
الشفاء العاجل للزميل/ أنور سعد

محافظة دمياط
تهنئة للنجاح الباهر للتلميذه إسراء أشرف
فتحي من والدها لحصولها على المركز
الثاني على مستوى المدرسة
محافظة المنيا
تهنئة للسيد/ فاروق حكيم لخروجه على
المعاش بأتم صحه وعافيه
اللجنة التقابيه بالمنيا للأستاذ/ رمضان عيد
بدوى لتفوق كريمةته دكتوراه مروه رمضان
أسره مأمورية مبانى ملوى تهنئ نفسها
لتولى الأستاذ/ إبراهيم عبد الستار مدير
المأمورية
أسره مأمورية مبانى تهنئ الأستاذ/ عبد
الرحمن أحمد الدريري لأختياره رئيساً
للجنة الفرعية لتقابه الضرائب العقارية
محافظة الإسكندرية
تهنئة بالخطوبه للزميله/ مها عقل على
الأستاذ/ محمد أبو حمد
محافظة مطروح
تهنئ أسره الضرائب العقارية بمطروح
الزملاء/ سامر وجمعه وسعيد وعبد المجيد
وأشرف الشريينى بالمولود الجديد .

مأمورية الخليفة والمقطم تهنئ الأستاذ/
نبيل إسماعيل بوصول حفيده
تهنئة من الخليفه والمقطم للزميل/ نبيل
إسماعيل
تهنئة بعيد ميلاد سعيد للدكتوراه/ مارينا
صموئيل أبنه الزميلة/ ميرفت لمى عقل
محمد عبد الحليم خفاجى يهنئ الأستاذ/
نبيل إسماعيل حمد الله على سلامه الأبن
العزيز محمد من الحادث مع التمنيات
بالشفاء العاجل
أجمل التهاني بعيد الميلاد السعيد مع أطيوب
التمنيات: نجياه موفق للأستاذة/ جورجيت
جورجى رئيس السجلات بشبرا
تهنئة للزميله/ سحر سالم بقسم الكشوف
الرسميه على المولود السعيد (محمد)
الإستاذ/ محمد عبد الحليم وأسرة مأمورية
الخليفه والمقطم تهنئ الأستاذة/ وفاء
إبراهيم بخطوبه أبنها إبراهيم
محافظة البحيرة
تهنئ للأستاذ/ عبد العاطى رئيس قسم
الأطيان للخروج على المعاش بأتم صحه
تهنئة بالزواج السعيد للأستاذ أحمد رجب

محافظة الجيزة
زواج سعيد سيهام علام وأسامة إبراهيم
دعوات بالشفاء للزميل صبري لبيب.
تهنئة: إسلام حجازى مبروك النجاح
تهنئة بالزواج السعيد: للزميل/ أحمد
محمود عبد المطلبى من مأمورية الوراق
تمنيات الجيزة بالشفاء للزميله/ هيام
تهنئة للأستاذ/ عبد الرحمن الشريف
مناسبه لبوغه المعاش بصحه جيده
تهنئة للأستاذ/ وحيد حسين بمناسبه أن
رزق بنجله الأول محمود
الضرائب العقارية بالجيزة تهنئ الزميل
سلامه مهدي بالزواج السعيد
الضرائب العقارية بالجيزة تهنئ إسلام
بالزواج السعيد
الضرائب العقارية بالجيزة تهنئ للزميل/
حمدى سيد عبد الله زواجه السعيد
محافظة القاهرة
عيد ميلاد سعيد: أحمد محمد رؤوف
تهنئة بلوغ المعاش ونتمنى لهم دوام
الصحة الأستاذة/ ثناء عبد البارى
الأستاذة/ منيرة أحمد على
الأستاذ/ كمال عبد المسبح

البقاء لله

على السيد (كفر صقر)
- تنعى محافظة الشرقية: والده الزميل
محمد جوده أحمد
- أسره الضرائب العقارية بدمياط تقدر
خالص التعازى إلى الأستاذة/ صباح راضر
جندي لوفاه أبنها
- أسره الضرائب العقارية ببئر العبد تنعز
بالحزن والأسى لوفاه أخو زميلهم السيد
سعد السيد حسين
- الأخوه الزملاء بمحافظة القليوبية ينعون
والد الزميل/ إبراهيم حافظ
- أسره الضرائب العقارية بالقليوبية ينعون
شقيق الزميل/ فوزى عبد الحميد
- تتقدم محافظة المنوفيه بأحر التعازى
للزميله/ ميرفت عبد الحميد لوفاه أبنها
- نشاطركم الأحران من المنوفيه لوفاه والد
الزميل/ محمد عدلى إسماعيل
- أسره الضرائب العقارية بمنوف
تشاطر الزميل/ عماد عامر الأحران فى وفا
والدته

ميرفت النحاس يوم ٤ / ١ / ٢٠٠٨
- الأستاذ/ محمد عبد الحليم يتقدم
بخالص التعازى للزميل يوسف أمين لوفاه
عمه
- تتقدم محافظة القاهرة بالتعازى للزميل/
محسن عبد الحليم مكاوى لوفاه شقيقة
- تنعى محافظة القاهرة والد الزميلة/ منى
على السيد
- مأموريه أيتاى البرود تنعى الزميل/ سعيد
الشيشنى نشاطركم الأحران
- مأمورية كوم حماده تنعى شقيق الزميل/
السيد إبراهيم الديب
- مديرية الضرائب العقارية بالبحيرة تنعى
الزميل/ عبد العظيم حسن عنهم أحمد
رجب، وحيه محمود
- نشاطركم الأحران للأستاذ/ حامد أبو
زيد لوفاه أثنين من أشقائنا
- تنعى الضرائب العقارية بالسويس والده/
الزميله الأستاذة/ سناء حسين
- تنعى محافظة الشرقية: المرحوم/ فرحان

الدمسوقى بدير محمد ووالد الزميل/ نصر
أحمد إبراهيم
- البقاء لله تنعى محافظة الدقهلية وفاه
الزميل/ الصباحى أحمد عيد
- البقاء لله تنعى محافظة الدقهلية والده
الزميله/ زكيه عبده متولى حسن
- للبقاء لله فى وفاه شقيق الزميل/ حماده
أبو بكر ياسين
- البقاء لله فى وفاه شقيق الزميل/ السيد
عبد الحافظ محمد
- البقاء لله فى وفاه والده الزميل/ خالد
خافظ
- البقاء لله فى وفاه زوجه الزميل/ محمود
حسان حسن
- البقاء لله فى وفاه شقيقه الزميل/ حماده
أبو بكر محمود
- توفى إلى رحمه الله تعالى والد الزميلة/

- نشاطركم الأحران من مأمورية الصف
تنعى اخ الزميل/ حمدى طه
- مأمورية أطفح تنعى والد الزميل/
مجدى قبانى
- مديرية الجيزة تنعى والده الزميل/
سيد يوسف
- الضرائب العقارية بالوراق جيزة تنعى
وفاه والده الزميل/ أحمد هلال
- نشاطركم الأحران من محافظة الجيزة
لوفاه والد الزميلة فتحيه مسعود عباس
- تتقدم مأمورية أمبابه ثان بالجيزة
بخالص العزاء للأستاذة/ سلوى شبل
على فى وفاه حماتها
- مركز معلومات الضرائب العقارية
بالجيزة ينعى شقيقه الأستاذ/ شعبان
عبد الله
- تنعى محافظة الدقهلية وفاه والد الزميل/



اخبط دماغك في الحيطه...!

نقفُ حبايب و قرايبُ
م اسكندرية لحلايبُ
و نحرس المال السايبُ
و نقول كمان «شايبُ عايبُ»
و حاضرنّا بلُغُ للغايبُ

* * *

و جَوْلَةٌ مِنْ أَلْفِينِ جَوْلَةٌ
أشْرارِ بَتِيهَشْ و عتاوَلَةٌ
مش إننا ناخذُه مَقاوَلَةٌ
مُحَاوَلَةٌ... و الحُذْبُ مُحَاوَلَةٌ!
ولا خافش من بطش الدولة

* * *

اتعلموا الدرس بسرعة
و قبل ما تجف الترعَة
ربك حيسعى لو تسعى!
و إيد لوحدَهَا إيد خرْعَة
يهزم جنود ابن القُرْعَة

* * *

و رفعا ليه البرنيطة
و آدي الجاروف و البرويطة
و الغنوة تلحين «ابو عيطه»!
بيث سمّه في الزَيْطَة
«إخبط دماغك في الحيطه»

حتماً و لزمأ ساعة الجِدُ
عزم الضرايب شد العزمُ
واقفين نواجه ظلم الليل
للغول نقول «عينك حمرا»
خدر النفاق مونة و أجرة

يا مصر دي لسه بشايرُ
نقابتنا درْعُ نواجه بيه
حب الوطنُ إننا ندُيه
حبينا مصر و قدّ منا
عاش اللي شارك في الإضراب

يا كل أهل المحروسة
قبل الجحيم ما يطال الكَلُ
يا كل مظلوم في بلدنا
إيد وياً إيد الإيد ترقوى
إيد ويا إيد نصبح مارِد

عزم الضرايب شد الحيل
بنبني للحق نقابة
ماشيين نغني «تحيا الشمس»
غنوتنا تهزم كل نشاز
غنوتنا نور بيقول للليل:

الكلام في كل دار (قصيدة للزميل على شيحة*)



جاهز شغلته طمس الحروف اكتبى

بالحبر الاسود

دول بضاعة بس فاسدة

لاجل ما ولادك تشوف

يعرفوا اية اللي جارى

م اللي غير فى الحقيقة

واللى زور فى الكشوف

واحنا فى الوقت العصيب

الى فية لابد نعلم بالشفاف على ايد

طيب

عارف مشاعرك

لا يدخل غضب عنك جوة بيتك اى

ديب

وانت فى حالى انفجار

المروءة والشهامة والانتماء

ماشيين فى سكة الاحتضار

وانت ساكتة ومن سكونك ينولد كام

الف حية

يشربوا من بحر تانى

وانت عايزة بق مية وفلاحينك

والشادوف

عايزة لحظة تجمعى فيها الحروف

تقلع الباطل بجدره

والى مش شايف يشوف

30 يونيو 2005

كان طبيعى ان افكر وانتبه
واعمل حساب كل الظروف
والبد فى حضنك بالام
وسلاحة يدبج اى خوف
واخذ بسيف الحق حقى
وكلمتى ترص الصفوف
كلمة فيها المعنى يوصل
للى فاكرينها تكية
واللى فاهمنى هفية
بينهبوا ويضحوا بى وانديج وانا مش
خروف

كان طبيعى انى افهمهم واشوف
واسألك ازاي يا صابرة يشحتوك؟
وانت خيراتك صنوف
بس فى جيوب الاكابر
والمراكز اللى سيفهم فى الكلى والكبد
نافذ
ناس تخلص الجرح نازر
والكلام فى كل دار
حولوا خيرك لبره
سرقة وف عز النهار
والعجيب باين وانه

شكلهم ماهوش غريب كل يوم
بنشوف صورهم
واحنا فى عز اللهب
نصرخ غيتونا
يطلعوا لنا بلعبة تانية
ويسرقوك ويسرقونا
وتبقى للمجهول قضية
ياما راح منك يا صابرة
تحت بند الاكرامية
والعمولة والرشاوى المليونية
والعسس حامى اللصوص
فية قانون مفتول حباله

فبركة وماميهوش خوف ملكهم مطبخ

* صدر للشاعر ديوان جديد بعنوان «الكلام فى كل دار»، وهو عضو فى اتحاد كتاب مصر وعضو مجلس ادارة جمعية الادباء بمصر وصدر له عدة دواوين: اللى جرى كفى، اكتب شهادة وفاتنا يا امى يامه، نبيّن زين.

Translation of Newsletter Headings:

A Moment of Awakening

The Voice of the General Trade Union of Workers in the Real Estate Tax Collection
(Independent)

May 2009

A Member of Public Service International (PSI)

No. 4

And We Have Won!

International and Local Recognition of the First Independent Trade Union in Egypt
The Legality of the Union Began With the Acceptance of Our Registration Documents
on 21st April (page 1 of the newsletter)

A shining white light defeats “the yellow team” (page 2 of newsletter)

The Story of Our Union (page 3 of the newsletter)

The Problem of Implementing the Routine Rules number 19 for the year 2002 (page
4 of the newsletter)

Decisions (page 4 of the newsletter)

Please give me this medicine (page 4 of the newsletter)

An Administrative Unit without Staff/Cadre (page 5 of the newsletter)

Our Independent Union (page 5 of the newsletter)

Presenting our papers (documents) = the government’s recognition of our union
(page 5 of the newsletter)

The Men of Suez ... an event without embarrassment (page 6 of the newsletter)

The Victim of Injustice and the Victor (page 6 of the newsletter)

The Story of Labor Day (page 7 of the newsletter)

Labor Day...how can we consider it a holiday/a celebration? (page 7 of the
newsletter)

Secrets.... Day of Victory – Chants by an Activist (page 8 of the newsletter)

Day of Victory (page 9 of the newsletter)

Social Issues: Legal or Temporary (page 10 of the newsletter)

Enough those who are enemies of success (page 10 of the newsletter)

The Fruits of Strength (page 10 of the newsletter)

What is the Public Service International (PSI)? (page 11 of the newsletter)
Our legal existence and theirs...(page 11 of the newsletter)

Real Estate Tax Collectors Union – its organization; names of provinces and leaders in each (page 12-15 of the newsletter)

The First Independent Trade Union in Egypt develops its internal structure (page 16 of the newsletter)

Urgent to the Minister of Finance (page 16 of the newsletter)

The People's Representative Hamdeen Sabahi writes about: The Independent Trade Union (page 17 of the newsletter)

Congratulations to our Colleagues (page 18 of the newsletter)

Our Condolences (page 19 of the newsletter)

Poetry – Talk in every house; hit your head against the wall, cartoon (page 20 of the newsletter)

An Elusive Victory – Egyptian Workers Challenge the Regime
(2006-2012)

Heba Fawzi El-Shazli

**Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic
Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Planning, Governance and Globalization**

Joel Peters, Chair

Timothy W. Luke

Rachel M. Scott

Ariel I. Ahram

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January 2011 Uprising

**An Elusive Victory – Egyptian Workers Challenge the Regime
(2006-2012)**

**Appendix: B Examples of Other Significant Protests by
Egyptian Workers**

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Examples of Other Significant Protests by Egyptian Workers

The research presented thus far has focused on two types or categories of workers' protests: garment and textile workers specifically at El-Mahalla el Kubra and civil servants working as real estate tax collectors in the Ministry of Finance and municipal governments. The persistent wave of protests that lasted from 2006 to 2010 had an indelible effect on the rest of the working class, including white-collar professionals¹ in addition to blue-collar workers. In this appendix, I will review other worker protests, often referred to as "wildcat strikes",² their repertoires of contention, mechanisms of diffusion, and the framing of their grievances to contribute to an ever-growing worker-based social movement. This appendix will add empirical evidence obtained through research, observations, and interview notes to the overall research project. This information will show the wide breadth of worker's discontent and collective action to challenge the regime for improved working conditions, initially. Workers from so many different economic sectors were in protest over socio-economic grievances that evolved and became political statements of discontent with the regime.

It is interesting to note that civil servants were better positioned to create independent unions given the balance of forces in Egypt. Factors include the public feud between the minister of manpower and the head of the ETUF; the government's embarrassment over criticism of Egypt and the ETUF at the 2008 ILO conference and in other international forums; [then the placing of Egypt on

¹ White-collar professionals are organized into professional association referred to as syndicates, which wield power through their licensing authority. So for example for an journalist to practice his craft he/she has to be a member of the Journalists' Syndicate in order to receive their press credentials.

² Wildcat strikes are not sanctioned by the official ETUF trade union

ILO's black list of countries violating the fundamental convention #98: right to organize and bargain collectively]; the tax collectors' advantages of being able to temporarily suspended tax collection, thus impacting government's revenues; civil servants' independent unionization does not threaten the privatization of the public-sector enterprises; and civil servants are not employed by an institution with a high degree of historical and political symbolism like El Mahalla el-Kubra.³

The following are the most significant protests that took place from 2005 to 2010:

1. ESCO Spinning Company in Qalyub, north of Cairo, February to May 2005
2. Ghazl Shibin Spinning Company, which was sold and became the Indorama Shibin Spinning Company, 2006
3. Estimated 526,000 administrative workers in the Egyptian public school system, 2008-09
4. Postal workers threatened to create an independent union, 2009
5. Tanta Flax and Oil Company (Kitan Tanta), 2005-2010
6. Port workers at the Canal Company for Ports and Large Projects at the Suez Canal, 2008
7. Train drivers, January 2009
8. Omar Effendi department stores (retail workers) in Cairo, April to May 2009
9. Mansura-España Garment Company workers, April to June 2007
10. Information technology centers' workers, 2010
11. Teachers in elementary and secondary public schools, 2009-10

Background: The Legal Framework to Control Workers

In 1957, Egypt ratified the ILO convention No. 87 (1948) on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. In 1954, it ratified ILO Convention No. 98 (1949) on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. However, compliance with these conventions was undermined by national

³ Beinun, *Justice for All - The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, Washington, DC, The Solidarity Center, 2010:32

legislation, close links between the ETUF and the state apparatus, and intervention in trade union affairs by security forces, typically State Security. These state instruments were often involved in resolving “wildcat” strikes, protests, and prevention of independent labor organizations.⁴ As previously noted, the ETUF is closely aligned with the state apparatus with its leadership firmly under the control of the ruling party.

The Right to Strike in Egypt

It is important at this juncture to review parts of the Egyptian labor law that concerns strikes. Egyptian Labor Law No. 12 in 2003 also provided in Article 191: “(W)orkers have the right to a peaceful strike which is to be exercised by their unions in order to defend their vocational, economic, and social interests within the limits and according to the regulations stipulated in this law. If workers of an establishment that has a union decide to strike in the cases allowed under this law, the establishment’s union—following the approval of two-thirds of the members of the administrative board of the concerned general union—should notify the employer and the concerned government authority of the strike at least fifteen days in advance in a registered letter. If there is no union in the establishment, workers should notify the concerned general union of their intention to strike. In this case, the administrative board of the concerned general union—following the approval of the majority mentioned in the preceding clause—should make the aforementioned notification. In any case, the notification should include the reasons behind the strike action and its intended

⁴ Beinín, Joel. *Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, 2010, page 27

period.” Article 195 of Labor Law No. 12 of 2003 considers the period of the strike an unpaid leave for the worker.⁵

The following pages will present through mainly interview material the details surrounding the contentious actions by teachers, factory workers and information technology personnel.

Teachers on strike: “Education and Learning Are Not Taking Place in Egyptian Schools”

The overall decline in public education in Egypt is a result of the following factors: the dismal state of Egypt’s antiquated educational system, the decline of state investment in infrastructure and personnel, and the increase in class size. “Abdel Hafiez Tayel directs the Egyptian Center for Education Rights (ECER), an activist organization dedicated to pressuring the government into investing more into the education system. ECER just announced its report on the dismal state of Egypt’s education system. The report showed that the current budget in Egypt calls for spending \$757 US annually to educate one student, compared to \$8,000 in Saudi Arabia and \$11,000 in Israel.”⁶ Teachers are state employees and depend on the government to allocate enough funds in the state budget for salaries and benefits. As Egypt has been prescribing to neo-liberal economic reforms, education has become a scapegoat for government’s re-shifting of priorities while maintaining the most important state security apparatuses to keep the regime in power. The result has been a slow and gradual decline in the

⁵ <http://egypt.electionnaire.com/issues/?id=8> and <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/arabic/laws/labour/default.aspx>

⁶ Paul, A. “Egypt’s Labor Pains: For Workers, the Revolution Has Just Begun.” *Dissent* 58 (4): 11-14.

education system with teachers bearing the brunt. There are about 810,000 teachers from kindergarten to high school and about 28,000 school buildings.

It became apparent that government employees were better positioned than others to establish independent unions. The balance of power tipped toward those employees who could affect the government's performance and use that power to force the government to give in to their demands. This was clear with the Real Estate Tax Collectors when they closed their provincial offices and stopped collecting taxes. These taxes are direct revenue for the government and can impinge negatively on government's performance. The same situation describes another group of workers — 526,000 administrative workers in the Egyptian public school system. “These administrators — who manage student affairs, order and distribute school books, organization examination materials, and work in accounting, human resources, and legal affairs — demanded wage parity with teachers.”⁷ So when those administrators threatened to stop administering exams or not to order and distribute schoolbooks, it could have had a serious impact on millions of students.

Historically, the salaries of teachers and administrators were the same and very low. In 2007, under pressure, the Egyptian Parliament passed a bill to increase teachers' salaries but not the administrators' since they were not classified as “educational staff”.⁸ The ETUF affiliated union for educational services workers did not support their members' grievances. So these workers formed an independent committee to provide representation for them instead of

⁷ Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) report, “Subject to Discrimination” April 2009.

⁸ Beinun 2010:33

the official ETUF union. "The committee organized local strikes in several schools and local education authorities in February and March 2009, a demonstration in front of parliament on March 9, and a national school strike on March 29."⁹ Their demands then included the creation of an independent union to their demand for increase or parity in wages with teachers.

The teachers' advocacy for their rights continued after January 2011.

1st March 2011: More than 6,000 teachers went in strike today in front of the premises of the Administration of Education in the Governorate of Qena. They called for permanent jobs for the teachers working according to temporary contracts. The Minister of Education issued a decision yesterday to appoint all the teachers who worked as temporary employees for a period of three years on condition that they pass the "Cadre Examinations" which the Ministry will hold on March 25, 2011. Commenting on the Minister's decision, Mr. Essa Aly Mohamed, a teacher at Abu Mannaa Bahry School said it disappointed all the teachers employed by temporary contracts. He said that the strike will continue until the Ministry responds to their demands.¹⁰

Several additional workers and government employees threatened to form independent unions to advocate for their rights. They demanded improvements in working conditions, increase in wages (in many cases wage parity), and job security. In 2008-2009, postal workers, train drivers, and port workers were additional examples of such actions and how the government used State Security and the official trade union to pressure workers to end their protests and accept

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ CTUWS press release; http://ctuws.com/labour_movements/?item=836

an inept agreement. “On May 18, 2009, postal workers in Kafr al-Shaykh governorate went on strike for six days (...) They demanded wage parity with the Egyptian Telecommunications Company (ETC) workers, who earn up to three times as much as the 52,000 postal workers (....) They also demanded that the 5,000 temporary workers employed by the Postal Authority receive permanent status.”¹¹

Workers at Omar Effendi, the largest government-owned department store chain, also joined the strike wave, reported Carr, in April and May 2009. “(Workers) went out on strike for three days in April 2009 and again on May 5, 2009. In 2007, the Saudi Arabian-based clothing retailer, Anwal United Trading, bought a 90% share of the previously publicly owned firm. Strikers claimed that the new owners violated a contractual commitment that the work force would be cut by no more than 600 and that new employees had been hired at higher wages than more qualified workers doing the same work.”¹²

Garment and textile workers who were primarily women at the Mansura-España Garment Company protested for better working conditions and wages. “These women were the principal force behind a two-month strike April - June 2007. In the course of the strike, several women went on a hunger strike, and five threatened to commit suicide. Even though the strikers nominally won their demands, management and the government did not fulfill their promises. Their culturally supposed ‘docility’ and ‘traditional’ background did not inhibit active

¹¹Beinin 2010:34 and <http://www.arabawy.org/2009/06/08/disgruntled-postal-workers-call-for-independent-union/>

¹² Carr, Sarah, Daily News Egypt, April 2 and May 7, 2009 and from Beinin 2010:52

participation in the strike.”¹³ Women workers played an important role in several of the protest strikes that took place in Egypt from 2006 to 2011.

“Women are also part of this revolution,” is the title of a chapter in *Arab Spring in Egypt* by Sholkamy. She presents the concept of liminality which highlights that moments of solidarity and popular mobilization “are also ‘liminal’ moments in which hierarchies and structures of distinction are temporarily suspended (Turner 1969; 1974); they are also moments that (are) impossible to sustain as they are temporally and spatially bounded.”¹⁴ The liminal phase is when anything is possible under particular circumstances and taboos, rituals, and traditions are broken. “Liminal moments are wedged between two states of normalcy as they mark the disruption of one order and clear way the debris of what used to be the norms (...) In order to create a new set of norms.”¹⁵ Working women at the Mansura-España Garment factory, in addition to many other workplaces, engaged in those liminal moments and broke with traditions to advocate for their rights. They became “equal” with their fellow male workers and free from the strictures and structures that had defined them.¹⁶ This condition is defined by Turner as one of “communitas”,¹⁷ a necessary condition from which a transformed order emerges and into which women and others are reintegrated, creating a new state of relations between men and women workers in this particular situation. This condition of communitas existed in several

¹³ Beinin 2010:72

¹⁴ Sholkamy, page 154

¹⁵ Ibid. 155

¹⁶ Sholkamy page 155

¹⁷ Ibid.155

worker protests over the period of 2005-2010 and into those eighteen days in Tahrir Square in 2011 and beyond.

Sholkamy further supports the thesis of this research project: “(W)ith hindsight it is now clear that the protest movements that had been taking place for a decade, and that were initiated by rights activists belonging to workers’ and civil liberty groups and other social movements, became the revolutionary agglomeration that toppled the elite echelons of the regime.”¹⁸ The elements of time (more than a decade of organizing and protesting) and the increase in miserable economic and working conditions made these protest movements more successful despite the lack of a larger coordinating organizational body.

Privatization and workers’ fear of losing their jobs became a regular occurrence, and there are several examples. One example is the ESCO Spinning Company in Qalyub, 12 miles north of Cairo, where a strike took place from February to May 2005. “By 2005 the number of workers in the six ESCO textile mills had been reduced from more than 10,000 to 3,500 through a combination of attrition, early retirement, and a long-term hiring freeze following a major strike in 1986. When the 400 ESCO workers learned about its impending sale to an Egyptian investor they began a campaign to reverse the privatization of their workplace.”¹⁹ They wanted job security, and if that as not possible, then to receive adequate pensions. However, as soon as Prime Minister Nazif’s government took over in 2005, ESCO Qalyub Spinning Company’s privatization process began. This was part of a larger strategy of the privatization of the textile

¹⁸ Sholkamy, Hania. “Women are also part of this revolution,” *Arab Spring in Egypt*, editors Korany and El Mahdi, AUC Press, 2012, page 153.

¹⁹ Beinun 2010:48

industry as a whole. The ethos of the public sector being owned by the workers was still relevant, and so workers felt the sale of the company to private hands without their participation and consent was illegal. The ETUF affiliated union did not stand by the workers, and they supported the government's policies. "While the ESCO workers did not stop the privatization ... they did receive a pension package according to the Unified Labor Law of 2003. This strike set the tone for many that followed in the public sector... the ESCO workers conducted an orderly strike and sit-in. They were not subjected to violent repression. And they achieved economic gains well beyond anything that other striking workers achieved in the 1980s or 1990s. As a result, Egyptian workers received the message that collective action might achieve real gains."²⁰

Another example of privatization that became a disaster was the Ghazl Shibin Spinning Company, which was sold in 2006 and became the Indorama Shibin Spinning Company. The company employed 4,200 workers and was sold to a private foreign company. The contention between the workers and the new management continued from 2006 to 2009 with the management failing to meet the minimum agreements. The agreement stipulated that workers could take the early retirement package (referred to by workers as the "early death plan") in addition to not hiring any new employees until they reached the "optimal" workforce. "In February 2009, the company sent out a letter announcing that due to the international economic crisis it would not be paying workers their annual bonus, equivalent to 228 days' pay. This provoked an 11-day sit-in strike

²⁰ Ibid.

beginning on March 5.”²¹ In this case, the ETUF affiliated union supported the workers and after negotiations they did receive their bonuses. However, in May 2009, four of the strike leaders were punitively transferred to the company's warehouse in Alexandria. In addition, the company managers continued to accuse the workers for the company's financial losses. Indorama Shibin has experienced two major strikes and 100 brief work stoppages and other protests since it was privatized.²²

Tanta Kitan (Linen) Factory in the City of Tanta, El-Gharbiyya Province

On Tuesday, June 11, 2013, I met with three workers and trade union leaders from the Tanta Kitan factory, Gamal, Ashraf, and Mohammed²³ at a local coffee shop in the city of Tanta in the El-Gharbiyya province of the Delta region. Their story is that of struggle and sacrifice, and it begins one year before the January 2011 revolution. They told me that Hussein Higazy Street in front of the Council of Ministers headquarters building needed to be renamed “Egyptian Workers' Street” since it has witnessed so many protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins for days on end in the last few years in particular. The Tanta Kitan factory workers stayed in that street for seventeen days, probably the longest number of days compared to other worker protests. Tanta Kitan was (and in the workers' minds remains) a public sector factory. It was sold under suspicious terms to a Saudi investor, Abd el Ellahy El Kahky, who built the City Stars Mall in Nasr City in Cairo. This was a profitable factory that employed 2,300 hundreds of workers,

²¹ Beinin 2010:52

²² Ibid.52-53

²³ They asked me to use their first names only

but today there are 166 plus a few hundred contract workers earning about LE 500 (about \$71) per month. The ten factories in the complex make use of every part of the linen plant, including linseed oil, various types of linen, plywood, and even furniture.

The following narrative is their story in a detailed timeline based on the facts and stories that they shared with me.

2004 – This was the beginning of full privatization program. The prime ministers that implemented this full privatization program began with Prime Minister (PM) El Ganzouri, then by PM Atef Ebid and final coup de grace was delivered by PM Ahmed Nazif who took office in July 2004)

2005 - 2006 — There were successive problems between the new owners and the workers.

2007 – Tanta Kitan workers went on strike in addition to many other workers all over the country in a variety of workplaces such as building material workers, transport workers, Cairo underground metro workers, food processing workers, bakers, sanitation workers, oil workers in Suez, and many others.²⁴

2009 – Tanta Kitan workers held a thirteen-month strike where the infamous nine trade union leaders (union committee) were fired. This was actually the first ever “legal” strike because it was approved by the ETUF affiliated union (under the leadership of Saeed el Gohary, the ETUF garment and textile union president at the time). The strike initially lasted five days and then continued to thirteen months. It took the ETUF affiliated union six months to publicly announce that the strike was legally sanctioned. After those first six months, Minister of

²⁴ Beinun, *The struggle for worker rights in Egypt*, 2010, page 14.

Manpower Aisha Abdel Hady, Saeed el Gohary, and the Saudi owner signed an agreement without consultation with the workers or their leaders. The agreement stipulated the end of the strike, giving the workers six months leave without pay and that the workers had to pay back their social insurance payments for those six months. “Talk about a massive slap in the face,” said Gamal. “After that incredibly outrageous agreement, nine trade union leaders stayed in the factory for seven days in protest. And no one could move them off of the factory premises. For those six months they were able to get their base wages yet without any of the additional allotted allowances, etc.”

“The factory occupies a large space of land, approximately 74 feddans²⁵ and so it is a large complex that is worth a lot of money (for) just the land itself and this is without the buildings, equipment, and raw materials. It was sold for much less than its value, and rumor has it that the minister of manpower and the ETUF leadership received a monetary sum under the table to ensure that all goes smoothly and that the new owner does not have any labor trouble which was not the case,” said Ashraf.

January-February 2010 – Another strike began mid-January and lasted for seventeen days, one year exactly before the January 2011 uprising. One of their many chants was: “Build the walls/the fences of prison and make them higher; tomorrow is the revolution that will rise and bring down these fences.”

All three workers interviewed agreed to the commonly heard statement made by workers that the government's early retirement scheme is referred to as the “early death”. They usually received a lump sum payment between LE

²⁵ Feddan definition, an Egyptian unit of area equivalent to 1.038 acres

25,000 (\$3,571) to LE 50,000 (\$7,143), and then they received a monthly “pension of pittance” between LE 250 (\$36) and LE 300 (\$43). “The new Saudi-owned management forced those with terminal diseases to leave the factory so not to incur additional health insurance costs,” said Ashraf.

June 30, 2010 – An agreement was made with the Saudi owner in Beirut, Lebanon since there was a court order in Egypt against the new owner for two years prison. He was could not travel to Egypt or he would be imprisoned. There is an archaic statute called “attack on the rights of others” that was used in this case by Khaled Ali, the workers’ lawyer. The court, in this case specifically Judge Hamdy Yassin Okasha (head of the Judges’ Club in Maglis el Dawla) handed down a decision (72 pages long) in favor of the workers, but it has not been implemented. This court decision called for the Tanta Kitan factory complex to return to the government’s ownership as of 2005 and that the sale to the Saudi investor was null and void. “Sadly, the government after the 2011 revolution went to court to say it does not want Tanta Kitan factory back,” said Gamal.

Gamal, Ashraf, and Mohammed returned to sharing the details of the Beirut agreement between the Saudi owner and Minister of Manpower Aisha Abdel Hady. “The agreement called for 450 workers to go into immediate retirement on June 30(end of fiscal year). So Gamal, for example, was re-instated back to work on June 30 and then put on retirement on the same day, 30 June. This deal called for LE 50,000 (\$7,143) lump sum payment and then the small monthly pension thereafter. The local ETUF union committee and national union played an incredibly negative role adding more pressure on the workers. There was a lot of “buying time” through delays and wasting time. The next date

in court will be on September 28, 2013.²⁶ Today, two factories out of the ten are working and at one-third production rate with only one shift of workers at work.”

The Factors, and Organizations that Helped and Supported the Tanta Kitan Factory Workers

“The independent media played a very important role,” Ashraf said. “Daily there were news reports, articles, and headlines from *El Masry el Youm* newspaper to Al-Jazeera television broadcast. There was an independent union at the factory yet without an official name. They were daily fighting the ETUF affiliate union for survival and for the workers' rights. There were no profits, no raises, no meal allowances, and no promotions since the new Saudi owner took over. It seemed that they were running the factory into the ground on purpose in order to sell it as property and make a large profit. The workers were accused by (the) minister of manpower of being ‘politicized’ in a bad way and influenced by the Communists, Revolutionary Socialists, and others but not the MB,”²⁷ he continued. This tactic is similar to those carried out in Central and Eastern Europe, and former Soviet Union states and Russia post-Communism.

El Masry el Youm ran a report called: One night living on the street with

«the Tanta Kitan workers. ²⁸ «تفضى ليلة اعتصام كاملة مع عمال «طنطا للكتان» أمام

مجلس الوزراء فرشوا الأرض «كراتين» وأعدوا ١٢ «صفيحة جبنة»... وقالوا: ننتظر عودة نظيف

Translation: “*El Masry el Youm* spends the night in a full sit-in with the Tanta

Kitan workers in front of Ministers' Council; they spread cardboard boxes and

²⁶ The government again did not wish to re-possess the factory complex and the agreement has yet to be implemented leaving the workers in limbo

²⁷ Notes from interview with workers from Tanta Kitan Factory on Tuesday, June 11, 2013

²⁸ A report by *El Masry el Youm* journalist on one night spent with the workers on strike at a sit-in in front of the Prime Minister's office <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=244156>

prepared 12 large cans of cheese, saying: we are waiting for Nazif's return." A journalist spent the night with the workers during their sit-in and wrote a story. Gamal recounted parts of the story: "For about fifty to seventy meters on the pavement in front of the Council of Ministers' building on Hussein Higazy Street (which includes the Prime Minister's office) slept the workers for seventeen days. The businesses and inhabitants in the apartment buildings on the street were very supportive. There was one shoe maker/cobbler on the street who did have a hard time getting business, so Hussein el Masry (head of education and training at the CTUWS) asked him to make a pair of shoes for him just to give him some business. The food establishments all benefited from having the workers there day and night. Once the police and state security forces got so fed up with these hundreds of workers not leaving that they decided to cordon off the area and not permit them to leave to go to the bathrooms so the workers just went to the bathroom at the feet of the security. It sent a message. Then the workers' representatives told the security forces, 'the tents are coming tomorrow, and then our wives and children are coming too' the security forces recognized that these workers (were) not going anywhere and they (were) staying." Again, this is a preview of the Tahrir Square events, tactics, and repertoires.

According to Gamal and the others, there were several civil society organizations that helped the 450 striking Tanta Kitan workers for the seventeen days sleeping in front of the Council of Ministers building on Hussein Higazy Street. They were The National Organization for Change; Dr. Abdel Galleel; the CTUWS; the Kefaya movement, especially George Ishak, who brought thirty-seven blankets for the workers sleeping on the street; Hisham Fouad

representing the Revolutionary Socialists organization; the Lawyers Syndicate's human rights committee; the El Hillali Center; and the Solidarity Workers' Group led by Fatima Ramadan. They began a "living support fund" with each organization contributing about LE 1,000 to feed the workers. Tents were also brought in so that they could sleep in a bit warmer area since it was January and got cold at night. The tents caused lots of discomfort and anxiety for the police and state security forces since it meant that the workers (were) staying and not going anywhere. The state security apparatus did arrest for a few hours some of the supporters of the striking workers, including Fatima Ramadan and other activists. The workers got very irate and threatened to attack — the police then quickly released them. "Al-Jazeera news, written and television, also played an excellent role in keeping the issue alive," said Mohammed.

Gamal continued to say: "Daily the workers would release a press release, so they had seventeen in all, one for each day. They bought whistles and used them, which annoyed the Council of Ministers building employees. Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif got married during that time and so they chanted: 'Ya Nazif, ya aarees (new groom), we are sitting on the pavement; Ya Aisha [minister of manpower] the blind, you burned the banya (okra).' The Ghazl el Mahalla factory (Misr Spinning and Weaving factory in El Mahalla el Kubra) workers stood in solidarity with us and so did the Amonsquito factory workers, too. They protested in front of the Shura Council, and each day they removed one piece of clothing to protest." They had very creative mechanisms of protest, slogans, songs, and repertoires.

Ashraf shared information about another workers' protest movement at the Amonscito factory. He said, "Mohamed Farid Khamis, (a) well-established Egyptian investor in the tenth Ramadan industrial city, wanted to buy Amonscito factory, yet the workers knew his terrible, bad reputation and actions. So having knowledge played a good, important, and positive role, confirming the old adage that knowledge is power. Workers of the information centers, disabled workers, and the Amonscito workers all protested in front of the People's Assembly, too. So the government was under siege – protests and sit-ins at many of its institutions Hamdeen Sabahi (political figure, leader of Karama political party and ran for president after the uprising) came very often to check in and see how to help the striking Tanta Kitan workers. There was and still is a strong feeling that those industries that were nationalized under Nasser should never be privatized. The Tagamu political party also supported the workers. In the report of the manpower (labor) committee in the People's Assembly, there is great stuff, including Saeed el Gohary (president of the garment and textile workers affiliated with the ETUF) supposedly 'crying' for the workers. All the while Yusri Bayoumi, an MB member of parliament, quietly advised the workers to go against the management and to oppose the government. They were not upfront in their support at all."²⁹

The workers from Tanta Kitan Factory were not surprised by the January 2011 uprising for them it was just a matter of time. The uprising was a culmination of a tsunami of labor protests that had been taking place regularly for several years. "So January 25, 2011, was not a surprise at all," said Gamal. I

²⁹ Notes from interview with Tanta Kitan factory workers on Tuesday, June 11, 2013

asked, “Why were the workers not ‘obviously’ present in the first few days?” He responded, “1) anything that threatens their daily bread they are cautious about and not always eager to not get paid. 2) Bad to poor organizing; they did not come down to Tahrir as a block/group, they came as individuals — this changed as the days went on and Mubarak gave them one week paid vacation (first week of February 2011). Afterwards, they came in droves.”

Gamal continued, “On May 1, 2011, there was a huge worker presence in Tahrir Square. Public sector ideology needs to be understood and included in analysis – it is very hard for workers growing up under the Nasser days to give that up. So privatization has to be done very, very carefully, with the workers’ participation and understanding. We need a true labor and trade union law that is correct and fair. The public sector did play a good role – this cannot be ignored – it provided employment for so many (people), health insurance, and a living wage to eat and raise our families. With the sale of public sector companies, there are many unemployed workers, wages are still low, and consumer prices of goods are going higher daily. What is needed is good, expert management to make these public sector factories profitable and competitive.”³⁰

Gamal, Ashraf, and Mohammed, worked between 23 and 31 years at the Tanta Kitan factory and now get a pension of LE 200 (\$29) to LE 400 (\$57) per month. It is clear that for these workers and many others, privatization is a dirty word. Pension reforms have been negative for workers and government employees. They were also very keen to mention the “indispensable role of cell

³⁰ Notes from interview with workers from Tanta Kitan factory on Tuesday, June 11, 2013

phones” and how cell phones (mobiles) were effective organizing tools. There was no mention of Facebook or Twitter.

The Information Technology (IT) Centers' Workers: “We Just Want to Live” (November 2010)³¹

The number of workers in these centers for Information Technology (IT) is around 32,000, and the centers are located all over Egypt. They were hired as the result of a national contest held in 2001 and 2002 based on students' academic achievements and cumulative grades in college. These employees signed a document saying they would not take on additional part-time jobs so that they can be full-time focused on this work. Their salaries were LE 150 (\$21) per month for those with a university-degree, LE 120 (\$17) per month for those with a technical/vocational college degree, and LE100 (\$14) for those with a two-year associate's degree. They worked on several national projects gathering information and inputting data, such projects included a national literacy program; creation of tourist maps for the governorates; collection of data on the bread crisis and the bird flu epidemic; and field research on gathering data on numbers of street lights, numbers of water pumps, and wells in rural areas; initiatives for improving girls' education; the population census in 2006; and the census of disabled persons. These workers started their strikes and protests in March 2010 raising the following demands: 1) receive unpaid salaries several months past due and full salaries for some who had only been receiving LE 99 (\$14) for the last eight years; 2) end of contractual arrangement to make them

³¹ Information obtained from the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) Arabic press releases and personal interviews in June and July 2013.

full-time workers with benefits given to other civil servants, increase salaries and bonuses, create clear job descriptions, receive health insurance, and receive social security; and 3) regular payment of salaries every month instead of getting paid every three months per an agreement made between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local Development.

In March 2010, around 4,000 workers participated in a sit-in protest in front of the Council of Ministers' headquarters in Cairo, a favorite and effective gathering place for worker protests. They came from the following provinces: Beni Suewayf, Damietta, Kafr el Sheikh, Port Said, Alexandria, Sharqiyya, El Gharbiyya, Ismailia, El Minya, El fayoum, Sohag, Menoufiyya, Qena, Cairo, Giza, and El Behera. This protest included a large number of women who set up "picnic-style" blankets on the pavement facing the building, and many brought their children including babies. One of the female protesters said, "What can we do? The house is empty without food and money, we cannot leave our children alone at home, and we just cannot continue living this way." Many suffered from a lot of pressure by the governors to produce information, and the government refused many requests for days off or vacations, especially in Menoufiyya province. In Kafr el Sheikh province the governor threatened to fire the workers if they did not comply with his order to open literacy classes and work there, even though this project was considered voluntary. Fifty-three workers from all of the IT centers in the province then held a sit-in protest in front of the city council building. In El Minya province, security forces prevented a bus with IT center workers from leaving for Cairo to participate in the larger protest per the instructions of the governor. In Sohag province, 380 workers conducted a sit-in

protest with their families in front of the governor's office building as a result of the unreasonableness of the governor's actions and decisions.

One of the protesters reported that they presented more than three official signed petitions to the member of the parliament on the committee of grievances, Ehab Othman, and each time he told them to be patient and that he was working on their situation. Many parliament members took an interest in their situation so they presented a formal request on March 29, 2010, to the parliamentary committee for labor and social issues to discuss this problem. The members of the committee agreed to solve the problem by making all the IT center employees permanent civil servants and ensured they would receive their owed salaries within two weeks. Based on the committee's decision and declarations, the workers suspended the sit-in protest that had been taking place for nine days. However, the workers never got these basic demands met despite the parliamentary committee decision, and they returned to protest again on April 17, 2010. This time more than 1,500 workers protested in front of the parliament building, and this continued for thirty days. This resulted in repeated sessions of negotiations until finally an agreement was signed providing for the following: increase in salaries so that the minimum wage is LE320 (\$46) for those with technical college degrees, LE381 (\$54) for those with university degrees; yearly raises; and to transfer their current work contracts to permanent employment civil servants' contracts. At the same time, the government announced the allocation of LE150 million from the state budget to raise salaries in the IT centers, which meant an increase of LE100 million from the current allotment in the budget. The increase in wages would begin from July 2009. The story does

not happily end here, for on September 14, 2010, over 4,000 workers returned to a sit-in protest in front of the Cabinet of Ministers' building to demand that the aforementioned signed agreement be implemented.

These workers continued to push for the implementation of the signed agreement. They faced many threats of firings and some were transferred to other IT centers far from their homes. Supervisors implemented rigid work rules, and there were threats of reporting workers to State Security. Then came another insult: the salaries were paid but at the old rate. These protests continued again in October and November 2010 without serious resolution or implementation of the negotiated agreement. One female protester said, "My husband does not work regularly, and when he does he brings home LE 300 (\$43) and my salary is LE 119 (\$17). We have three children and two of them go to school. Our combined salary is around LE 400 (\$57), and we cannot afford to buy two kilos of meat (about LE 160=\$23) in one month. After we slept on the pavement, they promised us that our salaries would increase to LE 300 (\$43), which is really not enough money but it is at least something a little more to help us live. That is all we are asking for, we are not asking for more, we just want to live."³²

³² Information obtained from the Center for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS) Arabic press releases and personal interviews in June and July 2013.