

Thousands of textile workers strike in defiance of Egyptian dictatorship

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Thousands of textile workers in Egypt are on strike for higher wages and better working conditions in defiance of the brutal Western-backed dictatorship of General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

On Thursday, the *Middle East Eye* reported that as many as 16,000 workers were involved in the walkout at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company (MSWC), Egypt's largest state-owned textile mill, located in the Nile Delta City of Mahalla al-Kubra. Overall, MSWC employs more than 25,000 workers.

Six thousand workers struck the company on August 5, demanding improved wages and benefits and the payment of delayed bonuses. On August 8, 10,000 additional workers joined the strike and refused to resume work after management met with workers' representatives and offered a 10 percent basic salary rise. The workers rejected the offer and said they would end the strike only if their demands, which also include an increase in their share of the company's profits, an increased food allowance and changes in promotion policy, were met.

One of the striking workers, who spoke to the Egyptian online newspaper *Mada Masr* under the condition of anonymity, reported that the strike was being carried out at all of the company's plants, including eight spinning factories, seven cloth factories, one wool factory, one grille workshop, 11 textile factories and the garage, electricity and water departments.

Speaking to the Egyptian daily *Al Ahram*, Faisal Loksha, a leading strike activist, described the strike as a "final escalation." He said, "For the past couple of weeks, we have organised short rallies inside the factory after working hours, demanding the raise. As our demands had not been met, we decided to go on a full strike in the factory."

Mahalla al-Kubra is a historic center of working-class struggle in Egypt. Workers at MSWC mounted massive strikes against the regime of former dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2006 and 2008 and played a key role in the mass revolutionary struggles in 2011 that brought down Mubarak. In December 2012, amid rising working-class opposition to Islamist President Mohamed Mursi, workers and students in Mahalla declared themselves "autonomous" from what they called Mursi's "Muslim Brotherhood State."

The current strike in Mahalla reflects growing working-class opposition to al-Sisi's counterrevolutionary military dictatorship that has killed and jailed tens of thousands of political opponents since the July 2013 military coup against Mursi, and is now preparing an all-out assault against the working class. On May 22, security forces violently dispersed a sit-in strike at the privately owned Tourah Cement Company in southern Cairo, detaining 32 workers who were demanding full-time contracts.

The current strike erupted after Egypt's consumer price inflation jumped to 33 percent in July—the highest rate since the floating of the Egyptian pound last November, following a \$12 billion loan approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As part of the IMF-dictated austerity package, the regime last month raised fuel prices by up to 50 percent and imposed severe cuts to the bread subsidies upon which masses of impoverished Egyptians depend.

With the economic and social crisis in Egypt deepening and protests and strikes once again on the rise, fear of another revolution is rising among the imperialist powers. A recently published paper by the European Council on Foreign Relation titled "Egypt on the edge: How Europe can avoid another crisis in Egypt" warns: "The Egyptian economy is the most

pressing cause for concern in the country today. Since the 2011 revolution, political instability and security fears have deterred investors and tourists, causing revenues to plummet. The political repression instituted by Sisi has only exacerbated the situation.”

The authors continue: “All signs point to the continuation, and indeed escalation, of social and economic protests motivated by local, sectarian and even nationalistic considerations. Not all protests are politically inspired, but it is unwise to overlook the discontent that is simmering in Egyptian society. The 2011 revolution was preceded by thousands of protests, sit-ins and strikes organised by the labour movement; they could be playing the same role today. Sisi would ignore the discontent of Egyptians at his government’s peril.”

The imperialist powers may be concerned that Sisi’s repression is only fueling another social explosion, but their reaction is to arm his regime to the teeth. On Tuesday, the Egyptian Navy, at a ceremony in Kiel, received its second of four Type 209/1400 submarines from German shipbuilder Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems. According to media reports, the contract for the four vessels is worth some €1.4 billion.

In April, US President Donald Trump welcomed al-Sisi to the White House in a public demonstration of support for his bloodstained regime. After Israel, Egypt is the second-biggest recipient of US military and economic aid in the region. The central function of the massive Egyptian military apparatus, funded by \$77 billion in US aid over three decades, is to police the largest and strongest working class in the Arab world.

As of this writing, the strike is continuing. Reports indicate that the regime is not willing to meet the demands of the workers and is preparing for a confrontation. Speaking to *Ahram Online*, MP Nemat Amar of Mahalla urged the workers to end their strike. He claimed that they did not have the right to ask for the special wage increase promised by al-Sisi and the Egyptian parliament, as it applies “to the workers and employees of the ministries and general authorities only.”

The Egyptian daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reported that the Gharbiya Security Directorate deployed troops to the entrances and exits of Mahalla, along with secret agents to quickly control the workers should marches or protests break out.

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