

Thousands of textile workers strike at Egypt's largest industrial plant in Mahalla al-Kubra

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While the imperialist powers support Israel's genocide against the Palestinians, resistance is growing in the working class against their Arab stooge regimes. A particularly significant development is the current strike of several thousand textile workers in Egypt.

On Sunday, the Egyptian online newspaper *Mada Masr* reported that workers have been on strike at the largest state textile factory in Egypt, the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company (MSWC) mill, since Thursday. The company is located in Mahalla al-Kubra, a city in the Nile Delta where MSWC employs tens of thousands of workers.

The strike erupted in factories predominantly employing women, who were already "at the forefront" of important strikes in the past, *Mada Masr* reported. Hanan, a factory supervisor, reported that the workers started chanting slogans and then stopped work as the chants spread from one factory to another.

Security forces tried unsuccessfully to suppress the walkout. The report explained, "security personnel sealed off exits to prevent the women from spilling into the complex's central square, known as Talaat Harb Square. This security measure was also enforced at the power station... Security personnel unlocked the factory gates around 3pm on Thursday, half an hour before the end of the morning shift, to ensure that workers exited the premises and did not gather inside."

The protests grew, nevertheless. On Saturday, about 7,000 workers flocked to Talaat Harb Square to reiterate their demands for higher wages and better working conditions. Among other things, they demanded that their daily food allowance be increased to 30 Egyptian pounds (LE). Even this amount, equivalent to around 90 US cents, would hardly cover the price of "one liter of milk," the workers chanted. At the same time, they called for the implementation of the

recent increase in the minimum wage for the public sector. "Where is Sisi's decision?" they demanded to know.

Fearing a social explosion, the military dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in power since 2013, ordered the monthly minimum wage to be raised from 4,000 LE (US\$129) to 6,000 LE (US\$194). For certain employment groups, possible additional increases of 1,000 to 1,200 LE were mooted.

Mada Masr reported that although the MSCW is state-owned, it does not fall within the scope of the presidential wage increase, according to the Egyptian Ministry of Finance. Even if it did, in view of the galloping inflation of over 30 percent, this would hardly change the bitter poverty and exploitation of the workers.

A worker told *Mada Masr* that after more than 25 years he does not earn more than 4,000 LE per month. Another worker, Abdullah, says that after 33 years with the company, his salary is 4,200 LE. Hanan, who is about to retire, receives a salary of about 6,200 LE.

The unions, confronting a rebellion by workers, urged the government to make concessions. "The only way to resolve this crisis is to respond quickly to the call for the minimum wage to be applied to all workers in other sectors," the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS) said in a statement Saturday. The CTUWS officials added, "the planned increase does not correspond to the largely high inflation rates."

Trade union NGOs such as the CTUWS, which are traditionally supported by pseudo-left forces such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), are nervous above all because Mahalla al-Kubra is a historic centre of the class struggle in Egypt. In 2006 and 2008, the textile workers of Mahalla organized mass strikes against the regime of former dictator Hosni Mubarak. Just three

years later, they played a key role in the revolutionary struggles that led to Mubarak's overthrow in February 2011.

The Mahalla's strike shows the growing opposition of the working class to al-Sisi's counter-revolutionary military dictatorship, which has arrested and murdered tens of thousands of political opponents since its July 2013 military coup in an effort to drown the Egyptian revolution in blood. Prior to al-Sisi's state-orchestrated re-election last December, the regime further intensified repression. As an appendage of imperialism in the region, it plays a key role in facilitating the US-backed Israeli genocide of the Palestinians.

The growing resistance in Egypt is part of an international movement of the working class against militarism, war, social cuts and dictatorship. To succeed, this movement requires an independent revolutionary perspective and a socialist program.



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