

MOUVEMENT COMMUNISTE & KOLEKTIVNĚ PROTIKAPITALU

EGYPT:

**A HISTORIC COMPROMISE
OVER AN ATTEMPT AT
DEMOCRATIC INSURRECTION**

NOTE TO THE READER

We thank Mr. G. Bouvin who, as the editor responsible, makes it possible for us to legally publish and distribute this publication. We wish to point out that Mr. G. Bouvin is not responsible for the political content of the articles and, more generally, for the programmatic positions defended in our press.

PRESENTATION

This document is simultaneously published in three languages: Czech, English and French. This is not because we are such efficient translators but because it is the result of a common work by speakers of these three languages since its very conception. It is a work jointly performed by comrades from KpK, MC and others. We hope that this first step of common political work will be confirmed and amplified in a way which tends towards the unification and centralization of communists.

CONTACTS

For contact:

Kolektivně proti kapitálu

See the web site: <http://protikapitalu.org/>

Mouvement Communiste

For all correspondence, please write, without adding else to the address, to: BP 1666, Centre Monnaie 1000, Bruxelles 1, Belgium.

See the web site: <http://www.mouvement-communiste.com>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>WHAT HAPPENED IN 2011</u>	3
INTRODUCTION	3
CHRONOLOGY	4
SOCIAL MOVEMENT	4
<u>BACKGROUND OF EGYPTIAN SITUATION</u>	5
SOME ECONOMIC KEY FACTS	5
INTRODUCTION	5
ECONOMIC GROWTH IS BASED ON SHAKY FOUNDATIONS	7
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMY	7
THE STRUCTURE OF THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMY	9
RAPID POPULATION GROWTH	13
CLASS COMPOSITION	14
THE ROLE OF THE ARMY IN THE ECONOMY	15
THE CREEPING OPPRESSION OF WOMEN	16
A BIT OF HISTORY	16
THE CONTINUING APPEAL OF RELIGION	17
WOMAN: SLAVE OF MEN	17
HONOUR CRIMES	17
A LOWER STATUS	18
A LIMITED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT	19
<u>A BIT OF GEO POLITICS</u>	19
USA GAMBLE	19
WHY TURKEY AND NOT EGYPT?	20
<u>THE PILLARS OF SOCIAL COMPROMISE</u>	22
POWER OF THE ARMY	22
PRESENTATION	22
ORGANIZATION OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY	22
BUDGET	22
STRUCTURE	23
SOME HISTORICAL FACTS	23
EVOLUTION	23
THE ARMY, AN ECONOMIC POWER	23
THE POWER OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERS	24
A LONG HISTORY	24
THE RETURN TO THE SCENE	26
NOW	29

OPPOSITION: THE VACUUM	32
POLITICAL PARTIES	32
UNIONS	33
ON THE WORKING CLASS SIDE	34
<hr/>	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORKERS' STRUGGLES IN EGYPT	34
BACK TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	34
THE ATTEMPT AT A BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION	35
AFTER INDEPENDENCE, 1952-1984	36
FROM BREAD RIOTS TO MUBARAK'S FALL	37
RECENT WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES	38
PRESENTATION	38
CHRONOLOGY	38
SOME ANALYSIS	50
CONCLUSION	52
<hr/>	
DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS, FREEDOM AND COMMUNISM	52
WHAT WAS IT THAT IGNITED THE EVENTS?	52
WHAT WERE THE MAIN DEMANDS?	52
WHAT HAS THE WORKING CLASS ACHIEVED IN THIS MOVEMENT?	53
WORKERS AND OPPRESSED CLASSES	53
WHAT COULD HAPPEN?	54
A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WHAT'S GOING ON	54
POLITICAL SCENARIOS	54
THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	55
THE WORKING CLASS	55
APPENDIXES	57
<hr/>	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	57
IN ENGLISH	57
IN FRENCH	57
MAPS	58

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2011

INTRODUCTION

In the wave of riots and uprisings that have shaken the Arab countries since December 2010, Egypt appeared on the stage straight after Tunisia. But there were dramatic differences, not only because of the size of the country and its geopolitical importance, not only because of the number of dead (864) and injured (roughly 9,000), not only because the economic background and development of capitalism were different, but because the two major actors of the regime change were different. In Egypt it was a social compromise between the Army and the Muslim Brothers rapidly appearing on the scene (but not right at the start of the movement) that determined the pace of events.

Contrary to Tunisia, there was no union like the UGTT and even fewer political parties able to play any part. This compromise worked, as the results of the referendum on constitutional reform in March showed. But, as with every compromise, each side is trying to push the balance in its favour at the expense of the other. The refusal of the government to accept an IMF loan of \$3 billion on 7 July, after first requesting it, and its choice of Islamic bank funding instead is clearly a victory for the Muslim Brothers against the Army, which was in favour of IMF loans.

Within this narrow framework, the movement against the Mubarak regime and for democratic demands tried to elbow its way in but, up to now, it has not been able, despite many attempts, to overcome the limits which have afflicted it from the beginning. Remaining a desperate minority, it is not able to incorporate all the layers of Egyptian society, including the poorest of the poor living in the Cairo slums, not to mention the poor peasants who still represent 40% of the population.

Even in the sectors of the Egyptian proletariat with jobs, the figures are not so encouraging, or at least don't appear to be on the level of "strikes", "discontent", "something going on". Obviously, the lack of detailed and accurate data is a big burden that prevents us from making definitive statements. Nevertheless, although the working class has been a significant factor amongst others in the toppling of Mubarak, there has been an almost complete absence of any strikes or agitation in some important sectors like the Army owned factories and the industrial sized tourism sector, while others have been going on.

Egypt is important in the Middle East scene both for geopolitical and religious reasons. The USA was aware of what happened in Tunisia, favoured reform from the top and wanted to see the Muslim Brothers participating to a compromise rather than being fiercely in opposition. But they kept a close watch on the situation, partly because, in the Sunni world, Cairo is gaining predominance against Mecca, and Saudi Arabia is still the best partner of US in the area.

What is sure is that in all the Arab countries, including Egypt, people are not struggling for communism (however we might define this word, at the very least a classless society) but for Democracy. And what we have to explain is what this Democracy and all the democratic demands mean, by examining deeply what is going on in these countries, even under the umbrella of a still powerful army. Given that the main actor of transformation towards communism is absent from the front line, we must question if Democracy is "the rifle at the shoulder of the Proletariat" or "the best capitalist trap to bury the Proletariat". Perhaps it is something in between.

The text therefore includes:

- What happened in 2011,
- Background of the Egyptian situation,
- A bit of geopolitics,
- The pillars of social compromise,
- On the working class side,
- An attempt at a conclusion,
- Appendixes.

CHRONOLOGY

For a detailed chronology refer to website (<http://www.comunist-movement.com>)

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

We have to make one thing clear from the beginning, which relates to the question of an Internet Revolution as mentioned many times in the world media and among activists. It was certainly not a revolution. As Mubarak fell, not only did the state not change but social relations both in workplaces and outside did not change. As for the internet, nobody can deny that the internet was used to call people to demonstrations, but when we consider the number of people connected¹, it's clear that only a very small number of people were involved in the movement through the internet. Obviously (limited) access to the internet is not the only means by which people can gather. If we want to put the emphasis on one thing connected with the February events it is the number of dead and injured people. This proves that a movement has a price to be paid, not on the internet, but in the blood that courageous demonstrators shed.

The majority of the Egyptian population didn't participate in this "spectacle of revolution". The workers with settled jobs did participate in actions in their workplaces, many more than participated in open strikes, by making traditional demands around wages and hours, and, even more so, to get rid of corrupt managers and union bureaucrats too close to the bosses and the old regime.

Workers with a settled job are a minority of the Egyptian working class. In the suburbs and in the poor neighbourhoods it is the informal economy, which we know little about, that is dominant. In those places, at the beginning of the movement police stations were attacked and burned and some cops' guns were stolen, but never used. This reaction against the police came only as a defensive measure after the police attacked first. In Suez, the reaction of demonstrating workers was against the private militia of one of the wealthiest bosses (owner of factories, TV networks and a luxury car dealership). When the demonstration was near the car dealership, the "guards" shot without warning "to protect cars". Then the demonstrators stormed the offices there, and in other places that belonged to this boss.

If we must talk of violence we have to enter the mysterious realm of the *baltaguya* – hoodlums of the underworld used by the authorities to keep the lid on the social pressure-cooker – where nothing takes place openly.

There is an atmosphere of semi-riots with fights between areas. It's called "*thar*", a kind of mass vendetta. Quite often those fights involve Copts and Muslims living in different

¹ According to World Bank, in 2009, 4% of the population (workplaces included) have a computer and 1% a internet access. (See <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/egypt/personal-computers-per-100-people-wb-data.html>). Data from Pyramid Research indicates that the 10% of the population have a computer and 10% have internet access.

zones. It's pretty difficult to understand precisely what is at stake in those confrontations. The gangs who were used by the caciques of the fallen regime are still operating.

These agitations don't seem to perturb the economic order. Contrary to what is happening in the Maghreb countries young people aren't "propping up the walls" all day long. There are no "hittistes", the young unemployed, usually massively involved when a riot starts. The massive poverty in Cairo is linked to a very high level of activity. Mainly informal, very low level business, for example the distribution of goods imported from China.

But this situation doesn't produce any kind of general revolt - the state is far away and the exploitation relationships are dissolved in the informal economy. The social disorder is the apparent sign of a reorganization of the economy, but a reorganization still controlled by the caciques. It's what happened in the 1990s, when a new hierarchy took the place of the old notables, constituting a new hierarchy's Islamic racketeering.

Egypt isn't Algeria and the social peace doesn't need to be imposed by heavily armed anti-riot cops. Poor people massively accept the social order. Their main demand is about dignity "we are human beings, not dogs". For instance, the inhabitants of an Alexandria slum burned down an administrative headquarters because a rumour said that a petition had been thrown in the bin.

When the movement broke the surface, once it had been empowered by the presence of the Muslim Brothers militants, the government used many different means to fight against it. In the open were the various police forces, and behind the scenes there were secret police members or militants of the NDP, or gangs. This allowed the government to use a two-level repression. First the police at the front, then the others behind to create terror and reduce people's confidence. Once the police were invited to stay at home, people from various neighbourhoods of Cairo began to organize self-protection in form of informal "popular militia" that were in charge of checking who wanted to come into the neighbourhood when they were unknown or not accompanied by well-known people. Often this was a bit paranoid but at other times it helped to arrest some plain-clothes cop or push back some enemies. Nevertheless, at the check points many people were discussing the situation and what to do for the success of the revolution. Certainly this is a good thing but, compared to the number of people involved in the events, it remained a surface phenomenon.

BACKGROUND OF EGYPTIAN SITUATION

SOME ECONOMIC KEY FACTS

Introduction

In Egypt, as in Tunisia, rising food prices were one of the major triggers of the protests. Despite the fertile Nile Delta, Egypt needs to import large quantities of food (it's the world's largest importer of wheat).

Rising food prices have an immediate effect on its people's ability to meet their basic needs (in Egypt, the food makes up 50% of household spending). So far, governments have tried to limit the impact of rising food prices through subsidies, but the high budget deficit limits this flexibility.

Contrary to the Tunisian economy, the structure of Egypt's economy depends to a large extent on rent. Although the proportion of rent relative to GDP is lower than in the years '74-'86² (37% of GDP and 130% of total exports of goods and services), it is currently around 20%.

2 Ressources exogenes et croissance industrielle: le cas d'Egypte by H el ene Cottenet

This rent has several components: tourism, Suez Canal revenues, remittances from expatriates, revenue from hydrocarbons (oil and gas taxes and royalties) and various forms of foreign aid, including from the US. These resources have largely taken precedence over the export of cotton, rice and other agricultural products.

Rent and rentier states

By nature every state is rentier because it takes rent under form of taxes, etc. What we call a rentier state is a state that gains a great part of its income from the rent produced by a raw material (for example, agriculture for Argentina in the first 50 years of the twentieth century, cacao for Ivory Coast, or oil for various countries from Venezuela to the Middle East) and that is unable, along with the ruling class as a whole, to accumulate capital in the zone where it holds power, to the level of development of the world market.

The rest of the Egyptian economy is focused primarily on the following areas (to which we'll return later): agriculture, textiles, construction, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, banking, steel production and a large "grey" economy more difficult to quantify³.

The change in the economic and social structure, initiated at the end of the reign of Gamal Abdel Nasser, after the defeat of the Six Days War in 1967, was pursued by Anwar Sadat (under the policy of so-called "infitah", economic openness) then by Hosni Mubarak⁴. This migrated the majority of public sector businesses developed during the fifties and sixties to the private sector. This change is a reflection of the state's inability to adequately manage the industrialization of Egypt rather than a stated desire to liberalize the economy.

This privatization caused the emergence of a class of beneficiaries, proponents of rentier capitalism, closely linked to the state apparatus, and therefore to the army, and has largely resulted in a deterioration of living conditions for most Egyptians, particularly peasants, workers and the middle classes who constitute the vast majority of the population (an estimated 40% of Egypt's population lives on around \$US 2 per day).

Egypt's economy has been resilient in the face of the crisis of 2007-2009, not because it is flourishing, but rather because the financial contagion has been contained by limited direct exposure to structured products, low levels of financial integration with the global financial markets, the lack of a pension system financed by pension funds, etc.⁵. If before the crisis, the growth rate was around 7%, it was 4.7% in 2009 and around 5.1% in 2010.

As for the public and private sector contributions to economic growth during the reporting year, the public sector generated 1.1% (against 1.4% a year earlier), and the private sector 4.0% (against 3.3%), indicating the key role played by the latter in economic development. The main contributors to economic growth were the sectors of manufacturing,

3 "The analysis of the economic situation, depending on official data, cannot take into account the informal sector. It cannot be ignored, however. It involves in fact between 27% and 40% of the workforce according to various sources which may involve some duplication, and up to 40% of private economic units are not reported. The consequences of this are considerable, both on a social level, because of the lack of protection (health, pensions) for employees, and the tax shortfall that results for the state coffers, as well as inconveniences such as the absence of control over the quality of products. The government has started thinking about legalising the shadow economy, but the process will be long considering the issues around employment, and access to consumption for small budgets and production." (Sophie Pommier. *Egypte, l'envers du décor. La Découverte*. P.154)

4 Egypt embarked on the liberalisation of its economy in 1974, but it is still under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, to widen this process and bend it to the laws of international competition. It waives its protectionist policies and so will benefit from additional international aid. Trade with the EU will accelerate from the early 2000s. Exports were 2 to 7 \$billion between 2001 and 2006, while imports increased from 5.2 to 11 \$billion.

⁵ IMF Country Report No. 10/94 – April 2010).

wholesale and retail trade, construction and building, tourism, and agriculture. At the level of the public sector, the main driver of growth was the general government⁶.

This growth is polluted by a rather high inflation (16.2% in 2008, 12% in 2009 and 10% in 2010) and by a high unemployment rate, particularly among young people and graduates (the average age is 24.8 years). The official rates are 9.2% in 2007, 8.1% in 2008 and 9% in 2009 (IMF), but the actual rate must be much higher (unemployment at least 50% for the age range 15 – 29)⁷.

Egyptian production, if we look beyond the favourable macroeconomic figures, generally suffers from a lack of competitiveness, a shortage of trained staff, exports of low value-added products (raw materials, aluminium, cotton, semi-finished products, basic pharmaceuticals.), a major lack of infrastructure, non-observance of contracts, and corruption.

The latter, far from declining, is almost universal and not just confined to the public sector. According to Transparency International, the "corruption index" of Egypt between 2005 and 2007 increased from 3.3 to 2.9 on a scale of 10 (0 is the worst).

Economic growth is based on shaky foundations

The pillars of Egyptian economic growth are traditionally tourism, money transfer, Suez Canal revenues and oil. But they are now suffering a downturn:

- Tourism is subject both to the economic conditions in countries where tourists come from, and also threats of terrorism (Egypt has seen several bombings in recent years which have temporarily scared off tourists).
- Money transfers from expatriates are in direct proportion to the health of economies that employ them, and are therefore also dependent on the economic fortunes of other areas. They also depend on the evolution of migration policies, themselves linked to economic cycles (preference given to workers from South and South East Asia relative to those from Arab countries).
- The Suez Canal revenues are sensitive to economic conditions, the commissioning of new pipelines which compete with it, and also the problem of piracy near the Red Sea off the coast of Somalia.
- The oil resources are dwindling (production is constantly decreasing and does not even cover domestic consumption). Egypt has to import oil (expensive) and to subsidize the price (a double penalty). Gas is doing better and new deposits are discovered regularly. There is the beginning of a substitution of oil energy with gas.

To add to this, the education sector is in complete decay. It is damaged. Teachers are not paid and are virtually forced to turn to private lessons to get by. In public education, the emphasis is on learning by heart and educational attainment is at a very low level, to the point where Egyptian private companies are turning to the better qualified Indian workforce, despite cheaper labour power in Egypt.

The transformation of the Egyptian economy

If the Nasser period meant a protectionist and "socialist" economy with its succession of nationalisations (especially in textiles) along with pharaonic works like the building of the Aswan dam, along with the creation of heavy industry (steel mills, foundries, cement works)⁸, in the early '70s Sadat set Egypt on the road to liberalization.

⁶ Source: Central Bank of Egypt, Annual report 2009/2010

⁷ *Confluences Méditerranée* n°75

⁸ But also, as mentioned below, the modern factories run by the army, already built in the late '50s.

The beginning of this overhaul of the economy is in a period marked by a record growth rate. The years 1974-1985 were years of economic splendour because of rising oil prices, a massive influx of foreign currency from Egyptian expat labour in the Gulf, and a significant increase in tourism.

*"Under the policy of "denasserisation", the confiscation of assets carried out in the 1960s is declared illegal, foreign investment becomes the key to development and import-export activities open to the private sector."*⁹

But this policy of economic *infatih* was not without social consequences that strongly marked the reign of Mubarak. The agrarian reform of 1974 which restored the land to its former owners ruined a large number of peasants. Many officials (there was serious overstaffing in the previous government) were faced with a drastic reduction in their wages and a deterioration of their living conditions, leading to unrest against the rising price of bread in 1977.

In 1979, the signing of a peace treaty with Israel resulted in the exclusion of Egypt from the Arab League, and the abolition of the related aid. This loss was offset by the peace premium granted by the USA.

In the early years of Mubarak (Sadat was assassinated in 1981) the economic environment was still favourable. This enabled him to make concessions to public officials and to largely subsidize certain parts of the economy (energy, staple goods, transportation, housing, etc. ...). But this improvement was quickly overshadowed by the counter-cost of the oil crisis and rising population pressure. The Egyptian government was forced to rely heavily on foreign debt and to cut some subsidies, while trying to preserve social peace.

A precarious balance, if it was one... In a critical situation and on the verge of bankruptcy, the Egyptian state was forced to sign an agreement with the IMF, who imposed drastic measures including cutting subsidies, suppressing the shadow economy, etc. It didn't have the political means to implement this agreement.

The war against Iraq in 1991 came at the right time for Egypt. Indeed, the Egyptian state, almost bankrupt, joined the American camp and was greatly rewarded for this with new aid.

"Cairo got from its Club de Paris Western debtors the cancellation of half of its 20 billion dollar debt and the rescheduling of the remaining 10 billion. In return, this time it had to undertake reforms and implement the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the IMF Agreement (May 1991) and the World Bank (Agreement of November 1991), although a flexible schedule was authorized to prevent further rioting".¹⁰

There followed a slightly more favourable period (higher oil prices) and the Egyptian state increased its spending again, accompanied by a wave of privatization in food and beverage, hospitality and construction.

But in 1993-1994, due to various factors (reorientation of Western aid to Eastern Europe, falling revenues from the Suez Canal), the situation deteriorated. The government had to reorient its spending towards the security forces and their administration to deal with the Islamism "Renaissance" of the Muslim Brotherhood, and towards attempts to create ideological counters, for example, by supporting thousands of associated mosques. These expenses were made to the detriment of the productive sectors, education, etc.

"The reform program was recovering and still running in the second half of 1990 with the sale of new public companies and the liberalization of land rents, completed in 1997, which eventually did not cause the feared peasant mobilization. In the course of the decade,

9 Sophie Pommier. *Egypte, l'envers du décor. La Découverte*. P.155

10 Sophie Pommier. *Egypte, l'envers du décor. La Découverte*. P.155

domestic borrowing, undertaken to fund major projects and loans to businessmen, took precedence over external debt. It was funded through pension funds by means of the National Investment Bank, Treasury bonds, and Treasury bills. This public debt is now one of the main black marks on the economic picture."¹¹

The early 2000s were marked by a slowdown of the economy (still expanding at around 3%) leading in 2003 to the dropping of the link between the Egyptian pound and the dollar, allowing a devaluation of the Egyptian pound, leading to improved price competitiveness.

The year 2004 marked the acceleration of reforms of the economic structure. Privatization was revived, particularly in the area of banking, telecommunications, retail trade, cement.

In 2005, there was nearly 600 million dollars of revenue from this process, and nearly triple that in 2006. Customs procedures were streamlined, fees were strongly reduced and the state set up free trade zones (QIZ¹² - Qualified Industrial Zones) which opened the US market for Egyptian textiles.

To stimulate consumption and fight against fraud (less than half the tax returns are completed each year), in 2005 the state cut income taxes (from 40% to 20% for higher income and 27% to 10% for low income) and on profit (consolidated at 20%).

In 2007 the government made some amendments to the Constitution and removed any reference to socialism. Thus, in Article 4, "The economy of the Arab Republic of Egypt is based on the socialist democratic system" is replaced by "The economy of the Arab Republic of Egypt is based on the development of the enterprising spirit".

The structure of the Egyptian economy

The five pillars

As we saw earlier, the Egyptian economy is still strongly marked by rentier logic (around 20% of GDP).

Tourism

The sector provides 10 million direct and indirect jobs and thus occupies a very important part of the structure of employment. In 2006, the industry reported \$7.2 billion or nearly 23% of all currency and \$11.8 billion in 2009/2010.

Tourism is not limited just to hotels welcoming tourists and so does not just have an unproductive role (in terms of value). It is also composed of a significant number of construction companies that build not only hotels, but also all the infrastructure required (roads, railways, airports, etc. ...), agricultural enterprises (to feed all the tourists), etc.

The major tourist areas are located in Luxor, Cairo, Hurghada, Sharm al-Sheikh, Aswan, the Red Sea regions and the Sinai.

Suez Canal revenues

With \$4.7 billion of revenue in 2009/2010, the oil sector provides 15 to 20%, less than the transportation of finished products.

Its revenues are closely linked to the geopolitical situation and changes in the global economy (goods shipped to China and India and the size of boats). Significant work is

11 Sophie Pommier. idem. P.156

12 "The establishment of Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ) resulted from an agreement signed in late 2004 between Egypt and Israel under American sponsorship. It opens the US market to textile products made in Egypt, excluding taxes and quotas, provided that those products are made with a certain percentage of Israeli components. In late 2007, this agreement was revised: the proportion of components was reduced slightly (from 11.7% to 10.5%). Meanwhile, the number of Egyptian companies involved in this partnership was increased from 54 to 203." (Sophie Pommier. Ibid. P.157)

regularly undertaken to address the increasing size of vessels (5000 tons in 1869, 210,000 in 2006, 350,000 in 2012)¹³.

This important economic and geostrategic route is threatened by various projects moving goods by rail (connecting the port of Ashdod in Israel, to those of Eilat or Aqaba).

Money Transfers from expatriates.

\$9.8 billion in 2009/2010. In 2006, approximately 4 million Egyptians lived abroad. This emigration, already started in the '30s was due to population pressure and lack of employment opportunities in Egypt.

In the '60s and '70s, the destination countries were mainly the Gulf and Libya. Currently, the Gulf countries are also confronting unemployment and workers there is a preference for workers from Asia (Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos). Egyptian workers do less qualified jobs such as construction, catering and agriculture.

The hydrocarbon sector (oil and gas).

Egypt is a middle rank oil producing country (its position is between the 19th and the 26th largest producer in the world depending on the year), with relatively few reserves. Its peak of production was in 1996.

Proven Egyptian oil reserves were 4.07 billion barrels in 2008 (6th place in Africa), or 16 years of production. The proven gas reserves reach 2060 billion m³ (the third largest in Africa), supplemented by more than 3000 billion m³ of probable reserves. In terms of gas production, Egypt occupies the 22nd position globally.

The oilfields are concentrated in the Gulf of Suez (42.6%) and in the Libyan Desert (24.7%). Gas reserves are located in the Mediterranean and the Nile Delta (Port Faud, Temsah South and Wakah) and in the Western Desert.

All the activities of exploration, production, refining and distribution are managed by public institutions under the Ministry of Energy, namely the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC) for the oil sector and the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) for the gas sector. Any exploration activity and production require the creation of a Joint Venture (JV) with EGPC or EGAS. Contracts for exploration and production now take the form of a concession for a fixed period to the JV.

Oil production and refinery capacity¹⁴

	Oil production Barrels/day		Refinery capacity Barrels/day	
BP Egypt	12,000	Existing capacity (9 facilities)	747,000	
Eni Egypt	97,000	Suez Canal	500,000	Egyptian, Saudi and Kuwaiti investors.
Apache Energy	66,934	Ain Sukhna on the Red Sea	130,000	
Other foreign companies	33,000	Asyut	250,000	Egyptian and Libyan states
EGPC	491,066	Sum new capacities	880,000	
Sum	700,000			

Currently, Egypt has become a net importer of oil, its domestic consumption being above its own production. This requires imports of oil at high cost, and because the price at the pump is heavily subsidized this leads to spending more and more of the state budget. This

¹³ Sophie Pommier. Ibid. P.162

¹⁴ Source: *Oil and gas in Egypt*, UBI France, June 2009.

is why Egypt is currently developing significant gas production, both to overcome the deficit and to increase its oil export revenues.

The main gas producers in Egypt are BG Egypt (its 18 billion m³ per year alone accounts for around 40% of total production), Eni (8.39 billion m³ per year), BP Egypt (3.24 billion m³ per year), Apache Energy (2.26 billion m³ per year) and Dana Gas (0.2 billion m³ per year).¹⁵

International aid

This is the fifth pillar: by itself, US aid (including arms – see below) was about \$3 billion in 2009/2010 and is more generally of the order of \$1.7 billion per year (about \$400 million for civilian aid and the rest for the military). In July 2007, \$13 billion in additional aid over 10 years were granted by the US to Egypt.

But this is not the only source from which the Egyptian state drinks. There is assistance from the World Bank (2 to 2.8 billion between 2005 and 2008 to promote investment and economic, social and financial reforms), from Europe (2 billion dollars to upgrade the Egyptian economy and form a free trade agreement), Japanese aid, and also from Arab Gulf countries.

Besides these five pillars of rent, the other important sectors of the economy of Egypt are traditional activities, such as agriculture and textiles, and other, more "modern" ones, such as construction and telecommunications.

Other sectors of the Egyptian's economy

Agriculture

The cultivated area is 3.8 million hectares, equivalent to 4% of land area. Agriculture is based almost entirely on irrigation from the Nile. Nile waters are of poor quality, partly because of bulk use of pesticides and fertilizers (a rate among the highest in the world), but also because many polluting industries directly discharge their waste unfiltered into the river. The country is not self-sufficient in food. It is the world's largest importer of wheat. The importance of agriculture in the GDP has steadily declined (50% of GDP in the late 70's, 10% in the late 90's and to 5% currently).

Industry

The sector employs about 14% of the Egyptian workforce. Industries are divided into forty industrial zones and ten free zones¹⁶.

Textiles

Textiles and their export are no longer a state monopoly, since the 1990s. Nevertheless, the state continues to dominate spinning and weaving, while the private capitalists focus on finishing operations (dyeing, etc.).

15 "Investment opportunities abound. The Gaz de France Group has operated since 2005 in the West El Burullus concession. The French company has pledged to invest 22 million dollars over 8 years in prospecting for three new wells. Britain's BG, the main gas producer in Egypt (40% of total production), announced it would invest 1 billion USD in Egypt in 2009 and 2.5 billion USD in 2010. The energy group Edison (48.96% owned by EDF and 51% by the Italian group A2A), which acquired the rights to the exploitation of the Abukir site, plans to invest 1.7 billion USD over twenty years. In May 2009, the Italian Eni is committed to invest 1.5 billion USD over the next five years in exploration and production. Dana Gas (UAE), which made significant gas discoveries in October 2008 in West Manzala, also confirmed its intention to increase its presence in the country and to double its reserves. Finally, the company Total announced in May 2009 that the Egyptian authorities had granted it an exploration license in Block 4 of the site of El Burullus Offshore East located about 70 km from the Mediterranean coast (100-1600 m depth) Oil and gas in Egypt. UBI France. June 2009.

16 "Alexandria, Madinet Nasr (Cairo), Port Said, Suez, Ismailia, Damietta (Delta North), Six-October (Cairo); Media Public Free Zone, Shabina al-Qom (Menoufiya governorate, delta center), Qoft (Qena governorate, Upper Egypt), Port Said East Port." (Sophie Pommier. Op. cit. P.165)

This sector is in crisis, because since 2005 it has suffered the effects of quota removal ordered by the WTO (loss of preferred access to the European market) and is subject to competition from China and India (lower quality but much less expensive) or the US for cotton. Consequently, the sector is undergoing restructuring, with many companies sold to foreign manufacturers who are constantly trying to modernize the manufacturing process and increase the pace of work, which has led to numerous strikes in previous years (such as that at Misr Spinning and Weaving in Mahalla al-Kubra in 2007).

Construction industry

Cement production has grown rapidly since the late '80s. This sector was privatized in early 2000 and foreign private capital was invested massively – Lafarge and Ciment français from France and Vicat from Portugal, Italy and Mexico. These foreign groups represent over 50% of total production.

Telecommunications

This is a sector that has been significantly restructured and expanded in recent years. Egypt has amongst the highest number of lines per capita in the Middle East. There were 22 million mobile phone subscribers in 2007, up from 4.3 million in 2002.

The mobile network covers major cities, the Suez region and major axes of the Delta, and is growing rapidly. It is wide open to private capital. The main actors are Mobinil (owned by Orascom Telecom group, also active in construction), Vodafone, and Etisalat (Emirates Telecommunications Corporation).

The development of this sector is due in large part to international aid for development, including from the US (USAID), and the involvement of the Egyptian State (the Minister of Telecommunications, Ahmed Nazif, was originally a professor of computer science).

Pharmaceutical industry

Characterized by cheap labour, it represents 30% of the regional market and is the principal player in this region. This sector is heavily subsidized. It imports its ingredients from abroad at high prices, making this activity less attractive for private investors because of price controls.

The banking sector

The banking sector has undergone various phases of nationalization and privatization during the twentieth century. In the early fifties, foreign banks largely controlled the Egyptian banking sector. In 1956, of the 32 banks operating in Egypt, 12 had their headquarters abroad. These foreign banks took approximately 54% of bank deposits and lent nearly 47% of credit.

Under Nasser, there was a great wave of nationalization in the Egyptian banking sector in 1960 and 1961. As a result the state ended up in control of 100% of the banking sector. Furthermore, public ownership of the Egyptian banks was accompanied by a significant deterioration in their performance.

From 1961 to 1974 the Egyptian banking sector was highly concentrated (10 banks in 1963 and 6 banks in 1971) and very rigid. The sector practiced its traditional activities within a specialized framework decided by the State, with the complete absence of competition or development of new services.

A first correction took place in 1974 with the enactment of the Act of June 10 (called the Law of Arab and foreign funds investment) and the organization of the Free Zones. Foreign banks were permitted to establish banks on Egyptian territory either through branches or in association with Egyptian capital. For activities in local currency, the banks had to be founded in the form of a joint enterprise with Egyptian participation of at least 51%.

Despite this early privatization, the state still controlled the majority of the banking sector through the four major state commercial banks which then represented nearly 60% of

the capitalization of banks in Egypt. In addition, the state indirectly owned (through public banks alone or with other agencies) come majority stakes in the capital of most joint venture banks created since 1974.

A new program of privatization of banks started in 1993 largely dictated by the orders of the IMF and the World Bank. In 2003, the country still had 64 banks (28 commercial banks and 31 investment and business banks), but the market was dominated by public sector institutions which include the four largest banks in Egypt.

The “Big Four” - Bank Misr, National Bank of Egypt (NBE), Bank of Cairo and Bank of Alexandria, control over 50% of the total activities of the banking sector, but they also hold a significant amount of bad debt.

In December 2004, there were 57 banks. In June 2006, there were only 43 banks and in June 2010, only 39. The aim of the restructuring led by the Central Bank of Egypt is to reform the banking sector by creating large banks capable of meeting international standards set by the Basel Accord (including the international solvency ratio), and to cope with increased international competition.

The banking sector in Egypt is composed (since 2006) by three types of banks: commercial banks, specialized banks (relating to specific economic sectors) and Islamic banks. The bulk of bank capitalization remains in the hands of commercial banks.

But, despite the restructuring that has gone on for more than 10 years, by international standards Egyptian banking is still not fully open to competition. Within the private sector, there is a lack of access to credit, restrictions on foreign exchange rates and excessive government bureaucracy are often cited as barriers to investment, and Egypt remains an economy with very basic banking services. The banking sector accounts for only 4% of GDP.

In 2011, the privatization of the “Big Four” is still on-going, and Islamic banks represent hardly 1% of the banking sector.

Rapid population growth

In 1962, Egypt's population was about 30 million. In 2010, it was 77.8 million. These are the numbers of Egyptians living in Egypt. Taking into account the expatriates, the population is over 80 million. Nearly 43% of the population lived in urban areas in 2008 and the average age is 24.8 years¹⁷.

Much of the country is uninhabited, 95% of the population is concentrated on 5.5% of the surface area in the Delta and the Nile Valley, in the coastal areas and in the northern governorates¹⁸.

Almost two thirds of Egypt's population lives from day to day, without an assured income. They lack access to health services, education, etc. In 2006, in the whole territory, the illiteracy rate for women was 37% against 22% for men. In rural areas, this rate reached 47% and 27% for men.

A quarter of the population (the “middle class”) has access to mainstream services (health, education in the private sector, housing ...) at a regular salary giving them access to cars and various leisure activities. 10% have a standard of living corresponding to a high level of skills (senior administration, business executives, etc. ...) and 1% (i.e. less than one million people) have a life of leisure and travel and have access to the best universities in Europe or the U.S. States¹⁹. (Confluences Méditerranée N°75).

¹⁷ Source: World Bank

¹⁸ Confluences Méditerranée N°75

¹⁹ Ibidem

Cairo city alone accounts for 25% of the population, with a high proportion of poor farmers from the countryside and living off the crumbs of the richest.

"The rentier structure of the economy is not based anymore on the exploitation of local labour, surplus to the needs of tourism, the processing industry of local resources (cotton, oil, agro-industries) or semi-manufactured product imports such as automotive or electromechanical ... and merchant services. The result is a proliferation of fake service jobs and a saturation of the administration, coupled with corruption and begging in disguise, which is omnipresent and seizes up the economic and social machine, while also allowing the survival of millions of 'useless' mouths²⁰"

Class composition

About 63% of people in Egypt are 15-64 years old, 33 % are kids - 14 years or younger. The total workforce in Egypt is roughly 26 million. Circa 32% of workers are, according to the last available estimates, in agriculture, 17% are in industry (especially textiles, but also construction, production of cement, gas and oil etc.), and 51% are in services (tourism). Rural employment in Egypt remains strong despite the flow of the population into the cities (especially Cairo) in the last two decades.

A large percentage of Egyptians are self-employed and work in the informal economy. Hundreds of thousands of micro and small-scale enterprises dominate this sector. It includes personal service workers, like maids and other household employees. But the government sector is still the largest in the Egyptian economy - even during the '90s (when austerity measures and privatization were starting to get going) it was the fastest growing and the largest contributor to employment creation.

The participation of women in the labour force is growing over the long-term. In 1980 it was roughly 11%, in 2001 already 22%. The numbers of working women have grown especially because of their employment in the government sector. Many Egyptian women also work in the informal sector, especially those who do unpaid family work.

Figures from 2005 put the number of people below the poverty line as 20%. Unemployment is 10%. From the geographical point of view there is a lack of work especially in rural areas, particularly in the Lower Delta. Unemployment is highest among the age group 20-24, and among graduates of intermediate education. Surprisingly low is unemployment amongst illiterate people. Women are hit by unemployment much harder than men.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Sectorial structure of employment in Egypt in the years 1977-92, ages 12-64:

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Millions</i>				<i>Structure (%)</i>				<i>Average annual growth rate (%)</i>		
	1977	1981	1984	1992	1977	1981	1984	1992	1977-81	1981-84	1984-92
Agriculture	5,3	5,4	5,4	5,8	51,5	47,5	43,5	39,6	0,2	0,1	0,9
Manufacturing, mining, and utilities	1,4	1,7	1,8	2,2	13,8	14,7	14,2	15,0	3,9	1,9	2,8
of which public enterprises	0,7	0,7	0,7	0,8	6,4	6,2	5,8	5,7	1,6	0,6	1,8
of which private 10+	0,1	0,2	0,2	0,3	1,4	1,4	1,5	2,0	2,2	4,7	6,0
Residual (informal sector)	0,6	0,8	0,9	1,1	6,0	7,1	7,0	7,4	6,5	2,5	2,8
Construction	0,3	0,5	0,6	0,9	3,2	4,6	4,9	6,0	10,8	5,6	4,6
Services	3,2	3,6	4,3	5,8	31,4	31,6	34,5	39,3	2,4	6,0	3,7
Total domestic employment	10,3	11,3	12,4	14,7	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	2,3	3,1	2,1
Unemployment	0,3	0,6	0,8	1,4	2,8	4,8	5,7	8,8	16,5	9,3	7,8
Total domestic labour force	10,6	11,9	13,2	16,1	-	-	-	-	2,8	3,4	2,5

Source: Ikram, Khalid: *The Egyptian economy, 1952-2000: performance, policies, and issues*, London 2006.

The role of the army in the economy

From the Nasser period, the military had access to the business world. For example, we find the military involved in real estate from which they derive substantial profits because of the high population growth. The military also manage important heritage property and many farms. They also participate in a bonus program of land reclaimed from the desert and in the development of tourist infrastructure.

Then there are various industrial activities (construction and armaments in particular) for which they receive subsidies for the purchase of raw materials, and are exempt from some restrictive laws. The arms industry is directly managed by the army. They are involved in several major projects like the construction of roads, the Cairo metro and airport development. The army controls between 33% and 45% of the Egyptian economy (see below).

THE CREEPING OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

A bit of history

To support the war effort during the First World War, the British government drew heavily on the resources of its Egyptian colony. This led to a severe deterioration of living conditions for Egyptians, involving a rise in unemployment, the requisition of crops, forced conscription of peasants, etc. This generated a reaction that led to the formation of an interclassist national independence movement. The arrest of three of its leaders and their deportation into exile in 1919 triggered a wave of strikes and demonstrations, with clashes with the British police.

Women joined the movement, in particular during spontaneous demonstrations from high schools and during a demonstration in 1919, called by Hoda Shaarawi (1879-1947), a founder of the feminist movement in Egypt.

At these events, women often chose to remove the veil (the veil being an item of clothing imported by the Ottomans) as a sign of their demand for independence, alongside that of men²¹. Following on from this, in the '20s a process of emancipation of women developed in various fields (education, media, and literature), always in the context of the struggle for national independence against British rule.

The process accelerated after 1952 when it was institutionalised in the Nasser period with the introduction of a new constitution which stipulated equality between men and women. Girls' school enrolment, access to higher education and work for women were encouraged by the Egyptian authorities.

From that time until Sadat came to power, the gap between the laws and their application in matters related to the situation of women was the opposite of what happened afterwards. That is to say that, at that time, social practice was far ahead of the law (which was less favourable to women). Polygamy was disapproved of, and the refusal of a man to grant a divorce was seen as unworthy.

All this changed with the arrival of Sadat. The process of regression of the position of women starts from this period. Sadat reintroduced the "religious" in to the public arena from which it had previously been expelled. He then built the "State of Science and Faith", granting pardons to Islamic activists, and inviting back to Egypt the Muslim Brothers exiled by Nasser. The post-Sadat governments continued on the same path.

Paradoxically, it is therefore in the Sadat and post-Sadat period (under the leadership of the US, whose financial support was needed) that the *laws* concerning women have improved, while the *social position* of women has regressed.

The situation of women throughout the world, whatever their social class, is one in which oppression is a constant, but to varying degrees. We don't want to claim that the oppression of women in Egypt is the worst in the world but we do want to try to understand its specific characteristics.

A particularly horrific form of women's oppression which has scarcely been affected by capitalist modernity is genital mutilation – removal to a greater or lesser extent of the clitoris. According to a report by the World Health Organization, 91% of Egyptian women have undergone this type of mutilation. This practice predates the advent of Christianity and Islam in Egypt and affects women of both faiths. In June 2008 the state passed a law banning the practice, and there has been a certain amount of public campaigning against the practice

21 A famous historical event was the return of Hoda Shaawari from a women's conference in Europe in 1923. Stepping off the train in Cairo she removed her veil. Many of the women waiting to greet her applauded and removed their veils too!

since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. But its prevalence seems to have only declined very slightly in recent years and only amongst the most urbanised and educated sections of the population²².

The continuing appeal of religion

Religion is still central to Egyptian law – 80% of legislation is based on Sharia.

Article 2 of the Constitution states that: *“The coordination between the duties of a wife to her family and her work in society, given their equality with men in political, social, cultural and economic life [shall be] without prejudice to the rules of Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia) ”*

While Article 9 says *“The family that has its roots in religion, morality and patriotism, is the foundation of society. The state looks to preserve the authentic character of the Egyptian family, the values and traditions that it represents, while affirming and developing this character in the relations within Egyptian society”*.

The influence of religion is so strong that even feminist NGOs will draw on interpretations of classical Islamic texts to justify their demands to improve the status of women²³. Of course, we shouldn't blame religion for everything - the feeling of superiority of men over women is strongly rooted in people's minds and does not always find its source in religion, more its legitimation.

Woman: slave of men

Women cannot travel without the consent of their husbands even if they are entitled to have a passport, and inheritance is based on inequality between men and women, once again favouring the male in his omnipotence.

Officially, since 2000, the divorce law is less unfair than it used to be. Before, it was enough for a man to divorce his wife by saying three times "I divorce you", while the latter could not divorce without proving that she had suffered abuse. Now women can obtain a divorce in a (long and complicated) legal process requiring the presence of a lawyer. They can also transmit Egyptian nationality to children of a non-Egyptian father, and finally, in cases of polygamy the husband must inform the first wife and get her consent. But the provisions for divorce continue to massively benefit husbands and, for the wife, leaving home means to be doomed to poverty. No shelter and no financial assistance can be provided until the divorce is finalised. Under the new law, a woman may seek a no-fault divorce, but it is on condition of renouncing her inheritance, alimony and, of course, returning the dowry. Egyptian women of the Christian faith must get the Coptic Church to validate the annulment of a marriage.

Honour crimes

A husband who takes the life of his unfaithful wife will get a sentence of between three and seven years imprisonment. This is called a "crime of honour" and wouldn't apply if the wife had remained virtuous.

Incidentally, adultery is actually illegal in Egypt, but a husband can only be sentenced to six months in prison, as against two years for a wife. A simple love letter is considered evidence of a woman's adultery, whereas for a husband adultery is only adultery if it is committed in the marital home. Rape in marriage is not considered a crime.

22 The Decline of Female Circumcision in Egypt: Evidence and Interpretation, a report by the Population Council, 1999.

23 *Confluences Méditerranée*. P. 75

There is no shortage of examples of murders: a brother who has doubts about the conduct of his sister; a farmer who beheads his daughter after having found out about a boyfriend; a mother who finds herself with a daughter pregnant from a stranger who punishes her by electrocution... Girl victims of rape commonly experience the same fate, even more so in cases of incest, which can see an incestuous father forced to kill his daughter if she becomes pregnant by him so as to cleanse the family honour. Some of these killings are also used as a pretext to eliminate troublesome heiresses in competition over inheritance.

In Egypt, such murders are often treated as suicides. According to the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, 25% of such crimes are actually carried out by women. In the city of Alexandria, 47% of women murder victims were killed by a family member because they had been raped.²⁴

Violence committed against women increased in the second half of 2010, and around 50% of women have made complaints, notably of sexual harassment²⁵. Domestic violence and "honour crimes" have seen a rise of respectively 13.2% and 7.9% during the same period. According to Unesco, 50% of women aged from 15 to 49 think that a husband has the right to hit his wife.

"Violence against women in Egypt remains at once culturally and legally acceptable and is generally accepted by the general public as a normal and legitimate form of discipline".²⁶

According to a survey by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 83% of Egyptian women have faced sexual harassment and victims of such harassment are mostly veiled women, although a majority of Egyptians, of both sexes, believe that modestly dressed women are less likely to be assaulted.²⁷

A lower status

The status of a woman in Egypt makes her totally dependent on her husband, her brothers, cousins and the extended family of males, but also on older women (especially mothers) who are usually the primary vector for transmission of traditional values and who will caution her against males outside the family unit and even against other women... A woman who pursues a career is invested with a bad reputation and is seen as responsible for violence in the street.

The woman is a machine for reproducing life, preferably male, and a nurturing housewife whose family home is the limit of her world. This view cuts across all social classes, but is more intense in rural areas. In the south of the country, Upper Egypt, the code of honour, the Tar, is applied very intensely against women.

Because the male remains a guarantee of survival for the family, the birth of a daughter is considered as a financial burden. From birth, a boy is spoiled and has a privileged status compared to his sisters, and he is responsible for ensuring their virginity before marriage, which will generally come soon because "the loss of virginity [before marriage] is a disgrace that only blood can wash away".²⁸

24 World Report on Violence and Health. WHO, Geneva, 2002.

25 *Egyptian center for women's right (2010)*

26 HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH VOL. 16, NO. 8 (E), december 2004

27 BBC News, 18 July 2008.

28 Poverty and Development, Calling for Change, Development Strategies to End Violence Against Women, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A limited access to education and employment

At the level of education, the gap between boys and girls has narrowed in recent years due to a deliberate intervention by the state, but the level of illiteracy amongst women remains high, even in urban areas. According to a 2008 report, there is 34% illiteracy²⁹ - 37% of women against 22% men. In rural areas the figures are 47% and 27%.

According to Demographic and Health Surveys, the percentage of women having a job was only 16% in 2008, and economically active women were more than four times as likely to be unemployed as men (22.9% versus 5.2%)³⁰. As for professions, some are still reserved for men.

A BIT OF GEO POLITICS

USA GAMBLE

"I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family."
Secretary Of State Hillary Clinton, March 2010

What is remarkable about the US response to events in Egypt is that there hasn't been one. The US government has essentially been a spectator, with its representatives making various vague remarks, initially supportive of Mubarak - "I would not refer to him as a dictator" (Vice President Joe Biden) – then calling for an "orderly transition" and finally accepting regime change as it became inevitable. It is impossible to speak of the US having a "strategy", other than just "wait and see". On 6 February Clinton said she would not "prejudge" a bid by the Muslim Brotherhood to enter Egypt's political process. On 8 February Defence Secretary Robert Gates said Egypt's military had behaved in "an exemplary fashion" by standing largely on the side lines during the demonstrations. On 7 February White House spokesman Robert Gibbs stated, rather implausibly, that "The United States doesn't pick leaders of other countries»!

If the rulers of the USA are concerned about the popular uprisings in the Middle East it is not because they fear worldwide proletarian revolution or even a liberal democratic utopia in the oil-producing countries. It is because they are concerned that the whole basis of their Middle East policy may be upset by the coming of populist regimes which actually have to take account of Arab public opinion. Any action by the US judged to be too aggressive may render these regimes even more likely to adopt policies hostile to the *status quo*.

The basis of US policy in the region can be summed up as: Israel is the number one ally, supported by heavily bribed Egyptian elite and Saudi elite who know they can't survive without US support. In addition, Iranian influence must be contained at all costs.

The first sign that the balance may be shifting came in mid-February when the new ruling military council granted permission for two Iranian navy ships to transit through the Suez Canal in to the Mediterranean on their way to Syria. No Iranian vessel had done this since the "Revolution" of 1979. Once again the US response was muted – a State Department spokesman simply said "We have, you know, on-going concerns".

The 1978 Camp David Accords serve as the basis for the Egyptian, Israeli, American relationship. Under these accords, paid for by the United States, Egypt agreed to not invade Israel, to serve as a security buffer between Israel and the Arab world, and provide Israel with half of its natural gas. This costs the US \$1.5 billion annually in mostly military aid to Egypt.

29 Unicef, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/egypt_statistics.html#77

30 <http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SI.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS>

Israel receives \$3 billion in US aid each year. President Mubarak was, naturally enough, an enthusiastic supporter of the Camp David Accords for three decades.

The changing relationship with Israel became apparent in early May when leaders of the rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation pact in the Egyptian capital. Egypt's secret role in brokering the agreement caught both Israel and the US by surprise. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, called the deal “a great victory for terrorism”.

There are also signs that that Cairo hopes to renew ties with Iran and renegotiate the long-standing contract to supply Israel with natural gas. Then there are reported plans by Egyptian authorities to open the Rafah crossing into Gaza, something that would effectively end the four-year blockade. Furthermore, Egypt's foreign minister, Nabil Elaraby, has called on the United States to recognize a Palestinian state – a reference to a move expected in September by Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, to seek recognition of Palestinian statehood at the United Nations. Israel and the US have previously insisted that the Palestinians can achieve statehood only through negotiations with Israel.

These changes in the policies of one Middle Eastern country don't amount to a dramatic shift in geopolitical certainties in themselves, but combined with the continuing quagmire of US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, they can only accelerate its decline as kingmaker of the Middle East.

WHY TURKEY AND NOT EGYPT?

What could be the fate of Egypt according to the policy of the Muslim Brothers? Their broad political offer possibly indicates a will to normalise their position by shifting from a “classical” Islamist party towards a modern one like the Turkish AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* –Justice and Development Party), the party lead by Erdoğan, whose has held the reins of Turkey since 2003 as prime minister and with Abdullah Gül as president since 2007. But is this really possible? We must examine the reasons that explain Erdoğan's success, but which go beyond him and his party, the historical and economic reasons.

Bourgeois revolution and the establishment of a real state began successfully in 1922 after a war against foreign countries and internal minorities gave the Kemalist state the right to rule over the new area of modern Turkey. Under Kemalist rule, Turkey was modernised with an iron fist which allowed the liberation of women, the adoption of western laws and an education system, along with strong industrial development in the state-controlled sector. Even the countryside was modernized, but without any deep agrarian reform.

The Egyptian bourgeois revolution of 1921 was a failure, and the country remained under British control up to 1952. During those 30 years, industry developed slowly and the state was not modernized. Nasser's road of “Arab socialism” using soviet investment and soviet style industrial development (Aswan dam, heavy industries, etc.) was not a success and the reform in the countryside hit only Coptic or foreign landlords and did not change the lives of poor peasants.

In Turkey the Army has been the central pillar of the Kemalist regime and has intervened three times in political life (1960, 1971 and 1980) by taking power from civilian parties, and even in 1997 when it pushed aside the pro-Islamist government of Necmettin Erbakan. Nevertheless, the last ten years have shown that the Army, while remaining the standard bearer of secularism, has managed to find an agreement with the AKP (which has patiently waited for better days) based on mutual non-intervention in their respective domains. So we can say that Turkey has now reached a point of stability - success against the PKK rebellion, successful intervention during regional conflicts and a proven ability of the Turkish army. Nevertheless, the army also suffered an enormous political defeat when, on 29

July 2011, the government was able to dismiss the entire high command without the army reacting. This followed the arrest of 125 high-ranking officers in April 2011, for the attempted coup in 2003.

In Egypt, the Army is not ready to retire from business or politics, as shown in the latest events. On the contrary, while deeply rooted in economy, it is also the last guarantee of any regime since the beginning of modern Egypt.

After 1980, despite an intense war against the Kurdish guerrillas (starting in 1984) and a civil war against extreme left organizations, the Turkish economy was able to progress in the private-owned industrial sector first as a sub-contractors of foreign owned companies and under the protective mantle of the state, and then as a real actor in the market once the state began to abandon control of the economy.

Turkey today is more than a regional economic power (competing with Greece or Russia and other European countries) – it has become the world's seventeenth economic power with growth rates like Brazil (7.3% in 2010), even if the “black economy” is still important (figures vary from 15 to 30% of GDP, roughly 1/3 of the workforce is involved).

When the state began to involve itself less in various industries (mines, utilities, banking, transport and communications) the economy continued to flourish and a new class of able bourgeois entrepreneurs arose, deeply involved in industry. Turkey's traditional textile and clothing sectors still account for one-third of industrial employment, despite stiff competition in international markets that resulted from the end of the global quota system. Other sectors, notably the automotive, construction and electronics industries, are rising in importance and have surpassed textiles within Turkey's export mix.

It is this class of new entrepreneurs, in reaction to the “state bureaucracy” (considered by them as inefficient), born first in central Anatolia (an area of still powerful religious influence in everyday life), that decided to create their own Islamic company unions which naturally advocated integration into Europe (under the flag of free enterprise against the backward state). Thus Erdoğan, and his slow policy of compromise (i.e. no violent seizure of power that could be painful for business), and infiltration of the secular state, succeeded in showing that the AKP was not hostile to them and to capitalist development. For the bosses the deal is simple: let us make profits; let's benefit from the end of internal wars that have diverted investment; the ideology of the government can be anything - as long as it leaves us alone, we will not be hostile. And we will not be dragged into the underground struggle between the Army, bearer of Kemalist secularism, and the AKP.

In Egypt, on the contrary, even after the shift towards de-nationalization initiated by Sadat, the state (without even mentioning the Army-owned factories) remains a major player on the economic level. Even if a new generation of managers begins to take the reins of the state-owned companies and initiates changes, the private sector doesn't have these burgeoning entrepreneurs that exist in Turkey.

On the political level, the AKP is a more of an interclassist party than the Muslim Brothers. While less active in the working class, it is dominant in other classes, even among peasants (who still represent 25% of the total population) and has a gentlemen's agreement with the entrepreneurs. On the other hand, it is totally absent in the Army and Education but has successfully infiltrated the police.

In contrast, the Muslim Brothers are absent from the countryside (which still represents 41% of the total population), weak among the working class (or only present on an individual level) and among the traditional bourgeoisie. Their strongholds are thus poor people living in the slums of big cities, state employees, teachers, doctors (i.e. the liberal professions, already become wage earners or state employees) and lower layers of the bourgeoisie. They have also influenced lower rank officers and some soldiers in the Army.

Even if the most modern currents of the Muslim Brothers wished to transform themselves into a modern AKP-style political party and even if they won over a majority of organized members (that is really not sure), they will still inherit a society more backward than Turkey (where the agriculture question is not yet solved, not to mention food and water problems) and, above all, they would inherit a chaotic economic structure not at the same level of capitalist development and without the modern entrepreneurs that exist in Turkey.

But even if one day or another, the Muslim Brothers are able to evolve into a modern AKP, this would be no progress for women and the working class. The AKP, very slowly indeed, is un-building what (in an authoritarian bourgeois way) Kemalism has done in favour of women, not to speak about the pressure against freedom of thought.

THE PILLARS OF SOCIAL COMPROMISE

POWER OF THE ARMY

Presentation

The Army in Egypt is not only important because it is ranked as the tenth army in the world, it has also provided all the leaders of the country since the fall of the monarchy: Neguib (July 1952 to November 1954), Nasser (November 1954 to September 1970) Sadat (September 1970 to October 1981) and finally Mubarak (October 1981 to February 2011). It may have been defeated abroad (1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973) but it is strong at home as the primary force for repression (1977, 1986) and a strong economic power by holding private or state owned companies both for the civilian and the military sector. Finally, it is the only political power able to counterbalance the strength of the Muslim Brothers, and this power has a strong economic side.

Organization of the Egyptian army

The Egyptian army is organized around four main components - Land army, Air force, Navy and Air Defence command. The Egyptian Army as a whole has 668,000 regular troops and 500,000 conscripts.

The fifth component consists of: Government paramilitary forces 397,000 ; Central Security Forces 337,000 personnel and among them, Border Guard Forces 60,000 are under the control of the Ministry of Interior

The Ministry of Defence controls the National Guard for the defence of the Presidential institution and the capital city.

Budget

The USA provides annual military assistance to Egypt which amounted to US\$1.3 billion in 2009. Here the pillar of the state is without any contest the army, with a million men. Provided with its own industries, and occupying almost all the higher levels of the state administration, it is the guardian and the foremost beneficiary of the lucrative rent from the Suez Canal (\$US 3.5 billion in duty collected per year out of a GDP of less than \$220 billion) and international financial aid, America's first and foremost (around \$2 billion per year). Joshua Stacher, an American specialist on the country, estimates that the military control between 33% and 45% of the Egyptian economy. The army which made Hosni Mubarak and which is now behind Omar Suleiman is the uncontested political protagonist, together with the Muslim Brotherhood (five to six million paying members), of the present events in Cairo.

Structure

It is very difficult to consider the Egyptian Army as a unified body. This is not only because as in any army in the world there is competition between the Air Force³¹, Navy and Land Forces but because the Egyptian army is deeply divided from top to bottom between high rank officers generally trained in the USA (5 ranks from Brigadier General to 5-star general), the middle level officers (5 ranks from 2nd lieutenant to Colonel), the low level officers (2 ranks) and the troops. Among the two last, we know that influence of “political Islam” is important, and we should recall that the officers who killed Sadat were close to Islamic Jihad.

Some historical facts

In January 1977, during “hunger revolts” in response to increases in the prices of basic necessities, the Army supported the Regime by organizing a harsh repression that killed at least 800 people, although the riots only ceased when the price rises were abolished.

In 1986, the Army repressed the mutinies of the Central Security Forces (equivalent to the French “CRS”, created in 1966, reorganized in 1977) which led to the expulsion of 20,000 CSF members out of 300,000, indicating the influence of the Muslim Brothers within this body.

During the “war” against the Muslim Brothers the Army was obliged to be in the front line of repression and brutally swept away the Muslim Brothers’ “soldiers” in the countryside by burning crops (where they were hiding) in the villages of the Nile valley. Apart from this, the Army remained “quiet” in the 1990s and 2000s.

Evolution

Despite peace agreements and treaties signed with Israel since 1979, Egypt has maintained its military power against that of Israel. So, the Egyptian state decided that part of the army had to finance its own expenditures. To do this, the Army began to invest in industry, energy and in real estate development.

Nevertheless, due to the Camp David accord, the Egyptian army has received \$40 billion from the USA, but more and more voices from the Pentagon and other American military agencies are now saying that this money has been diverted from purely military expenditures the benefit of top officers, directly or indirectly.

For the officers, new cities have been created (such as Nasser City in the environs of Cairo) where they can enjoy good conditions of living and gain access to dedicated stores and shops. This has led to a separation between “military” society and “civil” society.

The Army, an economic power

For many years (since 1978) the Egyptian army has, through three organisations, become the owner (or the majority owner in the case of joint ventures) of 28 major Egyptian factories³², with an estimated workforce of roughly 80,000 workers, of which 3,000 are engineers. A majority of these factories, very much in the Soviet style, produce both for military and civilian needs in the same place. The range of products is very wide – on the military side, the Abrams M1A1 tank is the jewel in the crown.

31 Mubarak was a famous pilot and former Air Force commander.

32 For list of these factories along with workforce, location and production refer to www.mouvement-communiste.com.

Geographically speaking, those factories are overwhelmingly (27/28) located in the greater Cairo area (the town of Helwan has 10 factories, Heliopolis has 7, Kalioubia has one and Cairo itself has 9).

The institutions through which the Army runs those factories are:

- The Ministry of Military Production, for 16 military factories, of which 14 are producing both civilian goods and military products,
- The Arab Organisation for Industrialization (AOI), a joint investment fund created in 1975 by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Since 1993 it's been managed by Egypt and wholly owned by the Egyptian State (and managed by a committee chaired by the Egyptian president), with 9 military factories, of which 2 are producing both civilian goods and military products,
- The National Service Products Organization (NSPO), created in 1975, a state owned entity, for 3 companies of which one is a service company.

The size of the defence budget is not published by the Egyptian government. However, various publications estimate defence expenditures to be around US\$ 3 billion annually, of which, we recall the US government provides about \$1.3 billion.

THE POWER OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERS

A long history

The Society of Muslim Brothers (*jamiat al-Ikhwan al-muslimin*) was founded in 1928 by a schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna, while Egypt was under British occupation. The creation of this movement was a reaction against the wind of freedom blowing in some Egyptian cities regarding thought and social mores.

The SMB had plans to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia. To achieve this project, it had to "re-Islamicise" all sectors of Egyptian society through preaching, *da'wa*, promoting a return to the ancestor's practice of Islam, *Salaf*, the "original Islam".

The first members of the Society came from both the urban working class and the petty-bourgeoisie. The project of the Brothers is primarily a grassroots movement that transcends all social classes, preaching also among people living in rural areas.

The values of Islam must penetrate every home, every school, every factory, etc. The Family is one of the cornerstones of their ideology. Besides *da'wa*, the Brothers create charities to compensate for the absence of state provision. The social question is another base for their actions, creating a good incentive for people to listen to them.

While the Brothers claim to want to come to power by peaceful means, they are careful not to put forward their ideas about the use of violence. Al-Banna considered that there should only be a confrontation with the Egyptian government when people are mature enough, which means pious enough, to take power. Therefore in the early '30s, along with the well-established Society, a secret military organisation was created, "The Special Organization". The existence of this unit was only known by the leaders and its members. Spreading a peaceful message in public, Al-Banna and his henchmen, however, were preparing to use force against any obstacle in the way of an Islamic state.

*“Praying during the night, knights during the day! Islam is religion and state, the Koran and the sword, cult and leadership, citizenship and country. God is our goal, the Prophet our model, the Koran our law, jihad our way, martyrdom our hope”*³³

The "Special Organization" fomented attacks against the regime and was involved in 1948 in the war against Israel, the new arch-enemy. The Brothers are the spiritual fathers of armed jihadism. Seyyid Qutb, executed under Nasser, theorised in his writings the armed struggle under the banner of Islam. Attracted by the writings of Alexis Carel, a theorist of eugenics, Sayyid Qutb did not hide his admiration for fascism. Even today, Qutb remains the point of reference for all contemporary jihadists.

The Brothers consider the expression of power to be what we would be tempted to call the "party of Islam", an assembly composed of elders headed by a guide, a leader:

*"...Islam refuses party affiliation because it undermines the unity of community and its consistency, then the multi-party system is not a condition of the system whose founder is consistent with the basic principles of government in Islam, then the existence of parties is not the condition of the practice of political work, and finally a multi-party is not a guarantee of opinion and expression"*³⁴.

Hostile to foreign capital and against any social revolution, Umma, the mass, in their eyes is a model of social peace:

*"In terms of domestic policy, they called for unity of social classes, understanding and harmony between workers and management, between landowners and fellah. These were hallmarks of "conservative reform" within the middle class in the Arab world"*³⁵.

Al-Banna admired fascism and Nazism in Europe, sharing with them a certain conception of the state.

*"Communism, socialism and capitalism are western inventions to impose a failure of religion. The West has not even decided for the best to choose to build society or revive a civilization ... Party was quoted in the Quran fourteen times, associated with the idea of evil and badness"*³⁶.

While the supreme leader at the time, al-Tilmisânî adds:

*"I reject single party-state rule from deep within myself and based on my religious beliefs. Similarly, I do not accept the principle of multi-party and especially the principle on which it is currently based: the opinion and its opposite. Islam does not use competition to gain power"*³⁷

Harshly repressed under Nasser, the Brotherhood was forced to adapt itself to new situation not only practically (by creating an illegal underground structure) but also ideologically (the Arab nationalism advocated by Nasser also needed a nationalist answer from the Brothers that lead them to move away from the classical umma conception of the Saudi Sunnis towards nation-rooted Islam).

In 1967, when Nasser needed support after defeat in the Six Day War he reduced the pressure on the Brothers but they were only reintegrated into the Egyptian scene by Sadat, after 1972, an avowed anti-communist. He used the Brothers to fight against the communist atheists in Egypt.

33 Martine Gozlan, Pour comprendre l'intégrisme islamiste p. 50

34 Amr Elshobaki, p 20.

35 Ibidem p. 22

36 Ibidem p. 117

37 Ibidem p. 117

*"How can anyone claim that the Marxist left is in accord with Islam? Isn't salvation in Islam only realized by the disappearance of Marxism?"*³⁸

During the Sadat period, the Muslim Brotherhood battled mercilessly against communist atheists and leftists. In the Palestinian territories, the Muslim Brotherhood hunted down and killed anyone who claimed to be atheist and Marxist. Later, a section of the SMB will give birth to Hamas. The 1973 defeat by Israel was responsible for the end of the honeymoon between the Brothers and power. Sadat became the first Arab leader to visit the Jewish state to negotiate withdrawal from Sinai. In exchange, he signed a treaty formalizing mutual recognition between the two countries.

Following the assassination of Sadat by former Brotherhood members who had become dissidents, the crackdown on SMB militants struck again. Most of the time during Mubarak's period constituted a withdrawal for the SMB. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government was trying to pull the rug from under the feet of the Islamists of all stripes by enacting laws conforming to Sharia, and condemning everything that is not in conformity with Islam. Note however that since its creation, the SMB has managed to achieve one of its projects with the unintentional help of the Egyptian state: making Egyptians pious, religious and conservative.

The return to the scene

In 2005, the Brotherhood won 88 seats, a fifth of the seats in parliament. Five years later, they boycotted the second round of elections, accusing the government of fraud. The repression against the movement has never ceased. That's why during the events of this year in Egypt, the Brothers kept a low profile in the early stages before taking to the stage, cautiously watching to see what turn events would take before intervening. Before the crackdown, there were several competing currents within the SMB, particularly between the old guard and new recruits, on the tactics to adopt. The first were for a withdrawal to focus again on *da'wa*, the latter were more open to reform, open to the world and ready to fight against the power of the old guard in the Guidance Office. The Turkish AKP serves as their model. Today we can identify three main currents within the Brothers: two wings are the hard to find heirs of Sayyed Qutb, Salafis, and the young guard seduced by the AKP in Turkey.

SMB and Copts

During the '70s and '80s, the Christians in Egypt were considered the fifth column of Crusades and Communists. Copts, who officially represent ten percent of the population, were seen as conspirators, proselytes and conquerors by establishing a policy to breed rapidly and become the majority in Egypt. There were church burnings, farmers were forced to sell their land and traders told to pay a tax imposed on non-Muslims. Like the Jews, the Christians have a lower status compared to Egyptians of Muslim faith. The Brothers accuse the Copts of being the cause of the violence that targets them. Yet, they call for consensus in the interest of the nation as was the case during the British occupation and the Tahrir Square protests. The Brothers, nostalgic for the golden age of Islam, want to offer Christians and Jews the status of "*dhimmis*", "protected", subservient to the Islamic order.

SMB and trade-unions

The SMB profits from the vacuum left by the state in matters of social protection by offering members health coverage or preferential loans. The Brothers have always used their charitable network to convince people. In addition, they benefit from disrupting traditional trade unions which are weak and inattentive to the demands of their members. However, their infiltration into workers' organizations was weak for a long time because these were

38A1-da'wa n°2, 1976 p. 18 in "Les frères musulmans des origines à nos jours, ..."

controlled and mainly financed by the Ministry of Labour (since 1952) to neutralize their political influence, and supervised by the General Union of Workers Unions. After the death of Sadat, the SMB embarked on industrial action, with some success. The Brothers came to persuade sections of the upper classes with their message:

“The majority of unionist Brothers belong to the younger generation who led the student movements during the Seventies, the “New Brotherhood” accept a peaceful settlement of the political game and are taking steps to achieve their goals by following a gentle and progressive method and seeking a large popular support. At the same time, the “new brothers” learn from the older generation’s experiences. They use now the power of organization, specific actions and collective work, having realized the power of faith in a society where the religious component weighs heavy”³⁹

Today, they control the main trade union of engineers, doctors and lawyers who fight for pensions, against the state of emergency, for a multi-party system and human rights. These unions denounce the economic imperialism of the domineering and exploitative northern hemisphere, which plundered the south and left it destitute. If the Brothers long neglected the working class, a sudden interest has emerged over the past two decades. A scab in the '40s, the Brothers have always thought that the strike weapon in the hands of the proletariat was contrary to Islam and used by the Communists, even though they organised some. This feeling is always present and the Brothers are able to dissuade workers from demonstrating.

The SMB has a modern approach to trade-unions, considering these organizations as *“an instance of the reconciliation of the interests of capital and workers”⁴⁰*. In 2006, they presented 2,200 candidates for labour union delegates, but we don’t know how successful they were. Nevertheless, in twenty years, they were able to obtain, primarily through preaching, some visibility in the working class world.

SMB and Women

The role of women in Islam for the Brothers is simple: they have the noble mission to generate and educate future generations of men.

“We must not forget that the woman has a noble and significant task entrusted to her by Allah Almighty, child-bearing and motherhood. (...).

”These characteristics, duties and rights which have been allocated to women by Allah are in balance with the duties she has towards her husband and her children. These duties must be given precedence over other responsibilities and they are necessary for the stability of the family which is the basic cell of the society and the cause for its cohesion, strength, and efficiency. However, the husband has a right to permit his wife to work. This right is to be regulated by an agreement between the husband and the wife. Such rights should not be regulated by law and the authorities should not interfere with them except in some rare cases”⁴¹

Islam gives them rights and allows them to work in certain sectors. If women are educated and work their proper place according to the Brothers is their home.

“Also, there is nothing to prevent her from working in what is permissible since the public office is a type of work that the Sharia allowed women to undertake. Women can work

39 Ibidem. p.171

40 H. Tammam, P. Haenni, *Les Frères Musulmans égyptiens face à la question sociale : autopsie d’un malaise socio-théologique*

41 <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=4914> : The Role of Muslim Women in an Islamic Society

in professions becoming doctors, teachers, nurses, or such fields which she or the society may need"⁴²

Their conclusion on the status of women is explicit:

"We, The Muslim Brotherhood, wish to draw attention to the need of distinguishing between a person's having a right and the way, the conditions, and the appropriate circumstances for the use of that right. Thus, if today's societies have different social circumstances and traditions it is acceptable that the exercise of these rights should be gradually introduced in order for the society to adjust to these circumstances. More importantly, such an exercise should not lead to the violation of ethical rules laid down by the Sharia and made binding by it"

We completely reject the way that western society has almost completely stripped women of their morality and chastity. These ideals are built upon a philosophy which is in contradiction to the Sharia and its morals and values. It is important in our Islamic Society that the Islamic principles, morals and values are upheld with the fullest conviction, honour and austerity, in obedience to Allah, exalted be He."⁴³

SMB and economy, workers and fellahs

Besides charities, the Brothers have a network of companies and enterprises. Although they are hostile to foreign capital, the Brothers are liberals, favourable to a small state and public services, they have always supported all the policies of privatization and structural adjustment of Nasser's successors, considering private ownership as a right blessed by Islam.

The Brothers supported the land reform enacted in 1992 which led to peasant revolts. It consisted of gradually increasing, over a period of five years, leasehold estate from seven to twenty-two times the amount of property tax. Then, each owner was allowed to freely set the leasehold estate price. In addition, the peasants have to pay the leasehold once the contract is signed, representing between 30 and 50% of sales, long before the harvest. Farmers unable to pay debts were evicted. The Brothers consider that it "*was a return to God's law*"⁴⁴.

If al-Ikhwa's ideology considers social issues and charity important, they are closer to the middle classes than to the workers and peasants, particularly in terms of its active members, many of whom are businessmen. The SMB invests in health, construction and real estate, education, transport, tourism, etc. The Brotherhood is certainly not supporters of the end of man's exploitation by man. The Brothers are conservatives and in favour of keeping capitalism, class division between exploiters and exploited, in exchange for providing the illusion of a fictional community of common interests, the community of Islam. As we wrote in 2001:

"What is there in common between young unemployed in Gaza or Algiers and billionaires from the Gulf or ruling classes of states in the region, apart from their religious affiliation? Nothing, of course. Islam only serves to create a so-called community of interest between oppressors and oppressed "Muslims" whose proletariat in these regions continues to pay the price"⁴⁵.

The poor, the disinherited, the exploited, the proletariat represent the business of the Brothers like for all monotheistic religions:

42 Ibidem

43 Ibidem

44 <http://www.cetri.be/spip.php?article757&lang=fr>: Paysans contre Propriétaires :

45 http://www.mouvement-communiste.com/pdf/leaflet/tract_011008_contre_la_croisade_et_le_jihad

"New Islamists never talk about social justice or redistribution (...). Their claim is that they must be rich to be good Islamists and they never reverse the argument and say Islamists are good people working for social justice and redistribution ".⁴⁶

In other words, Brothers, like all bourgeois philanthropists, respond to poverty and exploitation by charity and a good conscience. Religious Alms, *zaakat*, has an important religious meaning because it is one of the five pillars of Islam and is an obligation for every good Muslim if he wants his place in heaven. Through God, the Brothers legitimize the capitalist order in which human laws operate as something natural.

The strike on 6 April, 2008 against unemployment and the cost of living was marked by the absence of the Brothers who refused to participate. Besides the fact that the Brothers are generally against workers' demonstrations, it can be difficult for them to support when one of them, Saad Husseini, owns a factory on strike. However, they decided to make a small appearance on May 4. A year later, the SBM was reluctant to participate in the strike's commemoration but eventually advised demonstrators to march peacefully and agreed to university students taking part. While in January 2008, the Brotherhood made a statement denouncing the high cost of living and injustice, this approach was only undertaken in order to prevent possible disturbances that may have undermined bourgeois social order.

Now

What do the Brothers want today?

Lurking in the shadows and representing the only opposition force, the Brothers are an asset to those in power. Far from being revolutionary the Brothers want a place on the Egyptian political scene in exchange for their influence in calming the ardour of those who banished Mubarak. The Brothers are the only opposition group with 600,000 members that they can bring to the streets if the government asks them to bring opponents to their senses. The Brothers were quick to negotiate with the state when they demanded that Mubarak step down. On March 19, 2011, SMB and other Islamist groups campaigned heavily to adjust the constitution rather than perform a complete overhaul. On June 6, 2011, al-Ikhwan received the tacit approval from power for the legalization of the Party for Freedom and Justice, a showcase for the movement's political brand, with 8,000 founding members, including a hundred Copts.

On the other hand, the SMB seem to show some internal contradictions. Some young SMB have met and advocated a modern form of militancy. Others have talked about the transformation of the SMB into a more modern party like the Turkish AKP, however much the social and economic basis for such a project is lacking. Does this prove anything? Even on a foreign policy level some voices among the SMB advocate a cold peace with Israel. Through its existence, under clandestinity and repression, the SMB has trained a strong nucleus of able militants and cadres. It has also rooted its influence deeply in various layers of Egyptian civil society. Also Islam was never absent from Egypt even during Nasser's "Arab road to socialism" and the SMB always benefited from this. Sharia has always been potentially applicable, the only problem was that the state claimed to be the only authority to apply Sharia or not. The agreed compromise between the SMB and Mubarak's regime can be summed up by "to you the power, to us the society", with some give and take it seemed to work fairly well. The movement of February opened up a small window and the SMB was able to change its partner but not its policy, making a big step forward.

46 op cit. *Les Frères musulmans égyptiens ...*

So what is the real policy beneath the surface?

First we have to understand that the SMB is a real political movement with a goal that is to change society, or at least civil society, because it will never propose to smash capitalism or even to pressurise companies towards a redistribution of profits. But it really does want to make changes - this is the re-Islamisation of civil society.

Second, it proved during February that it can participate in a movement which it has not launched and whose purpose was not in its favour, and after it to agree to sup with the devil, i.e. the Army. This means that what the “political bureau” decides is transmitted to the “central committee” and then to members, and in the end spreads to sympathisers. Nevertheless, the fact that it is no longer repressed will favour the expression of internal differences.

Third, in the situation in which the day to day situation is hard due to the economy, it is better for the SMB to stay in opposition (while in fact sharing power with the Army) and wait for the moment when the fruit is ripe enough to pick. With such a perspective, it is good for the SMB to present itself as more modern, allowing tendencies to publicly express themselves and widen the “political offer” of the SMB. In this way, the SMB looks like a hybrid party, something like a Stalinist one (with the core of trained militants and cadres) and a Peronist one (with its strong roots in civil society) which can infiltrate all layers of society (with objective limits among the peasants and the upper classes).

What the future hold for the SMB? Will it be able to gain a hold over workers in the workplaces? Will the upper classes always be reluctant to make some “Turkish” deal with the SMB? If the economic situation is not stabilised some bourgeois layers could choose the SMB as the best champion against social turmoil. In fact, the SMB do not consider workers as enemies as such. As long as the worker remains an individual he is welcome. But what the SMB hate above all is the working class as a collective body. “Class against class” is an anti Islamic policy that must be fought by the SMB. The problem is that if economic collapse is on the agenda, the Egyptian working class is not ready, up to now, to challenge the ruling class, so allowing the SMB solution to dominate.

Situation of the Copts

The Coptic⁴⁷ Church is one of the most ancient Christian Churches in the Middle East, the first church being founded in 42 AD. Starting from a split in 451 during the Chalcedon council, the Coptic Church has lived a separate life from the other Christian churches, both Catholic and Orthodox. It is confined to Egypt and has identified itself with Egyptian history from ancient times and so the Copts were promoters of modern nationalism during the nineteenth century. Its main religious characteristic is the cult of the martyrs, prosecuted by the Roman Empire in 284 AD., but also the use of the Coptic language⁴⁸ for religious ceremonies. From the Islamic conquest in 640, the influence of Coptic church continuously decreased through both periods of relative tolerance and those of harsh persecution like the ones of 1010 (under Caliph al-Hakim) or in 1320 under the Mameluke domination.

The bourgeois revolution of 1921 opened the way for the Copts’ participation (mainly the Coptic bourgeoisie) in national life. Copts were militants of the Wafd party and two were prime ministers and one the president. The success of the Coptic bourgeoisie was that it owned 50% of the national wealth. They were not only like Boutros Galli’s family who

47 Copt comes from an ancient Greek word “*Aegyptos*” meaning Egypt, coming itself from old Egyptian word “*Het Ka Ptah*”

48 This language comes from the ancient demotic Egyptian language and is written with an alphabet mixing Greek and Coptic letters.

owned 10,000 feddans (1 feddan = 40 Acres or 0.4 ha) of land, but were also private capitalists in various industrial sectors.

After the fall of the monarchy in 1952, it was easy for the so-called Arab Socialism represented by Nasser to expropriate the Coptic bourgeoisie, mainly in the countryside, in the name of nationalism and socialism. A lot of Copts (along with Jews) fled from Egypt, significantly reducing their numbers in society. By way of compensation, the freedom to practice the Coptic religion was guaranteed as a counter balance of Nasser's repression against the Muslim Brothers, but this changed after the defeat of the 6 Days War in 1967. To consolidate his weakened power Nasser called for the unity of the nation behind Islam. During the '70s and '80s, Copts suffered from Islamist pressure leading to Islamic taxes on shop keepers, the forced sale of properties and lands, the boycott of doctors and pharmacists etc. The state ignored this but changed its mind when it again attacked the Muslim Brothers and Islamists like *Gamaat Islamiya*, starting in 1992. Nevertheless, in 1997 the Islamists began to target Copts by killing them and bombing Coptic neighbourhoods and schools, like in Abu Qourqas (Middle Egypt) in February 1997 where 10 Copts were killed, while spontaneous pogroms also broke out. And the fact is that if the Islamists killed in public places, people would attack Copts that lived next to them without any reason other than panic or simply fear of the other. The harshest incident was in January 2000 in Al-Kocheh in Upper Egypt when a dispute between street vendors (one Coptic and one Muslim) degenerated after a call from the mosques for "Christian hunting" led to 21 dead and many houses burnt down. In June 2001, Copts demonstrated in the streets of Cairo against rumours planted in newspapers that a Coptic monk had sexual relationships in a monastery in the Asyut area. This leads to 70 demonstrators being injured but no deaths.

Copts are second-class citizens. They are prohibited from being upper-level officers in the army, deans and high ranking professors in universities, judges of any rank... they represent no more than 1.5% of public sector employees. They are out of "politics". In 1995, the NDP (Mubarak's party) had no Coptic candidates and it's only because according to Egyptian law the president can designate 10 deputies that 6 Copts were in Parliament's lower chamber (out of 454 deputies).

However, in the Cairo and Alexandria areas, Coptic capitalists, like the Sawiris family who own a building company, telecommunications, tourism and services, are very active. As a sign of good will Mubarak promoted Youssef Boutros Ghali, a Copt, as minister of Economy and Finance, in 1999.

In fact the Mubarak regime had an ambiguous attitude towards Copts in general. In 2004, he established that the Coptic Christmas (January 7th) will be a national holiday and in 2005 that destroyed Coptic churches will be rebuilt. Before the elections of December 2005 that saw a relative victory of Muslim Brothers, the official representatives of the Coptic Church like pope Shenouda III publicly called for a vote for Mubarak's party. During the campaign, in Alexandria, fights between Copts and Muslims broke out.

In January 2011, after the bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria, that killed 21 people and injured 96, confrontations with the police erupted in Alexandria the same day and in Cairo the day after.

During the events of February and March, no sign of anti-Coptic agitation was seen.

Today it's difficult to estimate the number of Copts because "minority" is a nonsense in Egyptian statistics but the word is also rejected by some Coptic intellectuals because they say that "*Copts are not a minority of Egypt but an essential part of it*"⁴⁹. But estimates are around 8 million. Very important in Cairo and Alexandria, the big cities of modern Egypt, Copts are

49 Muhammad Haykal

also living in the upper Nile valley from Asyut to Luxor (*Saïd* area) where they represent a third of the population (roughly 4 million) and are the majority in many villages. In this area, Copts are no different from their Arab neighbours: poor and very poor, peasants tied to the land and following the *Tar*, the local honour code.

But we cannot say that Copts are, even in Cairo, a unified community of wealthy people. For instance, dustmen's jobs are not performed by a public authority but by "private" entrepreneurs who negotiate their work with neighbourhood authorities. They are called *Zabbalin* and 90% of them (roughly 150,000) are Copts and are living in Moqattam neighbourhood. They are despised also because they are pig breeders and this is the worst sacrilege for Muslims. In April 2009, under Islamist pressure, the government decided to slaughter 250,000 pigs belonging to Copts on the pretext of swine flu. This reduced the means of survival for a lot of poor Copts.

Copts are not a unified body even by religion: there are 350,000 Catholic Copts and 200,000 protestant Copts, not counting the atheist Copts....

What is sure after the slaughters in May is that the situation of the Copts will not improve.

OPPOSITION: THE VACUUM

Political parties

In Egypt, the National Democratic Party had two million card-carrying members when it was in power.

After the fall of Mubarak attempts to establish political parties in all corners of the political spectrum exploded. On the one side rose, for instance, right-wing liberal parties like the Free Egyptians Party, launched by the telecommunication tycoon Naguib Sawiris. The party envisions a civil democratic state that would adopt a free market economy, encourage private investment, and in the meantime ensure social justice.

Revolutionary Socialists

Relatively important (or at least visible) in the grassroots of leftist activism in Egypt are the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), closed to The International Socialist Tendency and the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The group began in the late 1980s among small circles of students influenced by Trotskyism. The organisation functioned during Mubarak era underground. After 2000 the activists from RS were involved in the Palestinian solidarity movement and attracted hundreds of new militants. The activists of RS were very active during the latest uprising in Egypt - there are many known faces among them like the blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy (aka *3arabawy*) or Gigi Ibrahim.

What is positive about the RS is its stress on the importance of struggle in workplaces. "The regime can afford to wait out the sit-ins and demonstrations for days and weeks, but it cannot last beyond a few hours if workers use strikes as a weapon," wrote RS in February 2011. They argue that the working class was the key player in ousting Mubarak, rather than the Egyptian youths' use of Facebook and Twitter and, as has been widely reported.

On the other hand, the political profile of the RS has a lot of weaknesses. Just like their British colleagues the RS follows an anti-imperialist position, concretely a very strong anti-American and anti-Israel stance, which is very problematic from a working class point of view. From this it's only a few steps to the "united front with all the anti-imperialist forces", in this case with the Islamists.

The RS's relationship with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood is distinct from earlier leftist organizations in Egypt, which held similar positions to that of the Stalinist Communist Party of Egypt (see below), which generally equated Islamism with fascism. The RS however,

advanced the slogan "Sometimes with the Islamists, never with the state". The slogan was coined by Chris Harman of the SWP in Britain, in his book, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, which was translated into Arabic, and widely distributed by the RS in 1997. The RS has thus been able to campaign alongside the Brotherhood at times, for example, during the pro-intifada and anti-war movements.

Workers Democratic Party

The Revolutionary Socialists were, together with other leftists, involved in setting up the Workers Democratic Party (WDP), established in February 2011, but till now (August 2011) not officially recognized because it falls under the law prohibiting parties formed on the basis of class.

The WDP is backed by the new Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions. According to official data it has around 2000 members. The party claims to be anti-capitalist and on the side of the workers, but also says that socialist revolution "is not feasible in the current political environment". The Egyptian working class allegedly has "a lack of political experience and underdevelopment of the labour movement". They instead advocate the re-nationalization of industry and "more genuine worker democracy". Unlike under Gamal Abdel Nasser, where state-owned factories were appointed by the president, the WDP calls on workers of these factories to appoint their own managers. "We want to bring back the companies, which were usurped under the corrupt era of Mubarak and the old gang, to the Egyptian people", says Fayoumy, one of the founders of WDP, a labour activist and long time electrician with Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in the central Delta city of Mahalla al-Kubra.

It is certainly also a demand of part of the working class, which sees in privatization the further worsening of working conditions, lowering of wages and layoffs. But, probably, part of the army will have a very similar desire because their economic power has been eroded by the two decades of privatization carried out by Mubarak and his son Gamal.

Egyptian Communist Party

In Egypt there has also existed, from 1975, the Stalinist Egyptian Communist Party (ECP), which until 2011 functioned only underground and faced repression. It traces itself back to the Communist Party of Egypt founded in 1922, which later supported President Nasser (even today the ECP speaks only positively about him). The Party took part in the uprising, but its demands were oriented mainly towards the forms of the post-Mubarak government without any reference to the situation in workplaces. There is unfortunately no accessible information about how many militants the ECP has and what its influence is within the working class.

Unions

Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF)

The only existing trade union structure in Egypt before 2011 was the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which was essentially an arm of the ruling party – something like the unions in the Eastern Europe before 1989. According to official data, it is organised into 23 unions, with 2.5 million workers, which means around 10 % of the workforce.

ETUF played no role in the workers struggles of the last decade. On the contrary it opposed the strikes and supported the government's privatisation plans. So, this means that until 2011 all workers' struggles in Egypt were organized outside the unions, because this structure was totally alienated from the needs and demands of the workers. It is one of the

main differences from the movement in Tunisia, where the official trade union federation UGTT formally joined the working class protests.

Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (FETU)

The response to the state ETUF is the new Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions. FETU was founded on 30 January 2011 during the protests, at the meeting convened in Tahrir square. At the beginning there were health sector workers, teachers, other state employees and people from various industries. But in numbers this new federation is very weak: it has, in 12 unions, only 250,000 members. This means approximately 1% of the total workforce.⁵⁰

Labour NGOs

The organisations which did play an important part in the Egypt protests and strikes of recent years were the pro-labour NGOs. One of the best known of these groups is the Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUW), which has been around since 1990 – it was predated by the big strikes on the railways (1986) and the steelworks (1989). As a result, these organizations were targeted by the regime, their offices closed and leaders arrested. Important for the activists, for example from CTUW, was the connection with Western trade unions, for instance with the unions from the Netherlands or with the American AFL-CIO.

Recently CTUW and other labour groups and the unions have called for the dissolving of ETUF, but so far without success.

Despite the fresh wave of new unionism, it is questionable if the working class in Egypt, after the experiences with the state ETUF, will want to again taste the insipid fruits of the other unions. “Workers are used to believing that unions are government entities that one joins to serve his personal interests” complains Kamal Abbas, general coordinator of CTUW. “We need to exert a lot of effort to convince workers that labour unions are organizations that seek to improve working conditions for workers” he adds.⁵¹

ON THE WORKING CLASS SIDE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORKERS’ STRUGGLES IN EGYPT

Back to the nineteenth century

The development of the proletariat in its modern form is always inextricably bound up with the rise of trade unions and social democracy, however much we might wish to see a “pure” expression of the proletariat separating itself from its representation within bourgeois society. In Egypt, as elsewhere in the region, particularly Tunisia, there is the added complication that it was also enmeshed with populist nationalism and therefore the rise of the “development state”.

The emergence of an urban industrial working class in Egypt can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when Mehmed Ali, the Ottoman governor of Egypt who participated in the Anglo-Ottoman campaign to drive out the French, established state-owned textile workshops. In the 1820s steam engines imported from England were installed in workshops in Cairo and Mansura. However, this brief early experiment in state-led, import-substitution, development was dismantled when the British imposed free trade in textiles in 1840. But the textile industry has continued to be important in class formation up to the present day. Cotton, both as an agricultural product and as a raw material for the mills, has played the leading role

50 <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/418296>.

51 <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/418296>.

in textiles ever since the American Civil War (with the blockade against the Southern States) created the conditions for a boom in the export of Egyptian cotton.

The Suez Canal opened in 1869. It was mostly built by forced labour – there was an annual *corvée* 20,000 labourers and thousands died during the 1859-69 construction period. Slave labour was also involved – East African slaves were used on coastal ships as late as 1873. One of the first recorded strikes by workers in Egypt was that of the coal-heavers of Port Said (a town founded during the canal construction) in 1882.

The largest employer in the early 20th century was the state railway, which included the first railway line ever built in the Middle East the Cairo-Alexandria line completed in 1854. It employed around 12,000 workers. The Cairo Tramway Company established in 1894 had over 2,000 workers.

After the state bankruptcy of 1876 and the British occupation of 1882, industrial investment in Egypt shifted decisively to multinational investment groups, primarily French, British and Greek. Along with modern transport, the cigarette industry was another major centre of class formation. By the early 1900s five Greek firms controlled 80% of the export trade and employed 2,200. There were also 2000 employed for the local market. The most highly skilled workers in this sector, the hand rollers, were mostly Greek and they organised the first known strikes in Cairo and created the first unions.

Following a provocative incident by British army officers in 1906 (the Dinshaway incident) there was a massive upsurge in nationalist agitation in Cairo. This was to have a profound impact on working class life and organisation, despite the isolation of the educated land-owning nationalists from the working class. The fact that the nationalist movement was led by landowners was actually a factor in the development of a strong relationship between the nationalists and the trade unions. The demands of urban workers didn't pose a direct threat to large landowners! Consequently, they wanted to mobilise urban workers for the nation rather than peasants.

We should also note that up until the 1930s most wage labourers in large firms in Egypt were employed and supervised by people seen as foreigners by virtue of language, nationality and religion – British and French bosses, but also locally resident Greeks, Italians, Armenians, Syrian Christians, Jews... Therefore it's not too surprising if strikes were often seen, by the workers and wider society, as part of the nationalist movement. However, we shouldn't forget that up until the early twentieth century a large proportion of the working class were also "foreign", and non-Egyptian workers often played an important role in militant strike action, political agitation and the formation of early unions. For example, a committee of fourteen made up of five Greeks, five Egyptians, two Syrians, one Italian and an Armenian, ran the shoemakers union before World War I. For this reason internationalist politics, in its Socialist and Anarchist forms, had some implantation in Egyptian society over several decades, but it never achieved much of an audience amongst the native Arabic-speaking workers.

The railway and tramway workers struck several times in 1908-10 and, although the demands of the workers were strictly concerned with workers' needs – for a shorter working day, higher pay, against fines and sackings – the struggles were enthusiastically supported by the nationalists.

The attempt at a bourgeois revolution

At the end of World War I a nationalist party known as the Wafd ("Delegation", because they wanted to attend the Versailles peace conference) was created. The suppression of the Wafd leads to massive demonstrations and strikes. There was a general upsurge in workers' struggles and the formation of the same kind of organisations as in other industrial

centres. The Communist Party of Egypt and its associated union confederation the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail, of course!) were founded in 1921. The CGT had a massive influence in the workers' movement, particularly in Alexandria. Around this same time Wafdist lawyers became important advisers to trade unions and even encouraged workers to strike, much like middle class radicals in nineteenth century Britain had done.

The Wafd took office in 1924 and, naturally enough, immediately started suppressing strikes as well as banning the CPE and the CGT. At the same time the Wafd created its own union federation. This was to set a pattern for relations between workers and nationalist regimes.

The urban working class grew significantly during World War II, as wage labourers were recruited to serve the needs of the Allied armies based in Egypt. At the end of the war there were around 623,000 factory workers, out of a population of 18m. But large numbers of workers were laid off after the war was over. There were three big waves of strikes between 1945 and 1952. In all of them textile workers and their economic demands played a leading role, but so did nationalist organisations such as the DMNL (Democratic Movement for National Liberation).

The first two waves could only be contained by savage repression – there was a period of martial law from 1948 to 1949. The third broke out after the Wafd were once more elected to office in 1950, with very low voter turnout. A major issue for workers this time was that the government brought in minimum wage and “cost of living allowance” legislation which was not enforced. On 25 January 1952 British forces attacked an Egyptian police station and killed over 50 assorted cops, apparently because they believed that the cops had been aiding guerrilla attacks against British installation in the Suez Canal zone. This led to immediate public outrage and a massive nationalist riot in Cairo. Fires destroyed large parts of the European business district. Martial law was declared and repression once again succeeded in suppressing both worker and nationalist agitation, but the old regime (centred on the monarchy) was widely seen as finished.

After independence, 1952-1984

However, there was only one force in Egyptian society sufficiently well organised and united to take on the job of ending this regime: the army. On 23 July 1952, Gamel Abdel Nasser and young army officers calling themselves the Free Officers overthrew the monarchy and established the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). As with previous nationalist governments, it had real support from workers, with its talk of “social justice” as well as Egyptian independence and the abolition of “feudalism” (that is, domination by big landowners). Once again, the workers would pay for their misplaced enthusiasm. In August, 9,000 workers at the Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving Company in Kafr al-Dawwar, in the Nile Delta, went on strike over various economic demands, the removal of abusive managers and the right to a freely elected union.

Despite the workers' proclamations of support for the new regime, the army quickly crushed the strike after an exchange of gunfire between workers and cops. Two workers were dragged in front of a military tribunal and sentenced to death – they were executed within a few days. At the same time the RCC passed legislation banning strikes but also making it harder to lay off workers imposing arbitration on all labour disputes. In 1956, Nasser, the only candidate on the ballot paper, was elected president with 99.9% of the vote. As is well known, Nasser became popular across the Arab world, after nationalising the Suez Canal and obtaining, with the help of the US and, of course, the Soviet Union, the departure of the French, the British and the Israelis in the “Suez Crisis” of October 1956. In January 1957 the regime created the first state-run trade union federation, the Egyptian Workers' Federation. In

1961 it was reorganised into the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which is still in existence. The foundations of the style of military authoritarianism which still exists in Egypt today had been laid.

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s Nasser consolidated a new social settlement known as Arab Socialism. All foreign firms and large and medium-sized Egyptian companies were nationalised. Their workers became state employees and their standard of living was significantly improved and they received numerous social benefits. The regime guaranteed all university graduates a white-collar job and all high school graduates a blue-collar job.

But the glories of Arab Socialism did not last long. The first five-year plan of 1957-62 generated 1 million new jobs and an annual GDP growth of 6%. However, the second five-year plan (1962-67) was abandoned due to lack of investment and real wages fell sharply in 1965. Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War also served to undermine the legitimacy of Nasserism.

Presidents Anwar Sadat (1970-81) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) set about reversing Nasser's economic and political orientation with pro-US "Washington Consensus" policies, notably flexible labour market reforms and cuts in subsidies on basic consumer items. The cuts in subsidies led to the "bread riots" of January 1977, causing the government to temporarily back off. The oil price boom of 1974-82 created the opportunity for workers to migrate to the oil exporting countries and earn many times what they could earn at home. Remittances from such workers became the most important source of Egypt's hard currency and created a pattern of massive migrant labour which has existed to the present day. The fall in oil prices after 1982 and the resulting economic contraction led to a sharp rise in workers' struggles in 1984-89.

From bread riots to Mubarak's fall

In 1984 a new law was applied which doubled wage deductions for health and pensions in the public sector. In October of that year tens of thousands of textile workers in Kafr al-Dawwar (see above) along with their families poured into the streets in a three-day insurrection. They cut telephone lines, started fires, blocked transportation and destroyed train cars, leading to a massive confrontation with security forces. At the Iron and Steel Company in Helwan, an industrial suburb of Cairo, where there were 25,000 workers, there were two workplace occupations in July and August 1989. The action was in favour of a pay rise and against the sacking of two worker activists. Again there was a big confrontation with the forces of order, resulting in a worker being killed.

In 1991, Egypt made an Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) agreement with the IMF and the World Bank. This led to a large number of state companies being privatised, but even today there are large concentrations of workers still in state employment, such as the 25,000 textile workers of the Mahalla al-Kubra complex, that great symbol of economic nationalism and workers' power. There was another wave of collective actions in the mid-1990s, but it was not until the early 2000s that workers' struggle really began to take off again, mostly concerned with loss of real wages due to inflation and the uncertain future of workers faced with the privatisation of state companies. This was particularly so after the Nazif government came to power in July 2004.

During the 2000-2010 decade over 2 million workers participated in more than 3,300 factory occupations, strikes, demonstrations, or other collective actions. As before, workers in the textile and clothing industries played a leading role - the Mahalla al-Kubra factory was on strike in December 2006 and September 2007 and the workers made substantial economic gains. And this role was not just a question of leading by example. For example, it was the workers in this historic factory who first raised the demand for a national minimum wage of

1,200 Egyptian pounds (about \$US 215) per month in 2008 – a demand which was taken up across Egypt by other groups of workers. The strikes also spread to building material manufacture, transport, food processing, sanitation, oil production...

In addition there was an unprecedented wave of militancy by administrative workers in the state sector, notably the urban property tax collectors, who understood that their strike action could instantly deprive the state of revenue! In December 2007, 3,000 municipal property tax collectors occupied the street in front of the Ministry of Finance for 11 days. They won a 325% wage increase, and their action led to the creation of the first non-state-run trade union since Nasser abolished such things. Interestingly, it was this group of workers who established the prolonged street occupation as a method of struggle. For example, this was taken up in February 2010 by workers from over a dozen workplaces who sat in front of the parliament building for many weeks. The urban middle class formations campaigning for democracy over the last decade have certainly identified with workers' struggles, even if this has not always been reciprocated by the workers. For example, in March 2008 democracy activists made an online call for a general strike which appeared to have an effect, but only because the Mahalla al-Kubra textile workers were already out! This led to the creation of the April 6 Youth group. However, when the same people made a repeat call in May of the same year, it was largely ignored. Nevertheless, it is not too fanciful to say that the indefinite street occupation tactic was copied from militant workers.

RECENT WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES

Presentation

For the chronology of workers' struggles, both inside and outside factories, listed below we have collected data from various media in Egypt (but not in Arabic) and all over the world. We have kept only fairly precise information - that is to say, with identified factories (location, production) and, above all, the number of strikers out of the total workforce. As you can see, the data remains "fuzzy" mainly because we don't know what the outcome of many of these strikes was. Happily we found two examples of detailed reports of strikes (one in the biggest cotton mill in Al Mahalla al Kubra on February 24 and one in a textile mill in Ghazl Al-Mahalla on February 23) and insert them as by-lines.

Chronology

Feb 08

About a kilometre from Tahrir Square, some 500 employees protest outside the headquarters of the state-owned Rose al-Youssef newspaper and magazine. Protesters denounce the operational and editorial policies of their editor-in-chief Abdallah Kamal and administrative chief Karam Gaber. Another protest involving around 200 journalists is staged outside the Journalists' Syndicate in downtown Cairo, demanding the recall of the syndicate's president Makram Mohamed Ahmed, a member of NDP.

At the headquarters of the state-owned *Al-Ahram*, Egypt's largest daily paper, around 500 print-shop employees protest, demanding full-time contracts, benefits and bonuses.

5,000 employees of the state-owned telecommunications giant, Telecom Egypt, stage static protests at three different locations across the city, for the establishment of an adequate minimum wage and a maximum wage.

More than 6,000 protesters belonging to the Suez Canal Authority stage sit-ins in the cities of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, demanding salary adjustments.

Over 100 workers at the state-owned Kafr al-Dawwar Silk Company and over 500 at the state-owned Kafr al-Dawwar Textile Company protest, before and after their shifts, to

demand overdue bonuses and food compensation payments.

Approximately 4,000 workers from the Coke Coal and Basic Chemicals Company in Helwan announce a strike for higher salaries, permanent contracts for temporary workers, the payment of the export bonus and an end to corruption. They also express solidarity with protesters in downtown Cairo.

Around 2,000 workers from Helwan Silk Factory stage a protest at the company headquarters to call for the removal of the board of directors.

In Mahalla, some 1,500 workers at the private-sector Abul Sebae Textile Company protest to demand their overdue wages and bonuses. These workers also block a highway.

In Quesna, some 2,000 workers and employees of the Sigma Pharmaceuticals Company go on strike. They demand improved wages, promotions, and the recall of a number of their company's administrative chiefs.

In Mahalla, Gharbiya, hundreds of workers from the Mahalla spinning company organize an open-ended sit-in in front of the company's administrative office to call for the delivery of overdue promotions. More than 1,500 workers at Kafr al-Zayyat hospital, also in Gharbiya, stage a sit-in inside their hospital to call for the payment of their overdue bonuses. The nursing staffs start the sit-in and are joined by the doctors and the rest of the workers at the hospital.

Around 350 workers from the Egyptian Cement Company protest at their factory and outside their company's headquarters in Qattamiya. They demand the establishment of a trade union committee at the factory, a right which the company's administration had denied.

In Suez, more than 1,000 workers from the Misr National Steel company begin a strike to call for pay raises, saying they have not received any bonuses for years and that the average salary at the company does not exceed LE600. About 2,000 unemployed young people gathered outside a petroleum firm to demand the company give them jobs.

Feb 09

Protesters in Port Said, a city of 600,000, set fire to a government building, saying local officials had ignored their requests for better housing.

A lawyers union launches protests in Cairo with 3,000 demonstrating.

5,000 unemployed youths storm a government building in Aswan, demanding the dismissal of the governor.

Some 3,000 Egyptian National Railways (ENR) workers go on strike demanding that the Minister reconsider their incentives. The protesters sat on railway lines, disrupting train services, threatening not to move until their demands were met. An official source at the Transport Ministry said that the ENR had received instructions to respond to all of the demands and to resolve the strike peacefully.

1,000 of Petrotrade Co. (Egyptian Petroleum Trading Service Co.) workers organize a number of sporadic protests at the company's Cairo branches, joined by workers from Petroment and Syanco petroleum companies to demand wage increases and permanent job assignments. The protesters stage sit-ins at the Abdeen, Maadi, Nasr City, Haram and Faisal branches of Petrotrade co., with some 1,500 protesters at the Haram and Faisal branches. They complained that their monthly salaries of LE500-700 were not sufficient for a dignified life and they demanded their salaries be raised to LE3000-4000 pounds per month.

More than 2,000 workers from the Sigma pharmaceutical company in Quesn stayed on strike.

Feb 10

The strikes and protests continue despite promises by Egypt's newly formed government to raise public sector salaries and pensions by 15%, one of a series of steps taken to placate the protesters.

100 tunnel workers block the entrance to the Saleh Salem tunnel, a major traffic conduit in central Cairo, around midday, waving signs demanding better contracts.

Up to 3,000 workers of a state oil and gas firm in the northern port city of Alexandria go on strike over pay and conditions.

About 150 temporary employees at Cairo airport demand fixed contracts and better working conditions.

Public transport authority employees and workers start a protest in front of their central office in Gabal al-Ahmar area in Cairo. Thousands chant demands for better wages, bonuses and health care. "We have nothing to do with Tahrir, and we do not have political demands. Our demands are merely concerned with pay and bonuses," said a driver. A bus driver holds up his pay slip to indicate his low salary, which according to the pay slip is LE 342 Egyptian pounds (\$58) per month, as he and other bus drivers strike at a bus depot in Shubra Mazalat.

Hundreds of doctors in white coats march down a street from the Qasr El-Aini hospital to Tahrir, chanting "Join us, O Egyptian".

Workers of the Misr Spinning and Weaving textile factory in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra padlock the buildings and mass in front of the administration offices in solidarity with the protesters in Tahrir Square and for the minimum wage to be implemented.

Feb 13

"Labour strikes were spreading like wildfire," says Mohamed Mourad, a railway worker and board member of the Coordinating Committee for Rights and Freedoms, an umbrella group for labour organizations from Aswan in the south to Alexandria on the Mediterranean.

Workers at Misr Spinning and Weaving, Egypt's largest factory, suspend their strike in support of the revolt that toppled Hosni Mubarak but will continue to press for higher wages.

More than 400 workers at a spinning machinery factory in the governorate of Helwan strike. They call for an increase in annual bonuses and demand that delayed promotions be implemented.

Around 700 workers at Coca-Cola resume their strike at the company's Nasr City location. They call for the permanent appointment of temporary workers, and salary improvements to cope with rising prices.

At Misr-Iran Textile Company, 2,400 workers organize a sit-in calling for the resignation of the managerial board.

The mostly female work force of a major carpet maker in El Mahalla continues their strike to raise the minimum wage.

From state-owned financial institutions in Cairo to Alexandria's seaport, workers start striking, disrupting operations and forcing the central bank to declare an unscheduled bank holiday on Monday 14 February.

Feb 14

Egypt's army called for national solidarity, urging workers to play their role in reviving the economy, and criticising strike action. It was the fifth communiqué by the Higher Military Council.

"This is stage two of the revolution, when the working class takes Tahrir to the factories" said a labour-rights activist.

Around 150 workers from Egypt's tourism industry hold a protest on Monday by the

Great Pyramids to demand higher wages.

The central bank of Egypt has asks commercial banks close their offices on Monday in response to a strike call by workers of state-owned banks.

In Cairo, thousands of workers protest outside the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation to demand the resignation of its unpopular head Hussein Megawer and the board members, who they accuse of corruption.

At least 3,000 workers at the public Transport Authority continue their strike for a fifth day demanding that the board be sacked and better pay.

At the Cairo Opera House, staffs are demanding the removal of the director accusing him of corruption and ignoring employee demands for higher wages.

Medics at the Qasr al-Aini hospital stage a walkout, blocking traffic on a major road in central Cairo.

In the Giza district, hundreds of ambulance drivers demonstrate to demand better pay and permanent jobs. They park at least 70 ambulances on a roadside along the river, but don't block the main road.

In Kerdassa, south of the capital, more than 5,000 workers of a large textile plant stage a sit-in for better working conditions, demanding to have their temporary contracts changed into permanent ones.

In Giza, around 500 ambulance workers call for health benefits and higher wages.

In the Nile Delta province of Qaliubiya, traffic police refuse to show up for work, demanding higher wages.

In the province of Beni Sueif, thousands of residents protest outside the governorate building to demand housing.

In Aswan, medics at a cancer hospital refuse to work in support of colleagues on temporary contracts.

Feb 15

Cell phone users in Egypt are receiving text messages from the military exhorting the workers to do the right thing. "Some of the sectors organizing protests, despite the return to normal life, are delaying our progression," one of the messages said.

Thousands of workers in banks, textile and food factories, oil facilities and government offices are still on strike. Prices of food and drink, accounting for 44% of the basket used to measure inflation, increased year-on-year by 18% in January, up from 17.2% in December. Egyptians say prices have risen since then. The new cabinet has already promised to maintain subsidies and raise some state wages and pensions by 15%.

25% of the 6,000 workers at the Arafa company in the Tenth of Ramadan City factories go on strike.

Lecico, the ceramics maker, says operations have been disrupted for the past two and a half weeks. It agrees to increase pay and benefits after a two-day strike. Productivity was down 30% during the past two weeks and local commercial and export activity halted for eight days.

Feb 16

Hussein Megawer the head of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), calls for an end to labour action and urges all the heads of trade unions to "initiate dialogue with workers in order to understand their problems and demands ... in order to put an end to the strikes".

More than 12,000 workers at state-owned Misr Spinning and Weaving go on strike again. In Damietta, about 6,000 spinning and weaving workers are also striking.

Companies such as ceramics maker Lecico have already bowed to some union demands.

Sinai Cement says earnings will be affected by the bank shutdown and ASEC Cement, a unit of private equity firm Citadel Capital, says contractors are having trouble due to strikes and this is affecting its work schedule.

Central Auditing Organization employees stage a sit-in demanding that the organization be given total independence from the government. Workers call for amending regulations, promotions and a bonus increase, among other demands.

About 2,000 Manpower Ministry employees protest against corruption and call for bonus pay and a monthly travel allowance of LE 200.

In Ismailia, government employees at the irrigation, education and health ministries protest outside the province headquarters demanding "fairer salaries".

The Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) vowed to take all necessary measures to ensure that the legitimate demands of workers in the banking sector are met.

In Port Said, about 1,000 people demonstrate to demand that a chemical factory be closed because it is dumping waste in to a lake near the city.

Feb 17

Railway transport is stalled as conductors protest, calling for equality with workers in other transport sectors concerning the 30% bonus approved by the Ministry of Transport.

More than 600 workers at metro maintenance workshops in Tora, south of Cairo, prevent metro trains from stopping at that station, demanding permanent instead of temporary contracts.

Around 1,500 workers of the Suez Canal Authority stage protests in three cities, demanding better salaries and medical insurance. Workers, including technicians and administrators, rally in front of governorate buildings in Ismailia, Suez and Port Said,

Some 20,000 workers go on strike at the state-owned Mahalla Textile Company for improved working conditions, rights and wages. The workers announce an open-ended strike and chant slogans against administrative corruption.

In a statement, striking workers in Mahalla el-Kubra, said that they will no longer take part in a government-controlled labour union but that they would rather join the new Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, which it said was set up on Jan. 30.

Mahalla Textile Company

"We are in a revolution, and the revolution, as they say, cleaned out the corrupt leaders," says Faisal Naousha, a stocky, moustachioed 43-year-old who is an organiser of the strike which he said has shut down the Misr Spinning and Weaving factory in Al-Mahallah al-Kubra. "The strike is on-going ... The military leadership sat with us yesterday and we gave them a list of demands,"

An increase in wages is another key demand. "The salaries of the workers of Mahallah are ... nothing," said Ibrahim, a 35-year-old who has worked at the factory for 14 years. Naousha said workers make between 400 and 1,000 Egyptian pounds (\$68 and \$170) per month, but want salaries to be raised to between 1,200 and 2,500 Egyptian pounds (\$204 and \$425).

Apart from striking in solidarity with the anti-Mubarak protesters, Misr Spinning and Weaving workers said they were also directly involved. Workers would "work, then protest, work, then protest," said Tantawi, who was burning through and freely distributing locally-produced Cleopatra cigarettes. (thedailynewsegypt.com , 18 Feb 2011)

Feb 19

About 300 labourers in the Sukari gold mine near the southern Red Sea coastal town of Marsa Alam start a hunger strike. They attribute the action to poor salaries, increased working hours, wrongdoing by company officials, and the fact that the company failed to sign permanent contracts with them.

Around 15,000 workers from Misr Spinning and Weaving hold a sit-in for a fourth day in front of the administration building and refuse to end their protest until their principal demand to remove the head of the company is met.

Feb 21

Labour protests within Egypt's electricity sector escalate as workers at seven power plants stage sit-ins. Technicians and administrative officers organize strikes at the Nubariya plant in Beheira, Tebbin and Karimat in Helwan, Abu Sultan in Ismailia, and Oyoun Moussa and Ataqa in Suez. They chose to stage the sit-ins at their workplaces so that the sector can continue functioning.

Damietta's Kafr al-Battikh plant also sees a number of small-scale demonstrations calling for permanent job contracts. They demand danger and housing allowances, an increase in basic salaries, and the raising of their job grades to reflect the certification they have obtained while in their posts.

Feb 22

Vice President of the Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving Company in Kafr al-Dawar, Raafat Geneidi, dies after thousands of angry factory workers stormed his office on Tuesday.

Workers at the company had organized a protest to demand the resignation of the board of directors and the union board. They also demanded the resignation of the company advisors and termination of employment contracts for people above the state pension age.

Feb 23

A group of police officers, who are protesting after being fired, set the Interior Ministry's personnel building in downtown Cairo aflame. Military police cordon off the ministry while the cops chant slogans calling for their jobs back. Police have over the past few days staged protests in front of the ministry to call for higher pay, and some complain that they were arbitrarily dismissed from work.

Some 1,800 workers from the South Valley Agricultural Development Company and the Ramses Agricultural Services Company in Toshka declare an indefinite strike, threatening to torch their respective companies' premises if their demands are not met. Workers from the East Delta Electricity Company continue to protest to demand the dismissal of the head of the company's production department, who, protesters say, had arbitrarily fired many of them.

Teachers contracted on a temporary basis by the Ministry of Education stage protests to demand permanent contracts and pay raises.

At the National Railways Authority, some 300 laid-off workers stage protests to demand that they be reinstated. A military vehicle arrives at the building to protect it after the armed forces were told about the protest.

Some 1,500 workers from the Loqma Pipes Factory hold 50 managers hostage in an effort to force the company chairman to give them salary raises and bonuses.

Workers from Cairo International Airport and the Nile Cotton Company stage demonstrations to demand bonuses and better working conditions.

In 6 October City, 450 workers from the Cleaning Authority stage protests to demand improved financial conditions.

In Qena, 400 workers from Hebi Pharmaceutical block the highway. They say they have not received wage increases for the last two years.

In Sharqiya, workers from Hakim Plastics manage to block the Cairo-Ismailia

highway for a full three hours to demand higher salaries before the armed forces intervene to disperse them.

Around 700 employees from the United Bank stage a sit-in to call for better compensation and accuse their president of procrastination and refusal to respond to their demands. Employees from the Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit, and the Misr-Iran Development Bank also participate.

Employees from several branches of the Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit protest at the bank's headquarters to press their demands.

Among the demands at the Misr-Iran Development Bank are calls for higher pay and for setting regulations for medical insurance.

Some of the demands are satisfied and the workers are back to work at the Misr Spinning & Weaving Co. factory. "Our most important demands were met, and we're very happy for that," said Fayomy, 47, an electrician and member of a 10-worker committee that negotiated an end to the brief strike with the government.

Feb 24

Hundreds of mine workers in Bahariya Oasis hold sit-ins to protest poor living conditions.

In Port Said, hundreds of residents of the village of Radwan demand investigations into violations regarding the sale of land allotted for college graduates (under the Mubarak project for young graduates) without official permission.

In Beni Suef, 1,000 new graduates, workers, and teachers protest for the second day in front of the Education Ministry building in the governorate.

Dozens of residents of Nadha village in Amriya protest in front of the carbon factory. The protesters complain about the carbon particle emissions from the factory.

In Suez, around 1,200 workers in the Egyptian and national steel companies block the Al-Adabiya-Ain Sokhna Road. Workers in the Egypt Amiron company for steel pipes continue their sit-in for the fourth consecutive day at company headquarters.

In Kafr al-Sheikh, bus drivers in the city of Desouk go on strike to protest the increasing cost of their insurance.

In Daqahlia, 1,500 farmers protest the actions of the Ministry of Religious Endowments. The ministry had illegally sold land to traders and businessmen in a public auction. The farmers had been renting the land for more than 70 years.

In Damietta, tens of employees in the health departments in Farsco and Zarkaa hold a protest, calling for increases in bonuses, the restructuring of wages, and the removal of the department's financial manager.

In Menoufiya, 50 women from the families of prisoners in Shibin al-Kom general prison, protest in front of the court complex to demand that their relatives be released or that they be allowed to visit them in the prison.

In Qalyoubia, around 300 drivers storm the governorate's building, destroying the main gate. They go up to the second floor, occupy the halls and encircle Governor Adli Hussein's offices.

In Aswan, 700 workers in Al-Nasr mining company in Edfu present a memorandum to the general miners' union, ETUF and the Holding Company for Mining Industries, demanding the withdrawal of confidence from the chairman of the board and the union committee. Workers demand a new temporary administrative committee composed of workers.

Feb 26

A group of labour leaders meet to establish the "Coalition of the 25 January Revolution Workers". In a statement, the coalition – including Khaled Ali, head of the Egyptian Centre for Social and Economic Rights, Saber Barakat, and other key labour leaders – affirms workers' absolute right to restore their rights, to strike and peacefully protest, and to fight corruption in their management teams and labour unions.

The statement also calls for the abolition of the Emergency Law, the immediate release of all political prisoners, the abolition of the State Security body and the trial of all officials guilty of repression and torture.

Journalists from the state-run Middle East News Agency (MENA) decide to form a "wise men" committee to lay out a new editorial policy and elect a new chairperson and managing editor.

Journalists from Al-Osbou newspaper continue a sit-in at the Journalists Syndicate for a second day.

Journalists from Al-Ahram continue to protest the paper's editorial policy and reject the nominees suggested by the paper's chairperson. They insist on electing the new editor themselves. In most media companies workers accuse their directions of corruption.

Feb 27

Rumeia villagers block the Asyut-Cairo highway for four hours and burn tires, blaming the government for failing to stop bakeries selling subsidized flour on the black market.

In Manfalout, one of Asyut's main cities, around 2,000 municipal employees and workers go on strike demanding better living conditions and accusing senior officials of corruption.

Angry demonstrators set fire to the formerly-ruling National Democratic Party's headquarters in the city.

Workers from Cairo Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries in Shubra start protesting, demanding the dismissal of the company's board of directors as well as certain sector heads they accuse of corruption. They also say they want permanent contracts and higher bonuses.

Feb 28

Workers from a number of government-owned companies in the important industrial town Helwan, south of Cairo, continue protesting to complain about pay, working conditions and corruption.

More than 1,500 workers from the Arab Organization for Industrialization continue a sit-in at the company's headquarters for a second consecutive day. Workers from Al-Nasr Company for Coke and Chemicals start a strike to call for the dismissal of their board of directors, the punishment of officials who caused the company's decline and the improvement of their financial condition.

Mar 01

Around 1,000 workers and employees from Cairo Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries in Shubra stage a sit-in. Meanwhile more than 300 workers from Samuel Tex, a linens manufacturer, announce a strike to call for the payment of their salaries, better pay, fixed working hours, and official days off work as stated in the law.

April 03

Approximately 7,000 sub-contractors at the Suez Canal Authority are on strike until their demands are met. They demand parity with those directly employed by the Suez Canal Authority.

April 07

Workers at Arab Company for Radio Transistor and Electronic Appliances (Telemasr) in Cairo protest after the owners shut down the factory and impose a one-month paid holiday. There were 3,000 employees in the 1990s and this has dwindled to 200.

April 11

Employees at 14 power stations begin a series of strikes to push for the removal of ministry officials involved in corruption and for a stand to be made against the squandering of public funds, which they say is rampant.

April 14

Tens of workers at the Al-Nasr Automotive Company in Cairo protest to demand the government honour its promise to pay the remainder of their early retirement incentives. More than 3,100 workers at the company were forced to accept early retirement schemes between 2005 and 2010. The company stopped production altogether three years ago.

April 11-17

In Cairo, 200 Tax Authority employees stage protests, demanding wages and bonuses in line with their qualifications.

In Gharbiya, 1,200 workers (out of 2,645) of the Financial and Industrial Company (EFIC) from three factories demonstrate in front of company headquarters for better wages and benefits, while 350 workers of the Chipsy Company in Monufiya stage protests for the same reasons.

Workers at Shebin El-Kom Textile Company in Menoufiya, north of Cairo, resume their strike after suspending it for two days following an agreement between the workers and management. They accuse the company of trying to manipulate sacked workers into signing resignation letters by saying that this will grant their colleagues a return to work. Management call the armed forces into the plant on 6 April, as workers try to resume their sit-in.

Shebin El-Kom Textiles Company workers hold a 35-day sit-in to protest against the Indonesian management's attempts at eliminating the workforce and dismantling factories in order to reuse the 152 acres of land on which the factory stands. Now they say that they will not end their sit-in until all their demands are met.

April 23

About 4,000 workers start a strike together with the manager of a factory in the industrial city of Mahalla, protesting against the rise in prices of cotton.

Reporting from El Mahalla el Kubra, Egypt

The groaning industrial looms are cranking again inside the massive Misr Spinning & Weaving Co. factory in this gritty Nile Delta city famous for its textiles. Workers are streaming past army tanks and concertina wire to resume production of cotton and wool fabrics after a four-day wildcat strike.

That's good news for tough-minded textile workers such as Kamal Mohammed Fayomy - and also for the military rulers struggling to keep Egypt's economy from stalling in the wake of the national uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak after three decades of rule.

"*Our most important demands were met, and we're very happy for that,*" said Fayomy, 47, a burly electrician and member of a 10-worker committee that negotiated an end to the brief strike with the government this week.

Alarmed by a sit-down protest in an industrial town with a long history of labour defiance, military leaders had initially threatened to use force to stop the strike in the government-owned factory complex. Instead, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces quickly agreed to some worker demands without resorting to violence.

And that, Fayomy said with satisfaction, has given new hope to a labour movement long dominated by crushing government control. The military met a key worker demand and fired the plant director, who had been accused of corruption. Workers at the state-run plant also were given a 25% monthly salary bonus.

"*And we got paid for the four days we were on strike,*" Fayomy said, beaming as he listed the government concessions.

The swift resolution of a potentially devastating strike was a reminder that labour unrest is a key issue facing Egypt as it seeks a return to normalcy after the chaos of the uprising.

"*Let's just say a political deal was reached. It was important to both side*" said Hamdy Hussein, a socialist who runs the communist party-affiliated labour advocacy agency Afak from a cramped office above a trash-strewn street here.

El Mahalla el Kubra⁵³, home to more than 100,000 workers at 3,000 textile plants, became a breeding ground for unrest three years before protesters at Tahrir Square in Cairo staged their weeks-long demonstrations against Mubarak. A strike here April 6, 2008, gave birth to Egypt's youth movement after videos of police attacking workers flashed across the nation and the world on YouTube and Facebook.

Protesters rampaged through Mahalla back then after police shot and killed at least two people. Their signature act was ripping down and stomping on a portrait of Mubarak in the central square - a rare act of public defiance.

"*We broke the taboo against the emergency law bans on gatherings and demonstrations,*" said Fayomy, who has been arrested twice for labour activism.

The military clearly did not want more labour strife at the Misr factory because of its potential ripple effects. Misr is the largest textile plant in Egypt and a centrepiece of a sector that produces more than a quarter of the country's industrial output. About 15,000 of the plant's 24,000 workers joined the wildcat strike.

"*A strike here really gets the government's attention. It affects workers across the whole country,*" said Gamal Abu Ela, who manages another labour advocacy foundation in Mahalla. Ela said young organizers of the Tahrir Square protests drove 65 miles from Cairo on Monday to congratulate strike leaders.

52 "Egypt cotton mills whirl again after army, workers reach pact", David Zucchino, *LA Times* 24 February 2011.

53 With a total population of 500,000 inhabitants.

The government agreed to meet more worker demands *"as soon as the country is more stabilized,"* Fayomy said. Other workers said they did not want to take advantage of political instability or further damage the sputtering economy by making excessive demands.

"We don't want to spoil the revolution by making too many demands right now," said Faisal Lakosha, 43, who has worked for the company for 19 years. *"Eventually, we'll get what we want."*

Mohamed Mustafa Sabagh, an official with the government Directorate of Manpower, said, *"It's just a matter of time"* before the workers' remaining demands are met.

Workers are supposed to earn 1,200 Egyptian pounds (about \$205) a month, but labour leaders said they actually are paid barely a third that amount. Special bonuses make up some of the difference.

Workers had demanded a doubling of salary, better medical insurance, job training credits and higher food and transportation payments. But they said getting rid of the plant director, Fouad Abdel Alim Hassan, was more important for now than getting more benefits.

With Hassan removed, the hulking Misr plant cranked away with new life this week. Stretching for blocks, the plant is a city within a city and known locally as the "industry castle." Secured by high concrete walls and concertina wire, it contains mosques, a hospital and employee housing.

Outside the walls, the city hummed with commerce. Produce hawkers shouted out orange and tomato prices, women sold fish from roadside stands, and beggars cadged coins in flyspecked tea houses. Merchants displayed brightly colour bolts of fabric, and white wedding dresses hung next door to bloody cow carcasses on hooks.

Mahalla is a dreary, working-class city of half a million people surrounded by green farm fields and smothered by a blanket of grey smog. Because of its politically active textile workers, it is viewed with suspicion by authorities in Cairo.

Fayomy and other strike leaders said they want political reform as well as improvements for workers - not only in Mahalla but across Egypt.

Fayomy said workers will keep pressure on the military government to honour its promises because they are wary of "the same tricks of the old regime." For the moment, though, workers seem more willing to take the government at its word.

"The revolution is still continuing," said labour activist Hussein, who has been arrested several times. *"If the military doesn't keep its promise, then we'll just go back on strike."*

Second testimonies⁵⁴

Outside the gates of Egypt's state-owned Ghazl Al-Mahalla textile factory, angry employees have swapped spinning and weaving for protest at the end of the barrel of a tank.

Under the gaze of the bored-looking soldier in the turret, scores of workers protested in one of the many post-revolutionary strikes that have broken out at businesses and government offices across the country.

Elsaid Habib, a pensioner who served 43 years at the company, says: "The revolution will give us more push against the managers. Maybe they don't know how to run the business – but we are asking for our rights."

The unrest is an emblem of what many sees as the failings of an industrial policy that was mismanaged under President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule, and which must be overhauled if the country's new political order is also to bring economic prosperity.

With its mixture of large, sclerotic government companies, employee discontent and struggles with global market forces, the city of Mahalla's textile industry is part of a much broader economic malaise that lay behind the overthrow of Mr Mubarak this month.

In the febrile period before and since the former president's resignation, a wave of strikes has broken out in workplaces ranging from hospitals to hotels. Spooked by the way the street demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square seem increasingly to be melding with and morphing into industrial action, the country's new army rulers have demanded that everybody return to work.

It is not surprising to find that Mahalla, an industrial centre in the Nile Delta north of Cairo, is one of the places where the military's order has been ignored.

The city's long history of worker unrest includes a 2008 textile workers' strike whose date – April 6 – became the name of one of the main opposition movements behind the anti-Mubarak uprising.

In a room off one of the city's many dirt backstreets, Hany Matawea's 10 sewing machines were still busy producing socks – but not, he says, at much of a profit.

Struggling to make himself heard over the clatter of equipment and the Koranic recitation playing on his old FM/AM radio, he says the rising cost of raw materials means he cannot compete with Chinese socks selling for £18 (\$3) a dozen, which is his production cost.

Part of the problem, he says, are the myriad taxes and fees he must pay – 24 in all – and the endless paperwork and bureaucratic obstacles he faces. He clings on to a small, positive sign he has seen since Mr Mubarak's departure: water deliveries to his factory, once blocked by government officials demanding documentation, are now being waved through.

"I think in the next days, things will be more optimistic," he says.

Mr Matawea's difficulties have filtered down to his employees, such as Suleiman Abd El Latif, who worries about the two things that perhaps trouble Egyptian workers the most: housing costs and price rises.

Mr Latif says he earns just £20 a day, compared with his £300 monthly rent, while his bean sandwich breakfast is now 75 piasters, 150 per cent more than two years ago.

He says: *"I hope the political change will improve my rights as a worker – and I hope it will help me live a better life."*

His complaints are amplified many thousand fold among the huge workforces of the government textile companies, where years of state investment have failed to yield either convincing profits and productivity or happy staff. Security guards at the Ghazl factory say no managers are available for comment.

54 "Egyptian workers strike for change", *FT*, Michael Peel, 23 February 2011

Ghazl, like its industry competitors, is grappling to cope with the additional blow of a surge in international cotton prices of almost 45 per cent between the start of the year and mid-February.

Hisham Ghida, chief executive of MG, a family owned lingerie company, argues that the government was partly to blame even for this, because it could have lessened the impact by doing more to promote domestic cotton growing.

Mr Ghida says this is one of many areas in which the country's street revolution needs to trigger a change of economic approach – not just in the ailing government sector, but among private companies that were formerly too afraid to campaign for new policies, for fear of reprisals.

“Now, we need to be together,” he says. “The mentality will be different – from the owners and from the labourers also.”

Some analysis

Steps

We can divide workers struggles into three steps:

- From February 8 to February 12 (toppling of Mubarak): irruption of workers more during demonstrations than strikes giving the necessary signal for the ruling classes to remove Mubarak;
- From February 13 to February 23 (end of second strike at Misr Spinning and Weaving co., the biggest factory in Egypt in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra): spreading of strikes, blockades, sit-ins and demonstrations.
- From February 24 up until now (August 2011), organizations were consolidated (old or new trade unions controlled by members and workers) and decline of strikes.

Localization

The workers' struggles (strikes, demonstrations, protests, etc.) obviously took place in major industrial locations, i.e. greater Cairo area, Canal zone (Port Said, Ismailia and Suez cities), Alexandria and the Nile delta textile hub. Outside these places events remained isolated (Asyut, etc.).

Class composition

Many workers involved in strikes belonged to the core industry of Egypt, textiles, but it wasn't just them.

Some big state sector companies like Egypt Telecom and SCA (Suez Canal authority) where hit for several days.

In transport, the Cairo metro was not brought to a standstill even if the maintenance workers of the Tora shops went on strike. The national railway (which also owns the Cairo metro) was hit by a strike but was not brought to a standstill. Some Cairo airport workers went on strike but not for long.

Two hospitals were hit and even if some doctors participated we have no accurate details about the composition of strikers and the organization of strikes (regarding the attitude towards patients).

We can even see some marginal sectors (ambulance drivers, opera workers, tourist guides) participating.

Demands

The demands covered basic needs for workers: wages, pay structure, bonuses, health, overtime, but also for transforming casual contracts into permanent contracts (proving that being a worker is not a “guaranteed” situation). There were also plenty of demands regarding the sacking of bosses generally accused of being corrupt. And only two cases of “solidarity with the demonstrators”.

Methods

Demands were rather well known (at least as general categories), but data about methods of organization are hard to find, with the exception of the big textile factory in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra for which we know that a strike committee organized discussions with the bosses.

We also have to be clear about what lay behind sit-ins and protests. Generally a sit-in meant a short-term strike (some hours) during which workers stand inside the factory or just outside to express their dissatisfaction. Demonstrations can be part of a strike or outside working hours. That was the case, for example, before Mubarak fell for workers of foreign companies in the new developing zones along the Suez Canal. As they worked in two shifts, they were able to participate in demonstrations all day-long before going back to work.

We saw some violent confrontations within one factory and during some blockades in the streets or of a railway line in Cairo, but generally this was not what happened.

Success and failures

Once again, due to the lack of accurate data we are not able to know what was the outcome of many strikes except for Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra. But we can imagine that as workers actions were more eruptive bubbles than deep waves that some easy to concede demands were satisfied (removal of an executive, for instance) and the others were not. On a general level we can see that all these strikes and actions remained minoritarian not only in numbers across the country (with regard to most workplaces where nothing happened) but also within each particular place (and we can see this even with the lack of data). Once again the strike in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra is an exception: starting on February 10 and lasting up to February 13 for the first attempt, and again from February 16 to February 19. For the second case we can see that strikers started with a number of 12,000 (50% of the workforce) and reached 20,000 (83% of workforce): this means that not only was the strike powerful from its beginning but was able to even gain new support. This points to an organization of the strikers (from workshops to factory level) provided by the strike committee of 10 members in charge of negotiation.

For the rest, we have many examples of strikes starting and remaining with a minority. The case of big companies (with many locations) like SCA or Egypt Telecom exemplifies this. In the first case, strikers started and remained at 42% (out of 16,000) and the strike was not able to go further. In Egypt Telecom strikers started and remained at 10% (of 55,000) and nothing else happened. Obviously in a company where the workforce is split geographically (more than 50 work places) and by category (installation, operation, maintenance, research, etc.) it is very difficult to organize during the first attempt, above all if the company is strongly lead by a director⁵⁵ who was able to increase greatly productivity by reducing the workforce (by 9,000) and reorganising the work process during the past ten years without facing strong resistance from workers.

Except in sectors where workers have already developed strikes and organization in previous years (as textile workers in 2008), self-organization is in its infancy and everything has to be discovered step by step. Workers need to train themselves through short skirmishes against capital before launching a movement of greater extent. Another thing to take into account is the fact that in Egypt relations between workers and the state are not like in Western countries and strong repression is never far away. In February and March, workers benefited from a certain “vacuum” of state authority (mainly lack of a police force) that liberated their energy. But the state obviously did not disappear and this lead workers to strengthen their new born organization. This explains both the open creation of new

⁵⁵ Akil Beshar has been CEO of Egypt Telecom since 2000.

independent trade unions along with underground rank and file links. Another thing is not to be forgotten: the power of Muslim Brothers always hangs over the future of the workers' movement like a black cloud as long as their attitude towards it is unclear. What we have seen during previous years is them publicly denouncing the 2008 strikes. Are they willing and able to confront strikers in the coming years?

Something else which obscures the future of the workers' movement in Egypt is that two industrial sectors have been totally absent in the past months: the Army-owned factories and the big resort hotels on the shores of the Red Sea. What can explain the fact that in the first case, an 80,000-strong highly qualified workers sector and, in the second case, 100,000 employees working in big "industrial" hotels didn't take any advantage of Mubarak's fall to organise strikes?

Certainly in the Army-owned factories the level of wages is higher and working conditions are better than elsewhere in Egypt, but is this sufficient to explain such passivity? Whatever the reasons may be, if they remain, future workers efforts will continue to be undermined.

CONCLUSION

Democratic demands, Freedom and Communism

What was it that ignited the events?

Following the Tunisia events, people began to react first against rising prices of goods then against the Mubarak regime identified as responsible for every evil afflicting Egypt.

The rise in food prices and growing unemployment, particularly among the young, were at the origin of these explosions. In these countries, expenditure on food makes up around 40% of total household spending. In 2010, the price of wheat in Egypt, which is the world's biggest importer, went up by 73% and maize jumped by 88%. Meat, fruit and vegetables became unaffordable for a large number of Egyptians.

But on this basis, once people gathered in Tahrir Square (for Cairo area), and because of the repression (the only means that the government chose to use), people called for freedom as a general objective, the fall of Mubarak as an immediate objective and daily demonstrations as the means, showing a courageous determination paid for by hundreds of deaths. Thus, despite their violent form, the first riots had an eminently defensive character.

It's worth remembering at this point that the exercise of violence by the proletariat is in no way a synonym for an offensive struggle, and even less for worker's autonomy.

What were the main demands?

Aspirations for freedom are strongly anchored in this wave of popular revolts and for good reason. Proletarians know very well that any protest, even the most peaceful, will be violently crushed by the state. For the first time, the exploited have satisfied the essential need to practice the freedoms to which they aspire in and through their own struggles. In the independent fight, speech frees itself, autonomous organisation can blossom and individuals can develop all their capacity for socialisation. It is only on this terrain that the class struggle can absorb and resolve in the fire of struggle the most far-reaching libertarian aspirations of civil society. This type of approach is the only one capable of drawing a line of demarcation with democratic bourgeois demands.

No formalisation of individual and collective freedoms within the framework of the state can be satisfactory.

On the other hand, it would be stupid to brush aside the opportunity offered right now by the loosening of the dictatorship of capital and its state, even when it is crystallised in a bourgeois democratic foundation. The rejection of an indifferent attitude towards constitutional and institutional democratic changes must not however go so far as to directly or indirectly support the process of restructuration of the state. While taking any position that favours its organisation and struggles, it is necessary for working class not to forget that it is just one moment in the long term fight to smash capitalism. The way forward for the working class is always to promote its own demands. This is true even when the process of restructuration starts out from an action by the proletariat and takes place in the heat of the moment, in a framework of acute crisis of the state.

After Mubarak fell, the police who were blamed for repression were authorized to “stay” at home and not to be seen on the streets until things got back to normal. In the meantime people learnt to self-organize and control their neighbourhood against the police or supporters of Mubarak. But this was not widely spread across the whole Cairo area nor did it last very long. The absence of any critique of the Army, always presented as the protector of the “revolution”, helped get people back off the streets.

What has the working class achieved in this movement?

The capacity for the working class in movement to draw towards itself sectors and individuals coming from other layers of civil society remains, in our view, a vital condition for its victory over the dominant classes. The problem is that at this stage the proletarian cause is masked by classic democratic demands and the power games within the dominant classes. Very quickly, the insurgents showed that they were incapable of considering themselves as an expression of a social class which is independent and without a country, a class which aspires not only to the overthrow of authoritarian and corrupt regimes but also the destruction of the state, of all states, and, above all, the revolutionary constitution of a centralised cooperative society, without classes, without money, without exploitation and without oppression.

As in Iran in the summer and autumn of 2009, the main limit of the movement remains the under-utilisation by workers of the essential weapon at their disposal: the strike. In this way they deprive themselves of the only really solid foundation of their fight and, at the same time, of a form of struggle which is the most effective against the state and the bosses, whether “native” or “foreign”. The heart of the system of domination in any country in the world is production. It is there that we need to strike.

Workers and oppressed classes

If the working class sets out on the difficult path, making advances and suffering defeats, towards communism (which is by its nature antidemocratic), this does not mean that it has nothing to do with democracy or democratic demands or is indifferent to them. On the contrary, the working class has an “interest” in (or is not opposed to) what is generally understood by the term Freedom (freedom of movement, freedom of speech, etc.) for every human being. But there are a few important points to make here.

- During a struggle against dictatorship or an authoritarian regime the working class puts forward freedoms which it wants to, or aspires to, practice directly and which are in line with its general struggle against capital and the state (freedom of organisation in the factories, for example).
- In addressing itself to other oppressed classes the working class explains to them that to obtain these freedoms, it is necessary to also fight against the bourgeois perspective of the democratic state. This is a perspective which aims to transformer and congeal these freedoms into rights granted and conditioned on social peace.

- While people yearn to satisfy their need for direct expression, the working class always puts forward the struggle and organisation to transform these demands into living, and, above all, direct, practices, into movements which prefigure a new order, founded on social cooperation and going beyond the state form.
- The strength of conviction of the working class is directly proportional to its proven capacity to be an independent social and political protagonist, in the places which are its own: the factories, working class neighbourhoods, public transport, schools, hospitals etc. Its power of persuasion depends, in sum, on the exercise of its direct power to destroy capital and its state.

What could happen?

A brief summary of what's going on

Now that the cheers for Mubarak's downfall have died down, the harsh reality of the crisis of valorisation of capital in Egypt has again come to the fore. Various economists estimate that the GDP fell by around 1% in 2011. Exports of oil, which represents more than 40% of the total of Egyptian goods sold abroad, have fallen once again because of diminished growth in Europe. Tourism (20% of GDP) has seen its number of customers fall by 40% in the first half of 2011. During the "events", many foreign companies have closed, not because of strikes but out of fear of attacks, innumerable interruptions in transport services and the temporary suspension of banking activity. The provisional closure of the Suez canal reduced state revenue. Since then a shortage of petrol has hit the country and led to a new increase in prices and problems with transport. Insufficient and unpredictable supplies of flour and maize followed. For two months, food prices fell strongly with the fall in global demand for these commodities. In August, inflation fell again to its lowest level for 45 months (8.5% in annualised figures). The government food subsidies had increased since July. But the risk that this assistance would be wiped out by a depreciation of the currency caused by the fiscal crisis of the state increased.

As for the civil administration, it remained generally inefficient. The shutdown of some police services created zones where the state no longer had the upper hand. The fiscal crisis also came knocking at the door. With a budget deficit of the order of 10% of GDP in 2010/2011, Egypt first of all turned to the IMF to obtain some \$10 billion which it needed, and then towards its rich Emirati neighbours, more acceptable on the political plain. In addition to these internal problems there were the external negative factors: the war in Libya sent back to Egypt hundreds of thousands of immigrants, now unemployed. Their return meant both a considerable impoverishment of their families and a dramatic fall in money transfers from abroad. Because of this, the money sent by migrants has fallen by 20% in one year. Before the "events", these transfers of liquidity, together with tourism revenues, accounted for some 70% of Egypt's hard currency earnings. The foreign bosses looked at the situation and prudently reduced their involvement. Direct foreign productive investments have almost entirely disappeared although they reached more than \$4 billion between January and June 2010.

Political scenarios

The Muslim Brothers gained more influence every day, progressively gaining footholds in civil society and in the machinery of the state. The ultimate objective: to win over part of the army, the real backbone of the state, or at worse, to agree a lasting division of power with it. Can we therefore say definitively that their road to power is perfectly secure?

Maybe not. The Brothers have still got plenty of obstacles to overcome in their long march towards executive power.

If they don't have serious political opponents, neither do they have hegemony in all layers of Egyptian society. A great number of peasants and workers are reticent or indifferent to them. The Muslim Brothers have still to define an economic policy, and restrict themselves to proposing solutions inspired by a more egalitarian distribution of national wealth, conforming to their pious creed.

Manufacturing industry counts for 20% of Egypt's GDP, around the same percentage as tourism. The role of the factory working class in the process of reproduction of social capital in Egypt is therefore far from negligible. It is a working class with many structural weaknesses but which has shown that it knows how to fight. Also, the Muslim Brothers have so far been incapable of developing a specific discourse which addresses itself to the workers and takes account of their traditional demands around pay and working conditions.

In 2008, during the strike by textile workers, the Islamists clearly chose the camp of the bosses. It was a pledge of social and political stability which benefited the state, which was restructuring, and the Army, which was banking on the continuity of the regime with a few superficial modifications. The fact that the succession to Mubarak took place without any great problems shows that the dominant classes can base themselves on this new configuration of executive and legislative power. It's a configuration where the Army will always be the keystone of the system and where the Muslim Brothers will present themselves as a mass party, a party of civil society, of a regime which has become partly double-headed.

The international environment

The wave of intensified nationalism which erupted in the streets in Tunisia and Egypt could reopen a phase of war with the Zionist state. In some circumstances of crisis, there is nothing more effective for reconsolidating a nation than identifying and declaring war on an external or internal enemy. The former internal enemy in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, has organic links with the Islamist party in Jordan and with Hamas in Palestine. The latter is very close to Syria and Iran which, with Hezbollah in the Lebanon, possesses a powerful regional connection to the corridors of power in Beirut. Hezbollah is in its turn closely linked to Damascus. This scenario is something we have to take account of; even if we can't be sure what will happen, particularly when it is a question of addressing ourselves to the proletarians who will be the cannon fodder in the eventual wars to come.

More than ever, only a politics which is rigorously anti-state and defeatist can represent both the immediate and historic interests of the working class. There, as everywhere else.

The working class

How to draw an accurate balance now that workers have generally ceased to act openly? What can be said is that for workers who struggled in February and March, whether they won their demands or not, it was a good occasion to take advantage for a moment of the weakness of power as a whole, and the state in particular. Even if the state has been for a time weakened in a non-democratic society (i.e. one with a lack of bodies able to integrate conflicts without negating them by harsh repression) it's certainly a good indicator of maturity for workers to consolidate what they have gained – that is, the growing unity of all. But, as we have noted, two factors are negative. Workers in regular paid employment in significantly sized private or state enterprises are a minority among proletarians, and within that minority many workers didn't do anything during the events.

So far, no opposition has developed between the “stable” workers and others who are “without reserves”. However, the influence that the Muslim Brothers have over a significant part of the latter could later on be used by the state and the bosses to separate them, setting them against the factory working class in the name of Islam, the Nation and the fight against those privileged people with such good jobs! This is why, in Egypt, the workers who are in a strong position to fight as workers must at the same time take up the struggle for their own interests specific to their condition and watch out for opportunities to expand the spectrum of struggle so as to integrate objectives which improve the general condition of the poor. This means paying particular attention to the unemployed, to labourers in the black economy, who are the great majority of the working population in Egypt, and to the poor peasants of the interior.

APPENDIXES

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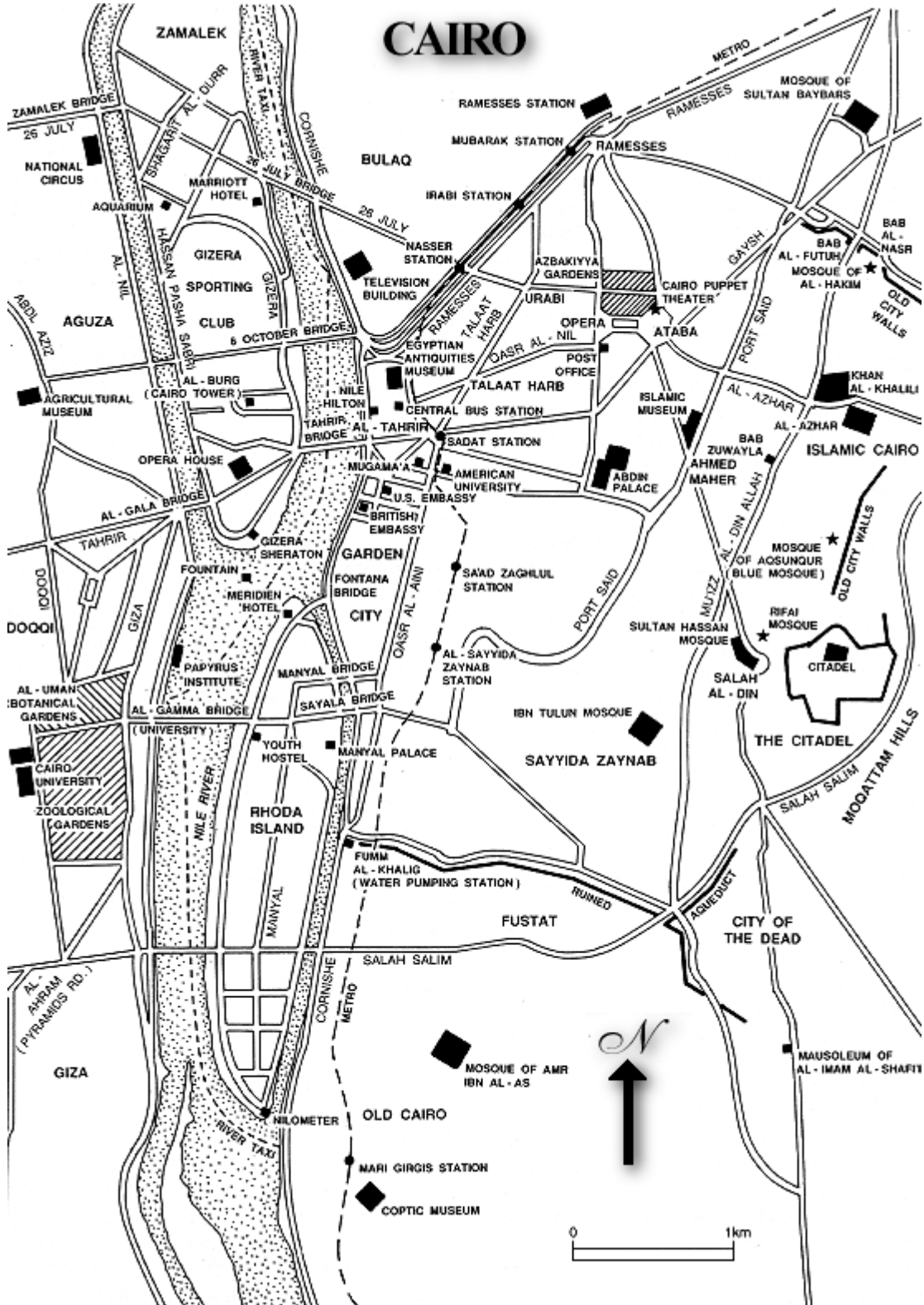
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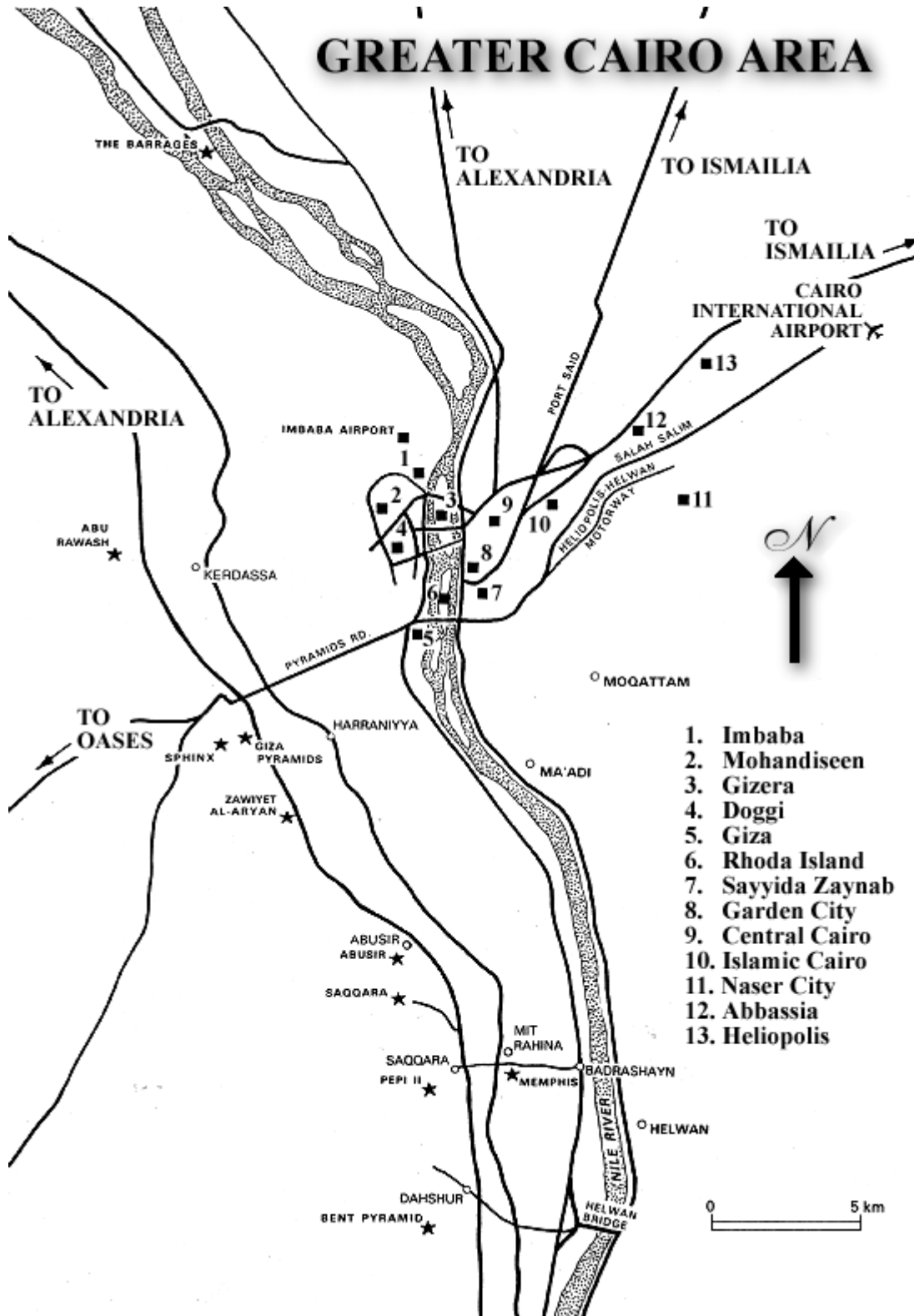
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“By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they [the workers] would certainly disqualified themselves from the initiating of any larger movement”

Karl MARX,
Wages, Prices and Profit, 1865