

Independent unions under attack...

Egyptian workers resist the generals' austerity drive



Around 3,000 workers at Beshay Steel took part in a sit-in to protest against cuts to their bonuses in April 2016

Organised workers played a key role in the revolution of 2011, with strikes and protests paving the way for the fall of Mubarak. After the revolution nearly 1000 independent trade unions were created, joining the four which broke the state's control over the workers' movement before 2011. Under the old regime, the sole legal trade union was the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which was controlled by the state. The independent unions have been at the heart of workers' struggles to realise the revolution's demands of 'bread, freedom and social justice', despite facing waves of attacks on their right to organise and strike from successive governments.

The military regime which came to power in July 2013 initially promised workers would benefit from social reforms. It appointed a leading figure from the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, Kamal Abu Aita, to the post of Minister of Labour. In return, the army demanded complete support for its brutal repression of the Muslim Brotherhood, including the massacre of over a thousand protesters in a single day on 14 August 2013.

Strikes were banned amid calls for national unity behind the military's "War on Terror". Promises of social justice were simply a smokescreen for the military's counter-revolution, and within months, the new regime was unveiling plans for a massive austerity drive. In order to meet conditions for World Bank loans and to encourage foreign investment, the government

is slashing social spending, cutting subsidies on basic foods and launching an assault on workers' pay and job security in the public sector.

Despite high levels of repression, strikes and protests by workers have continued to erupt since 2013. A massive wave of strikes in early 2014 challenged the government's exclusion of hundreds of thousands of public sector workers from a rise in the national minimum wage.

Trade unionists face constant repression as they organise. Strikes are frequently broken up by force and organisers arrested in dawn raids. Trade unionists are hauled before the courts, sometimes facing military judges, while key activists involved in defending workers' rights, such as labour lawyer Haitham Mohamedain, have been arrested during security crackdowns.

www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org

Lawyer who defended workers' rights arrested



Egyptian prosecutors have ordered the detention of labour lawyer Haitham Mohamedain while they investigate serious charges against him. Haitham is one of hundreds of activists seized in a series of security raids aimed at stopping the growing momentum behind protests over the handing over of Red Sea islands Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia by the Egyptian government. A coalition of opposition groups and student movements is calling for protests on 25 April.

According to prisoners' rights group [Freedom for the Brave](#), Haitham is currently under investigation for alleged membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, for attempting to overthrow the regime and for calling for illegal demonstrations.

Haitham is one of Egypt's best known labour lawyers, and an activist with the Revolutionary Socialists. He has worked tirelessly to defend striking workers from attack by the police and army. Bus workers, health workers and rail workers are among the many groups of workers he has defended in the courts and on the picketline. He was arrested previously in September 2013 while en route to represent steel workers in Suez who had been arrested after the police attacked their sit-in, sparking an [international solidarity campaign](#) supported by the leaders of most of the UK trade union movement.

What you can do

- Sign the statement of solidarity with Haitham and other political prisoners arrested in the recent crackdown – www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org/solidaritywithhaitham for more details
- Send a letter of protest to the Egyptian authorities calling on them to respect workers' rights to organise and strike
- Back Amnesty International's campaign for Truth for Giulio Regeni and speak out against forced disappearances in Egypt. See www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org/justice-for-giulio for more info

New civil service law to force through massive job cuts

A new civil service law which came into force in March this year gives employers discretion over promotion, opening door to corruption and favouritism. It makes it far easier to sack workers and threatens to push hundreds of thousands into forced early retirement. Egyptian president Abdelfattah al-Sisi has made it clear that shrinking the civil service workforce is a key goal. "We only need 1 million civil servants but we have nearly 7 million", he said in a recent speech.

Hussein Ibrahim of the Independent Teachers' Union hit back at government claims that there is no money to pay wages. "Why does the government want to borrow when we have rampant corruption and corporate tax evasion? How can the state let billionaire Naguib Sawiris off paying 7 billion pounds, and at the same time ask the poor to pay up? The biggest problem is that the poor know these donations won't even reach them and their families but will benefit particular groups who have received pay increases after 30 June 2013: the army, the police and the judiciary."

Cambridge researcher Giulio Regeni murdered

The torture and murder of Giulio Regeni, a Cambridge PhD student who was researching the independent unions in Egypt, shocked the world. Human rights activists believe he was killed by the security services and his parents have launched a campaign for justice with Amnesty International and the backing of trade unions in Italy.

Giulio's colleagues in Cambridge are joining the call for truth, and are mobilising to put pressure on the British government over its close relationship with the Egyptian regime.

www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org