

Wave of struggle shakes Egyptian regime

Tuesday 15 February 2011, by [ALLISON Jamie](#) (Date first published: 7 April 2007).

The Cairo Conference took place after a series of inspiring mass strikes that have spread across Egypt.

There were 220 major strikes in 2006, bringing out tens of thousands of workers. This strike wave, the largest in Egypt for a generation, has continued this year.

As the conference delegates gathered, over 9,000 workers at flour mills in the capital began a walk out on strike. The walkout took place at Giza Grain Mills Company in Cairo.

Jihad is a worker at Ghazl el-Mahalla. Like other workers there, he earns just £45 a month. In February this year over 27,000 workers struck at the textile factory against the reduction of bonuses.

He told *Socialist Worker*, "The workers of Ghazl el-Mahalla are the workers of all Egypt. Whatever they suffer, all of Egypt suffers.

"We didn't strike just because of the monthly wage. I want to live and eat, breathe and learn, like a human being. And with that logic we walked out. We didn't acknowledge the state-run union because they don't represent us. There are no unions in Egypt who represent the workers.

"But the people cooperated with us in an amazing way, especially women workers who fought by our side in the factories. Ordinary people defied the police to bring us water when we occupied the factories and threw us bread from the rooftops.

"Nothing like this has happened before. The workers showed they have the power to change Egypt. We have nothing to lose, we're staying here and not going anywhere".

Jihad added that workers would continue to defy attempts by the regime to crack down on dissent.

Mahmoud Nahan is from the town of Kafr el-Dawwar. Workers at the textile mill joined the mass strikes earlier this year, securing key victories over management.

He said, "The government said our factory was bankrupt. But it is the government that ruined our company and our country. All the struggles are connected - the strikes against Mubarak and the changes to the constitution.

Aisha Abd el-Aziz is a worker at Kafr el-Dawwar tobacco factory. Workers there struck in 2003 and 2006 over unpaid wages and bonuses. They are still waiting for their bonuses for 2005 and 2006.

She said, "When we went on strike in 2006, people just met in small groups and then walked out. In February this year we sent a letter to the official union and followed the procedures for a strike.

"Two days before the strike a state union representative came and presented us with a lousy deal. We were due a bonus of £7.50 but that was reduced to £5.80. People are against this agreement. But we are not striking now because of victimisation by state security thugs and management."

The conference heard from peasants who have been fighting to stop the return of the old landlords after Mubarak reversed land reforms instituted in the 1950s.

The peasants paid instalments on the land. Many villages made their final payment in 2004.

Soon after, the government declared that their land belonged to the old landowning family. State security thugs then descended on the villages.

Socialist Worker visited the village of Dekerness in the Nile Delta.

Fifty families, each with three acres, have confronted the state security and thugs on seven occasions. Now they are camping out on their land to prevent the landlord taking it.

On the day of our visit they had already seen off a small group of goons and security police.

One farmer, Hamdi Hamid Ali, said, "The state security came to seize our land but we just sat down on it and stayed. We confronted the thugs and drove them away."

Toha Hassan is called "the brave" after she stood up to the thugs.

She said in May 2006 that over 1,000 policemen with armoured cars came to evict the families. She stood up to the police commander

"He called me a bitch. I told him he was the son of a bitch, and that I will die rather than leave this land.

"He pushed me to the ground in front of the tank and told the driver to run me over.

"But the driver refused. The soldiers said to me afterwards, 'Just wait until we are gone and then kill Badrawi (the landlord) and don't leave your land.'

"Mubarak is a bastard. He only rules for the rich and not the poor. I was born here, my mother was born in this house and I will never let them take our land."

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P.S.

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