

# Egypt strikes continue despite military warning

Tuesday 22 February 2011, by [ZAYAN Jailan](#) (Date first published: 16 February 2011).

CAIRO (AFP) – Egyptian workers tested Wednesday the limits of the freedom they won in the revolt against Hosni Mubarak, staging pay strikes despite calls from the new military regime for them to return to work.

Workers in Egypt's largest factory re-started their strike for higher wages and better conditions, defying the warning by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that more strikes would be "disastrous."

Faisal Naousha, a strike organiser, told AFP that workers in the Misr Spinning and Weaving textile factory — which employs 24,000 people in the Nile Delta city of Al-Mahalla al-Kubra — also want two top managers to resign.

The workers had suspended a strike three days ago, but Naousha said at the time they would continue to press for higher wages.

Last year a court ruling raised the minimum wage from 400 LE (\$68) to 1200 LE (\$204), but the workers have not received their dues, he said.

The strike comes a day after the military council urged strikers to head back to work, warning that the economic impact of labour protests would be "disastrous", but stopping short of ordering them back.

"The Supreme Council is aware of the economic and social circumstances society is undergoing, but these issues cannot be resolved before the strikes and sit-ins end," the state agency quoted military sources as saying.

"The result of that will be disastrous," it added.

Hussein Megawer the head of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), who is facing mounting calls to step down, called for an end to labour action and promised "dialogue" with the workers.

Most Egyptian unions are affiliated with Mubarak's National Democratic Party and many of their members see the leadership as cronies of the ousted regime.

Megawer urged 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," the official MENA news agency reported.

His call comes a day after thousands protested outside the ETUF headquarters in central Cairo, demanding the immediate resignation of Megawer and fellow board members, accusing them of corruption.

Thousands of workers at the Misr Helwan Spinning and Weaving company, south of Cairo, continued their strike Wednesday, also demanding higher wages.

In the canal city of Ismailiya, government employees at the irrigation, education and health ministries protested outside the province headquarters demanding “fairer salaries”, witnesses said.

The political protests that toppled the 30-year-old regime of Egypt’s strongman Mubarak have given way to a nationwide “explosion” of pay strikes.

Workers in banking, transport, oil, tourism, textiles, state-owned media and government bodies are striking to demand higher wages and better conditions, said Kamal Abbas of the Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services.

“It’s difficult to say exactly how many people are striking and where. Who isn’t striking?” Abbas said this week.

Many trade unions are headed by people affiliated to Mubarak’s former regime, leaving workers with few formal channels to air their grievances.

“In many places, workers want the removal of senior figures who are accused of corruption,” Abbas said.

The salary gap between management and staff is a major issue, while many workers are demanding benefits and legal protection, having worked on temporary contracts for years, he said.

Strikes and protests have spread across Cairo, the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, the Nile Delta province of Qaliubiya, the canal cities of Suez and Ismailiya and the southern city of Aswan.

Nationwide protests erupted on January 25, ending Mubarak’s firm grip on power in less than three weeks and sending shockwaves far beyond the borders of the Arab world’s most populous nation.

Around 365 people were killed and about 5,500 wounded during the 18 days of protest that led to Mubarak’s resignation, Health Minister Sameh Farid said on Wednesday.

In another development, Switzerland’s justice ministry said it has received a formal request from Egypt concerning the assets of Mubarak and “representatives of the former regime”.

Switzerland had taken pre-emptive action to freeze the assets of Mubarak and his entourage on February 11, barely two hours after he stepped down. Twelve people were hit by the move, including Mubarak’s immediate family members.

Journalists at Egypt’s state-owned Al-Ahram daily, long considered the propaganda arm of the regime, meanwhile apologised for what they called its “unprofessional and unethical” coverage of the uprising.

**by Jailan Zayan**

---

**P.S.**

\* From AFP, Wed Feb 16, 3:01 pm ET:

[http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20110216/wl\\_africa\\_afp/egyptpoliticsunrest](http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20110216/wl_africa_afp/egyptpoliticsunrest)