

# EGYPT

## @Industrial relations conducted by force

Four people, including a child, were killed and dozens injured when security forces broke up a sit-in in a textile manufacturing factory in October 1994. More than 70 people were arrested in connection with the sit-in.

The sit-in began on 27 September 1994 in the premises of the Misr Weaving and Textile Company in Kafr al-Dawwar. The workers were protesting at management decisions to change working conditions, particularly sick-leave, bonus, public holiday pay and procedures for applying penalties. They demanded the resignation of the chairman of the board. Reports received confirm that the sit-in was orderly and peaceful.

In the early morning of Sunday 2 October, families of the workers reportedly heard that the security forces had stormed the factory. The news was in fact false, but many families gathered on a bridge close to the factory. The security forces reportedly fired into the air to break up the gathering at first, and then opened fire on the assembled crowd injuring several people.

Later that morning, the families of the workers apparently attempted to take food to the workers in the sit-in. The security forces refused to allow them into the factory and allegedly threw the food into a nearby canal. This led to a demonstration and clashes in which people threw stones at members of the security forces. In response, the security forces reportedly fired rubber bullets indiscriminately on the area surrounding the factory, which contains houses and schools. They opened fire on a school killing one pupil, Mohammad 'Izzat Foda.

Security forces reportedly entered the factory and beat people inside it, they also fired bullets and tear gas canisters. After leaving the factory they apparently fired rubber bullets indiscriminately at the assembled crowd which led to three further civilian casualties: 'Abd al-Hamid Shayboub, aged 32, Mohammad Mahrous, aged 38 and 'Abd al-Qadir 'Abd al-Mun'im, aged 28. Dozens of others were injured, and nine people who received wounds to their eyes were left in danger of losing their eyesight.

In addition, at least 70 people, including a number of workers, were arrested. Those arrested were held for several weeks before they were released on bail. The workers ended their sit-in during the same day, after most of their demands had been accepted.

During 1994 and early 1995, members of other professional organizations have been arbitrarily detained. On 17 May 1994, 27 lawyers were arrested in connection with a

planned demonstration to protest at the death in custody of a colleague. The security forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets directly into the Bar Association's building just as the lawyers were about to leave the premises to march to the Presidency. The following day the police arrested nine members of the Bar Association's elected council.

Egypt is a party to a number of international human rights instruments which uphold workers' rights to organize in trade unions, and to protect their interests through trade union activity including peaceful assembly and strikes. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). In Article 22, the ICCPR states that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests". Egypt has also ratified ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize and Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining.

The Egyptian judiciary has acknowledged that Egypt's ratification of the ICCPR and of ILO Convention 87 and 98 affects Article 374 of the Penal Code which prohibits strikes by workers in the public sector. In a previous strike 37 railway workers and trade unionists were acquitted by the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court of all charges connected to a rail strike in July 1986. The judgment recommended that the right to strike provided in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Egypt is a State Party, should be incorporated into Egyptian law. This judgment was not however approved by President Mubarak who has the power to refer back judgments from (Emergency) Supreme State Security Courts.

The State of Emergency, which has been in force since 1981, has been criticised by the Human Rights Committee and the United Nations Committee Against Torture as a "serious impediment" to the full implementation of the ICCPR.

**Amnesty International is calling on the Egyptian Government to:**

- Set up an independent investigation into the events which led to the death of four people and wounding of dozens at the Misr Textile and Weaving Company in Kafr al-Dawwar; and make the methods and findings of such an investigation public; those found responsible for ill-treatment and use of excessive force should be brought to justice.
- Give guarantees for the physical safety of those exercising their right to strike and to peaceful assembly, and ensure that Egypt complies with its international obligations to uphold those rights set out in Article 22 of the ICCPR and ILO Conventions 87 and 98;

- Take immediate steps to ensure that law enforcement officials at all times respect international principles regulating their use of force and firearms.

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