



# THE MOVEMENT(S) OF EGYPTIAN TEACHERS FROM 2006- 2014



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## The Movement(s) of Egyptian Teachers

### From 2006- 2014

**"The opinions expressed in this report reflect the views and experiences of the persons interviewed, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the research team or the website."**

The protests of teachers are not only the largest but also the most ongoing ones that Egypt has witnessed during the first two decades of the second millennium. Throughout the years from 2006 to 2014, the movement has gone through several battles before its entities had been assorted, unintentionally connected with the political affiliations of the leaders, to whom we resorted to write the testimonies for this documentation. They, definitely, were figures for this movement, leaving different parties; most of them were the Egyptian left movement. In the education sector's eyes, this modern movement was dissimilar or without heterogeneous spectra, it had internal disputes and divisions, leading- for example- to the establishment of the "Federation of Egyptian Teachers" in parallel with "Independent Teachers Syndicate". It also was a reason for withdrawing the confidence from the bureau of the Independent Syndicate, and the reelection of a new board of directors on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. The syndicate practices were utterly new to the teachers. Thus, the politics dominated as well as, in some cases, the individual opportunist interests dominated over and above the exaggerate showoff of leadership by some of its leaders; resulting in dramatic losses to the whole movement. That, however, does not negate being a gain, especially when it comes to uncovering some faces that became figures for their great abilities in mobilization and discourse or even for their long political history. Here, we had to put aside any disputes relating to the teacher groups of common battles as well as interests against the background of their disagreements or different political affiliations. According to Raed Al-Husseini, head of the Independent Teachers Syndicate, the teachers' movement leaders had established the Independent Syndicate in parallel with the Federation of Egyptian Teachers owing to this dispute over and above the experiment is new to both so as to set up independent entities affected by political trends as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

Basically, the movement's goal was to organize the assembly of all teachers away from the Educational Professions Syndicate, seeking an organization that prioritizes the teachers' interest rather than appease the regime. It is designed to build a teacher that is aware of his\her interest, able to organize themselves for fair demands: fair wages and appropriate work environment.

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<sup>1</sup> An interview was made by the team with Raed Al-Husseini in 2017

In spite of the participation of thousands of teachers in the movement following the revolution outbreak in 2011 through demonstrations and protest events, it does not mean that there is an organized movement of durable action. It rather does not mean that the leaders were able to build other leaders in the second and third lines, or bringing up a generation of unionists. But from the experience of the movement during the revolution along with the testimonies of its leaders and figures, we saw that the teachers' movement, in its extension and momentum during the revolution, was an extension of the momentum of the revolution itself. Similarly, it became later on under the control, and it seems that the politician has led the unionist, while the latter had failed, despite taking over the reins of the independent union, to maintain the momentum through the continuous trade union action.

This research is based on testimonies that were recorded with the figures of protests and assembly movement among the Egyptian teachers during the months of 2017, including Abdel-Hafiz Tayel, from the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education, which is the most important civil society organization that worked on education issues in Egypt; Abdel-Nasser Ismail and Omar Morsi, founders of Federation of Egyptian Teachers; Muheb Aboud, Raed Al-Husseini and Hussein Ibrahim from the Independent Teachers Syndicate; Anwar Fath Al-bab and Dr. Kamal Moghaith, expert in the National Center for Educational Research.

## **Where were Teachers before the January 25 Revolution?**

With the outbreak of the 2011 Revolution, many social movements have emerged; the teachers' movement was among them. The establishment of many different teachers' movements following the revolution, however, makes us raise an important question about the teachers' situation before 2011. Where were they before 2011? What was their situation? Had their situation been stable and financially adequate? Did they receive fair salaries and real privileges under the several political regimes during the modern history, since July Revolution 1952? Or there is another explanation?

Dr. Kamal Moghaith, an educational researcher, replied to this question during our meeting with him in May 2017, saying that the teachers participated in the 1940s and 1950s protests with the then-active leftist movement. They were not isolated; instead, they had demands of establishing a syndicate for teachers in 1951<sup>2</sup> under Al-Wafd Government. But the establishment of Educational Professional Syndicate was in response to the collective demands

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<sup>2</sup> Tarek Al-Bishry. State Apparatus and Governance in Present Egypt. Nahdet Masr Publishing. January 2015.  
<https://bit.ly/2QxwdSD>

of teachers. It was just a way to allow the regime to have a grip on the teachers, especially the only syndicate that July Revolution was keen to assign its syndicate head as the minister. The syndicate had not witnessed any mobility, and its law was allowing the regime to dramatically control the teachers, who were not able to select their syndicate head directly, but they could only choose the representatives of the central syndicate, and then the latter chooses the board of directors and its head<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to the situation of teachers during the Gamal Abdul-Nasser era, Dr. Moghaith explains that Abdel-Nasser followed the educational and ideological mobilization, instead of the cultural one. This radical shift penetrated the awareness and minds of teachers because they were in affluence during Abdel-Nasser era; their salaries were good, compared to the current situations that reached the lowest level. The salary of the Egyptian teacher currently is the lowest salary for a teacher in the world, according to Dr. Moghaith.

The least salary to a teacher in Algeria is \$400, while the Egyptian teacher receives \$65; if his\her salary is EGP 1200, it means he\she is lucky for being appointed at the Ministry of Education. Until 1970, the preparatory school teacher's salary was EGP 18. "The 18k gram of gold was worth 81 piasters, so the teacher then could buy 22 grams of gold. Thus, if we multiply the grams by (today's price of) EGP 600, they equal EGP 12 or 13 thousands."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Moghaith resumes his talk about the journey of teachers with the Egyptian state, in the late 1960s, when, in the lead-up to war, there was a setback for the teachers' salary increases. Thus, the state allowed the after-school remedial classes. Accordingly, the teachers were divided into two groups; one completely refuses the idea, those senior teachers cherishing themselves, and another group supports it, they were the fresh graduates that were in the social formation stage, building new families, so they were more flexible.

The era of Sadat, with the start of dismantling the national project of Abdul-Nasser- witnessed decreases in teachers' salaries as well as spending on the education budget, leading to the emergence of two-period and three-period schools. The situation of teachers began to deteriorate. Thereafter, the private schools emerged. Here, the Egyptians returning from the Gulf countries, accumulating the money of petroleum, saw that the private schools are better than the public schools that do not provide quality education. Then the labyrinth of private education started, and it prevailed in the second half of 1970s<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Kamal Moghaith in 2017

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Dr. Moghaith mentions that the teachers are "a conservative professional entity in terms of politics, and a main part of their job and the school is the social discipline and maintaining the existing system." They are thus, definitely, not a revolutionary professional group. This has led that the matters go in this way without mobilization. Moreover, it contributed to that state of stagnation, the division of the professional movement into factions (workers and administrative officials) in the Educational Professions Syndicate. It is not a normal state because it is a form of movement, with the fact that private education teachers enjoy better financial conditions, and that Al Azhar teachers are of a conservative nature. All these factors - and others - weakened the political movement of teachers. However, with the deterioration of the situation significantly during the Mubarak period, and with the promise of cadres, and then delaying its issuance, protests and mobilizations started surfacing.

### **Platforms on the Path of the Teachers' Situations Improvement Demands:**

Since 2006 to 2014, the teachers sector in Egypt witnessed a widespread advanced protest movement that, along with other protests, paved the way to the formal change of the political system in Egypt. That movement managed to receive many gains, but failure reached it at the end of protest years. The protest movement can be tackled through important axes that can be summed up in the following:

#### **1- Popular Trial of the Minister of Education, and Revolting against Mubarak Regime's delay in Approving the Cadre System**

The Egyptian teachers' situation was not good, and many teacher activists had tried to organize the movement's action in their sectors. The movement started late in 2006. The movement began in late 2006, and in 2007, and coincided with passing the Law 155 or the so-called Teachers' Cadre Law, and also coincided with - or shortly before - the promulgation of the Law on Quality Assurance and Accreditation No. 280 of 2006. "There were about 3 platforms for the movement of teachers; Al-Tagamoia Party, which has the teachers' office, and I was responsible for the teacher's office at that time; the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education, and Abdel-Hafiz Tayel was its director; and finally there was "Teachers without Syndicate", which is headquartered in Alexandria, and managed by a colleague named Hassan Issawi."<sup>6</sup>

In the opinion of "Abdel-Hafiz Tayel", the education sector has witnessed more than a problem that coincided with the issuance of the law on the quality of education and accreditation, which the teachers' activists saw as dealing with the school as a profitable institution.

<sup>6</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Nasser Ismail, Federation of Egyptian Teachers President, in 2017

Charges are levied on government schools to obtain a certificate of accreditation. These fees are then deducted from the education budget and go to the Quality Assurance Authority for Education. In addition, among the issues that affected the mobility of teachers was a major corruption case in Hussein Bahauddin's ministry. It was the special high school exams committees for the sons of senior officials in the state, including police officers, judges and businessmen: "There was a special exam committee for them in apartments in Dokki, and the teacher supervising the student was specialized in the subject. There was also corruption in the control room.. it was a very big scandal."<sup>7</sup>

The case of the outstanding high school student in Ismailia was among the problems that had led to the popular trial of Education Minister "Yousri Al-Gamal": "He was the ideal student at the governorate level. In his second year of the high school, he received 99% in his exams. In the third year, he got the full marks in all subjects except for physics; he had gotten 7.5 out of 50. His father was an engineer, well-educated and strong, who fiercely defended his son's right. He found out that his son's answer sheet was missing some papers, and every time he goes to the ministry office, they reply "ok" and receives no further assistance.

Thus, it was really important to try Yousri Al-Gamal *popularly* in 2006 in an attempt to hold the ministry accountable. In this popular trial, the judges were Dr. Hamed Amar, in addition to the dean of the Education College in Fayoum or Beni Suef, and a third judge who was a professor. Attendees at the Journalists Syndicate reached 1,000, including parents and teachers. One of the important results of the popular trial and one of the basic recommendations that came out of the trial is that the student's case was truly ended following 3 months, as the student enrolled in the college of engineering after he received 40 points in physics."<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the protests demanding the teachers' cadre, he says: "Mubarak, in 2005, promised that they would establish the teachers' cadre. The years of 2005 and 2006 had passed, and we came to 2007 when the teacher's protests, which the movement had led, started off. The movement had almost combined the different political currents in Egypt. The statements "Egypt's Teachers Movement in ...(Governorate Name)" was being written on the banners. The leftists and Muslim Brotherhood were the main parties involved in this movement. It was necessary to shed light on the protests of the young teachers, whose monthly salaries then were EGP 105 per teacher, while other teachers were being paid per class. Among the other complains that I received at the Center was a statement of a total wage of EGP 178 a month for ten teachers."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Hafiz Tayel in 2017

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid



Thus, the protests began, rejecting the delays of Mubarak who promised - in the time of the presidential elections in 2005 – to issue the so-called "teacher's cadre" law, which improves the salaries of teachers; and the year of 2006 passed without it being issued. The protests also rejected the issuance of the quality assurance and accreditation law, which paves the way for the privatization and commoditization of the education service in Egypt, in addition to the anger at the corruption of the ministry regarding the committees of the senior officials' sons. Moreover, young teachers were angry at poor salaries. In spite of that, the educational union did not lift a finger. Hence, the need for an independent trade union body became vital and urgent.

## **2- Establishing More than an Independent Entity: Independent Teachers Syndicate, the Federation of Egyptian Teachers & Teachers' Associations in Governorates**

While the Egyptian teachers' movement was growing, demanding the improvement of their financial situation by issuing the cadre law, the idea of establishing an independent union entity came out after the failure of the Educational Professions Syndicate since its establishment in 1954 to deviate from the control of the regime. It was a replica of the Egyptian Trade Unions Federation, which did not object to any of the state's violations of workers' rights, whether workers or employees of the "privatization case", early retirement with low gratuities- joining the ranks of the unemployed- or wasting pension funds."

In Anwar Fath Al-Bab's view, the Educational Professions Syndicate has never been an active entity or concerned with teachers' issues; rather, it has always been under the control of the state, especially the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Despite the teachers' attempts to run for the syndicate elections to reform its internal structure, there were discrepancies between their ambitions and the syndicate's regulation, which is still talking about its work within the framework of the Arab Socialist Union, indicating the rigidity of both of the regulation as well as those who won the elections under the auspices of the regime. He adds that the regulation does not talk about the rights of teachers or the organization of the profession or its ethics or the code of public conduct, but it only has a general wording and platitude far from the interests of teachers<sup>10</sup>.

Prior to 2011, there were arrangements for the formation of independent entities. Abdel-Nasser Ismael says: "In that period, there was a relationship between teachers and us, along with the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education, with regard to the formation of associations for the teachers and linking their movement in more than one place. Thereafter, an association called "Mualemeha" (Its Teachers) emerged and another one called "Amaan" (Safety) was established

<sup>10</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Anwar Fath Al-Bab, a secondary school teacher of history in Suez, in 2017

in Dakahlia Governorate. The Educational Professions Syndicate was not active, because Mustafa Kamal Helmi, who was the Chairman of the Shura Council, was its head<sup>11</sup>.”

However, the idea of establishing an independent trade union, despite the consensus of the teachers' activists on the need for an independent body, was contentious in several ways. While some were hastening the establishment of an independent union, there was a call by another group to take the time to think and move more carefully. According to Abdel-Nasser Ismail, the idea has been developed from “teachers’ associations” to an “independent union” after the success story of the Independent Real Estate Tax Union in 2008. But one question was when to set up an independent union. The latter group, that preferred moving slowly, wanted to start setting up union committees in at least 10 governorates with 50 members each, after which the "Independent Teachers Syndicate<sup>12</sup>" would be registered in the Real Estate Publicity Department. This was the opinion of the majority who wished to be wait. However, “there was yet another view, “a point of view that supports the reform of the official professional syndicate; this is a problem that still exists, as there is ambivalence in the existence of independent structures, and there are still people that run for the professional union elections. (Aside from this view), the other point of view is about hastening the registration of the independent union at the Real Estate Publicity Department.<sup>13</sup>”

The teachers’ union group has maintained its belief that the right path is starting from the bottom up. After the February 9th Journalists’ Syndicate conference, 2009, in which the enthusiastic group rushed to collect the teachers’ signatures for the establishment of the independent union, a group that included Abdel-Nasser Ismail and Omar Morsy established six trade union committees in 6 governorates: Giza, Cairo, Sharqia, Damietta, Qalyubia and Alexandria. The federation would be established after that: "Our idea was that we work on the same issues that we were demanding from our colleagues, which were to firstly establish trade unions in the governorates. In addition to the six governorates, we established trade committees in Menoufia, Gharbia, Matrouh and Aswan, until we reached about 11 unions. These all are trade committees. This means the federation idea still existed. Thereafter, in 2013, the federation was officially registered, but the registration of the 11 committees was delayed after the March 2011 ministerial announcement on trade union freedoms. However, we preferred to wait until our idea is realized, which is the idea of the federation of Egyptian teachers, and then we reached about 15 unions. Another committee was established in Assiut<sup>14</sup>."

<sup>11</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Nasser Ismail in 2017

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Omar Morsy, vice-president of the Federation of Egyptian Teachers

<sup>14</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Nasser Ismail in 2017

From the point of view of the wing that rejects the establishment of an independent union of teachers from above, that this approach was before the revolution and perhaps an attempt by the regime to preempt the revolution that was unimaginable in such a volume: "The outbreak of the Revolution served them and us. When Al-Borai became minister, he had an agenda to have unionists with whom he can negotiate.. This is the fact in short, and I even heard, before the outbreak of the revolution. This means that when you negotiate with an elected council, which was elected by the people without any security-related control, the result will definitely be better owing to the people's support. Also, I will not tell you exactly the degree of independence in this movement..When it came to the practice thereafter, we found that not all independent unions are truly independent<sup>15</sup>."

### 3. Teachers' Entities & Civil Society Relationship:

The role of civil society seems somewhat ambivalent regarding its relationship with the Independent Teachers Syndicate or the Federation of Egyptian Teachers. Some see that its role has positively contributed to shedding light on the issues of education and teachers in Egypt, and in support of the activities of these entities at the beginning, and provided them with the experience of organization, while others believe that the role of civil society organizations was negative. One of these organizations was the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education, which had clear contributions, such as raising the aforementioned issue of the student in Ismailia, and was behind the popular trial of the then Minister of Education, Dr. Youssri Al-Gamal<sup>16</sup>, in 2006. That was the first real event for the center, according to its director, Abdel-Hafiz Tayel. In addition to the popular trial, the Center organized trainings on the right to organize, the right to freedom of association and the right to education, as well as workshops on the law of quality assurance of education and accreditation, Law No. 280/2006. The Director of the Center saw the following: "Education is not the issue of the Center alone and not the issue of the Ministry of Education alone as well. It is the issue of society, and if there is fruitful efforts can be exerted, it will be helping people to organize themselves on the right to education. Thus, we worked on finding the groups that can be best organized, and had continuous and dynamic relationships: they are teachers and officials working in the education sector. As of 2007, we worked on this path; we started with the Egyptian Teachers' Movement, which started to become popular. Then, the first protest was staged outside the Educational Professions Syndicate in Al-Jazeera. We started to organize trainings for teachers and two or three periodic meetings every month<sup>17</sup>."

<sup>15</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Omar Morsi

<sup>16</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Hafiz Tayel, head of the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

That being the case, the overlap between the administration of Abdul-Hafiz Tayel of the center and being the first secretary-general of the Independent Teachers' Syndicate had negative effects. The two roles overlapped to such an extent that it was difficult to correct errors or to hold the culprit accountable, according to Muheb About: “This ambivalence caused real problems”. In addition to that, the confidence was withdrawn from its board of directors after the syndicate’s role declined and its voice faded. “In fact, if the withdrawal of confidence was made in 2013 or 2014, it could have made a difference, as that occurred at a time when everything became useless. Even the change had no significant difference, as it was made in conditions where everything was deteriorating<sup>18</sup>.”

#### 4 - The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Teachers’ Movement:

The role seems to be completely politicized and running in parallel to the movements of the Freedom and Justice Party on the ground, which works on both empowerment and control, and playing on what the media is saying in representation of the ruling military council and consecutive post-revolution governments, until we reached the point that the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi is elected president. There was a truce and an attempt to echo the opinion of the regime to calm the situation and follow ways far from the protests; the best example is what transpired with the "teachers without a union" movement in Alexandria. They remained in the path of reformist opposition, calling for reform inside the Educational Professions Syndicate until they succeeded in their elections. They were completely separated from the masses of teachers, who were protesting and demanding their right, and their voices were not heard.

They did so in Suez. The Muslim Brotherhood was present in the preparatory committee, but they began to organize their meetings separately from the masses of teachers in Suez at the beginning of the next academic year of the revolution 2011/2012, without even announcing the meeting recommendations. Then, they began to resist the idea of strike; claiming that it is *haram* (religiously prohibited) and that it is not in the interest of students, according to the testimony of Mr. "Anwar Fatah Al-Bab", who believes that their stance was due to being allied with the military council at that time<sup>19</sup>.

In Cairo, Hussain Ibrahim recounts the Brotherhood's teachers’ participation in the largest demonstration of teachers in 2011 and the following ones, on 10 and 24 September, that the Brotherhood had participated largely in the demonstration of 10 September, and then their withdrawal. “Of course, we then knew the reason behind that was the elections of the Educational Professions Syndicate, in which they won seats and stopped supporting us. This

<sup>18</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb About

<sup>19</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Anwar Fath Al-Bab

occurred once again, I swear, on 15/9 and the statement was published in all the national newspapers as reported by Ahmed Al-Halawani, the new syndicate head<sup>20</sup>.”

## 5- Protest Demands

As we explained at the beginning of this report, the conditions of teachers and schools have been deteriorating for a long time, starting from the 1970s, after the state ceased to finance the educational sector in general. Since the teachers belong to the conservative groups that silently suffered at times, and resorted to their own means at other times, migrating for work abroad, and private tutoring became their resort away from the low wages. Nonetheless, matters got worse when Mubarak’s announced law of the cadre in 2005, which teachers waited to improve their situation, has not been issued. Accordingly, the protests began, whose demands, perhaps the most important of them, are “fair wages and a free trade union”. The demands have been written on banners since 2009, along with the name of “Independent Teachers Syndicate under Construction”, and are as follows:

- Issuing the cadre law that improves salaries.
- Signing fixed-term contracts; especially after ceasing the commissioning and appointments since the mid-1980s, the teacher-school contract became exceptional, and the one-class teacher and the teacher of trustees committees, who work without contracts, have emerged.
- Cancelling staff tests.
- Minimum pension, such as minimum wage.
- Reforming the education system.
- Separating the political security from education.

There were demands that have been made during the protests, but the Independent Teachers Syndicate, as the trade union representative of Egyptian teachers, was calling for them on a daily basis.

"All the demands were about improving wages. In reality, that is the main issue. After the revolution, they wanted to give all the people, who were in the trustees' unions, their notice. Thus, the teachers began to think about changing the terms of work so that they would remain stable<sup>21</sup>.”

<sup>20</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Hussein Ibrahim Hassan, secretary general of the Independent Teachers Syndicate

<sup>21</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb Aboud, a former teacher of English, and former head of the Supervisory Board of the Independent Teachers Syndicate, in 2017

The demands that the union seeks to achieve are not necessarily general or large, but simple daily demands are equally important. The head of the Independent Teachers' Syndicate says, “The gains that are achieved are quite reformist. For example, when someone is unfairly transferred, or when a wife has not received her husband’s pension. These are the daily demands that put pressure on the lives of teachers.” He adds, “There are general demands that had been met such as the minimum wage and the cancellation of cadre tests<sup>22</sup>.”

Abdel-Hafiz Tayel says about the protest of 10\09\2011 that “it demanded a minimum wage of no less than EGP 3000, and the reform of the education system completely, the separation of political security from education, minimum levels of pensions, job security and the freedom of association of teachers. The slogan of the protests was "fair wage and free trade union". That was the first demonstration to be held, and the idea of the union was in our minds<sup>23</sup>.”

### Teachers’ Movements outside Cairo:

According to the interviews, it seems that the protests of teachers before and after the revolution were concentrated in (Cairo), since it is the capital, while the protests were less in Alexandria and the Canal cities. As for the governorates of Upper Egypt and the periphery, including Sinai, Marsa Matrouh and the New Valley, they did not witness protests necessarily, but there were initiatives that we will discuss later. The teachers only traveled to Cairo to attend major events, especially during the January 2011 revolution. They were attending these events and returning to their governorates on the same day. The most important protests outside Cairo were in the governorates of Suez, Alexandria, Qena and Fayoum.

**Suez** began its protests, after the revolution, in front of the headquarters of the Educational Professions Syndicate in February 2011; demanding to convene an extraordinary general assembly to withdraw confidence from the old board of directors. However, the army confronted those protests; whereas the third field army, headed by Gen. Sedqi Sobhy, addressed protests in Suez. Gen. Sobhi had met with the protesting teachers, but the meeting did not result in conclusions; it was just an attempt to calm the situation. After the appointment of Essam Sharaf as the prime minister and Ahmed Jamal al-Din as the Minister of Education, teachers were rejoiced because he is an open-minded university professor, who issued the law of cadres, despite its slow application. Hence, the idea of staging strikes came out, “The people decided to

<sup>22</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Raed Al-Husseini in 2017

<sup>23</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Hafiz Tayel in 2017

stage a strike in the first week of the academic year in 2011, which is the first school year immediately after the revolution." The post-revolution protests immediately produced what was known as the Preparatory Committee, which tried to gather the teachers protesting away from the parties or away from the powerless Educational Professions Syndicate, or even from the newly-established Independent Teachers' Syndicate<sup>24</sup>."

The Preparatory Committee was established there, despite the fact that Mohamed Al-Ashqar was the first to call for establishing it in the city of 6 October; it was a committee that included a full spectrum of teachers in Suez, including the Muslim Brotherhood supporters. This committee was preceded by the Federation of Egyptian Teachers, and preceded the independent union, which had not yet established a branch in Suez. A businessman from Suez had sponsored this committee and adopted the demands of the teachers in Suez for the purpose of running for elections. However, he did not intervene in the organized meetings of teachers, but ensured the mobilization of 14 buses to the mass rally of 10 September in Cairo, in autumn 2011<sup>25</sup>.

Among the most important activities of Suez, was a meeting conducted by Abdel-Hafiz Tayel with teachers in Suez, aiming to raise the idea of independent unions in March 2011, and also to organize a big conference, which preceded the demonstration/ strike of September 2011 and was attended by all the leaders of the movement to mobilize for the upcoming strike.

As for Alexandria, whose protests have been linked to demands for decent working conditions such as fixed-term contracts and fair wages, Muheb Aboud says about it that, "dozens and hundreds of teachers began to gather at times, in different places. The governorate of Alexandria building was stormed, and the governor was almost residing in the international garden. Thus, the protests were being staged there, and we used to know his dates, when he has a meeting with professors of the College of Law, or he is going to the College. He used to find us standing at the door, and a number of teachers were meeting and talking with him. We were protesting outside the ministry's building. That exactly took place in the winter of the first half of 2011 after the revolution and lasted until the summer as well as the next school year<sup>26</sup>."

He elaborates the problems of teachers in Alexandria, saying, "The group of protests that arose in Alexandria immediately after the revolution was linked to a very important matter; it is the conditions of work, especially with regard to forms of various contracts offered to teachers, including the contract of the board of trustees; in which the school's board gives a sheet to the teacher to work for a wage that is between EGP 100-200<sup>27</sup>."

<sup>24</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Anwar Fath Al-Bab

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb Aboud

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

As for Fayoum, the initiative of "teachers without rights" emerged at the same time of staging the protests against the cadres' tests in 2007, and the protests of young teachers appeared to demand appointments, under the auspices of Hassan Ahmed, head of the independent union later<sup>28</sup>.

The governorate of Qena chose the litigation to achieve the demands. "Certain cases are lodged through litigation. They also did not focus on the idea of organization, and people remained active in direct protests, but they focused on real gains through litigation. Although litigation did not leave an impact because the judgments have not been implemented, that does not eliminate the effort they made<sup>29</sup>."

### Ministry's Attempts to Contain Protests:

The ministry's attempts during the mass protests after the revolution was not in response to the demands of those protests, but it was to reconcile the leaders, and also to ensure their absence from the revolutionary action that was overwhelming at the time. This is so because teachers were raising a number of demands, which if the State were to meet, would cost millions of pounds. That was not preferable to the state, neither during the era of Mubarak, nor the military council nor any of the subsequent governments. The main aim was to reduce the state budget in the education sector, both in terms of wages and services, not to improve them for the benefit of teachers or for the benefit of the system as a whole. This containment attempt was met by one of the largest leaders in the teachers' movement; he is Ayman al-Bayli.

About this attempt during the reign of Minister Mahmoud Abu-Nasr, Abdel-Hafiz Tayel says: "Mahmoud Abu al-Nasr came and said, I need, instead of demonstrations, a job called a deputy minister. And I need the leaders of teachers' movements to come and talk, as they will be the link between me and the teachers. They were 40 ones; the most eminent one was Ayman al-Bayli<sup>30</sup>."

Muheb Aboud explains the same situation, and clearly stresses that the trade unionism is something totally different from joining the Executive. He explains, "that has damaged the reputation of the union very much, and I was present at a meeting when we gave a choice to accept the matter, or to remain a leader in the independent union. He preferred to leave the

<sup>28</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Hafiz Tayel

<sup>29</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb Aboud

<sup>30</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Abdel-Hafiz Tayel



independent trade union to take over the post. Ayman was famous and among the names suggested to be a candidate the ministry, for example<sup>31</sup>”.

### **Important Events:**

**Every mass movement has significant moments and important stations by which it is affected either negatively or positively. The following are the most important stations that the teachers’ movement passed up and down:**

- First conference for teachers on the law of quality assurance and accreditation and the so-called teachers cadres in 2007; it was the first conference held in relation to the rights of teachers and the union.
- The first protest in front of the Educational Professions Syndicate in 2007, attended by about 600 teachers to demand cadres, and the first activities to raise the slogan “fair wage and a free union”.
- Journalists’ Syndicate conference in February 2009, where signatures were collected to establish an independent union.
- The largest protest after the revolution was the 10/9/2011 protest. The following demonstrations were in the same date of the first day of school.
- The 24/9/2011 protest: during the protest the teachers were supposed to negotiate their demands with the ministry, but Ayman al- Bayli refused to negotiate until after the resignation of the minister, which led to the failure of the whole day.
- The 7/8/2015 protest was against the civil service law, in which teachers participated in, alongside doctors and tax officials.
- The 12/9/2015 protest in Fustat ... and the beginning of defeat.

It was clear as we were collecting the testimonies of the teachers' leaders that the movement was mostly political; in the sense that the leaders were all of political affiliations to parties and entities, such as the Tagamoia Party, the Egyptian Communist Party, the Popular Alliance and the Muslim Brotherhood. The masses of teachers were on the sidelines, which are also supported by a number of teachers participating in any pre-revolutionary activity, either at Tagamoia Party or the Journalists’ Syndicate, where the number of participants did not exceed 150, except for the conference of the Journalists Union in 2006 that was attended by nearly 1000 participants for the trial of the Minister of Education. The participation was in thousands after the revolution within the state of momentum for all segments of the Egyptian society. The proof is that the Independent Teachers Syndicate or Federation of Egyptian teachers participated in the protests as just individuals, not belonging to any entities, as all initiatives

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<sup>31</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb About

were by individuals of no more than 50 teachers at best. Despite the desire of the founders of the Federation of Egyptian Teachers to be a basic entity starting from the center of teachers in the governorates and then form a union, the weak funding through contributions and donations, in addition to the laws restricting the freedom of organization, made the activities of all entities, even those have funding at the beginning, such as the independent syndicate, or that were not financed by the Egyptian Teachers' Federation, impossible, and thus the entities remained limited to their founders without any rules.

## **Great Battle of Democracy: the Emerging Independent Union Changes its Board of Directors:**

While we are documenting the protests of teachers' movement, which also represent the mobilization of the teachers of Egypt between protesting for basic rights and the democratic building of the movement's organizations, we must note the great difference between the spontaneous protest- the protest that benefited from the momentum of the revolution- and the protest organized by a powerful union outside the purported legitimacy for the of Educational Professions Syndicate. The independent union was not only fighting for its legitimacy in the post-Mubarak regime, but it was also struggling to establish democratic principles within it on the decisions of the majority, not individuals, and the decisions of the General Assembly, not the Bureau. This battle took months, and passed through stages to change the union council.

We have tried to summarize the big battle without being subjected to dozens of details and personal accusations. Prior to the withdrawal of confidence from the Board of Directors of the Independent Teachers' Syndicate, it was headed by Hassan Ahmed, and Abdel-Hafiz Tayel was its secretary general. At the time, there were some attempts by the new board of directors, which rejected the administration of the old council, to transfer the administration with the least losses at the moral level to the old board and at the political level with regard to the reputation of the emerging independent syndicate, whose first board of directors was elected during the momentum of the revolution in August 2013. But sooner- according to the testimonies – it followed the same steps of the old professional union and the sterile political entities, so the teachers who were happy for the young democratic experience wanted to practice it by withdrawing confidence and changing leadership. The reasons behind the change in leadership in the Independent Teachers' Syndicate were as follows, according to various testimonies we collected.

## Tyranny of the Syndicate's Board

Teachers succeeded in establishing their independent union, but this success was not the end. Rather, it was the beginning of a daily battle to meet the demands of union members who had grievances or rights they could not receive. They had to maintain this independent democratic entity, since they elected its first board of directors at their general assembly in August 2013. Therefore, after the decline of the role of the union, they had to engage in another fierce battle to withdraw confidence from the first Council, whose head, Hassan Ahmed, when he received criticism for his management of the union, promised to withdraw voluntarily and then retreated. "I was the acting director, so, I was working more in the administrative affairs of the syndicate, along with the syndicate head... who was Mr. Hassan...He announced that, while I was taking meeting minutes, he will give himself the confidence as the Head of the union, during an coming meeting<sup>32</sup>."

Hussein Ibrahim explains that the management of the syndicate was – according to the old board - to meet with the seven founders, regardless of the General Assembly or the board of directors is complete, even Hussein Ibrahim himself - was acting secretary general - did not know about some decisions: "We did not know anything other than to go to the meeting, and surprised with decisions. He tells you: we had a meeting with the seven founders<sup>33</sup>."

## Complicity with Ministry of Education:

"We had a vision that the minister Mahmoud Abu Al-Nasr has achieved victory in breaking through the syndicate in many ways, and we were having doubts in the role of Hassan Ahmed. In the meantime, the role of the syndicate was completely being faded," said Muheb About<sup>34</sup>.

## Separation from Street Issues:

The decisive factor in the success of any trade union action is the survival of the relationship with the grassroots that elected the board of directors. They are the basis, and have the upper hand. They put the regulation of the union and elect their representatives to defend their interests. If this relationship is cut off, the board of directors loses its legitimacy. This is another reason for the anger of the members of the syndicate at the first board, when the crisis of the contractors- those teachers who have not yet signed fixed-term contracts in spite of being promised that- broke out. Having known that the ministry does not want to implement the decision, they had to take to the street. Then, Hussein Ibrahim asked Abdel-Hafiz Tayel to show

<sup>32</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Hussein Ibrahim

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Muheb About

solidarity with them even by issuing a solidarity statement, which “the latter refused to do<sup>35</sup>, according to Hussein Ibrahim”. This is despite the fact that these detailed claims create the power of the board by being present with different groups of teachers in all their crises, even if by issuing a solidarity statement.

### **Battle of Changing the Board Of Directors Begins:**

After some clashes between the deputy secretary general and his group with the old board of directors, in addition to the retreat of the head of the union on his withdrawal from the union, it was necessary to initiate formal procedures to withdraw confidence: “It is impossible to work together in this condition. Please, let us discuss all the issues before the General Assembly. Also, we reject the notion that the syndicate board became a supporter of the ministry in late 2013, especially after the minister Mahmoud Abu Al-Naser embarked on his policies of polarization. Hence, we took our path and initiated the formal procedures<sup>36</sup>.”

The formal procedures had been initiated in mid-October 2014 during the meeting of the general syndicate office. This meeting includes representatives of the syndicate’s branches in governorates: president of the sub-syndicate, secretary-general and treasurer along with 2-7 representatives that the General Assembly elects for the sub-syndicate. All of them attend the meeting of the syndicate bureau, as they attempt to take a decision of the emergency General Assembly to withdraw the confidence. However, “Hassan Ahmed, the president, delayed for too long, so that the meeting was paused and resumed under the leadership of “Muheb Aboud”. Accordingly, those who wanted to convene the emergency General Assembly had to collect signatures so as to request its convention at this proper legal meeting, which was attended by 99% of the general syndicate office’s members; 66 out of 72 members had signed the request of convening the emergency General Assembly and its sole object “withdrawing confidence”<sup>37</sup>.

After convening the emergency General Assembly and withdrawing confidence from the old council, "Mahab Abboud" was appointed interim president until elections were held three months later, according to the regulations. "Raed Al-Husseini" was elected as the head of the union, "Hussein Ibrahim" as its secretary general, and “Nishat Al-Gohary” as a treasurer on 31 October 2014. However, the old board of directors kept speaking as the legitimate board of the syndicate, ignoring the withdrawal of confidence in the emergency meeting, but it came to the dispute between the two boards in the Ministry of Manpower to lead the union, which was resolved, of course, in favor of the new one, since the emergency procedures were legal, and the meeting was attended by a representative of the Egyptian Union of Independent Trade Unions

<sup>35</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Hussein Ibrahim

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

and a representative of the Ministry of Manpower. The new board finalized its credentials, represented by changing the signatories on the bank account, and the papers were submitted to the Minister of Manpower.

In a tougher move, the new board, following the conflict over the syndicate leadership, had to convene a meeting so as to dismiss 10 members of the Independent Teachers Syndicate. Such a measure was not necessarily undertaken to irritate the old board, but rather, it was aimed at stop activities they had started under the auspices of the independent union. In Hussein Ibrahim's words, "the main reason was the meeting in which they met the minister and ruined our annual protest in September..They conspired against the syndicate. Can you image that the 3-month effort for the 9/10 protest, which always starts in July, went in vain<sup>38</sup>."

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<sup>38</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Hussein Ibrahim

## Conclusion

At the end of this report, in which we spoke about the most important years of the teachers' movement in Egypt, we must point to some of the most important mistakes made by the movement and its leaders, which were recognized by a number of unionists and teachers, whose testimonies have been used in this report.

- **Losing the Negotiation Opportunity:** The leaders, from whom we collected the testimonies, agreed on the big mistake made by "Ayman al-Bayli" in the right of the movement, when he announced in the demonstration of September 24, 2011 his refusal to negotiate with the ministry, despite the agreement of all leaders before the demonstration to negotiate if the ministry invites us to negotiation. It was so decided to the extent of forming a delegation for the negotiation. The crowd was huge; it was a typical case of putting pressure on the ministry, so that the teachers could grab at least some rights, not all. But what occurred confused everyone: "Although the idea is rational that we have the power, so we can negotiate when they ask us.. We were surprised during the protest that we do not accept negotiations except after dismissing the minister and changing the situations. Therefore, when we ask, why the teachers in particular did not reap their efforts at the national level, although their syndicate was established before the other syndicates? The answer is due to wasting that opportunity, which occurs once in a history."

- **Lack of accountability**

"Muheb Aboud" sees that the serious mistake of refusing to negotiate which was committed single-handedly by "Ayman al-Bayli", was a large, albeit not the only mistake. The biggest mistake is that the movement was unable to re-read the scene to discover the major mistakes that Aboud saw. But the price for these mistakes was not borne by specific people who committed them, but rather, it was paid by the teachers themselves. "Perhaps, our situation today would become different at least for the teachers<sup>39</sup>."

- **The Control of the Political over the Unionist**

This was confirmed by the concentration of protests, before the revolution, in Cairo, without the other governorates, where the teachers' movement had been involved in strikes and similar actions. The leaders and activists of the movement were mainly members of parties that focused their activities on Cairo, the capital. "The political idea, not the union-related one, controlled the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid

work in the syndicate. There are some of the famous figures (in the movement) have ceased teaching for many years, and yet they hide this....<sup>40</sup>”

### •Individual Leadership Controls

According to the testimony of Anwar Fath Al-Bab about the strike in September 2011, the agreement of the continuation of the strike was not a collective one. It was an agreement among the leaders without referring back to the grassroots at all. Also, these leaders were not able to solve the disagreement between the different sectors of teachers with regard to continuing or ending the strike. He adds that when the teachers, supporting Muslim Brotherhood group, attacked the strike, the female teachers were much braver and insisting on continuing the strike, and on seizing the opportunity to deliver their message to the ministry. So, how could we waste such an opportunity<sup>41</sup>, he wonders.

Anwar Fath Al-Bab also explains **that there was not a unified leadership between the independent syndicate and the Federation of Egyptian Teachers. The matters were being done randomly and without planning. The decisions were mostly top-down. To the extent that when the minister Mahmoud Abu Al-Nasr offered to appoint some leading teachers at the ministry, none of those who accepted the offer were able to see or demand the rules of their appointment<sup>42</sup>.**

**The team extends their thanks and appreciation to those who gave their testimonies that significantly contributed to writing this report:**

- Dr. Kamal Moghaith: Researcher at the National Center for Education Research and Development
- Mr. Muheb Aboud: a former teacher of English, former head of the Supervisory Board of the Independent Teachers Syndicate, and now he is the secretary of workers and peasants at the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.
- Mr. Abdel-Hafiz Tayel: a former teacher of English in Cairo, and head of the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education.
- Mr. Anwar Fath Al-Bab: A secondary school teacher of history in Suez, and a member of the political bureau of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party.
- Mr. Abdel-Naser Ismail: A teacher of English, and head of the Federation of Egyptian Teachers.
- Mr. Omar Morsi: A teacher of philosophy, currently retired, and he is the vice-president of the Federation of Egyptian Teachers.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> An interview conducted by the team with Anwar Fath Al-Bab

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

- Mr. Raed Al-Husseini: A teacher of French in Cairo, Abass Al-Aqad Experimental School in Nasser City, and head of the Independent Teachers Syndicate.
- Mr. Hussein Ibrahim Hassan: A teacher at El Abbasseya Secondary Decorative School- El Wayly Educational Administration, and secretary general of the Independent Teachers Syndicate.



**NOTES:**

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