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The development of the Trade Union reality 1958-1970: Egypt as a case study

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Abstract

The current research dealt with the way the Egyptian workers began and how they arose with the efforts of the Ottoman ruler, who made a qualitative leap to shift the workers, who only paid a service in return for their health while violating their rights, from a basic marginalized class into a well-known class with weight and significance in society. As time and conditions developed, the workers had unions connected in political scenarios, in addition to having developed a variety of institutions that assist workers, including entertainment and health institutions. Moreover, several laws were issued serving the workers and preserving their rights. The research included some laws which whereby the trade union was established in the Egyptian society. In a related context, the research dealt with the effective role of workers through their external relations and they held a number of conferences in order to unify Arab labor laws and views. It also dealt with how the workers faced the setback suffered by the Egyptians and how the trade unions were dealt with. In conclusion, the research dealt with the impact of the death of the Egyptian president on trade unions since he was the supporter for them.

Keywords: development, trade union reality, Egypt as a case study

Introduction

One of the oldest trade union movements in the Arab world was the trade union movement in Egypt, because the industrialization movement in Egypt preceded all Arab countries, and because it enjoyed some independence during the Ottoman rule. (Jassim, 2014). However, the industrialization movement crystallized in the middle of the 19th century, as it was linked to the level of industrial development. There were no industries in the second half of the 18th century involving machinery other than humans and animals, because the prevalent industrial system at that time was the system of small, manual production units. (Al-Jurtali, 2022; Serrano et al., 2023)

Factories were limited to using corn straw, rice and animal dung as fuel (Abbas, 2004). Thus, this was the major feature of workers' lives in primitive times, but the flow of production altered after Muhammad Ali Pasha's governance. (Rasheed, 2013). Industry dramatically advanced, because the country established a factory system, in which a substantial number of employees work on the basis of selling their labor power for money to the project's owner, for the first time in its history. Accordingly, the governor is considered to be the one who set the real beginning for the emergence of a new working class in industry that depended for its pension on what it gained from work. Moreover, most writers attributed that Muhammad Ali Pasha was the one who laid the foundations for the rise of the Egyptian working class through the development of productive forces. This led to develop this class

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through the movement of the industry that he brought it (Abbas, 2022; Tiza et al., 2023)

By changing the events in Egypt, the working class has developed and established some syndicates known and recognized by the Egyptian government. Trade unions also have a key role and opinion in political and economic issues in the country. Furthermore, trade unions have a role and position regarding international issues and the expansion of the area of trade unions through holding conferences to bridge the views and communication between the Arab trade unions. The union contributed to creating and establishing several federations that strengthened the trade union reality, including:

A The National Union 1958-1961 (Al-Banna, N.D)

This union was established within the framework of Article 191 of the Egyptian Constitution, which included the General Committee for Labor and Workers in the Egyptian Region, consisting of the National League for Labor. (Mahmoud, 1973). (The League's office) represents the National Labor League, while its (Board of Directors) represents the General Federation of Workers, and (the head of the office) represents the Labor and Workers' Office at the General Secretariat of the National Union. In addition, the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor serves as the chairman of the committee. In May 1958, Anwar Sadat, Secretary General of the National Union, issued the first labor regulatory publication, which covered how labor organizations were formed, the method and time of meetings, and the mission of each organization towards the workers and the National Union (Ameen, 2013 Czuba & Muster, 2023)

On this basis, the Labor and Workers Committees (National Leagues for Labor and Workers) were organized. These committees consisted of members of the popular base elected in the executive committees elected at all levels of organization in the National Union, as well as members with labor experience. Those members were appointed with the approval of the executive committees of the National Union. According to this division, all workers can be represented in the areas of union committees at all levels, in addition to representatives of the administrative bodies concerned with labor and workers affairs. (Azzyaat, 1985)

B Labor cultural institutions

This institution was established based on the recommendations of the National Committee to the Minister of Social Affairs, as this institution sought the assistance of the expertise of Mr. Stephen Laude, the Swedish expert in labor culture at the International Labor Organization, in order to prepare and direct labor culture programs (Nasser, 1959). Indeed, he came to Egypt in 1958 and remained there until the end of his work in July 1959. During that period, he was able to investigate the workers' conditions and identify the conditions of the trade unions and prepared a report in which he stated (if the trade unions alone cannot assume this responsibility due to their limited resources and capabilities, then the government should participate in the establishment of bodies for trade unions). That is what really happened. In July 1960, the General National Conference approved the recommendation made by the Labor and Workers' Office in the National Union regarding the establishment of the Labor Culture Institution. In December 1960, the Presidential Decree No. 2253 of 1960 was issued, which was like its birth certificate for the institution (Azzyaat, 1985; Amutuhaire, 2023) The decree stated that the aim of the institution was to promote cultural, national and trade union education institutions.

C. Labor social institutions

This institution was specialized in providing social, sports and recreational services. The Presidential Decree No. 476 of 1960 was issued regarding the formation of the social institution that aimed at improving the working conditions and workers by providing them with services. The President issued

a decision to allocate a financial grant to this institution on the 23rd of July of each year from the wages of workers, the subscriptions of the private sector, the subscriptions of citizens and members of the National Union, government subsidies and donations.

D. Labor health institutions.

This institution started working in 1961, when decree No. 571 was issued regarding the Health Workers Institution of the National Union, in order to achieve a decision of the first general conference of the National Union aimed at health care for workers. On this basis, some hospitals were identified for the safety of Egyptian workers (Amir, 1987).

The Labor laws in Egypt:

A. The Unified Labor Law No. 91 of 1959

After the establishment of Syria-Egypt unity, a united structure for the two states must be put in place, as it was determined to construct a central government and two executive ministries for workers in Cairo and Damascus. (Subhi, 1965). At the same time, a Committee for International Labor Relations was formed to unify legislation in the two regions. (Al-Abid, n.d.). It was agreed on principles and rules to unify them, including: equality between the people of the same country, adopting the best solution for the two regions, in addition to standardization of treatment among various categories of workers. This led to the issuance of a unified decree by the President of the Egyptian Republic No. 91 of 1959, in addition to unifying the 16 labor laws, some of them date back to the year (1933). (Ezzalddin, 1965). It is worth noting that this law laid the legislative foundations for the establishment of an integrated structure for trade unions.

The external labor relations

The Egyptian trade unions worked to bring their views closer to the trade unions through forming federations, including:

First: The Establishment of the Arab Trade Union

This union included some national federations and trade union organizations in the Arab world, including Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Tunisia, Marrakesh, Algeria, Aden and other Arab countries wishing to join the federation after establishing, whether it is present or will join in the future. The federation declared in the introduction to its constitution that workers in the Arab world believed in the unity of the Arab nation and its message of liberation, unity, and social justice. They also believed that the labor issue in the Arab world was an integral part of that message, and that Arab workers could achieve their full rights. The preservation of these rights depends on the liberation of the Arab nation from colonialism, exploitation and economic, political and social reaction. Achieving these major national and sacred workers goals can only be achieved by organizing the labor movement on the basis of the national unity of the Arabs. (Al-Ghazali, 1988)

The first act undertaken by Egyptian workers in implementation of the policy of this General Union of Arab Workers was their support for Algeria in its war against colonialism in 1958. What encouraged the workers to help was the order of Jamal Abdel Nasser to supply Algeria with weapons before they provide them with the National Guard to defend them in addition to their role in supporting the struggle of the working class in Iraq. (Al-Kayali, 1986). The Higher Advisory Council of Workers sent a telegram to the king announcing their support for the struggle of the people of Iraq, against the policy of Nuri Saeed. (Ahmed, 2012) (Al-Zaidi, 1987). When the Iraqi Republic was established on July 14, 1958, the Federation of Spinning and Weaving Syndicates sent him a telegram of congratulations.

Second: The Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers

The objectives of the union during this conference were to establish the rules of industrial relations, all organizations and members of the union in order to achieve a decent and fair standard of living for workers. Establishing cultural and training courses to prepare trade union leaders and educated workers, and to unify the labor ranks of the Arab oil workers were also objectives of the union. The federation also aims to consolidate the foundations of the Arab Workers Union, to instill the spirit of Arab national resistance among workers and national liberation movements, and to assist all Arab oil organizations financially and technically. It is worth noting that this federation was the first vocational federation for Arab workers.

Third: The African Trade Union

It was established during the period that the July Revolution of 1952 took place in Egypt and during the establishment of the new Egyptian state. The Arab and African countries in that period had not gained independence except for some nominally independent states such as Ethiopia, Liberia, and the Union of South Africa. However, since the Egyptian revolution, great efforts have been made to pay attention to the countries of the African continent and their liberation movements. Cairo has also become a source of advocacy and solidarity with African unity since 1957, as the first meeting between the Egyptian and African trade union movements took place in 1958 when representatives of the Egyptian Federation of Workers participated in the first conference of all African peoples. (Amir, 1962). The conference was held in Accra, and one of its most important decisions was a call for the formation of a general federation of all African trade unions.

In November 1959, a preliminary conference was also held in Accra to discuss the subject. This conference was attended by representatives of the workers of the African organizations, consisting of 17 African countries. In 1961, a conference of African workers was held in Casablanca, where Trade unions in Egypt, Guinea, Ghana and Mali participated in this conference. At this conference, a decision was taken to establish the African Union of Workers, with its headquarters in Casablanca. On this basis, Al-Mahjoub Ben Seddik was elected president of the new African Trade Union. (Ibrahim, 1966). This federation was called the Federation of All African Trade Unions. It is worth noting that this union did not encounter any difficulties in its formation, despite the multiplicity of cultures and tendencies of those in charge of its formation. (Al-Zaidi, 1987).

The development of Egyptian economy

Despite the end of the period of unity between Syria and Egypt, the trade unions remained compact among themselves and steadfast in imposing their mission and goals in the elevation of the working class and its trade unions. One of these economic developments: enacting and issuing some laws that develop the trade unions, including:

A. The Labor laws in 1962 and 1963

Several laws were issued in 1962, which developed and raised the message of the trade unions, not just because they are a counterpart to the administration, but rather they worked to unify the production process to the extent that it made it a vanguard base in the process of development (Abdulrazak, 2011). In January 1962, the nationalization of 77 special projects for bakeries was issued, which contributed to increasing the labor force and opening a new source of workers. At the same time, the government decided to involve 50% of the capital of (24) projects in grain milling, rice mills and bakeries (Awadth, 1987). The Law 175 was also issued, which emphasized in particular the reduction of working hours, provided that it should not, in any way, cause a reduction in workers' wages (Al-Jubaili, 1975)

B. The Law No. 62 of 1964

The issuance of socialist laws 1961-1964 and the nationalization of companies, banks, and private and foreign establishments necessitated enacting a law compatible with these new political and economic conditions. Therefore, the Law No. (62) of 1962 was issued, which aimed at reconsidering the trade union situation and working to establish general trade unions for workers of professions and industries that are similar or related to each other and to involve them in one production. (Awadth, 1987). Accordingly, general trade unions were formed on the basis of the following:

- 1- A trade union committee shall be formed for the workers of one establishment, provided that the number of applicants to participate in it is at least (50) workers.
- 2- The General Assembly of the General Syndicate consists of representatives and members of trade union committees.
- 3- The trade unions should conduct their work according to their basic system, which is described by a committee chosen by the founders from within, and then they join in the form (constituent assembly). This statute is the basis for the constitution of the union, which it operates on, where the name of the general union, its headquarters, and its legal representative are taken into account.

The labor conferences in Egypt

A. The 3rd conference in Cairo

A number of trade union conferences were held in order to strengthen the trade union hall and its recognition by the Arab world. Therefore, it was the task of the Egyptian trade unions to help in holding conferences for all Arab trade unions. One of these conferences was the third conference in Cairo for the period from 14-16 December 1965, as this conference was distinguished by the presence of all Arab federations except for Tunisia. (Awadth, 1987)

This conference was distinguished by its reliance on new means in the organizational field that were in line with the principles in force in international conferences, as it approved an internal regulation of the size of its trade union membership (Al-Zaidi, 1987). It is worth mentioning that the conference focused on the broader interest in strengthening the internal structure of the Federation, and developing the General Secretariat office in a way that makes it a collective leadership. The conference also dealt with the issue of labor education and work to establish a national institute specialized in the field of labor culture to spread awareness among the ranks of Arab trade unionists. The conference ended with major amendments to the constitution of federation, whereby the introduction of the paragraph (The Arab workers in the Arab world believe in the unity of the Arab nation and its mission to achieve social justice) was replaced by the following text (The Arab working class believe in the unity of the Arab nation and its mission aimed at achieving the socialist Arab society). (Beklanouf, 1944).

In accordance with the recent amendments to the constitution, a secretariat office for workers was formed, consisting of a general secretary and four assistant secretaries. Fawzi Saeed was elected president of the federation and an assistant to the president from (Iraq), and four assistant secretaries from Morocco, Syria and Palestine. At this stage in the life of the union, it carried out a costly activity to defend trade union freedoms, which were subjected to widespread aggression by the reactionary authorities in Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, and Kuwait (Al-Ghazali, 1987). In a related context, another conference was held in the same year to support production, as Ahmed Fahim called for a workers' conference that included 289 leaders of the General Federation and delegates of general trade unions to determine the role of the working class in providing services in order to increase production.

After long discussions, the Labor Conference issued an important document entitled the Labor Charter. In this document, the foundations of cooperation are defined in three starting points:

- 1- Participating the trade union committees and socialist administration equally as partners in the political process to raise production and develop it in support of the socialist society.
- 2- Resolving labor disputes without resorting to methods of pressure, stopping or refraining from work in any other way that harms production and is inconsistent with socialist behaviour.
- 3- Employing the arbitration by the political organization in disputes that the two parties fail to resolve, where the adherence to what the organization rules is reinforced by the confidence and support of the mass base. In the document, workers undertake to develop production, innovate, and implement improvements aimed at raising the level of production efficiency.

To embody the spirit of sacrifice and giving, it was announced in the document that financial and in-kind donations were made at the rate of (50%) allocated from the workers' share in direct social profits for a period of five years, subject to renewal. The reason was due to increasing production, raising the level of efficiency, and saving half of the profits that are spent in cash, as well as saving one day of each month as a contribution to forming the savings necessary for production (Alzaidi, 1987). In addition, the donation shall be at least an additional hour of work per day for those who work (42) hours per week without an increase in wages (Mahmoud, 2011).

It is worth noting that the Trade Union was not satisfied with this conference only to increase production, but rather they went on to organize a series of conferences on the issue of production, namely:

- 1- The first conference regarding labor legislation in October 1965 in Alexandria to study labor legislation after the economic and social transformation that occurred as a result of the decisions of July 1961, and the emergence of the public sector.
- 2- The Trade and Production Conference in March 1966 in Cairo, which dealt with topics related to workers, the plan, the responsibility of trade union organization in production, organization of work, incentives, workers, management, and labor legislation in the private sector.
- 3- The Production Conference in March 1967, a joint conference between trade union leaders and heads of boards of directors in (48) institutions and (384) companies to discuss production issues (Al-Jubaili, 2007).

B. The 4th Conference of the International Federation of Arab Trade Unions

The International Federation of Arab Trade Unions held its 4th conference in Cairo for the period from January 29 to February 1, 1969. It was an important event in the history of the Arab trade union movement, as labor delegations representing trade union organizations in the entire Arab world participated in its work. (Al-Zubaidi, 1987). This conference was sponsored by the Egyptian President, who opened its sessions with a political speech that expressed the nature of the conditions that the Arab nation was going through after 1967 (38). The conference ended its work by adopting a number of decisions, most notably:

- 1- Uniting the Palestinian resistance movement without any interference in its affairs, placing all Arab capabilities at the service of the battle and supporting the revolution, and urging the Arab governments to allocate the necessary funds to continuously support it financially.
- 2- Calling for the training of those who are able to bear arms and forming fighting labor brigades in support of commando work and the Palestinian armed struggle, and urging Arab workers to join the ranks of these armed brigades.

- 3- Donating a wage for the 15th of May and 5th of June of each year, provided that the trade union organizations assume their role in taking over that task (Al-Jubaili, 2007).
- 4- Denouncing the barbaric actions practiced by the Zionist gangs against our Arab people in the occupied land and calling for the establishment of a joint Arab fund to strengthen their steadfastness.
- 5- Activating the International Committee for the Advocacy of the Workers and People of Palestine and forming sub-committees for this committee in Arab organizations.
- 6- Asking Arab governments that have financial assets in foreign banks to invest them in the Arab world and use them to serve national development programs.
- 7- Stressing on Arab governments to apply and implement the slogan of Arab oil for Arabs and to liquidate all monopolies in Arab countries.
- 8- Supporting Arab labor organizations and enabling them to perform their union and national responsibilities, and to ensure the psychological and material stability of Arab workers.

The conditions of the Egyptian trade unions after the setback of June 5, 1967

The setback of 1967 was a severe blow with multiple consequences for the Egyptian people in general, as it launched slogans of correction and the liquidation of all centers of power that stood as an obstacle in the face of the socialist transformation process. In a related context, the trade union movement was fiercely attacked, which demanded the purification of the trade unions, the rebuilding of the trade union movement, and the pursuit of its leaders. The most dangerous thing about that attack was that it pretended commitment to the decisions issued by the National Conference of the Socialist Union (Mahmoud, 2011). On the one hand, the attack came from a number of informants, writers, and journalists who gathered around the Workers' Secretariat of the Socialist Union, as they took the Labor magazine as their platform. It was evident that their writings were against the trade unions which the Workmen's Secretariat was blessing and encouraging. In all of their criticisms, they were keen to exclude the Petroleum Workers Union because the one who heads it is the Workers' Secretary. These criticisms increased sharply in 1969 (Huweidi,).

On the other hand, the left-wing writers attacked the trade union, who took the Al-Tali'ah magazine as their platform, as their writings were characterized by criticism more than satire. It was sometimes characterized by deep analysis and attribution of testimonies to the performance of some well-known trade unionists. Whatever the true intentions of this campaign, it was of a positive dimension, which is a specific dimension that revealed a number of issues and phenomena that deserved the attention of the General Union and its leaders, such as the issue of low level of trade union membership, the issue of trade union democracy, the concept of revolutionism in trade union work, and the issue of controlling relations between the trade union movement and political organization. The Egyptian president supported that movement, when he issued special recommendations regarding trade unions on March 30, 1969. These recommendations were taken as a serious step for the work of the trade union movement. These recommendations were:

- 1- Reinforcing the trade union movement of the workers by defining the role of the trade union committees and their terms of reference so that they can play their role in the socialist society.
- 2- Rebuilding the trade union organization so that it covers the broad base of the masses of workers.
- 3- Achieving cohesion and interaction between the labor base and trade union committees.
- 4- Developing a training plan for the new trade union leaders to assume their responsibilities.

- 5- Holding periodic meetings between the political leaders and the administrative union to identify workers' problems and work to solve them.
- 6- The necessity of linking the trade unions with the corresponding socialist union organizations (Al-Samee,).

During that critical period, the head of the General Federation of Trade Unions was changed, as Abd Al-Latif Hamid assumed the presidency of the General Federation of Trade Unions on December 25, 1969, who worked to change the work of the trade unions. His close and ambitious ties to the Workers' Secretariat helped him to bring a great deal of calm to his relationship with the Workers' Secretariat. The plan of General Confederation for Trade Unions in the domestic field was based on:

- 1- Going to bases and meeting leaders and workers in factories and companies with the aim of mobilizing all efforts and capabilities.
- 2- Studying matters of concern to workers in their present and future, especially with regard to social security.
- 3- Organizing the internal work within the trade union organization at its various levels, with the help of technical secretariats specialized in the fields of trade union work.

Accordingly, the policy followed at the end of Gamal Abdel Nasser's life with regard to trade unions was the policy of appeasement. The distinctive character of Nasser's life was under the new leaderships, so there was no conflict over terms of reference from the political organization, and no pressure on the Ministry of Labor in urgent labor issues and problems.

Egyptian workers at the end of Gamal Abdel Nasser's life

On the evening of September 28, 1970, the United Arab Republic announced the death of the President Gamal Abdel Nasser, when the news about Gamal Abdel Nasser's death was received with astonishment from the first moments of hearing the statement. Mass rallies of millions of Egyptian people were shocked by the news, hoping that it was not true. As for the trade unions, they received the official statement with sadness and astonishment, as the Executive Council of the General Federation of Trade Unions hastened to hold an emergency and expanded session, attended by the heads of the general trade unions. (Awadth, 1987). The discussions continued until the morning, when the General Union issued in its name and in the name of millions of Egyptian workers a statement to the people and entrusted the late President in which they mentioned: (They are following his path and completing his long journey that he made for freedom, prosperity, justice and change). The general leadership of the federation and the labor leaders have reiterated their commitment to the late president in a document written in blood and placed in his tomb indicating that they would continue the long and difficult journey to liberate the Arab world from every defilement of colonialism and Zionism, defeat all reactionary forces and work to establish socialism. (Ansajj, 1966) (Al-Bursan,)

In a related context to what has been mentioned with regard to trade unions and the Egyptian government, the workers have gained many achievements under the revolution, and under the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which moved them from being a class that is restricted to work only while suffering from a lot of injustice to a class that has a major role in participating in the administration and the national political process that included the country. However, despite these reforms, which the workers enjoyed in general, they were suffering from a deficiency in some reforms that required them to proceed and fight for them under the new government headed by Anwar Sadat. Despite improving the economic and social conditions, the differences among workers with regard to the village and the city, factory workers and the government employees, handicraft workers and factory

workers, have narrowed somewhat in the areas of education and health due to the tendency of increasing numbers of workers to educate their children and due to the improvement of health level to a large extent to treat diseases and epidemics. However, the social and cultural differences and the rest of the other services have continued and the gap has increased to a large extent, especially with the processes of consumption modernization of the urban population and the continuation of the shortage, and even the lack of modern means for craftsmen in the village.

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