

Open Letter of Solidarity with Egyptian Workers from the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, April 30, 2020

May 13, 2010

We are writing to extend our heartfelt solidarity and support to you, Egyptian workers, who in recent months have been courageously demanding that your government address your desperate economic conditions. The American press has been shamefully muted about the grim economic and political realities of life for people in Egypt, a key strategic U.S. ally in the Middle East. But in an eye-opening article in *The New York Times* of April 28, 2010, "Labor Protests Test Egypt's Government," by Michael Slackman, the curtain was lifted, for a moment at least. The article says,

CAIRO — Day after day, hundreds of workers from all over Egypt have staged demonstrations and sit-ins outside Parliament, turning sidewalks in the heart of the capital into makeshift camps and confounding government efforts to bring an end to the protests.

Nearly every day since February, protesters have chanted demands outside Parliament during daylight and laid out bedrolls along the pavement at night. The government and its allies have been unable to silence the workers, who are angry about a range of issues, including low salaries.

Using an emergency law that allows arrest without charge and restricts the ability to organize, the Egyptian government and the ruling National Democratic Party have for decades blocked development of an effective opposition while monopolizing the levers of power. The open question — one that analysts say the government fears — is whether the workers will connect their economic woes with virtual one-party rule and organize into a political force.

This week, with blankets stacked neatly behind them, at least four different groups were banging pots, pans and empty bottles and chanting slogans. There were factory workers, government workers, employees of a telephone company and handicapped men and women. The group of handicapped people said they had been there for 47 days, demanding jobs and housing....

The government has tried to define workers' complaints as pocketbook issues, analysts said, hoping that if specific demands are met, workers will disband without blaming those in charge and without adding political change to their list of priorities.

Try as the Egyptian government might to define your complaints as simply narrow "pocketbook issues," divorced from democratic rights to protest, assemble, and assert labor's interests in the political arena, the distinction won't hold. They are inextricably linked, and this is true today in Egypt, Iran, China, the Philippines and everywhere else. Egyptian workers must have the right to freely assemble, protest and strike, and to form independent trade unions and political parties.

As Americans, we repudiate the hypocritical policy of the United States, our own government,

which turns a blind eye to human rights abuses on the part of its allies, such as Egypt, while decrying such transgressions by governments that defy U.S. power. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy firmly believes that a just and peaceful world must be based on respect for human rights.

We salute you in your brave struggle. We understand that the Mubarak government, which heads a de facto one-party state, is contemplating a crackdown on labor protesters. We will do all in our power to mobilize here in the United States and in countries around the world to prevent this from happening.

In peace and solidarity,

Joanne Landy and Thomas Harrison

Co-Directors, Campaign for Peace and Democracy

New York City

Web: www.cpdweb.org Email: cpd@igc.org