

Workers and the Trade Union Movement in Egypt

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THE estimated strength of the Egyptian proletariat is about 600,000, and of these there are only 15,000 organised in trade unions (the trade unions count a few extra thousand inactive members, who pay no subscriptions). But even this 15,000 is not a permanent figure, for the trade union membership vacillates, sometimes the figure is higher, sometimes lower.

The reasons for this position are: (1) Bad leadership of the trade unions (all the leaders are class-collaborators, who work in the interests of the bourgeoisie and the police); (2) the savage pressure brought to bear by the Government and employers on trade union members; (3) the trade unions do not fulfil their tasks but expel those workers who demand the class struggle. For instance, the tram workers in Heliopolis wanted to declare a strike, but the trade unions opposed the strike, and for this reason many workers left the union. After a few months a new trade union was organised, and the same story was repeated and the workers again left the union, because they saw that both the leaders of the old and the new unions did their work badly and constantly sold the workers.

The Government persecutes the workers' movement. The police keep a list of all trade union members, and from time to time persecute individual trade union members, hunt them away from their work and drive them into the villages or into the wilds of Egypt. Not very long ago 27 engine drivers were dismissed and banished to a place far from the railroad. Even the families of workers are exiled if they are suspected of Communist tendencies. The exile takes place without any reasons; it suffices if some spy or other sees the persons in question in the company of Communists. The police have their spies in every trade union, as well as in every enterprise and factory. The police buy over certain members of the trade union management, and every secretary and president of a trade union is obliged to give information to the police. R. Kantor, a Russian, is at the head of the espionage on the workers' movement.

Yet, in spite of this persecution the workers' movement in Egypt is advancing because the workers know only too well that their leaders are traitors and their enemies. They are now fighting the bourgeoisie and the traitors in the trade unions, and agitating to have these traitors cleared out. In August, 1927, the workers wanted to organise a Red Trade Union Conference, and had even secured the co-operation of four unions, when the police heard of it and broke up their meeting. When it became known that the Red Conference continued to exist in spite of this the police closed it down. The workers continued to work for the convention of a general conference of all trade unions. The presidents of the Egyptian unions convened a few meetings in the months of October and November of last year under

pressure brought to bear by the rank and file. But when they realised that they were faced with a serious situation, and that they were to be forced to convene a conference, then these trade union leaders took council with government representatives and agreed not to convene any conference. Afterwards they declared to the unions that the government would not permit the convening of a conference.

The following is a list of the trade unions that exist at present:

IN CAIRO	No. of members
1. Tramway workers	2,200
2. Tramway workers in Pellopolis, near Cairo	400
3. Hairdressers	150
4. Chauffeurs and motor workers	700
5. Doctors (not fully qualified)	120
6. Printers	1,400
7. Teachers	700
8. Textile workers	2,000
9. Railway workers	800
10. Office workers	500
11. Engineers	300
12. Tobacco workers	400
13. Gas workers and electricians	250
14. Trade school graduates	130
15. Cooks	690
16. Artists	110
17. Fez makers	140
18. Sugar factory workers	400
19. Narrow gauge railway workers	900
20. Printers (newspaper)	100
21. Cab-drivers	300
22. Tailors	800
23. Cabinetmakers	320
IN ALEXANDRIA	
1. Tram workers	2,500
2. Bus workers	540
3. Textile workers	850
4. Tradesmen	900
5. Bank clerks	400
6. Civil servants	750
7. Dock workers	500
8. Cab drivers	200
9. Coffee-house employees	100
10. Tailors	600
11. Salt miners	300
12. Printers	300
13. Tobacco	450
14. Water carriers	200
IN PORT SAID	
1. Civil servants	150
2. Dock workers	400
3. Tradesmen	900

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In addition to these unions there are about ten others in various towns with a membership of over 12,000.

The position of Egyptian workers is bad, especially now, because there is great unemployment in the country. We do everything we can, but that is very little when compared with the immense tasks with which we are faced. The majority of trade unionists are inexperienced, and in addition to this, great terror prevails. We attempted to issue a workers' paper, but three of our papers were immediately closed down.

The Amsterdam International is doing its utmost to win over the Egyptian workers, and sends books, papers, leaflets and manifestoes to all the trade unions, and asks for reports and articles, but the Egyptian workers have little desire to link up with Amsterdam.

In spite of the police terror and the persecution of the national bourgeoisie, and the "guardians" of the working class in the ranks of the nationalists and Amsterdam camps, the Egyptian Labour movement is growing and becoming strong; it is quite certain that the Egyptian working class is adopting the correct revolutionary path.

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