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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Science

The Labor Movement at the American University in Cairo
Strikes, Associations, and Institutional Change

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Sociology-Anthropology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

By Derek Ludovici

Under the Supervision of Dr. Amy Austin-Holmes

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**To Beth, for all the love and support
you gave me throughout the years.**

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Introduction

Ashraf lives in a busy neighborhood in the Giza Suburbs near the Ring Road. Part of the housekeeping staff, he works five days a week at the American University in Cairo (AUC). When I first met him he told me that he was lucky because the bus stop is in front of his house, making the walk from his home to the bus stop easy. However, when I went to visit him at his home I was unsure how that was possible, given that every main street was at least a twenty minute walk and I found it unlikely that an AUC bus would be able to travel in the heavy traffic and unpaved roads of the Giza and Haram District, as well as maintain an efficient schedule. He explained that the bus does not travel in the neighborhood, but rather stops on the side of the Ring Road when it picks the workers up in the morning and drops them off in the evening. Once on the bus, Ashraf's commute to the campus is as little as 40 minutes in the morning when traffic is light and as much as three and a half hours in the evening when traffic is heavier.

At the campus Ashraf works eight-hour days cleaning one of the buildings. He cleans the wooden banisters and decor that adorn the building, as well as using the "scrubber," a hand-push Zamboni machine that cleans the floor. Ashraf has an hour lunch break each day. He spends this time in the locker room (where workers change into their uniforms), eating lunch that he brings from home. After the workday ends, he takes the bus back to his neighborhood, has dinner with his wife, and watches television until he goes to bed. These are nights where he is not studying part-time for a degree in Commerce at Cairo University.

Ashraf is a housekeeper at AUC, but has played a key role in major transformations at

the university. In October 2010, against the wishes of the state affiliated AUC Workers Union (AWU), Ashraf and his fellow housekeepers orchestrated a wildcat strike in protest over deductions from their wages. Ashraf, along with other strikers, had their names given to the dreaded Amn Dawla (State Security) as an intimidation tactic by the AWU. Despite the union's attempts, the strike proceeded and managed to gain concessions from the university. This was the start of a wave of civil disobedience that spanned two years and saw five major strikes by workers and students, including demands against university administration. This research focuses on three of these strikes--October 2010, September 2011, and April 2012--all of which included workers from AUC's New Campus. I have excluded analysis of political protests held inside the campus that did not raise demands against the university, a workers' strike at one of AUC's research centers in the Nile Delta, and the student strike of September 2012, because the workers did not participate.

The October 2010 strike was significant because it was the first workers' strike at AUC on record. Furthermore, the strike occurred a few days after the AUC Workers' Union (AWU) called off their planned action, making the strike illegal under Egyptian law, which at the time stated that all strikes must be approved by the Egyptian Trade Union Federation's (ETUF) executive council.¹ Despite this, housekeepers and their student allies were able to carry out a strike, negotiate with the university, and achieve some of their demands. The September 2011 strike was much larger and far more successful. Holding a joint student-worker strike, the three groups of workers and students presented their demands. This was

¹ Beinín, Joel. (2009) Workers' struggles under Socialism and Neoliberalism. *Moment of Change*. London: Zed Books. 69

also the first strike in which the recently formed independent syndicate played a role. Not only were the workers and students successful in gaining most of their demands, but the strike also led to institutional changes within the university. Such changes included the formation of the Labor Rights Oversight Committee (LROC) and the Office of the Ombudsman (commonly referred to at AUC as the ‘ombuds’). The April 2012 strike was carried out by the security guards, bitter over a perceived lack of gains from the 2011 strike, and a small group of student allies. Additionally, the independent syndicate lent its support to the strikers, while the newly appointed ombuds helped to facilitate negotiations. The security guards gained some of their demands; however, this did not include their two main goals: increased salaries and the resignation of the Director of Public Safety.

Each of these strikes occurred due to an increase in contention; however, their outcomes are quite different. This study looks at the political opportunities that existed, both inside the university and within the Egyptian context at the time, and helped to define these strikes, including, but not limited to the willingness of students to support the workers and the revolutionary context that allowed for independent syndicates to form. Support from the students ranged from aiding the strikers, as can be seen in 2010 and 2012, to actually taking part in the strike, as happened in 2011. The degree and form of student support is useful in analyzing the tactics used during each individual strike and the amount of pressure placed on the university. Political opportunities of the revolution also allowed the syndicate to form, as I outline in chapter I. By taking advantage of this opportunity, the workers had an association that helped to organize the strike in 2011, and gave support to the security guards

in 2012. The formation of the AUC Independent Syndicate (AIS) also ties the workers to a larger labor movement taking part in Egypt.

When people think about the Egyptian Revolution, most remember the 18-day occupation of Tahrir Square and other major cities that culminated in the removal of former president Hosni Mubarak. However, the revolution was not a single event, but is a continual process. The narrative that the revolution was 18-days long fails to recognize the movements that gained momentum throughout the 2000's and posed a real challenge to the power of Mubarak and his National Democratic Party. This includes the labor movement, which helped to oust Mubarak, but has also directly attacked the entrenched power that the regime attempted to maintain over civil society, both before and after his fall, such as the formation of an independent tax collectors union in 2007.² The workers at AUC are a part of this history. The AIS formed a few months after the 18-day uprising. In doing so, the workers have become part of a national movement that focuses on removing the state's entrenched position within labor negotiations.

By forming an independent syndicate the workers are themselves competing with the state. Current legislation in Egypt favors state-affiliated unions, allowing them privileges over independent syndicates, such as the power to automatically deduct dues from members' paychecks and a largess from years of doing so. Disadvantaged financially, the AIS has worked in other ways to make itself a better asset to the workers than the AWU. It has done this in four main ways: Being accessible to the workers and flexible in the manner that a

² Beinun, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press.

worker reaches them, being continually in contact with the administration over grievances or unresolved issues, working to clarify information relating to work, and maintaining a democratic structure. Additionally, the syndicate has proposed university wide projects intended to provide benefits that the state-affiliated syndicates provide, but are too large for independent syndicates to provide, such as an emergency fund. Finally, the AIS positions itself within the university so that it becomes institutionalized. By co-sponsoring events with the administration and the students union, the syndicate is able to become a visible institution in university life in a way that the government affiliated syndicate is not.

There have been two types of research done on labor in Egypt. The first are studies of larger national changes that use case studies to demonstrate the direction of the labor movement, as well as the government's shifting positions towards them. In depth research by writers, such as Marsha Pripstein Posusney³ and Joel Beinin,⁴ have played a major part in our understanding of how the labor movement and the state interact. Ethnographies of labor action have academically been less prominent; however, they provide important insight into the lives of workers at the point of production. James Toth's ethnography of migrant laborers and their on-site “games” with management illustrates the ways in which workers contest their treatment when detached from a movement or association.⁵ Both types of research are instructive within my own work. Ethnography becomes a tool with which to look at how

³ Beinin, Joel (2009) Workers’ Struggles under ‘Socialism’ and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press.

⁴ Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (1997) *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵ Toth, James (December 1993) Manufacturing Consent and Resistance in Peripheral Production: the Labor Process among Egyptian Migrant Workers and Egyptian National Development. *Dialectical Anthropology*. 18:3 pp. 291-335.

contention arises in the locus of work. By looking at three of the main groups of workers who have joined the strikes and have taken part in syndicate politics--the housekeepers, landscapers, and security guards--we can understand how these groups differ from one another and how this translates into the demands that arise from each of these groups. The works of Posusney and Beinin become important for seeing how AUC is exceptional, as well as how it situates itself within national trends. This is particularly important because the AIS is already in the minority of private sector unions in the recently formed Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU).⁶ What also differentiates my research from the works of Beinin and Posusney is that instead of looking at different sectors or factories, I am looking at different groups of employees within a single workplace.

The housekeeping staff is one of the most visible groups of workers on campus. Numbering about 250, they work to clean every building and plaza on campus. This includes cleaning the floors, picking up litter, clearing the tables in the food court, cleaning the tables in the library and classrooms, and cleaning the bathrooms. They also have the largest proportion of women of any other group of workers within the university.

The security guards have two main areas of work: the gates and the library entrances. With about 400 members, their tasks include checking ID's, scanning bags with the X-ray machine, and making sure people who enter the library are faculty or students, as well as ensuring no one is taking a book from the library that is not checked out. They also patrol the buildings to make sure there are no problems. They also have women in their employ,

⁶ Beinin, Joel (28 June 2012) The Rise of Egypt's Workers. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved From <http://carnegieendowment.org>.

but not at the same level as the housekeepers. Both the security guards and housekeepers live in the area of Greater Cairo.

The landscapers wear green polo shirts, brown cargo pants and baseball caps with the AUC logo on. Smaller than the other groups, their numbers range from 15-30 people, depending on how many are employed at the time. The number is in flux due to several staff leaving AUC to work in Libya. There are two groups within the landscaping staff, irrigation and landscaping. Irrigation is a 10-person team, with one leader and one driver. Landscaping is a 20-person team, with 2 leaders and 4 drivers. They are responsible for the gardens and lawns on campus, as well as watering some of the potted plants on campus. Their main tasks include planting trees and flowers, making sure the trees are healthy, and ensuring the irrigation systems work. In the spring they prepare for planting the gardens by unloading trucks of manure. Their work is the heaviest manual labor on campus. What is distinct about the landscaping staff is that they are the only section of the AUC workforce that is entirely male. Additionally, they have a distinct geographical location of origin. Most of them are from the Upper Egyptian city of Minya. During the week they share housing near the campus in New Cairo.

To understand the strikes themselves we must understand how the workers feel about the strikes and university. In conducting my fieldwork, most of the participants expressed approval for the strikes. At the same time they also said that they were satisfied (raadi) with the work at the university. This seemingly contradictory statement stems from the material conditions that exist in Egypt. Egypt has problems of high unemployment, especially for

those with college education, which many of the participants of this study have. Even with such an education, many cannot find jobs due to a lack of the skill set that firms are looking for. Through striking many of the workers have been able to create stability, including an increased income and permanent contracts with AUC.

Whilst a majority of participants in this study are satisfied with the work at AUC, their opinion of the independent syndicate is split. About 90 percent of the housekeepers and a 100 percent of the landscapers are in the independent syndicate, with most expressing satisfaction with it. The security guards on the other hand have only about 40 percent⁷ membership in the AIS, with many members feeling that the independent syndicate does not do enough for them. Others from security feel that that prefer to stay with the AWU or not join any syndicate at all. This study shows that the disparity in membership along group lines comes from a recent history of syndicate negotiations, which has favored the types of demands raised by housekeeping and landscapers, but achieved few of the demands that the guards prioritize. This has had the effect of creating a nascent movement among the guards.

With such a heterogeneous workforce I originally planned to look at how areas of work, home, and community affected the workers demands. This project was too expansive however. The few months of field work I could spend on this research did not give me adequate time with the workers to gain enough of a rapport to go to worker's houses, save for Ashraf's. The more time I spent at the university talking to workers, the more interesting I found the syndicate politics and the ways the workers spoke of themselves in relation to the university and the syndicates. With so much changing in the time between 2010 and my

⁷ These are the AIS's own estimates given to me during a conversation with a few of the officers.

fieldwork, I instead focus on the dynamics of the university and how they have changed since 2010. In this regard I am not only adding to the history of the labor movement in Egypt by doing an ethnography of the independent syndicate, but also to the history of the American University in Cairo, which has a legacy of researching communities, both internal⁸ and external.⁹ Additionally, an ethnography of the formation of an independent syndicate allows me to situate this project within the workplace it was formed out of, by looking at the lived history of the workers who established it and interact with it.

This research looks at three main questions, which focus on the strikes, the syndicate and the workers themselves. First, how did contention and opportunities--in particular allies and the formation of the independent syndicate--define each strike, the tactics used, and its outcome? Additionally I ask, how did the strikes, in particular in 2010 and 2011, change the ways in which the workers can pursue their grievances within the university? The second question focuses on the syndicate itself. I ask, how has the independent syndicate competes with the older state affiliated syndicate, as well as, circumvent the constraints placed on it by the state, which favors the state affiliated syndicates? The third question focuses on the workers themselves. How do the workers feel about their work at the university, as well as the syndicates?

Labor and the State

To understand the context of this study we need to understand the specific context of

⁸ Fouad, Yaqeen and Joanne Walby (2009) Moving to the New Campus and the impacts on AUC Marginalized Workers. *AUC Before Community Conference*.

⁹ Hopkins, Nicholas (1988) "Participation and Community in the Egyptian New Lands: The Case of South Tahrir" *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 11:1.

labor in Egypt. The economy and work relations have gone through radical changes since the coup carried out by the Free Officers against the monarchy in 1952. Initially this coup lacked any ideological basis concerning the economy besides a commitment to modernization. This commitment led Nasser's regime to promote capitalist industrialization. It was not until the business elites posed a challenge to the regime's power that Nasser placed an ideology on their economic policies.¹⁰ In fact the regime spent little time sending a message of intent to labor; just 20 days after the coup, two workers in Kafr El Dawar received the death penalty in a special court for their role as strike organizers.¹¹ This did not signal the end of strikes, but their frequency was quite low until the 2000s.

Once Nasser adopted socialism as the ethos of production, labor relations began to change. These changes came in 1962 with the National Charter, which along with nationalization of business, also included social welfare such as health, education, and housing, along with land distribution for the peasants.¹² Additionally, in 1957 the Egyptian Trade Union Federation was created, which has since operated as an arm of the state. During the rest of Nasser's reign there were no significant labor actions.¹³

In 1976 President Sadat decided to implement International Monetary Fund recommendations leading to a fall in real wages. This was followed in 1977 by the cutting of many consumer subsidies in 1977, which led to the "Bread Riots." This, however, was not

¹⁰ Trimberger, Ellen Kay (1978) *Revolutions From Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books 148, 150.

¹¹ Said, Atef (2009) Egyptian Labor Erupting. *Against the Current*. September/October. 11:8 pp.13.

¹² Bayat, Assef (1991) *Work Politics and Power: An International Perspective on Workers' Control and Self-Management*. London: Zed Books 130.

¹³ Beinin, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 68.

purely a labor struggle, but also urban masses “[responding] spontaneously to a direct attack on their livelihood.”¹⁴ This was a victory against neo-liberal policies, but these victories would be short lived. After the end of the “oil boom,” during which many Egyptians emigrated to the Gulf for work, the Mubarak government was under increased pressure from international financial institutions to increase neo-liberal policies, which again resulted in a decrease in real wages. In 1984 a law was passed which would double the amount workers needed to pay into their health and pension plans. This led to a three-day insurrection in Kafr El Dawar, in which workers “cut telephone lines, started fires, blocked transportation and destroyed train carriages.”¹⁵ After this, the Mubarak government became much less tolerant of worker actions.

A mixture of co-optation and force was used to destroy the labor movement’s ability to mobilize during the 1990s. During this period the workers' party Tagammu' lost its popularity with labor because it decided to support Mubarak in his fight against Islamists. Besides curbing the political opposition, it also co-opted the marginal bargaining power workers had. In 1993, the ETUF, freshly reshuffled with regime loyalists, decided to support Law 203, which promoted rapid privatization.¹⁶ As far as force was concerned, the Mubarak regime became much less tolerant of worker actions. Two notable examples are the 1989 Iron and Steel Company worker strikes that witnessed the fiercest confrontation of the

¹⁴ Beinlin, Joel (2009) Workers’ Struggles under ‘Socialism’ and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 70.

¹⁵ Beinlin, Joel (2009) Workers’ Struggles under ‘Socialism’ and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 72.

¹⁶ Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (1997) *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring*. New York: Columbia University Press 220-3.

1980s.¹⁷ The other example is the 1994 Misr Spinning and Weaving protests in which six workers were killed and 100s were injured. These were the highest numbers of casualties during a single workers' action in Egypt's history.¹⁸ Workers' actions dropped significantly during the late 1990s and early 2000s, however; they would increase in frequency with a rapid increase in labor actions erupting in 2003.

Two of the main events of the 2000s took place in Mahalla El Kobra. In 2006, after Prime Minister Nazif announced a raise in annual bonuses to public sector employees, the news spread through the factories quickly. Workers spread the news, while the ETUF published it, attempting appropriate credit for the raises. When the next round of paychecks were circulated, the workers found they had received their usual salaries. This led to the women of the plant initiating a protest that would include 10,000 people. Security forces were quickly beaten and chased from the area by numbers that greatly outnumbered their own. Within four days the protesters were given a 45 day bonus and a promise of 10 percent of the profits to be dispersed among the workers if the company grossed more than LE 60 Million.¹⁹ This incident led to over 13,000 protesters signing a petition to the General Union of Textile Workers (GUTW), demanding the impeachment of local leaders who opposed the strikes and calling for new elections. The ETUF opposed these measures. In reaction, workers began mailing their resignations to the GUTW. Additionally, in September

¹⁷ Beinin, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 73

¹⁸ Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (1997) *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring*. New York: Columbia University Press 224.

¹⁹ Beinin, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 80.

2007 the workers went on strike again. This time because the bonuses for the fiscal year were not paid. The strike went on for 6 days until they received an additional 70 days bonus to their pay. The company's general assembly later increased this to 130 after the strike ended. Two other major victories were also won. The CEO of the company was dismissed and the ETUF was forced to travel to Mahalla to negotiate with an elected strike committee. Thus the local GUTW, which would normally conduct negotiations, was delegitimized.²⁰

2008 turned out much differently in Mahalla. On February 17th over 10,000 workers showed up waving bread. This was the beginning of the campaign to raise the minimum wage to LE 1,200 a month. Later that year Mahalla workers called for a national strike to take place on April 6th as a tactic to gain support to for this proposed minimum wage of LE 1200; however, there was a swift regime response that was at least part of the reason for the weak turnout.²¹ While this protest, from which the democracy movement, April 6th, takes its name was a failure, it did become a significant day on a national scale.

In recent years, many victories have been won by labor to create independent syndicates. This began with the tax collectors, who formed one in 2009.²² When the Egyptian Revolution began on January 25th 2011, workers were quick to promote independent syndicates. On January 30th the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) was formed amongst the masses protesting in Tahrir Square. Since the 18-day uprising, the momentum of this movement has increased with a second major

²⁰ Beinín, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 84.

²¹ Beinín, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 85.

²² Beinín, Joel (2009) Workers' Struggles under 'Socialism' and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 81.

independent labor federation forming, the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC). Combined they claim membership of at least 2.5 million.²³ With labor showing their power in the final days of the uprising through factory and transportation strikes,²⁴ the new government led by Prime Minister Essam Sharaf was quick to give concessions to the workers. Mohammed El Bora'i, who had been an advocate of syndicate pluralism was named the new Minister of Manpower and Migration. On March 2011 the new Egyptian Workforce Minister Mohammed El Bora'i attended a panel discussion, entitled "Know Your Role," along side two other prominent unionists, Kamal Abu 'Ayta and Kamal 'Abbas.²⁵ During the conference he stated his ministry's commitment to independent syndicates, as Al Ahram Online reported:

With tears in his eyes, El-Borai stated with resolve that workers would soon have the right to establish, form and join any trade union of the choice - trade unions which would remain completely independent of the ministry. These unions would be able to independently conduct their domestic affairs, develop regulations, allocate their funds and choose their own leaders.²⁶

El Bora'i's legal basis was that Egypt's ratification of the International Labor Organization's conventions, which guarantee the right to organize and associate freely, as well as collectively bargain, were amounted to international treaty obligations. This, El Bora'i argued, supersedes national legislation, in particular laws making the ETUF the sole legal trade union. While this statement gave hope to the workers and helped to encourage the

²³ Charbel, Jano (15 October 2012) Independent Unions Declare New Alliances. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

²⁴ Beinun, Joel (2011) Egypt's Workers Rise Up. *The Nation*. March 7-14.

²⁵ Beinun, Joel (28 June 2012) The Rise of Egypt's Workers. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved From <http://carnegieendowment.org>.

²⁶ Gaber, Yassin (14 March 2011) Egypt Labor Minister Declares the End of Government Domination of Trade Unions. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From: <http://english.ahram.org.eg>.

formation of more independent syndicates, El Bora'i's commitment to syndicate pluralism could not remove Law 35 itself. This left independent trade syndicates in a legal gray area, which has yet to be resolved.

As the workers were building momentum, the backlash against them was beginning to take form. Twelve days after the statement by Mohamed El Bura'i allowing independent syndicates, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) declared strikes and protests illegal in their Communique 34, the penalty being a LE 50,000 fine and imprisonment.²⁷ Although this did not deter strikes, a military court did sentence five workers of the Petrojet Company to a suspended year imprisonment in a show of force.²⁸ SCAF further interfered in the ministry's decisions in August 2011 when El Bura'i dissolved the ETUF executive council, and seven of their 23 unions. A 25-member committee, 13 of whom were independent unionists, was set up to look into the finances of the ETUF and investigate any evidence of corrupt dealings in the past. To make sure this did not happen, SCAF appointed Ismail Ibrahim Fahmi, the Mubarak era treasurer of the ETUF as the chair of the committee in order to sabotage the investigation before its work began.²⁹

Besides SCAF's attack on labor, there was also a backlash against El Burai for his attempts to reform the ETUF. In order to protect its institutional privilege, four of the ETUF's national unions declared a mass strike demanding that the ministry restore the former executive committee of the ETUF. The tactic worked and El Bura'i was forced to reinstate the executive council and reappoint all but one Mubarak-era official. SCAF also interfered

²⁷ Bein, Joel (2013) *The Rise of Egypt's Workers*. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>

²⁸ Bein, Joel (2013) *The Rise of Egypt's Workers*. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>

²⁹ Bein, Joel (2013) *The Rise of Egypt's Workers*. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>

by refusing to allow the interim cabinet to enact El Bura'i's legislation that would have recognized non-ETUF affiliated unions of 50 or more workers. In November 2011, Bura'i would resign, along with the rest of the cabinet.³⁰

The independent syndicate's positions have remained shaky since Mohamed Morsi's victory in the presidential election. The Muslim Brotherhood has a long history of union politics, as a way of encroaching on government power. Despite this, the Brotherhood is not an ally of the labor movement. As one prominent labor lawyer and activist, Rahma Refaat was quoted as saying, “[the Brotherhood] supports union democracy, but not union plurality.”³¹ The reason being is that union democracy has given the Brotherhood a foothold over the professional syndicates, but a plurality of unions would weaken this position. While the Brotherhood has a deeper history in the professional syndicates, since President Morsi took office, the Brotherhoods power within the ETUF and its unions has also increased. On November 25th 2012, Morsi issued Decree 97, which amended the trade union law in order to replace any board member over 60 years of age. Additionally, the decree allows the president to fill vacant trade union offices if no second place candidate existed. Because security forces prevented many independent candidates from running in the last election, which occurred in 2006, the Brotherhood could fill more than 150 seats.³² Further troubling for independent syndicates was Egypt's new constitution, which was ratified December 26, 2012. Within the constitution there are two articles in particular that are worrisome for the

³⁰ Beinlin, Joel (2013) The Rise of Egypt's Workers. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>.

³¹ Rahma Refaat qt. in Jano Charbel (1 May 2012) Political Estrangement, Legal Challenges Hamper Labor Movement. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

³² Beinlin, Joel (8 January 2013) All Unionized and Nowhere to Go. *Carnegie Endowment*. <http://carnegieendowment.org>.

independent syndicates. The first one is Article 52, which states:

The freedom to form syndicates, unions and cooperatives is a right guaranteed by law. They shall be deemed legal persons, be formed on a democratic basis, operate freely, participate in the service of community service, raising the standard of productivity among their members, and safeguarding their assets.

Authorities may not disband them or their boards except under a court order.³³

The main problem with this article is that it leaves the possibility for future legislation to curtail how a syndicate becomes a legal entity.³⁴ The article itself also does not specify the actual agency in charge of registering new unions. While safe in that regard, the AIS does need to worry about future legislation that may be used to curtail the validity of unions. By the fall of 2012 the Shura council had scrapped the Trade Union Liberties Law³⁵, which would have guaranteed the right to a plurality of unions within a workplace to exist and the right to choose one's own syndicate.³⁶ A prominent Egyptian labor journalist, Jano Charbel, told me that not only does the Freedom and Justice Party, the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, not want this right to exist, they are actively working to ban independent syndicates. This could be done through legislation that has been proposed to allow for independent syndicates, but only one within a workplace, which would favor ETUF syndicates already operating.³⁷

What is clear about the independent syndicate movement is that it is in a precarious situation. Functionally operating at a disadvantage compared to state affiliated unions, the

³³ (2 December 2012) Egypt's Draft Constitution Translated. *Egypt independent* Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

³⁴ Charbel, Jano (22 January 2013) Egypt's Constitution seen to Curtail Labor Rights and Workers Freedoms. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

³⁵ Charbel, Jano (1 May 2012) Political Estrangement, Legal Challenges Hamper Labor Movement. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

³⁶ Personal communication Jano Charbel 20 April 2013.

³⁷ Beinin, Joel (2013) The Rise of Egypt's Workers. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>.

independent syndicates have momentum, despite their disputed legality. Having faced hostility from all subsequent regimes since Mubarak's ousting, independent syndicates face the risk of being legally marginalized or being declared illegal outright. What can be said for certain is that they are changing the relationship between labor and the state.

Labor Literature

The literature on trade unions in Egypt has been quite extensive. Samar Soliman has conducted research on the idea of trade union plurality and has outlined issues at a national level that affect workers. One of the national arguments is whether to disband the ETUF and allow all unions and their federations to be independent of the state. This is the position of those that favor independent trade unions, yet other voices argue that these independent unions still are too weak to lobby the government and apply pressure on management. Rather this camp prefers reforms to the ETUF.³⁸ Soliman is highlighting a major problem that exists for the AUC's independent syndicate and the EFITU: the inability to adequately lobby the Egyptian government for favorable laws.

Barbara Pocock has pointed out that unions have four tools at their disposal as advocates for their members. These are collective bargaining, the creation of procedural rights in the workplace to allow employees to contest workplace conditions and treatment, the ability to de-comodify oneself, and political partnerships with parliamentary entities. Independent syndicates, such as the one at AUC, possess the ability to collectively bargain, as has been shown by the strikes at the university. Through these strikes the syndicate has

³⁸ Samer Suliman (26-7 July 2011) Future of Trade Union Pluralism in Egypt. Conference Paper: *Ways to Strengthen the Democratic Transformation in Egypt Conference*.

worked with the university to create and clarify procedural rights for the workers within the university. The ability for the workers to de-comodify themselves is a tool less available for the workers. Unemployment benefits and health services independent of an employment relationship are highly lacking for all workers in Egypt. Additionally, the ETUF has and protects its largess used for emergencies such as disabilities though its position as a government entity, leaving the independent syndicates with few political partners at the moment.

Marsha Pripstein Posusney argues that a moral economy exists between the workers in both the public and private sectors and the state. This moral economy is defined by a “patron/client” relationship, in which the state is seen by workers as ensuring that workers are compensated justly for their labor, while also exhibiting a belief that they have obligations to the state. She highlights the importance of symbolic protests as evidence of the moral economy. Eschewing strikes because they would harm production. Instead of strikes, workers would have in-plant sit-ins, during which management was ejected or ignored, but production was continued.³⁹ She argues that workers in the public sector use these techniques to protest low wages in comparison to the private sector, while the private sector fights for the same benefits at the public sector. While Posusney focuses on labor and the state, I argue that workers do approach labor disputes within a workplace with a moral economy approach; however, this is done as a tactic rather than emanating from a commonly held belief of the workers.

³⁹ Pasusney, Marsha Pripstein (1997) *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions and Economic Reconstructing*. New York: Columbia University. 155-6

Rabab El-Mahdi's writings on labor actions provides a general framework to look at the labor movement since the mid-2000s. She argues that labor protests in Egypt have abandoned the model of moral-economic protests and have begun to challenge the hegemony and dominance of capital, especially concerning the government's role.⁴⁰ This has been done through the creation of the independent trade unions and federations. I show that the workers on campus have made important gains that work to chisel away at the government's hegemonic control over their ability to organize. By striking without approval of the state, affiliate themselves with unions, and later form an independent syndicate, the workers at AUC have been a part of a broader movement to take away the government's monopoly over unions. It is as of yet ambiguous whether independent syndicates are legal in Egypt, the creation of the AUC Independent Syndicate has diminished the government's control over the workers. This can be seen by the fact that the syndicate has actively recruited members, held elections, played a role in workers' actions, and is negotiated with willingly by AUC.

Asef Bayat has discussed different schemes of workers' control and self-management in the global south, including Egypt. His study focuses on how workers have struggled for shop-floor control of production. He highlights tactics from below focused on gaining more decision making control, as well as, tactics by management to placate workers.⁴¹ Bayat defines control as, “demands by workers to control production and the administration of production, and the implications generated by such demands.”⁴² While this definition works

⁴⁰ El-Mahdi, Rabab (2011) Labor Protests in Egypt: Causes and Meanings. *Review of African Political Economy*. 38:129 pp. 392.

⁴¹ Bayat, Assef (1991) *Work Politics and Power: An International Perspective on Workers' Control and Self-Management*. London: Zed Books. 46-7.

⁴² Bayat, Assef (1991) *Work Politics and Power: An International Perspective on Workers' Control and Self-Management*. London: Zed Books. 46.

well in a factory setting, in which worker control can decide pace of work, and negotiations over the share of profits, for workers providing a service, their labor is both more removed from the profit of the enterprise, as well as more abstractly related to profit. Additionally, in the setting of the university, the administration is responsible for multiple groups of employees and students. Due to this, university employees cannot aim for the same type of control as Bayet is discussing. Instead, the workers have pushed for changes that would give them more avenues with which to address grievances, such as the independent syndicate.

Social Movement Theory

This work on the labor movement is good for noticing trends within Egypt, but gives us little understanding of how the movement affects individual workplaces. For this it is useful to look at the idea of *political opportunity*. Sydney Tarrow argues that political opportunities are “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure.”⁴³ He stresses that this is different from mobilization theory in that, to analyze political opportunities one should look at the mobilization of resources external to the group and often perceived or experienced by its members.⁴⁴ Opportunities open when conditions for mobilization increase. For the workers at AUC, the revolution has opened up many political opportunities that did not exist under Mubarak. Ahmed El Bora'i's comment at a labor conference in March 2011 was neither a ministerial decree nor backed by legislation, however it led to exponential growth in the number of

⁴³ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 76-7.

⁴⁴ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 77.

independent syndicates forming and affiliating themselves with either the EFITU or EDLC, including the AUC Independent Syndicate. This research draws on Tarrow's ideas to help identify what political openings the workers saw as a chance to advance their goals.

But not all mobilization is due to seizing political opportunities, sometimes it boils down to contention. As we will see in chapter one, throughout the strike wave, individual strikes changed in what caused them and how the workers went on strike. Tarrow states that contention increases either when people gain resources to allow them to escape their compliance, or their sense of justice is outraged.⁴⁵ Thus within researching a movement we need to be able to discern whether an event is taking place because of opportunities or a sense of injustice.

Tarrow's work on cycles of contention is also important for understanding the strikes.

Tarrow defines cycles of contention as:

heightened conflict across the social system: with a rapid diffusion of collective action in the forms of contention, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities.⁴⁶

During these periods, groups of early risers demonstrate the possibility that groups with less resources can mobilize, through “a variety of processes of diffusion, extension, imitation, and reaction.”⁴⁷ The strikes at AUC took place during a period of increasing levels of labor strikes on a national scale. Additionally, the AUC Independent Syndicate formed during a

⁴⁵ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 71.

⁴⁶ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 142.

⁴⁷ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 145.

period in which the number of independent syndicates was multiplying. Furthermore, Tarrow points out that the outcome of contentious actions depends less on the balance of power than on the structure of contention and responses by opponents and allies.⁴⁸ Not all strikes are as successful as others. This has certainly been the case for the workers at AUC. In 2011, the workers gained most of their demands, while in 2012 the security guards were unable to achieve the goals they gave the highest priority to. I show in this study that the most successful strikes were ones in which allies played large roles.

Movements need to be able to mobilize and create solidarity. David Snow and Robert Benford have formulated the idea of frames in order to tie movements together. They define frames as “interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment.”⁴⁹ Frames define the movement; however they are limited. The problem with frames is they do not help us understand culture within a movement and how this identity defines the movement.

Eric Selbin provides a useful theoretical tool to overcome this problem. He has argued that one should focus on the “culture that individuals create and transmit,” when studying social movements.⁵⁰ Selbin is speaking of the ability of people to create a culture of revolution, through their stories, songs and art. Selbin focuses on how revolutionary figures

⁴⁸ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 143.

⁴⁹ Snow, David and Robert Benford (1992) Master Frames and Cycles of Protest. in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller eds. *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press 137.

⁵⁰ Selbin, Eric (1997) Agency and Culture in Revolution. *Theorizing Revolution*. New York: Routledge, Inc. 81.

from the past are invoked in order to tie one revolution to another.⁵¹ In a revolutionary setting like Egypt, I contend that we can take this theoretical frame further and look at how the culture of ones own revolution is transmitted into a movement. For example, during the uprising, the chant “arhal” (leave) was yelled, referring to the demand for Mubarak to step down. Arhal was also chanted by security guards at AUC, demanding that their supervisor resign. In this way, the workers' own experiences with revolution was transmitted into their own struggle at work.

Material Conditions

While labor actions focus on improving the conditions of the workplace and labor compensation, we cannot ignore the material conditions outside the workplace when trying to understand the position of the workers and their reasons for acting. Johannes Augel has argued that public goods are utilized by different groups and individuals based on their position in society, with these public goods actually working against certain groups. He provides examples of justice systems, public administrations, and general security, as such types of public goods.⁵² Outside the manifest discrimination of public goods, he also argues that the poor often do not have the time to utilize public goods, such as children who must work instead of attending school.⁵³ In the Egyptian context there is a twist to this logic.

Those in positions of power and privileged benefit more from public trusts, such a energy

⁵¹ Selbin, Eric (1997) *Agency and Culture in Revolution. Theorizing Revolution.* New York: Routledge, Inc. 80.

⁵² Augel, Johannes (1984) *The Contribution of Public Goods to Household Reproduction: Case Study from Brazil. Households and the World-Economy.* Explorations in the World-Economy Vol. 3. Beverly Hills: Sage. 176.

⁵³ Augel, Johannes (1984) *The Contribution of Public Goods to Household Reproduction: Case Study from Brazil. Households and the World-Economy.* Explorations in the World-Economy Vol. 3. Beverly Hills: Sage. 175.

subsidies, while the public services offered by the government are under funded to such an extent that the poor end up being denied services or forced to pay for services that are in theory free. This can be seen in both public schools and hospitals. Thus any workplace like AUC, that provides education services, would be creating opportunities most people in the same social-economic level would not usually be offered.

Opportunities for work are also important to look at. The landscapers being from Upper Egypt are part of a rural transformation that is taking place. Kirsten Bach has discussed the declining job opportunities in Upper Egypt. In recent decades both domestic industrial labor declined at the same time that emigrant labor opportunities were also declining. Many Upper Egyptians have attempted to find work in the new desert cities; however, this is difficult without a *wasta* (middle man or facilitator, often a relative). This can be seen with the landscaping staff at AUC who got the jobs through connections.⁵⁴

Social Space and Class Consciousness

Since this study looks at multiple groups we need to understand a few ideas of how groups are differentiated. Bourdieu writes, “Social space is a multi-dimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous, i.e., more or less strongly and directly subordinated, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production.”⁵⁵ Workers can unite and struggle against management if other “fields” of symbolic capital are spatially more similar than the divisions put in place by management. Bourdieu provides one possible answer to how this group formation is carried out.

⁵⁴ Bach, Kirsten H. (2002) “Rural Egypt Under Stress” *Counter-Revolution in Egypt's Countryside: Land and Farmers in the era of Economic Reform*. Ed. Ray Bush. London: Zed 179.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre (1985) “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” *Theory and Society*. Vol. 14. 736

Fundamentally it is how difference is defined.

'I hate my brother, but hate the man who hates him.' The negative, forced solidarity created by a shared vulnerability, which is reinforced every time there is a threat to the jointly owned material and symbolic patrimony, rests on the principle as the divisive tendency which it temporarily thwarts, that of the rivalry between agnates. So, from the undivided family up to the largest political units, the cohesion endlessly exalted by the mythological and genealogical ideology lasts no longer than the power relations capable of holding individual interests together⁵⁶

The landscapers, housekeepers, and security guards all have different backgrounds: the landscapers are closer to housekeeping in their demands and how they have been treated at work my management; however, as far as their backgrounds, housekeepers and security guards are closer than the landscapers who are migrant labor from the south. Like the Kabyle example, the workers can organize around the shared vulnerabilities; however, there needs to be a manifest unity for the groups to stand together. Without the conscious recognition, management could concede to smaller demands of one group to break up the solidarity.

Methodology

My field research took place from September 2012 and continued until March 2013, with most of my interviews taking place between January and March. I began my research with multiple interviews and conversations with Ashraf. He would quickly become my key interlocutor. His trust and interest in my project allowed this research to happen. For that I am very grateful. Through his trust I was able to gain the trust of other employees. After explaining the project to workers, they were often hesitant to answer, thinking that what they said may jeopardize their jobs. At these moments Ashraf would assure them that this

⁵⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 66.

research was for a thesis and that I would protect their identity. This helped me recruit the five housekeepers.

Ashraf also helped me protect these workers by allowing me to use the syndicate office to conduct interviews. To protect the housekeepers, and all other workers in this study, I have changed the names of each worker I interviewed. I also took precautions during the interview process to protect the identities of my interlocutors. I would conduct them during their lunch breaks behind the closed doors of the syndicate office. This meant that no managers would see the housekeepers talking to me. The syndicate office also provided me with the opportunity to witness syndicate meetings and meet officials.

The security guards were a different story. When I went to recruit security members for the study, each guard told me that they wanted permission from their general manager for the study. The initial permission was easy to get. I told the general manager Mohammed Abdullah about the study and he gave me his consent. This consent was beneficial to the research because it allowed me to ask the guards questions during the working hours. Because most of these interviews were conducted during the winter break, the flow of people in and out of the university was slow, allowing me to ask questions uninterrupted. As I went to security guards to introduce myself and explain the study, they would call the security office to confirm my permission. This posed an ethical quandary for me. Would changing their names be enough to protect their identity. I was not convinced of this, so I recruited more participants, so that it is less apparent who I am quoting, even if every participant in the study is known by management. Furthermore, not every security guard's voice has been put

in my thesis to make it impossible to know who said what. Beyond that, the workers were given permission to talk to me, so there should be no repercussions. In total I spoke to ten security guards.

The landscapers were the most difficult to talk to. They take their breaks on the far side of the university campus at the Desert Development Center (DDC). This posed a question of how to speak to them. Ashraf attempted to have a few come to the syndicate office one day, but all refused because they wanted to eat their lunch at the DDC. They asked me to come and talk to them there, but I decided I could not keep their identities confidential, because the engineers who supervise them also eat lunch there. I found a solution for how to talk to them at the beginning of the spring semester. At this time, a student group 3leshanhom (pronounced 'aleshanhom) started running classes for the workers. Many of the landscapers went to a literacy class run by this group, so I began to attend at the suggestion of Ashraf. This gave me an opportunity to both talk to the landscapers, but also learn about benefits that workers receive through their employment at the university.

Another limitation of this study is language. While I have a grasp of Egyptian Spoken Arabic (a'mmayya), I am not fluent in the language. Compounding this issue is the large variance within a'mmayya. Diction and pronunciation changes depending on what region an individual is from. The workers who come from Cairo have much different accents than those who come from Upper Egypt. This creates limitations on how deep my analysis of their discourse can be.

Finally, this study is limited on how the information can inform other studies of labor

in Egypt. This is a single sited study with its locus being the AUC Campus in New Cairo. Due to this, there is limited knowledge that can be extrapolated from this study. Despite this, I attempt to situate the research within the revolutionary context and strike wave that began in 2006. In doing so I feel that it both adds context to the research, as well as, adds to the literature of worker actions around the events of the Egyptian Revolution.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I examines the history of the strike wave that hit AUC between 2010 and 2012, by looking at the three strikes that involved workers on AUC's Main Campus in New Cairo. It analyzes why these strikes occurred through the lens of social movement theory. Drawing on the work of Sydney Tarrow, I analyze how political opportunities within the university and Egypt created an opening for the strike to occur and the alliances that were formed during the strike wave. Within the discussion of each strike I also go into the tactics that were used and how they changed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the two main institutional changes at the university after the 2011 strike: the creation of the Labor Rights Oversight Committee and the Office of the University Ombudsman.

In chapter II, I examine the challenges the independent syndicate faces. The chapter begins with a discussion threats to independent syndicates since the 18-day uprising. This includes how the current government favors the state affiliated unions and thus impedes the independent syndicate. I then look at how the independent syndicate at AUC has worked to overcome these obstacles through reaching out to workers and proposing creative solutions to circumvent these laws.

Chapter III takes a closer look at the relationship of the workers on campus. It first looks at the idea of workers' satisfaction with the work at AUC to understand why individual workers said they went on strike. It then turns its focus to understanding why certain groups support the syndicate more than others. It looks at the ways in which these groups situate themselves within the university, as well as define and advocate for better positions.

Chapter I

The Strike Wave at the American University in Cairo

Political Openings, Alliances, Tactics, and Change

“We said one word only, 'Sit Down.’” This is how Ashraf, a housekeeper and official in the independent syndicate responded to my question of how the housekeepers had discussed and planned their strike in 2010, the first of three major labor strikes to take place on the AUC campus between October 2010 and May 2012. He was stressing to me that there was no planning, but rather an immediate reaction to finding that every employee had his or her salary docked. Following this impromptu strike, the ways in which workers addressed grievances changed. During this time many changes were taking place in Egypt, such as new labor laws that had implications for the workers at the university. This chapter tells the story of the October 2010 housekeeping strike, the September 2011 student-worker strike, and the April 2012 security guard strike. It focuses on how contention and political opportunities shaped each strike. Additionally, it explains how each strike evolved out of the previous one including the tactics that were used.

New Location, New Law: The 2010 Strike

In 2008 the American University in Cairo moved from its historic, central location in Downtown Cairo, to the desert suburb of Tagammu' El Khames. This move functionally changed the way the university operated. Greatly increasing in size, the university needed to significantly expand its labor force; specifically, the security and housekeeping staff, whilst also hiring landscaping staff to care for the expanse of gardens that cover the new AUC campus.

Due to AUC's new isolated position at the edge of development in Tagammu' El Khames, the university was required to provide services that were not needed at the downtown campus. Much of AUC's workforce comes from Greater Cairo or from the governorate of Qalubayya north of the city. As a result, all of the workforce, as well as most students and faculty require means of transportation to reach the campus. Through contracting bus companies, the university provides transportation for the workers. With this isolation, the new campus was also far from the type of food establishments that workers would generally purchase food from. The University has many international and Egyptian food chains throughout the campus, such as McDonald's and Subway, which provide American fast-food to the AUC community. In addition, there are food establishments that provide Egyptian staple foods like *tammayya* and *koshery*, which is cheaper than the foreign chains. However, unlike establishments in the heart of Cairo, which sell these Egyptian staples, they are much more expensive on campus. In order to solve the problem of where workers would purchase food, the university provided meals to the workforce through a private contractor. These meals were of low quality and many cases of food poisoning among the workers who ate them were reported.⁵⁷ By 2010 there was growing discontent with these services, but such grievances alone did not lead to a strike.

When AUC opened the New Cairo Campus, they contracted a large portion of its workforce through the firm, COMPASS Egypt. What was also significant about this time was that a new labor law was passed in Egypt, which barred any company over a certain size from using private contracting firms. In order to comply with this new labor law AUC

⁵⁷ Shams El Din, Mai (1 November 2010) Workers' Strikes Reach AUC Campus. *Daily News Egypt*. Retrieved from <http://www.masress.com/en>.

ended its contract with COMPASS Egypt and hired many workers directly⁵⁸. To compensate for an influx of workers within the auspices of AUC's Human Resource department, the university implemented several structural changes to the pay scale. Additionally, due to some of these former employees being spouses, there were contradictions to AUC's anti-nepotism policy through directly hiring these employees.⁵⁹

By October 2010, the AUC's worker syndicate was in negotiations with the university to rectify these problems. Initially calling for a strike on October 20th, the syndicate backed down claiming that the university had promised to meet the demands they had raised. These included making exceptions in the anti-nepotism policy, a multi-year effort to adjust salaries to market rates, monetary incentives for strong appraisals, and a bonus to help keep salaries in line with the cost of living.⁶⁰

The syndicate claimed this as a victory, but it was short lived. One week later, on October 27th, the housekeeping staff looked at their pay checks and found that between 180-300 pounds (26-43 USD) had been docked from each pay slip. The housekeeping staff sought immediate consultation with the office of the Vice President of Planning, Brian Macdougall. They were informed that the reason for this reduction in pay was due to a clerical error. When adding these employees into the university's payroll, AUC forgot to take out the state required pension. Additionally, the university removed pay for its medical plan. Human resources had failed to make these deductions in September so they took two months

⁵⁸ Shams El Din, Mai (1 November 2010) Workers' Strikes Reach AUC Campus. *Daily News Egypt*. Retrieved from <http://www.masress.com/en>.

⁵⁹ Shaker, Nadeen (24 October 2010) Staff Meet Macdougall, Call off Strike. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁶⁰ Shaker, Nadeen (24 October 2010) Staff Meet Macdougall, Call off Strike. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

worth from the October paychecks.⁶¹

Table 1: Demands and Outcomes of the 2010 Strike

Demands	Outcomes
LE 1200 monthly salary	Promise to bring wages to market level (Salary reached LE 1080 by Sept. 2011)
Saturdays off and considered overtime	One Saturday off a month
Replacing food program with stipend	Cancellation of food program with money placed in salary

Joined by some of the students and faculty, the housekeeping staff started to formulate demands. The students circulated fliers and petitions in support of the workers' demands.⁶² These included, a 1200 LE monthly salary and a 200 LE lunch stipend instead of the meals provided, Saturdays off, as well as a standard contract for all housekeepers. By the end of the strike, the housekeepers had made some gains. They were promised a gradual salary increase, which Ashraf told me amounted to their wages increasing to 1080 LE a month by the following fall. Additionally, one Saturday off a month for each housekeeper. Finally, standard contracts were given to each worker formally hired by COMPASS.

From Discontent to the Start of Something New

The 2010 strike was caused by discontent with the way that the workers were being treated at the university. As I highlighted, the 2010 strike was an instantaneous strike in response to a new human resource plan put in place by the administration. A lack of knowledge about the plan by the workers, clerical errors on behalf of the university, along with the old syndicate's failure to communicate these issues to both parties proved to be the matchstick needed to spark the work stoppage. Ashraf, said "One morning at 12pm we went to the [ATM] machine to see the salary and saw 400 LE...we tried to know why, but received

⁶¹ (28 October 2010) Students, Staff Continue protests till Demands Met. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁶² (28 October 2010) Students, Staff Continue protests till Demands Met. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

no answer, so we went on strike.”⁶³

Tarrow writes that contention increases when people gain external resources that can be used to escape compliance, or when they are threatened with costs they cannot bear, or which outrages their sense of justice.⁶⁴ While the housekeepers were greater in number than on the Tahrir campus, this alone cannot account for the strike, as there had been no such action in the two preceding years that the New Cairo campus operated. Additionally, the syndicate which had a monopoly on the workers funds had called off the strike a few days earlier. I argue that this newfound contention came from a sense of injustice caused by the deduction in pay and no effective means by which to rectify it. To underscore this argument we can look at why Ashraf decided to work at AUC. He had been working at a mobile shop in the Bab El-Louq neighborhood of Cairo: “My last work was not so good, and knew in my head that AUC is a very good job, so I told myself 'go.’” His decision was not based solely on salary; however, he also wanted “*istaqrar*” (stability), which he stressed was his major reason for leaving his job at the mobile shop for work at AUC.⁶⁵

Having had their stability shaken through this pay deduction, the housekeeping staff turned this perceived injustice into contentious action. The housekeepers were unified in purpose, but inexperienced in representing themselves through labor action. Soon, however, they found themselves with new allies. Within a few days of the workers striking, some of the faculty and student body joined the workers in support.⁶⁶ As one student, who joined the workers told me: “ We helped make signs for the workers who couldn't write. They told us

⁶³ Interview, Ashraf (September 2012).

⁶⁴ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 71.

⁶⁵ Interview Ashraf (September 2012).

⁶⁶ (28 October 2010) Students, Staff Continue protests till Demands Met. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

what they wanted included in the signs.”⁶⁷ Besides material and moral support, the faculty and students were important in helping with strategic aims of the strike. When asking Ashraf how the workers decided on demands, he replied, “We made a committee with ten workers, two students, and three or four faculty. Then they asked the workers about their demands. The workers talked about many things...Finally we made a list of three or four demands that were very important and three or four demands that could be discussed later.”⁶⁸ While the initial anger was over the deductions, the first demand became LE 1200 a month. This sum was not pulled out of thin air, but matches the broader Egyptian labor movement’s call for LE 1200, which began around 2008.⁶⁹ Intellectual help from these allies in the university helped to design the strike to match the broader movement. This changed the goals of the strike from demanding parity with COMPASS to working within the framework of the Egyptian labor movement.

Another important outcome of the strike was delegitimizing the AWU. Having negotiated with the university directly, the housekeepers stripped the AWU of its *raison d’etre*. The 2010 strike added new challenges to the status quo that the state hoped to maintain in its dealings with labor, even at a private, elite university like AUC. As noted in the introduction, delegitimizing ETUF affiliated syndicates by circumventing them is not a new tactic by labor in Egypt. Workers in Mahalla have refused to negotiate with their local union, instead forcing ETUF officials to become directly involved.⁷⁰ The housekeepers

⁶⁷ Interview anonymous (March 2013).

⁶⁸ Interview Ashraf (September 2012).

⁶⁹ Bein, Joel. (2009) Workers' struggles under Socialism and Neoliberalism. *Moment of Change*. London: Zed Books. 85 The April 6th strikes and protests in 2008 were originally planned to spread awareness of laborers call for a LE 1200 minimum wage.

⁷⁰ Bein, Joel (2009) Workers’ Struggles under ‘Socialism’ and Neo-Liberalism. *Egypt: Moment of Change*. El-Mahdi, Rabab and Philip Marfleet (ed). Cairo: AUC Press 84.

ignored the ETUF completely and negotiated directly with the university. Due to the intimidation and ineffectual dealings of the state affiliated syndicate, the workers began thinking of ways to circumvent the syndicate in an institutional manner. As one of the active faculty supporters of the workers, law professor Dr. Hani Sayed, told me:

[The old syndicate] would not endorse the demands of the workers. They would also stand with the administration and pass on false information. The administration would engage in salary changes and trusted the syndicate would acknowledge any contradictions that would arise, but would in reality not look into it. During that time we thought of ways to bypass the syndicate. This became possible because of the 2010 strike. We could not change the old syndicate itself because it was not possible to hold elections.⁷¹

For the housekeepers, while their strike delegitimized the AWU, the syndicate's intimidation also proved to many of the workers that there was no use in relying on the syndicate to effectively intervene on their behalf. For the time being, however, there was little the workers could do to legally circumvent the syndicate.

El edrab mashrou' mashrou'...ded el faqr wa ded el goa'!

“The strike is a project against poverty and hunger!” This chant, which is the title of the section, echoed throughout the halls of the administrative building as the housekeepers held their sit-in. While the last section discussed alliances that were formed during the 2010 strike and the outcome of the strike, I turn now to discuss the tactics used in the 2010 strike.

The strike was not only a way for the workers to show their discontent by refusing to work. The workers were also creative in the ways in which they presented their demands. Slogans, such as “wahed, etnein, haq el amal fein?” (“one, two, where are the workers' rights?”), were shouted as the housekeepers held their sit-in. These slogans not only formulated the demands as something rightfully due to the workers, but also implied the

⁷¹ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

administration was morally wrong. The workers and their student supporters made signs that said “haram.”⁷² Haram in Arabic means something forbidden in Islam. For example, if someone does something inappropriate, then someone may say, “Haram 'alaykom!” (shame on you). By using these slogans, the workers are implying that the act of deducting 200 pounds was a transgression. This was emphasized by the ways in which they talked about the 400 pounds: “roba' meet genay maloush haga” (four-hundred pounds, what can you do with that) and, “Macdougall, is 400 pounds enough to feed our children?”⁷³ As with the previous chant, they also pointed out who they felt was responsible: “esha ya brian wa aqoul el-haq” (wake up Brian [Macdougall] and tell the truth). It is through these slogans that the workers painted their cause as a fight against injustice, but also advertised their campaign to other members of AUC. By articulating the situation in this way the workers were justifying their cause and their demand for more pay.

As I mentioned, the workers went on strike a few days after the ETUF affiliated syndicate called off such action. It is important to make note that in 2010, striking was a tactic that the AUC workers had never used before. Under Egyptian law at the time, strikes were illegal without permission from the ETUF executive council.⁷⁴ The strike as a tactic is important in this particular context because it set a precedent for workers to negotiate directly with the AUC administration. By striking and gaining concessions in this way, the workers were not only flexing their labor power, but were legitimizing strikes and direct negotiations led by the workers themselves.

⁷² Interview Ashraf (February 2013)

⁷³ (27 October 2010) Staff Protest Rocks AUC Campus. *Caravan* Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁷⁴ Beinín, Joel. (2009) Workers' struggles under Socialism and Neoliberalism. *Moment of Change*. London: Zed Books. 69

After the strike ended the workers were in a precarious position. Whilst the housekeepers had won, they had also made enemies with the syndicate, the only legitimate institution to apply pressure on the administration. The workers could also not reasonably go on strike whenever there was a grievance. Which left them with a dilemma. In such circumstances, how does one push for better treatment? For the workers, many of their allies sought to pressure the administration to keep their promises. On November 11th 2010, these allies held a protest outside the administration building to push them to completely comply with the workers demands.⁷⁵ Many from the housekeeping staff and faculty knew that a change was needed if the workers were to effectively negotiate with the administration. Unknown at the time, this opportunity would come in the next couple of months.

New Political Openings of the Revolution

To understand the particular moment in which the strike wave began at AUC, we must also talk about labor's greater context at this time. To begin we must look at how the state situates itself in relation to labor in Egypt. As we saw in the introduction, since the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the state has exercised control over the syndicates by making them an arm of the state without direct elections in either the federation's executive council or the 23 national syndicates.⁷⁶ Even with the AUC Workers Union delegitimized, the workers had to wait for an opportunity to find an alternative to the state affiliated syndicate. Here I am using 'opportunity' to signify political opportunity in the sense that Sydney Tarrow uses the term, "Consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimension of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's

⁷⁵ Nadeen, Shaker and Dina Abo Alum (21 November 2010) Faculty, Students Continue Support for Staff Rights. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁷⁶ Beinlin, Joel. (2009) Workers' struggles under Socialism and Neoliberalism. *Moment of Change*. London: Zed Books. 68-9.

expectations for success or failure.”⁷⁷

This opportunity arose after the 18 day uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak. As mentioned in the introduction, labor showed their power in the final days of the uprising through factory and transportation strikes,⁷⁸ leading to concessions by the new government, lead by Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, which included the appointment of Ahmed Hasan El Bura'i. The Egyptian Workforce Minister's statement that independent syndicates should be allowed, in March 2011, was neither a decree nor law; however, this was all that the workers needed to initiate action. Seeing an opportunity in both the Minister's words and the rapid formation of independent syndicates across Egypt, some of the workers and staff began forming an independent syndicate on campus.⁷⁹

When the workers formed the AUC Independent Syndicate, they were taking advantage of a political opportunity during a peak period of contention. In February 2011, there were 489 separate episodes of collective action by workers, the largest number within any month in 2011.⁸⁰ This is particularly astonishing when one considers there had been between 3,400 and 4,000 strikes and other collective actions between 1998 and 2010.⁸¹ This is an average of 333 actions per year when using the highest estimate. Along with an increase in worker action early on in 2011, the number of independent syndicates increased rapidly. By the end of 2011 the EFITU claims there were 200 unions.

Those at AUC waiting for a way to challenge the AWU now had ample evidence

⁷⁷ Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 76-7

⁷⁸ Bein, Joel (2011a) Egypt's Workers Rise Up. *The Nation*. March 7-14

⁷⁹ Gehad, Reem (17 March 2012) AUC's Independent Syndicate: One Year Later. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁸⁰ Alexander, Anne (10 December 2011) The Strike Wave and the Crisis of the Egyptian State. *Jadaliyya*. Retrieved From: <http://jadaliyya.com> .

⁸¹ Bein, Joel (2013) The Rise of Egypt's Workers. *Carnegie Endowment*. Retrieved from <http://libcom.org>

that independent syndicates could be formed without intimidation, as in 2010. Tarrow states:

a cycle of contention begins when political opportunities are opened for well-placed “early risers,” when their claims resonate with those of significant others, and when these give rise to objective or explicit coalitions of disparate actors and create or reinforce instability in the elite. This co-occurrence and coalescence is furthered by state responses rejecting the claims of early risers, thereby encouraging their assimilation to other possible claimants, while lowering constraints and offering opportunities for broader contention⁸²

The workers at AUC turned out to be a set of “significant others” for the “early risers” in the independent syndicate movement, especially the housekeepers, who were already in a contentious relationship with the ETUF. Looking for ways around the AWU, the workers claimed that El Bura'i's statement gave them the legitimacy to found the AIS, which they did without waiting for ministerial declarations or legislation. With the ETUF's finances being audited and new appointments being made to key seats throughout the federation, I argue that the independent syndicates were able to take advantage of the ETUF's temporary impotence, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of independent syndicates forming.

We should see the AIS's formation within the political opportunities of this time: alienation from the state affiliated syndicates and the opportunity to challenge them through creating their own. By forming an independent syndicate, the workers at AUC became part of a wider national labor movement, explicitly by joining the EFITU and tacitly by posing a challenge to the AWU. The creation of the AIS is an outright attack on the state's dominant position over labor. El-Mahdi states that since the mid-2000s workers have moved away from seeing the state as a patron and have actively attacked its entrenched position through

⁸² Tarrow, Sydney (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 144.

leveling political demands, such as a national minimum wage and independent syndicates.⁸³ Despite the relatively small importance of AUC's workforce in relation to national production, the state does place importance on their acquiescence. This is why the housekeepers were intimidated in 2010. By creating the independent syndicate, the workers are posing a real challenge to the facilitators of labor-state relations in Egypt.

The AIS's formation and their intended goal that “aims to allow greater participation for workers in the management of their syndicate,”⁸⁴ was met with immediate opposition from the AWU. They claimed that the AIS would splinter the labor movement and that there was no legal basis for two syndicates to exist in the same workplace.⁸⁵ This did not deter the founding members of the independent syndicate and by May 9th the AIS was formed and held their first elections open to all members. Fourteen seats were competed for by 33 members and were monitored by both the AIS's judicial committee, as well as the Equal Opportunity Office of AUC.⁸⁶

Without the uprising it is doubtful the workers would have been able to start the syndicate. The university would not be permitted by the state to allow it operate in an official capacity. It is important to note that many of the founding members of the independent syndicate were members of the housekeeping staff who had taken on influential roles during the strike. While the opportunity arose because of outside factors, it was also the lived experience of these strikers that made forming a syndicate a salient project. Allies from

⁸³ El-Mahdi, Rabab (2011) Labor Protests in Egypt: Causes and Meanings. *Review of African Political Economy*. 38:129 pp. 394

⁸⁴ (4 April 2011) AUC Workers Set to Form New Syndicate. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

⁸⁵ (4 April 2011) AUC Workers Set to Form New Syndicate. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

⁸⁶ (16 May 2011) Results of New Workers' Syndicate Elections to be Announced Today. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

the strike were also important in helping to plan and organize the elections. At the beginning of the next academic year, the Independent Syndicate would have the chance to prove its merits.

The 2011 Strike

By the summer break discontent was brewing again. This time it was both the students and workers who were in separate negotiations with the university administration. For the workers, the syndicate had been in talks about certain issues regarding the workforce at large, while the security guards held a sit-in over the summer, which led to a meeting with the Director of Security Mahmoud Zouq. At the meeting the security guards communicated their demands for a salary increase and better uniforms, as well as expressing their feelings

Table 2: Workers' Demands of the 2011 Strike

Group	Demands	
Housekeeping	Five day work week	that Zouq was
	LE 200 meal stipend	making
	Permanent Contracts for Temporary Workers	“undemocratic
	New Uniforms	decisions.” ⁸⁷ By the
Landscaping	Five day work week	start of the school
	LE 2000 Monthly Salary	year a group of
	New uniforms	independent students
	LE 200 meal stipend	were calling for a
Security Guards	Better Transportation	strike on September
	LE 2000 Monthly Salary	4 th 2011. Their main
	Reinstatement of 60hr. Overtime Limit	
	Resignation of Mahmoud Zouq	
	Reinstate unjustly fired guards	

complaint was regarding a 9 percent tuition increase instead of the usual 7 percent.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ (13 September 2011) “Security Working Conditions: Unresolved Troubles” *Independent* Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

⁸⁸ (3 September 2011) “AUC Students to Strike Tomorrow Against Tuition Increase” *Independent* Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

Demanding a cancellation of the tuition hike and implementation of a tuition cap, the initial strike was unsuccessful due to low student turnout.⁸⁹ On September 11th the circumstances changed: the Egyptian Student Union declared support for the strike, and the AUC workforce join their student allies in a joint strike.

The alliances that were formed a year earlier allowed for a much larger strike, which enabled the students and workers to play separate roles, yet be in solidarity with each others demands. In addition to this, the syndicate was able to bring members of security and landscaping into the strike. The alliances were strong, but coordination was often lacking. As Dr. Hani Sayed described to me, the workers initially aimed for a 2-hour work stoppage only; however, due to the students being late to begin their march from one side of the campus to the other, the workers decided to wait for them. This turned a temporary work stoppage into a full day strike on the part of the workers.⁹⁰ By the end of the first day, garbage had filled the pathways and food courts of the university.

The independent syndicate played a major role during the strike. Uniting the housekeepers, landscapers and security guards, the workers presence was larger and more diverse than in 2010. Part of the AIS's role was in helping to facilitate the creation of demands by the workers. Unlike the AWU's top-down approach to labor negotiations, the AIS formed a committee with members from each group to come up with the list of demands.⁹¹ For the landscaping staff, they wanted a LE 200 meal stipend, a LE 2000 minimum wage, two days off a week rather than five days at the end of the month, contracts for the temporary day laborers, and improved transportation to work. The security guards

⁸⁹ Tbeileh Rogayah (4 September 2011) Low Turnout Dampens Student Protest over Tuition Hikes. *Caravan* Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

⁹⁰ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

⁹¹ Interview Ashraf (February 2013).

also wanted a LE 2000 minimum wage, the reinstatement of 3 terminated colleagues, restoration of the 60 hour overtime limit that had been decreased to 48 hours, contracts for temporary bus security workers, and prioritizing internal promotion within the security staff. The housekeepers, wanted LE 200 meal stipend, Saturdays as a holiday or overtime, and contracts for temporary workers. Additionally all three groups wanted new uniforms. The AIS was also able to protect the workers.

The reason the workers did not implement a complete work stoppage throughout the entire strike was because the syndicate urged them back to work after the second day, calling instead for workers to protest during assembly hour and before or after their shifts. This was done to put the workers at the same level of risk as the students, many of whom would protest in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS) plaza between classes. As Dr. Sayed said to me about the syndicate's logic, “you do not wage war impossibly.”⁹² For the workers, the risks were much higher than for the students. If the workers continued their work stoppage, the university could fire them and hire new employees. The syndicate decided that supporting the strike through having workers protesting during their breaks, as well as before and after their shifts was a better tactic.

This logic could be seen on September 14th when the university began to negotiate. University President Lisa Anderson held a forum in Bassily Hall in order to find solutions to the demands. This forum was ill attended by students, many of who were boycotting, instead calling for the President to come to HUSS plaza where the protests were taking place.⁹³ The AIS used this moment to negotiate with the administration. During the forum, Tarak

⁹² Interview Hani Sayed 4 March 2013.

⁹³ Menat Youssef (17 September 2011) Low Turn-Out at the President's Forum at Bassily. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

Maghrabi, the current president of the syndicate, proposed a special committee for workers to levy grievances to. With administrative support behind the idea, trust was built between the administration and the syndicate, giving more room for negotiation.⁹⁴ However, much tension still existed between the students and the administration.

The next day, September 15th, President Anderson attended the meeting the students had called for outside of HUSS. Students and workers voiced grievances to her. Many of these grievances Dr. Anderson admitted having very little knowledge of in the first place, such as the landscaping staff being barred from using the bathrooms in the campus buildings and abusive language from supervisors.⁹⁵ Dr. Anderson was conciliatory about many of these worker demands, claiming that she was unaware of these discriminatory and abusive practices; however, the tension between her and some of the students caused the meeting to end abruptly when Dr. Anderson walked out of the meeting due to student criticism of a lack of immediate concrete solutions to their demands.⁹⁶ As a result the students marched to the flag post and removed the American flag, as well as the AUC flag. The students claimed that this action was not to disrespect America, but to urge AUC to respect the American values of “democracy, freedom, and human rights.”⁹⁷ While this gained much criticism from others at the university, as well as making headlines in the national press, it did not hurt the strike, and by Sunday, September 18th the university began to give concessions to the students and workers. On September 20th the strike was put on hold, with the university offering

⁹⁴ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

⁹⁵ Abaza, Gehad and Youssef Menat (17 September 2011) President Anderson Walks Out on Student Meeting. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

⁹⁶ Abaza, Gehad and Youssef Menat (17 September 2011) President Anderson Walks Out on Student Meeting. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

⁹⁷ Staff (17 September 2011) AUC Students Take Down Flag, Ask President to Uphold American Values. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

concessions and further negotiations.

Table 3: Workers' Agreements of the 2011 Strike

Housekeeping Demands	Outcome	Time Table
Five day work week	Five Day work week	15. Nov. 2011
LE 200 meal stipend	Promise to fix ambiguities or problems with stipend in salary.	9. Oct. 2011
Permanent Contracts for Temporary Workers	Permanent Contracts for Temporary workers	1. Jan. 2012
New Uniforms	Workers collectively pick uniforms	1. Jan. 2012
Landscaping Demands		
Five day work week	Five day work week	15. Nov. 2011
LE 2000 Monthly Salary	Not met	
New uniforms	Workers collectively pick uniforms	1. Jan. 2012
LE 200 meal stipend	Promise to fix ambiguities or problems with stipend in salary.	9. Oct. 2011
Better Transportation	Same bus company as students and faculty	1. Jan. 2012
Security Demands		
LE 2000 Monthly Salary	Not met	1. Oct. 2011
Reinstatement of 60hr. Overtime Limit	Not met	N/A
Resignation of Mahmoud Zouq	LROC called to investigate allegations against Mahmoud Zouq	15. Oct. 2011
Reinstate unjustly fired guards	LROC to investigate unjustly fired guards	No Date
Permanent Contracts for Temporary Bus Guards	3,810 Severance Package and Job Search Assistance Workers collectively pick uniforms	
Other Gains		
	Sensitivity training for supervisors	1. Jul. 2012
	No retaliation or docked pay against staff who went on strike	No Date

The next day, the administration sent two E-mails, one to the workers and one to the students, outlining the concessions and a timetable for each to be achieved. For the workers, these included Saturdays off for all housekeepers and landscapers. For the landscapers this meant they could travel to Minya on the weekends and for the custodial workers they could pick up overtime if they chose to do so. An investigation was initiated to ensure that the meal stipend was being evenly placed in each workers salary and a promise was made not to decrease pay if any discrepancies were found. New buses for the landscapers were contracted. The workers were also all given the chance to collectively choose their new uniforms from a selection offered to them. Investigations were opened into inhumane treatment from management and a promise to provide sensitivity training to supervisors. As for the wrongful termination of certain employees, their cases were to be investigated by the newly formed Labor Rights Oversight Committee (LROC). The security salary was

increased by LE 250, bringing the minimum salary to LE 1500. Finally the university promised that they would not dock workers the two days pay for the work stoppage.⁹⁸ The temporary security guards would be terminated; however, they did receive two months severance and assistance in creating job portfolios with letters of recommendation.⁹⁹ Additionally, all non-temporary landscapers and housekeepers would gain contracts; however, this was not in the official agreements.¹⁰⁰

A Variation on a Theme: Tactics of the 2011 Strike

The tactics of the 2011 strike were radically different to the 2010 strike. There was a greater division of labor amongst the strikers. The students took the lead in the creative endeavors such as songs, signs, and chants. These were used to stress that the demands of the workers and those of the students were tied together. Chants such as, “our university is a university of thieves”¹⁰¹ was a way to focus on accusations by the students of corruption within the university. Because the students wanted to decrease the price of their education and the workers wanted more money, they needed to deflect criticism of conflicting demands within this alliance.

The workers did not merely chant with the students during their lunch breaks, but had actually collaborated with the students on the first day of the strike. In order to make a visual display of the workers labor power, the housekeepers refused to pick up trash. The students helped with the display by refusing to bus their own tables in the university food

⁹⁸ Anderson, Lisa (21 September 2011) Letter to Tarak Maghebi and Mahmoud Zouq
<http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/agreements/Documents/Workers%27%20Agreement.pdf>

⁹⁹ Anderson, Lisa (21 September 2011) Letter to Tarak Maghebi and Mahmoud Zouq.
<http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/GovAdm/Documents/Seasonal%20workers.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Interview Ashraf. (28 April 2013).

¹⁰¹ (11 September 2011) Students and Workers on Strike at American University in Cairo. *Ahram Online*. Retrieved from <http://english.ahram.org.eg>.

court. By the end of the day the tables and the grounds of the campus were covered in refuse. This was a tactic that had also been used in the 2010 strike.

The students were also able to take on tasks that the workers could not. Many of the students went through the halls and library interrupting lectures with their chants and slogans encouraging students and professors to boycott classes and join the strike. Like the housekeepers and landscapers withdrawing their labor power for the first two days of the strike, the students used these loud and disruptive activities to make the university have no choice but to pay attention. Disruption was important to the success of the strike. As Tarrow points out, disruption is multifaceted. A “concrete performance of a movement's determination,” disruptive activities also disrupts the daily activities of opponents and bystanders, forcing them to pay attention.¹⁰² Chanting in the halls demonstrated student solidarity, made people listen, and likely convinced some students and faculty that the strike was serious and worth joining. Acts such as removing the American flag put the university in the national news, which meant the administration could not ignore the strike and hope it would fizzle out.¹⁰³ This was an important division of labor because workers could not do the same activities as the students because of the risk it would put them in. Students accused of violating university policy received minor punishments like freedom of speech classes and community service.¹⁰⁴ The risk for the workers was having their employment terminated. So powerful is this fear of termination by certain workers that one landscaper, Galal, refused to admit that he ever went on strike. Waving his finger at me to tell me not to ask to pursue my

¹⁰² Tarrow, Sydney (1997) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 96.

¹⁰³ El-Gundy, Zeinab (15 September 2011) *AUC Strike: Students Pull Down American Flag*. Retrieved From: <http://english.ahram.org.eg>

¹⁰⁴ Abbas, Dalia (25 December 2011) *Cases Charged Against Students*. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

question, he told me, “the students took our rights for us. We did not strike.”¹⁰⁵ In the course of looking through pictures of the strike I have found multiple pictures of Galal holding up a placard of the landscapers demands. While this fear is not universal, Galal's feelings underscore the perceived repercussions that some felt striking could bring.

The syndicate used the students' disruption as a tool with which to negotiate. While the students boycotted the meeting at Bassilly Hall, the workers and the syndicate used this time to negotiate. This tactic was successful because it built trust between the workers and the administration, but also gave the workers an edge in the negotiations. Because the workers and the students stood as one, the university still had pressure on it to cede to the workers major demands. The reverse was also true. The workers may have been making gains with the administration, but they never ended their strike until the students also settled on agreements with the university.

By working together the strike was able to be more robust than the 2010 strike. It gave a sense that “everyone was there,” as one security guard, Layla, told me about the reason for her involvement. Through both dramaturgical acts of defiance and strong solidarity, the strike was able to gain a majority of its demands with a timetable of when the university would physically act. It is interesting to note that this strike took place during a peak in the level of workers involved in labor actions at a national level. In September 2011, there were a reported 500,000 to 750,000 workers taking part in labor actions, while the previous six months saw 400,000 workers involved.¹⁰⁶ While I attribute the workers decision to strike when they did as based on an opportunity to join their student allies, it is also

¹⁰⁵ Interview Galal (6 March 2013).

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, Anne (10 December 2011) *The Strike Wave and the Crisis of the Egyptian State. Jadaliyya*. Retrieved From: <http://jadaliyya.com>.

important to recognize that their actions match larger trends in Egypt.

Institutional Changes from Above, Pressure from Below

We know that there are many workers' grievances and student concerns that we have still to address. Equity and fairness is important to me, as I believe it is to everyone at AUC, so those of you who feel you have yet to have your voices heard should know that we are committed to working with everyone in our community to ensure that the students and their families are confident that the University is well governed, that the employees are fairly treated, and that the alumni are proud to be associated with us.

Still, we believe that this day marks the beginning of a new era of transparency and dialogue with the workers and their representatives to build together a more equitable workplace...

--President Lisa Anderson¹⁰⁷

The announcement by Dr. Anderson that the university was conceding was met by cheers from both students and workers. A syndicate official, Waleed Shepl, was quoted thanking President Anderson for negotiating directly because, “[the workers] felt that negotiations with the administration using the old way would yield no results, we would have reached nothing, the administration had been ignoring us.”¹⁰⁸ As this syndicate official and the letter from Dr. Anderson suggests, there were a lack of efficient means to address the workers grievances. This section will focus on two gains of the strike that were not on any of the signs that workers or students held, yet are a direct outcome of the 2011 strike: the Labor Rights Oversight Committee (LROC) (Lagna el Amal) and the Office of the University Ombudsman.

The Labor Rights Oversight Committee

As stated earlier, the Labor Oversight Committee was formed out of negotiations between the syndicate and the administration during the 2011 strike. The LROC gives

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, Lisa (19 September 2011) Letter to the AUC Community. Retrieved from: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/President/Pages/MessagefromthePresident.aspx>.

¹⁰⁸ Aboul Enein, Ahmed (24 September 2011) Administration Backs Down. *Caravan*.

workers a place to address grievances. It consists of members of management, representatives of staff nominated by the independent syndicate, a faculty member, and a student chosen jointly by management and the syndicate.¹⁰⁹ Dr. Sayed, who is the faculty member of the LROC told me, “it meets about anything relating to conditions of work.” Workers file an application to have a grievance reviewed by the committee. If the grievance is accepted the committee sits down with the worker and the person deemed the offender and they receive oral testimonies of the situation from both parties. The committee then looks at the situation from the perspective of what the labor law and human rights law stipulate. It then makes a decision as to whether the action by management is justifiable. What the worker receives, as said Dr. Sayed informed me, “is a [public] statement of right and wrong.”¹¹⁰

Soon after the 2011 strike was over, the LROC began looking at cases that had been a major source of contention during the strike: workers who were terminated within a year of being directly hired by AUC after the university canceled its contract with COMPASS. A standard contract with AUC gives the workers a one-year probation period. Many of these laborers had worked for three years at the university for COMPASS; however, when hired directly by AUC, many supervisors considered these workers to be under probation, during which time many of them had been fired. Much of the problem stemmed from supervisors looking at the date that someone had been hired on the contract and assuming that if the workers service was within a year of being hired by the university, then they were still in the probation period.¹¹¹ Through looking at the case LROC made the ruling that the firing was

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, Lisa (21 September 2011) Letter to Tarak Maghebi and Mahmoud Zouq. Retrieved from: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/agreements/Documents/Workers%27%20Agreement.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

¹¹¹ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

unjust. As Dr. Sayed said to me, “in my opinion the firing goes against the spirit of “probation,” which is a period in which to get to know the worker.”¹¹² Since these employees had worked in their position at AUC for more than a year before being hired directly for the same position LROC was able to have some of them reinstated.¹¹³

The Ombuds

A few months after the strike, the university announced that it was forming an ombudsman position. The decision to make the position was made by President Anderson along with some senior members of the university. A committee was then formed to create the new ombuds office¹¹⁴. In the job description sent out to recruit applicants, the university wrote, “The university ombudsperson is responsible for neutral and impartial dispute resolution, providing confidential and informal assistance to constituents of the university community, including students, staff, faculty and administrators.”¹¹⁵ Professor of anthropology Dr. Hanan Sabea was nominated by a student and a faculty member as the first ombudsman, who would start the position for the Spring 2011 semester.¹¹⁶

Sitting with Dr. Sabea after she completed her year as the university ombudsman, she described how the office took on negotiations between various segments of the university. She explained that while they had no blue print of how to run the office at first, they wanted to be an independent entity that could “mediate and ensure rights.”¹¹⁷ The office quickly became a space where anyone who was associated with the university could raise a

¹¹² Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

¹¹³ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

¹¹⁴ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

¹¹⁵ Retrieved From:

http://www.aucegypt.edu/Documents/OMBUDSPERSON_JOB_DESCRIPTION.June2011.docx.

¹¹⁶ Wahba, Sameh (11 December 2011) AUC's First Ombuds to Mediate Disputes. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

¹¹⁷ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

concern. This radically altered the university by providing an institution that could attempt to find the root causes of the problems and look for solutions to them. As Dr. Sabea told me:

We tried to understand what the concern was about. Not only by you bringing something in but, and this is where the anthropology was very important, not only what you said, but also by how do we recreate what happened or reconstruct what happened around a particular concern by talking to many people who have something to say about it. [This adds] more understanding about what the case was about.¹¹⁸

What is also important about the ombuds office is its ability to deal with each level of the bureaucracy. For example, if a worker was having a problem, the office first finds what the problem is and then discuss it with the director responsible. If the director is not willing to change, then the ombud has the ability to take it to the higher administration.¹¹⁹ During Dr. Sabea's tenure as ombuds these issues included workers not being promoted properly, aggressive behavior from colleagues and supervisors, benefit issues, non-renewal of contracts, discrimination, and sexual harassment.¹²⁰

By chance I had the opportunity to witness part of one of these meetings. One of my interlocutors was late for our meeting during his break period. When I called him he told me to come to the ombuds office. When I arrived I found three members of the housekeeping staff angry because they were barred from using the buses that student, faculty, and the rest of the staff use. They were told by the transportation manager that they were required to use the workers buses, which are much less frequent than the buses that the rest of the AUC community uses.¹²¹

Sitting in the Ombuds office with the workers who brought the complaint were two

¹¹⁸ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹¹⁹ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹²⁰ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹²¹ Field notes (February 2013).

officials of the syndicate. My interlocutor filled me in with the details of the case and told me that after the manager and the workers stated their case, Dr. Lamia Eid, the current ombuds, said that she saw no reason why they should be barred from using the student buses and that she would look into why this ban was implemented in the first place. As we left the office, the syndicate officials were asking the three housekeepers who brought the issue to the ombuds if they were happy with the mediation and all replied “mayya mayya” (one hundred percent). Happy with the outcome they went back to work.¹²²

Able to facilitate meetings between the workers and management, the ombuds is able to directly engage various levels of the bureaucracy, with an efficiency that never existed before at AUC. Along with LROC, the ombuds has become a valuable tool for the workers. However, the question remains as to why the administration took on these two initiatives.

From Mobilization to Control

When asking Ashraf about the strike, he stated that the two most important results of the strike, besides the increase in salary, were the Office of the Ombudsman and the Labor Rights Oversight Committee.¹²³ In the last section we saw both have worked to improve structural conditions, as they pertain to how workers rights are protected at AUC. The LROC was a proposal made by the syndicate president during the strike, and was quickly accepted by Dr. Anderson; however, the ombuds office had been an idea proposed for many years but never formed. As Dr. Sabea explained to me:

When I asked the [former] provost why it hadn't happen before he said that every time we decided to kick off the office there were various things from the cabinet or members of the administration and the board [of trustees] who decided that maybe this is superfluous activity. 'Why do we have to do that?' So there wasn't recognition

¹²² Field notes (February 2013).

¹²³ Interview Ashraf (September 2012).

off the back of the value of the office.¹²⁴

This changed after the 2011 strike. With so many grievances being pursued by various segments of the university the administration saw the need to address these problems. For the administration, it had become clear that there was an information void between themselves and the workers, as evidenced by the lack of knowledge of the prohibition on restroom use in buildings by the landscaping staff. Thus, the need to create lines of communication that could work to solve the issues before they grew into mass discontent started to be understood. This sentiment can be seen in President Anderson's post-strike statement quoted at the beginning of this section: “those of you who feel you have yet to have your voices heard should know that we are committed to working with everyone in our community to ensure that the students and their families are confident that the University is well governed, that the employees are fairly treated.”¹²⁵

It is unlikely that these measures were implemented solely because the higher administration saw that there had been communication issues. The workers and students had been actively been calling for major changes in how the university was run. Allegations of abuse by supervisors and the call to remove the director of public safety, were coupled with calls by the students for an open budget and membership of the AUC Board of Trustees.¹²⁶ With a united front of students and workers the university was compelled to find a solution to these issues. As Dr. Sabea stated to me:

I think if the 2011 strike didn't unfold the way it did, where by there was an alliance among different categories of workers and students and really raising some very

¹²⁴ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹²⁵ Anderson, Lisa (19 September 2011) Letter to the AUC Community
<http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/President/Pages/MesssagefromthePresident.aspx>.

¹²⁶ Farrag, Nadine (27 February 2012) AUC's Board of Trustees Rejects Student Representation. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

fundamental questions about the nature of the university that maybe we wouldn't have pressured the university to realize something that was on the books for some time but never actually took shape.¹²⁷

At the heart of these fundamental challenges was the student demand for representation on the board of trustees. Just as we have seen that the LROC's formation was part of the syndicate taking advantage of the 2011 strike in order to push through a structural gain for the workers, I contend that the board of trustees became warmer to the idea of the ombuds position in order to cool contention at the university. Here Asef Bayat's ideas of *control from below* and *control from above* become useful in understanding the logic of these two institutions.

Bayat defines control from below as, “the independent struggle of the workers to gain more control in the capitalist workplace, contrary to, or irrespective of, the desire and interests of managers.”¹²⁸ This is compared with control from above, “in which capital distorts the genuine movement (from below) for control by introducing a limited version in order to 'regain control by sharing it.'”¹²⁹ While Bayat's definition of control from below fits the foundation of LROC, this was not complete control. Since the LROC has both management and workers on it, the workers were aiming for limited control. If there was a dispute, it was more important for the workers to have avenues of redress than to have direct control. Bayat defines this, “restricted attempt by the workforce to get certain areas of managerial control into their hands,” as control as an ends.¹³⁰ This is not to belittle the achievement. The first case that the LROC looked into were major complaints of the strikes,

¹²⁷ Interview Hani Sayed (4 March 2013).

¹²⁸ Bayat, Assef (1987) *Workers & Revolution in Iran* London: Zed Books. 17.

¹²⁹ Bayat, Assef (1991) *Work Politics and Power: An International Perspective on Workers' Control and Self-Management*. London: Zed Books. 47.

¹³⁰ Bayat, Assef (1987) *Workers & Revolution in Iran* London: Zed Books. 17

such as contract issues, terminations, and abuse. In some ways this cooled the movement, but did not end it, as we will see in chapter three.

While the LROC makes sure that AUC's policies and personnel follow the spirit of the law, the ombuds makes sure that there are equitable solutions to disputes. The office actively pursued the rights of the farm workers at a university owned research center off campus in the spring of 2012, attempting to bring them the same rights as the other workers at AUC.¹³¹ The ombuds, similar to the LROC, has also advocated to ensure that agreements made during strikes are kept, such as making sure uniforms are of the proper quality.¹³² Thus these gains were from a movement below, which compelled the university to act on an issue that was not demanded. While this is similar to *control from above* in its intent to subvert a movement, it does so by giving equal weight to workers and management during disputes. It is important to note that when Bayat talked about control from above, he was discussing the implementation of state affiliated syndicates, such as the ETUF in Egypt or the Shura Councils in Iran. In these cases, the government subverted labor movements by giving them a voice in associations tied to the state, which diluted their power. The ombuds directly takes on cases, arbitrating the dispute. In this regard, the ombuds is not used to control the workers, but rather solve grievances.

While the ombuds gives the university little control, given that it is a neutral arbitrator, the reason it was formed was to subvert a movement, one which, as Dr. Sabea pointed out, “was raising some fundamental questions about the way that the university was run.”¹³³ Given the demands being raised by the workers and students, the administration

¹³¹ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹³² Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹³³ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

chose to find a solution that could cool the movement by giving individuals an avenue of redress before grievances became systemic. This led them to find an idea salient that it had rejected in the past. If the Board of Trustees did not previously want an ombuds office, it certainly did want students on the board, a call that the board has continued to reject.¹³⁴ The added benefit to the administration is that these changes reduce the likelihood of contentious action that could disrupt the universities operations. Thus the university implemented this control scheme to cede some power to the workers and students.

The 2012 Security Strike

Contention began to grow again in 2012, but this time it was the security guards who went on strike. Discontent by the security staff became vocal in February 2012 when the guards complained of poor compensation for their role in protecting the Tahrir campus during the Battle of Mohammed Mahmoud Street in November 2012 (the same street that three main AUC buildings are located in). Two hundred-eighty security guards were compensated 2000LE a piece for protecting the campus; however, they were unhappy with the way that overtime was calculated. They wanted the pay to be calculated as a holiday, which would mean double pay; however, because these were not official holidays, the university decided on a lump sum. From the universities perspective, this pay was also a way to compensate the workers for equal risk, since holiday pay would mean that higher-level guards would earn more.¹³⁵

This discontent with salary grew worse over the next couple of months. In April, a private firm called Jobmaster evaluated the security guards' salaries against the market,

¹³⁴ Farrag, Nadine (27 February 2012) AUC's Board of Trustees Rejects Student Representation. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

¹³⁵ Gehad, Reem (22 February 2012) Tahrir Security Guards Complain of Meager Rewards. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

reporting that they received above average for their job description.¹³⁶ Outraged by the assessment, the security guards went on intermittent strikes throughout the month of April, demanding once again for the resignation of Mahmoud Zouq and higher pay. The guards were upset with what they felt were Zouq's unfair treatment of them. They had been complaining that Zouq had been making “undemocratic” decisions. This had been publicly stated by security guards before the 2011 strike.¹³⁷ The guards were also unhappy that they only received a LE 250 increase, making the minimum salary LE 1500 rather than the LE 2000 they had demanded. They also wanted a return to a 60-hour overtime cap rather than the 48 hours that their maximum workweek was decreased to.

Demands	Outcomes
LE 2000 Monthly Salary	No Outcome
The Resignation of the Director of Public Safety	No Outcome
Cancellation of Breaks	Overtime if hr. Break not given between 3 rd and 5th hour of shift

Table 4: Demands of the 2012 Security Strike

During the strike, student involvement was minimal—the students would wait until the fall term bill was due to strike again; however, the ombuds became active in helping to negotiate the strike. Without being asked to intercede, Dr. Sabea took it upon herself to use the position to help find solutions to the problems of the strike.

I went see what was going on. [The office of the Ombudsman] started a series of discussions with the security and they went to the administration and asked what are your takes on this? So it was a back and forth, and at the same time trying to maintain what has been achieved in earlier moments of conflict or strike; its the alliance [between workers] and putting things in the larger perspective of the university¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Salah Eldin, Dina (4 April 2012) Job Evaluation Outrages AUC Security Staff. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

¹³⁷ (13 September 2011) Security Working Conditions: Unresolved Trouble. *Independent*. Retrieved from: <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

¹³⁸ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

While she felt that in relationship to the salary of other workers the demand by security for LE 2000 was unreasonable, she used the strike as an opportunity to work on another demands of the workers, the cancellation of breaks. This demand came from the fact that security guards were being told to take their breaks at random times during the day rather than at midday.¹³⁹ They instead wanted earn over-time by working the extra hour. Dr. Sabea found a solution that would appease both parties. What was decided during negotiation was a guard must be given a break between the third and fifth hour of their shift, otherwise this time would be considered overtime.¹⁴⁰ This would end the strike; although, as we will see in chapter III, there is still bitterness over a perceived lack of gains by the security guards

From Discourse to Action

The security guards had a way of communicating their demands that was quite different to the ways in which other workers had done so in the past. As the highest paid group in this study, security did not have much backing behind their demand of LE 2000. The syndicate supported the security through the strike but stressed their goal of removing Zouq over their demands for a higher income. With little support behind this goal, the security attempted to frame their demands for higher pay based their high levels of professionalism. The administration used the Jobmaster evaluation as evidence of providing an above-market salary. According to the evaluation, the security staff was making 30 percent more than the market value based on their years of service. The security staff response to this was that they wanted the job evaluation to be conducted, not exploring the market rate, but rather to explore the disparity between the security guards to other staff

¹³⁹ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹⁴⁰ Barsoum, Marina (6 May 2012) MacDougall Hopes to Avert Security Strike. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

members working at AUC. In particular they wanted to look at the disparity between the pay of the guards and that of the Director of Public Safety, whose salary was unknown, but rumored to be much higher. The security staff also argued that they deserved higher pay due to having more added to their job description.¹⁴¹ When I asked security guards about their reason for striking in 2012, most answered that they felt the 2011 strike improved conditions only slightly in or not at all. They all pointed to the fact that the LE 250 was not really a salary increase, since more work was added to their jobs, with the same pay.

The guards were intent to show their demands were merited by their hard work. In discussing their jobs descriptions the security guards discussed how much responsibility they took on. The guards cited how they could not take midday breaks because their managers told them that they were responsible if a problem arose. Because of this, the security called for the cancellation of breaks for overtime instead, citing that, “there is no such thing as breaks in security.”¹⁴²

This discourse left the security with a conundrum. How does one strike, while showing dedication to their work at the same time? Security solved this problem in two ways. The first was to strike in shifts as the workers had done in the 2011 strike. This is good for making a presence, but it lacked the disruptive aspect students created during the 2011 strike. In this regard the security had to develop a better plan of action. The second way of applying pressure was to call for a conventional strike, as they did on April 29th, after first receiving permission from the administration. This was coupled with claims that they had already

¹⁴¹ Salah Eldin, Dina (4 April 2012) Job Evaluation Outrages AUC Security Staff. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

¹⁴² Barsoum, Marina (29 April 2012) Security Strike Calls for Higher Wages, Zouk's Resignation. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

made arrangements for students to work the gates.¹⁴³ By turning to student allies, the guards were taking a lesson from past strikes. Instead of the students playing a disruptive role like in 2011, they would have helped demonstrate the responsible way in which the guards were approaching the strike, providing security through proxy. While the security guards never fully left the gates, this did give the independent syndicate and the ombuds room to negotiate the demands regarding their breaks, and setting up a committee to review the structure of their contracts.

The logic of highlighting their responsibilities and their refusal to abandon them during a strike, is similar to the way Posusney argued that workers under Nasser and Sadat acted symbolically to express discontent but maintain a “moral economy” between workers and the state. No such relationship exists between the security guards (or any other workers at AUC) and the administration. While workers within the moral economy in Egypt's corporatist model were under the superstructural hegemony of the state, AUC does not create a hegemonic superstructure in regards to the workers' roles. Instead the security guards strategically entered into a discourse with the university. Praise from the university, such as for protecting the downtown campus during moments of protest and street battles, gave the workers acknowledgment of their importance, and a basis on which to build their struggle. The security guards were able to take AUC's acknowledgment of their work and turn it into a discourse that stressed both their specific role within the university and provided a tactic for defining why they deserved higher wages. Additionally, by entering into this discourse, they stressed a demand, increased pay for increased work, which outlines their expectations from

¹⁴³ Barsoum, Marina (29 April 2012) Security Strike Calls for Higher Wages, Zouk's Resignation. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

the university.

Ultimately, this tactic left the strike smaller and less sustained than those in 2010 and 2011. The guards neither had the disruptive power, nor that the size that a work stoppage or student-worker strike would have necessitated. Without either of these two factors, they were reduced to staging intermittent protests with a minority of the guards participating at any given time. Whilst security staff are still not happy with their salaries, there have been no more security strikes. However, as we will see in chapter 3, this strike has defined how the security constitutes themselves as a group in relation to the independent syndicate.

Conclusion

The history of the strike wave is a convergence of contention, a changing political situation, and how they were acted upon. Whilst the 2010 strike was caused by a perceived injustice and the ineffectual nature of the ETUF, the outcome of the strike was a set of allies and the knowledge that a strike could be successful. This strike was the foundation for future action, in that it institutionalized strikes under the auspices of the workers rather than the ETUF as a legitimate form of contention. This particular moment in time was ideal for the workers, allowing them to draw on discontent with the old syndicate and seize the political opportunities that the revolution provided.

Allies proved important both functionally and tactically throughout the strike wave. Faculty members were important in helping the housekeepers get the most out of the moment they had created. Many of these faculty members would give support to the 2011 strike, but also help in less contentious moments, such as syndicate elections and the LROC. Whilst students who sympathized with the workers' cause helped on a functional level in 2010, they

became tactically more important in 2011. With such a robust strike the university needed to find ways to address fundamental issues raised. The LROC and ombuds were created out of this contention as tools to find solutions to issues and cool down the contention.

The 2011 and 2012 strikes show how these new means were used to give workers an avenue to address issues. The independent syndicate became an important tool to both negotiate and protect the workers. The syndicate was able to find key moments in the 2011 strike to formulate ideas that would become useful in further campaigning for the workers' rights. Whilst the ombuds has become important to the university as a whole, its ability to move between levels of bureaucracy has increased the workers' ability to solve issues before they become too large. These gains also allow for workers to strike alone when allies, both within the workforce and the student body, are lacking and without the same level of risk the housekeepers undertook in their initial strike.

The ombuds and LROC became important institutional changes for the workers and were created due to pressure from below. The difference is that the LROC had become a point of negotiations after the strike began, but the ombuds was never discussed during the strike. While the LROC was created out of a pursuit of control over the workers' stability by instituting protection for the workers' rights, the ombuds was the administrations attempt to solve issues before they grew too large.

Chapter II

Dueling Syndicates

Local Answers to National Questions

After the workers delegitimized the AUC Workers Union it did not fade away, rather it continues to hold a strong membership among certain segments of the workforce.

Additionally, AUC has made the decision to keep both syndicates in their duality, calling both in for major negotiations. Whilst this competition gives the AIS a challenge within the university, national politics create constraints and dangers for the AIS and the independent syndicate movement at large. In this chapter I look at the national politics that pose threats to the AIS. I then turn to look at how the AUC Independent Syndicate situates itself within the university in order to both circumvent these constraints, but also compete with the AWU.

National Threats to the AUC Independent Syndicate

In the last chapter we saw how the Minister of Manpower's declaration that syndicates could independently form was a political opening that the workers seized on campus. Whilst a major gain for labor, between 2.5 to 3 million workers joining the two main independent trade federations,¹⁴⁴ the independent syndicate movement still faces many political challenges, with implications for the AUC Independent Syndicate. As noted in the introduction, despite this mobilization, there have been major setbacks for labor nationally. SCAF's subversion of Bura'i's goal of reforming the ETUF, as well as the ETUF's strike in opposition of Bura'i's leadership left him with little room to advocate trade union plurality. Additionally, the administration of Mohammed Morsi has worked to replace Mubarak

¹⁴⁴ Charbel, Jano (15 October 2012) Independent Unions Declare New Alliances. *Egypt Independent*. Retrieved From <http://egyptindependent.com>.

loyalists with their own within the ETUF trade unions. Morsi's Freedom and Justice party has also been hostile to independent syndicates, with proposed laws that would render independent syndicates technically illegal in most cases.

A more exigent challenge to the AIS at the moment is laws that strengthen the ETUF compared to independent syndicates, such as those over pensions. When the AIS formed there was an immediate question of what to do about the money that had been collected from the workers over the years by the AWU. Many workers wanted the money they had paid into the ETUF after they left the AWU. As Dr. Sabea told me:

I have seen it in several cases that came to me as an ombuds at AUC. The old unions were deducting from your pay a certain amount of money that went into two things. The fund that was basically for emergencies as well as the retirement package. When the new independent syndicates came into being, emerged on the national scene as well as at AUC, who still had the power to control money? The old union and that remains.¹⁴⁵

Just as this had happened on the national scene, the university told the union that they wanted this money, but to no avail, only empty promises from the AWU.

The situation became worse with a new draft law that was intended to strengthen the ETUF. If passed, any worker who leaves an ETUF affiliated union, like the AWU, would lose entitlement to their pension money. Additionally, this law penalizes unionists with a LE 10,000 fine for spreading false information.¹⁴⁶ Whilst there have been minor disputed facts between the university and the AIS in the past, it is unlikely that AUC would move to have the government prosecute syndicate officials over them. What is plausible, however, is the AWU filing lawsuits against AIS. In which case, the AWU would be in a better position to hurt the independent

¹⁴⁵ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

¹⁴⁶ MENA Solidarity Network (November 2012) Trade Union Rights are our way to Social Justice. *MENA Solidarity Network*. Retrieved from <http://www.menasolidaritynetwork.com>.

syndicate because the one thing that cannot be denied is legal knowledge.

Local Solutions to National Problems.

With these challenges on a national level and from the AUC Workers Union, the independent syndicate has situated itself within the university in specific ways to compete over membership and overcome legal issues. As we saw with the strike, the AIS has agitated for the workers and created lines of protection for them, something the AWU was unwilling to do. The syndicate must scrutinize over when the most opportune time to strike is. Some demands, such as the security guards' demands for LE 2000, the university will not concede. What makes the AIS successful is how it situates itself in relation to the workers and within the university at large.

In the Service of the Workers

“I want to say something. The syndicate is not something far from the workers. I am from housekeeping and at the same time in the syndicate. The [independent] syndicate is the workers and the workers are the syndicate. In the past, [the old syndicate] was like the stars...distant from the workers.”¹⁴⁷ This is how Ashraf distinguished between the two syndicates the first time I met with him. Outside of its coordination and representation during strikes, the AIS has actively worked to make itself an asset to the workers. It has done this in four main ways: Being easily reached by the workers and flexible in the manner that a worker reaches them, being continually in contact with the administration over grievances or unresolved issues, working to clarify information, and keeping a democratic structure.

Unlike the AWU the independent syndicate has worked hard to maintain an open door policy towards the workers. A major part of this task comes from being available for

¹⁴⁷ Interview Ashraf (September 2012).

consultation during a worker's hour lunch break. To do this, a member of the syndicate dedicates most of his break to sitting in the syndicate office located in the administration building. Since much of my research took place talking to people in the syndicate office, it was not uncommon for my discussion with syndicate officials to be interrupted by two or three workers coming to ask for advice or file a grievance throughout the hour break. The same is true with phone calls. Many workers would call the syndicate officials' personal mobiles or the office phone to save a trip to the office.

Communication is not the only way the syndicate makes itself accessible. The syndicate has also set itself up in a manner that fits the primary needs of many of the workers. If a worker has a problem, they file a complaint with the executive office (maktab tanfizi). As a service to the worker, the head office will attempt to help the individual employee. This can be done in a few ways. First, as one syndicate official told me:

[We] always go to the person responsible for [this type] of problem. So for example if you have a problem with the buses [we] go to the person responsible for the problems with the buses. [We] can't just go to the administration at the beginning. If there is a problem specific to the workers then you go to the manager for the workers. You have to go to the [bureaucracy] that is responsible for the problem.¹⁴⁸

The syndicate's second option is to suggest that the worker seek the services of the ombuds. This referral is used when the syndicate believes that the ombuds is in a better position to arbitrate the situation.¹⁴⁹ The syndicate does not end its work by looking at individual issues. Once a complaint is filed, the syndicate makes note of it and tries to find a pattern of grievances in order to identify structural issues regarding the ways in which the university is run. It will then take these issues to the administration and attempt to work with the university to identify large-scale solutions.

¹⁴⁸ Interview Syndicate Official (February 2012).

¹⁴⁹ Interview Hanan Sabea (14 February 2013).

But communication and dedication to the workers issues are only two parts of the story. The independent syndicate also has a more accessible membership policy than the AWU. During the 2010 strike not only were the housekeepers intimidated, they were not allowed to be members. Ashraf told me that when he went to join, they said to him, “no, this syndicate is not for you.”¹⁵⁰ Part of the issue for housekeeping was that anyone not contracted through the university permanently could not join the syndicate. The AIS works in a much different way. This is open to all workers hired by AUC, as well as the office staffers. The syndicate has ensured that temporary workers have more rights than they had previously. Part of this is ample notice from the university of termination to make preparations before they leave. After the 2011 strike, AUC offered severance packages for the seasonal security guards that were fired without notice. The packages included two months of severance pay, as well as back pay for overtime. Additionally, they all received a dossier with letters of recommendation, confirmation of their background checks, as well as a resume that AUC provided assistance in creating.¹⁵¹

The second way in which the syndicate differentiates itself from the university is in constantly working to make sure issues agreed upon with the administration are completed to the satisfaction of the workers. As we saw in chapter I, the housekeepers' wildcat strike happened a week after the AWU called off their planned strike. Unlike the AWU, the AIS looks into the demands of the workers and follows up with the agreements it makes on their behalf, in order to ensure there are no contradictions.

An example of this is the new uniforms the workers are supposed to collectively

¹⁵⁰ Interview Ashraf (February 2012).

¹⁵¹ Anderson, Lisa (21 September 2011) Letter to Tarak Maghebi and Mahmoud Zouq <http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/agreements/Documents/Seasonal%20Workers.pdf>.

choose and receive twice a year: one for summer and one for winter. The workers first received their new uniforms in the spring of 2011 and were quite happy with them. For the housekeepers the uniforms consisted of a button up shirt, a jacket, and shoes. The problem with the uniforms arose the following fall when the cold weather arrived, but the new uniforms did not. The syndicate pressed the university until they finally received a shipment of uniforms, but found that instead of a complete package, like the year before, only polo shirts were included. The syndicate again filed a complaint with the administration to be told that due to budget reasons, the workers would only receive a shirt for the winter. The syndicate did not accept this, and rallied the workers to refuse to accept the uniforms until shoes and jackets came.¹⁵² This rallying of the workers gave the syndicate the room it needed to press the university to give the workers uniforms as they were promised.

Issues such as uniforms are time sensitive and require constant work if not completed in time. During the winter break I was walking out of the AUC bookstore and saw a group of housekeepers squeegeeing water from one of the pathways. A few of them were wearing their old thin button up shirts with thick sweaters underneath. For the workers, not receiving jackets leaves them exposed to the freezing cold desert winds that rush through campus in the winter. Through its willingness to be persistent over issues and rally workers for small acts of resistance, the independent syndicate attempts to pressure the university to keep its side of the settlements.

A third way that the independent syndicate has become an effective organization for the workers is that they actively look to clarify the information coming from the administration and are making sure there are no contradictions. A lack of knowledge can

¹⁵² Interview Ashraf (February 2012).

lead to confrontations between the workers and the university, as was seen in 2010. In January 2013 the syndicate held a meeting with Dr. Anderson and convinced the university to give the workers pay slips along with the monthly sum of cash deposited in the workers' accounts. By instituting payslips the syndicate is making it easier for workers to both prove if there is a HR error with their pay, but also they allow the workers to understand the deductions that the university is taking out of their paychecks. As one syndicate official, Ismail, told me "the importance of the syndicate is it connects workers to the administration."

Finally, the democratic structure of the syndicate is in sharp contrast to the opaqueness of the AWU. The make up of the AIS's head office attempts to mirror the nature of the university's workforce. In order to represent different groups from the workforce, the syndicate has a quota system for the elections. There are 15 elected positions, two reserved for maintenance, five for workers, and eight for staff. The landscapers and housekeepers are considered workers and security guards are considered staff members.¹⁵³ Whilst there are issues that come from the ways in which workers are categorized (this will be discussed in chapter III), the quota system gives the AIS an important distinction from the AWU; it guarantees that officials are from the workforce itself, whilst also providing a plurality of ideas within the syndicate.

The AIS proved its commitment to a democratic structure during its second elections, which took place on 26th October 2011. Forty-five candidates contested the 15 seats; however, a problem occurred in the voting. Workers on the Tahrir campus were told to write up to 15 names, but less would be accepted, while those in new campus were told that they must write 15 names or the ballot would be invalidated. The syndicate's judiciary committee

¹⁵³ Interview Ashraf (February 2012).

decided this would unfairly benefit those at the top of the candidate list for those who were looking to put 15 names on their ballot. Due to this discrepancy the syndicate canceled the enumeration before a single vote was counted and repeated the elections again a week later. This was done with many workers claiming that they had never seen individuals in positions of power admitting to mistakes.¹⁵⁴

Furthermore the independent syndicate demonstrated its democratic nature by holding elections a few months after it was formed and running its second election six months later, once the syndicate had a firmer foundation on campus and a larger membership. The AIS's charter states that it is to have elections every three years.¹⁵⁵ This is in stark contrast to the state affiliated syndicates. When the independent syndicate formed, the AWU put out a statement denouncing the workers for splitting the labor movement, stating that the workers should run in the next internal election of the AWU instead.¹⁵⁶ However, as we have seen, the ETUF held its last elections in 2006, since then they have been continuously disrupted, including a six-month delay declared by Morsi's decree 97. Through demonstrating its democratic nature, the AIS is able to provide a counter example to the ETUF.

Projects

Besides being an accessible and effective organization for the workers, the independent syndicate has been actively proposing projects that it feels would benefit the workers. I first learned of attempts by the syndicate to initiate such major projects one day as I was sitting in the office, talking to Ashraf. I asked him if the syndicate was currently

¹⁵⁴ Aboul Enein, Ahmed (30 October 2011) Syndicate Elections to Repeat Amid Controversy. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

¹⁵⁵ Interview Ashraf (21 April 2013).

¹⁵⁶ Salah Eldin, Dina (4 April 2012) Job Evaluation Outrages AUC Security Staff. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

working on any projects. I had not meant the word 'projects' so literally. I was referring to any negotiations between the syndicate and the administration over any grievances, but to my surprise Ashraf mentioned that they had proposed that the university build dormitories to house the workers and their families. These would have been separate to the apartments and dormitories that the university has built for students and faculty. He then told me the administration had rejected the idea because of cost.¹⁵⁷

A visit or two later to the office I noticed scattered among some papers were pamphlets from the Omrania Company, a construction firm. In these pamphlets were blueprints of beautiful apartment complexes with balconies on each flat and gardens surrounding each building.¹⁵⁸ I could see why the administration had rejected this proposal for cost reasons.

Another project the syndicate attempted was planning trips to Turkey for vacation or Saudi Arabia for religious pilgrimages. The syndicate distributed fliers with the tour packages available for either a vacation in Turkey or for Muslim employees, Hajj and Umra (the two major pilgrimages) trips to Mecca. They advertised this to the staff members of the university who could afford to go. Ashraf told me that they wanted to also ask for donations from these staff members in order to send a few workers on these trips. This project also proved infeasible and no one took the trip.

Despite both the workers' housing and trips failing to work, it shows an important progression of the independent syndicate. While these projects would have raised the workers' morale and made the daily commute easier for some, the syndicate changed its

¹⁵⁷ Interview Ashraf (November 2012).

¹⁵⁸ Field Notes (November 2012).

focus to projects aimed at mitigating the precarious financial situation of the workers. One of these projects is an emergency fund. What has been suggested is that every member of the AUC community would put in a monthly sum. Hypothetically students would pay LE 10 a month and every faculty member would pay LE 100. To get a sense of what these hypothetical amounts would mean at AUC we can look at the most recent student and faculty numbers. In 2012 there were 652 students and 431 faculty members;¹⁵⁹ this alone would create a fund which increases by LE 66,520 per month, or more than four and half years worth of salary for a housekeeper making the minimum LE 1200 a month. That is not to mention money that would also be deposited by the administrators, staff and workers.

This fund would certainly help workers and their families if they were in dire straights, meaning the AIS would have a major project in their portfolio for the future. The independent syndicate would also be in a much more powerful position than the AWU if the fund is created. As we saw the AWU has a monopoly on money, a condition that could remain for the foreseeable future, but if the AIS were to be able to nominate members to be part of the body that administers the fund and reviews the cases, it would have a much stronger position vis a vis the AWU than it currently has. Given the precedent of allowing the syndicate to nominate workers for committees, it is likely that in the case of an emergency fund being created, the AIS would be afforded this opportunity.

Lastly, the independent syndicate is working towards revamping workers' insurance packages. As one official told me, the syndicate is currently negotiating in order to provide workers with more options regarding their insurance plans. Currently the syndicate is proposing a change to the life insurance plan. The current plan gives the families about LE

¹⁵⁹ Retrieved from: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/Facts/Pages/default.aspx>

100,000 in the case of death. Instead of this, what is being suggested is splitting the life insurance plan into a dual disability plan and life insurance. The goal is to protect a worker's family not only in the case of death, but also in dire medical conditions. The plan would give the worker LE 50,000 in the case of death and LE 50,000 if the worker is seriously injured or develops a medical condition that would prevent him or her from working.

The benefits of these two projects for the workers is apparent and shows the syndicate is learning how to compete for membership and take on political challenges at the national level. The syndicate has shown an ability to adjust its focus from projects too large to work, or not matching the interests of the workers, to finding projects that mesh with the economic needs of the workers. It shows not only an acknowledgment of what the workers need, but also creative solutions to the constraints imposed on it by the law. The needs of the workers are catered for by helping to transform the university offered benefits. Providing benefits is a way of allocating resources to employees, thus proving its merits over the government affiliated syndicate, but there is also a pragmatic approach to designing these programs for the workers in the manner they do.

As I mentioned the ETUF affiliated unions are able to make deductions directly from members' paychecks. This is strictly prohibited for independent unions. By designing these projects to be administered by the university, the AIS is able to circumvent these laws. The insurance plan would be a modification of the plan already offered by the university, where as the emergency fund would be a university project, members of the university as a whole would sit on the board. The benefit to the AIS would be that there is a precedent for workers participation in campus projects. It is highly likely that, similarly to the Labor Rights

Oversight Committee, the university would allow the AIS to nominate the workers onto the board that administers the fund, because the syndicate is one of the groups lobbying for it. By not having these funds in the hand of the syndicate, the money collected is protected from legal challenges to the AIS. An unintended benefit is that even if the AIS is dissolved by court ruling the workers would still be on the committee and have a chance to keep those administrative positions away from the AWU. While these legal challenges are real, their conclusion is far from decided. The important aspect of the AIS's actions is that it is circumventing the constraints imposed by those who see political power in limiting union independence by inserting themselves into university programs.

This can be seen as direct action. Pocock has stated that the main tool used by unions is, “political partnership with parliamentary entities,” in order to create laws that favor labor.¹⁶⁰ With these partnerships lacking in Egypt at the moment, the actions taken by the AIS resemble direct action, although not in the anarchistic sense spoken of by Graeber--“rejection of a politics which appeals to governments to modify their behavior, in favor of physical intervention against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative”¹⁶¹--but rather as a tactic used to propose and create projects within legal gray areas, or areas in which the state is unlikely to interfere. Like the AIS's formation after the statement by Bora'i, that lacked legal approval from the parliament or SCAF, the AIS's projects also operate outside of official government sanction and regulation. More importantly these projects attack the hegemonic position of the state over labor unions.

¹⁶⁰ Pocock, Barbara (2011) Rethinking Unionism in a Changing World of Work, Family and Community Life. *Relations Industrielles*. 66:4. 562-583.

¹⁶¹ Graeber, David (2002) The New Anarchists. *New Left Review*. 13 January-February. 62-73.

Creating an Institution

Circumventing laws protecting the largess of the state affiliated syndicate is only one way the AIS can compete. With the university keeping both syndicates at equal length during major negotiations, the AIS has formed a strategy to increase its prominence over the AWU in new ways. In doing so it is in the process of institutionalizing its position in relation to the university.



Illustration 1: Flier for the Omar Mohsen Memorial Soccer Tournament

Sitting on the cement steps of the outdoor basketball courts, teams of workers, staffers, and students were playing, what the author considers, intense soccer matches.

Frequently the referee would give out a yellow card for aggressive play. It seemed like every five minutes an individual or two would trip and slide across the court, to be helped up, covered in abrasions, by another player. Each match was 15 minutes long. At the end of the tournament prizes of jerseys and backpacks were distributed to the first and second place teams. Trophies were also given out to those deemed the best players. This was the Omar Mohsen soccer match.

Omar Mohsen was an AUC undergraduate student who tragically died in Port Said when fans of the Port Said team, El Masri, stormed the pitch and murdered 72 members of the Ultras Ahlawi, a club of fans for the Cairo team, Ahly. In his honor the syndicate co-sponsors the soccer match along with the administration. These matches took place with two large banners honoring Omar Mohsen hanging from the gym's balconies, which overlook the court. Sitting on the steps were workers, staffers, and students watching the matches intently and cheering on their friends. In the center of the limited seating were officials of the syndicate chatting and watching the match along with the administrators. The syndicate used this time wisely. Once Ashraf met me on my arrival, he quickly excused himself, apologizing that he could not sit and talk, returning to his central seat near Vice President Brian MacDougall. I watched from a distance as syndicate officials mingled with the administrators.¹⁶²

Mingling with the administration is only the most visible part of embedding itself within the university. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the university created the LROC after the 2011 strike. On this committee are workers nominated by the syndicate. But there are other committees within the university that now have workers on them like the transportation committee. These committees give the syndicate input on how the administration's plans will affect the workers. It also give the workers a line of communication into the planning process.

The independent syndicate does not only co-sponsor events with the university administration; it also works with the student union on projects related to workers. Most of this work is with the student union group 3lashanhom (Because of Them; pronounced

¹⁶² Field Notes (21 February 2013).

a'lashanhom). The program director Ahmed Desouky explained that the student union had wanted a project to help the workers, hence the name of the group. The group originally ran lectures on politics for the workers, but through meeting with workers and asking what they wanted, they decided to start computer and language classes for the them. The computer classes give the workers an opportunity to earn an International Computer Drivers' License (ICDL), which proves basic proficiency with computers.

The language classes are split into two types, English and Arabic. The English classes are mostly taken by the housekeepers and security guards. In fact many of the security guards I talked to cited the courses they take as a major benefit of working for AUC. Ahmed Desouky stated that the security guards wanted to learn English so that they could communicate and help foreign students when they first arrive and have yet to learn about the campus or the rules. The Arabic classes on the other hand are designed for illiterate workers. Most of the workers that take these classes are landscapers and members of the university support staff. The goal is to enable the workers to eventually pass the state certification exam, which 3lashanhom would arrange once they feel students have reached a proficient level.

The first Arabic class for the workers had six landscapers and four maintenance and support staffers in attendance. A copybook, workbook, and pens were handed out to each worker. The class began with a warm up, where the teacher would write each worker's name on the board. Once all the names were written each worker would walk to the board and point to his own name. This was meant as a warm-up to make the workers feel comfortable. The teachers then went on to individually show each worker how to write his name in their

workbooks. At the end of class each worker was asked to write their name on the white board. They did this one by one with large smiles on their faces, that I am at a lost to describe. Seeing the joy in their faces made me think about how it must feel to finally learn a skill that without had left the many of the workers embarrassed.

While the students ran the classes, the syndicate was highly involved in the planning of these popular classes. One day, as a favor, Ashraf asked me to help write an E-mail in English to the woman in charge of reserving classrooms. The key point was that they wanted to reserve a single classroom twice a week for an Arabic class, so that there would be no confusion over the room numbers. He also wanted me to stress that the workers wanted the “student teachers” (3lashanhom's teachers) because they were more flexible than the teachers from the training office, which also runs classes for the workers. The syndicate’s role was highly valued to 3lashanhom because it, through Ashraf, would act as a liaison between the workers and students advertising the lessons. Finally, to make sure the classes were set up as planned with the administration, Ashraf would walk between classrooms on days that more than one class was taking place to make sure that everything was running smoothly. On other days he would sit in the Arabic classes to provide a syndicate presence.

Like the committees, these classes increase the syndicate’s role in university life, but also provide an important service for the workers. Most workers I talked to wanted to take classes to improve their job skills. One security guard, Layla, told me that she takes English classes on campus, and like many of the workers, studies part time after work. She has a degree in commerce and is currently working towards an accounting diploma from Cairo University. She is hoping to find another job other than security at AUC and suggested that

she would like to work as a lab assistant in the near future because she finds security work boring. These classes would help her improve her English so she is qualified for that position, in which she would like to work as she completes a Master's degree. Through helping to organize these classes the syndicate becomes a link between the students and the workers that would not have existed in the past.

The strikes also signaled a change in the relationship between students and workers at AUC. The students and workers at AUC are from radically disparate backgrounds. Most students at AUC come from Egypt's wealthy elite class. Paying about LE 41, 980 for a 15-credit semester,¹⁶³ they are spending more than a housekeeper, making LE 1200 a month, would make in 34 months. Additionally, in years past, student-worker cooperation was fairly unheard of besides the student activists who helped the housekeepers. After the 2011 strike; however, things changed. The workers gained a more prominent position in the social imagination of the students. Eric Selbin argues that a culture of revolution can increase the likelihood of revolution happening.¹⁶⁴ I contend that the same is true in a society that is currently undergoing revolutionary change. By the syndicate actively participating with student groups, they are creating a bridge between the workers and the students. Student activists and the syndicate worked to mutually improve the situation on campus for one another during the 2011 strike. Whilst the social-economic situation of these two groups are vastly different, working together created an acceptance of each others position. 3lashanhom and the AIS, aside from improving the lives of the workers, are providing interaction between the workers and students and are creating an awareness of the workers lives and

¹⁶³ Tuition Fees for Academic year 2013/2014 (Per Semester). Retrieved from: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/students/finaff/fees/Documents/Tuition>

¹⁶⁴ Selbin, Eric (1997) "Agency and Culture in Revolution" *Theorizing Revolution*. New York: Routledge, Inc. 81.

giving them an identity of being part of the university community. This is underscored by talking to the PR spokesperson of the group, Dina.¹⁶⁵ Dina told me that she got involved in the group because she was shocked to find out that many of the workers are illiterate. For her, this was an unexceptionable position for an “AUCian” to be trapped in.

This idea of what constitutes an AUCian is important to understand. Some students use it to refer to attending the university. It has also been used to refer to ones loyalty to the university, as was expressed by Omar Elsheikha in an op-ed piece arguing that students should not pledge loyalty to a university that raises tuition with little benefit for the students.¹⁶⁶ Whether enrolled students or loyal students, “AUCian” reflects an identity and association tied to the university. By extending this to include the workers, students are acknowledging the importance of the workers' roles at the university and relating themselves to the workers. This change in the culture of the student body is a recent change that began with the strikes, but has continued through the distinct ways that the AIS promotes the workers' presence in university life.

Another event 3lashanhom sponsored was a talk by a motivational speaker. The theme of the talk was on doing well in one’s work. The speaker was a plain dressed man in a flannel shirt, with a closely trimmed beard. In the audience were landscapers and housekeepers. The speaker was very engaging and spiritual, using religious slogans when he finished a point. This encouraged many in the audience to repeat the sayings back, giving the talk an interactive feel. During the talk, he told the workers that they should not think that Europeans sit around and drink wine and other *haram* things all day. Rather, they work.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Interview Dina. (March 2013).

¹⁶⁶ Elsheikha, Omar (13 September 2011) Are you AUCian? *Independent*. Retrieved from: <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/independent>.

¹⁶⁷ Field Notes (27 February 2013).

The point was that hard work and a job well done leads to great accomplishments. Like the classes, in the middle of the talk there was a lunch break. At the end of the talk Ashraf went around passing out forms for the workers to evaluate the event. As the assembly hour was ending, Ashraf and myself walked back to the building where he was working and he told me that he was disappointed with the turnout. He had wanted to fill the auditorium, but there could not have been more than 50 workers at the assembly. I told him that hopefully like the classes, as more people hear about how much the others enjoyed them, they would show up to these events.

For the syndicate, working with 3lashanhom is a way to provide skills and boost the morale of the workforce. Just as the Omar Mohsen Soccer Tournament provided sport and entertainment for the workers and students, these co-sponsorships are important steps towards establishing the AIS as a prominent institution on campus. Ironically this makes the AIS fit the constitution's description of what a syndicate is better than that of the AWU: “participate in the service of community service and raising the standard of productivity among their members.” More important, however, is that it makes the independent syndicate a key actor in the university with amicable relations with both the students union and the administration. The same people who were chanting slogans at Brian Macdougall in 2010 were the ones sitting with him at the soccer tournament. This institutionalization allows the AIS to be the group that the university turns to as a liaison for the workers, which is rare in most workplaces in Egypt at the moment.

The Politics of Presence

The AUC Independent Syndicate is a major success story of the independent

syndicate movement. Challenged through its lack of resources and relative newness, it has been able to rise to the challenges facing independent syndicates. Whilst the AWU's repertoire includes a largess and legal know how, the AIS has been able to compete by being an accessible and effective organization for the workers; learning about their needs, initiating projects for them, and becoming an important institution within AUC by being active in university life.

Friedrich Engels wrote that unions are, “the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided.”¹⁶⁸ We have seen that the AIS can effectively lead strikes, but we have also seen that syndicate officials do not want strikes to be their only repertoire. Instead, the AIS draws its strength from being active and visible. By being an organization that is there for the workers, operating in multiple capacities in university life, the AIS has raised its prominence at AUC. Putting in the time to make sure the workers' classes are working, or making sure workers are happy with a meeting with the ombuds, the syndicate is able to interact with the workers and show their dedication in ways that the AWU has never done. It allows the workers to compete with the state affiliated syndicate by providing the human element that was missing from the AWU. Until the syndicate is able to create financial safety nets for the workers, their presence is their greatest organizational asset, one that has let them gain over 1000 members of the workforce at the university.¹⁶⁹

The AIS's presence has become an asset for the university as well. By creating committees with the AIS's input, the university is able to plan more efficiently. It is always

¹⁶⁸ Engels , Friedrich (1845) *Condition of the Working Class in England*. Retrieved from Marxist.org.

¹⁶⁹ Interview Ashraf (21 April 2013).

cheaper to plan and get it right the first time, than be required to adjust once a new plan is in place. Whilst the AIS could be disbanded depending on the tide of national politics, it is unlikely that the gains they have made will be completely lost. Committees like the Labor Oversight Committee and Transportation committee would continue to have workers on them, just not in their capacity as representatives from the syndicate.

Chapter III

Work and Association

“I was a part of the old syndicate [AWU], but I never saw results so I joined the independent syndicate. The old syndicate was tied to the government.” This was the feeling of one of the security guards, Wael, who has worked in security for the university for 16 years. When I asked him if he was satisfied with the work at AUC he replied, “hamduallah.” (Praise God). With membership in the AIS at 40% among the security staff, he is in the minority of security guards belonging to the independent syndicate; however, he underscores an important feeling among many of the workers regarding why they have chosen the independent syndicate. The AIS does not have the same level of alienation as the AWU did. He sees the independent syndicate as working to improve his conditions. While Wael has had grievances, he has also made AUC his career. Part of his satisfaction comes from the fact that he can take advantage of the benefits of working at AUC. One of these is the gym, which Wael and other security guards go to after their shifts. For them this was a quality of life benefit that AUC provided them with. For the workers at AUC, the university provides benefits that very few jobs offer.

This chapter attempts to understand the workers' opinions of AUC as a workplace. Through understanding how workers define their desires and needs, we can understand how the workers feel about the work itself and how they have settled grievances. Through their opinions we can understand how their histories in the university relate to their feelings towards the independent syndicate.

The University as a Workplace

To fully understand the needs of the workers and why they went on strike we need

to understand the material realities that exist in Egypt. In chapter I we looked at the strike. This section looks at the workers' views of AUC as a workplace and situates it within the Egyptian context of work. In the course of my research I asked each participant if they were satisfied (raadi) with their work at AUC and overwhelmingly every participant, save for one, said they were. Every person also said that they participated in at least one of the strikes suggesting that there are things they wish to change about the work environment; however, even participants who felt little has changed during the strikes said they were satisfied with the work. In the first part of this section I will untangle these seemingly paradoxical views, which were found to be almost ubiquitous amongst my interlocutors. In order to do this I will examine the university as a place of work.

As we saw in chapter I, the housekeepers went on strike when their stability was shaken by unexpected pay deductions. Stability was brought up often during the course of my interviews. One security guard named Fuad had spent years working at a petroleum plant as a technician, but left the job because the work was inconsistent. He stated in English that, “at AUC there are no broken shifts.”¹⁷⁰ Like Ashraf who wanted a job with more stability, Fuad took the job because he could have more control over his income. For many of these employees, AUC presented itself as an opportunity, which is important given the job market in Egypt.

One of the landscapers, Hani, told me that he works at AUC because “it is a job.” He did not care for the other benefits offered by AUC but rather worked at the university because jobs are hard to find.¹⁷¹ Indeed employment is difficult in Egypt. The

¹⁷⁰ Interview Fuad (22 January 2013).

¹⁷¹ Interview Hani. (27 February 2013).

government's own statistics puts unemployment for 2011 at 12.39 percent.¹⁷² These numbers have only gotten worse since the 18-day uprising. For Hani and other landscapers like him the unemployment numbers are much worse. For illiterate workers in Minya the unemployment rate is 12.7 percent, which is not only above the national average, but is also above the national average for illiterate workers, which is 3 percent. Like many workers in Upper Egypt, who migrate to find work in the satellite cities surrounding Cairo¹⁷³, the landscapers have come from Minya to work in Tagammu' El Khames.

While the landscapers are in a precarious situation, it is not much better for more educated workers. As I mentioned, Layla, one of the security guards, studies in her spare time and wishes to gain a masters degree in order to improve her employment opportunities. While she studies at a state university, she is also able to take English classes at AUC. She, like many other workers, is using AUC as a foundation for the future career she is hoping to secure. This is important because the unemployment numbers are very bad for educated workers from the Greater Cairo Area, which consists of the governorate of Cairo and the adjoining urban areas of at the edges of the governorates of Giza and Qalubayya. Whilst there is no way to know the numbers for the greater Cairo area exactly, we can estimate the total by looking at the numbers for Cairo itself, which is 43.1% unemployment for those with a university education and above.¹⁷⁴ To even have a job with these types of numbers is reason enough not to leave employment, even if one has grievances.

¹⁷² Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (2011) Labor. *Statistical Yearbook*. Retrieved from: <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>.

¹⁷³ Bach, Kirsten H. (2002) "Rural Egypt Under Stress" *Counter-Revolution in Egypt's Countryside: Land and Farmers in the era of Economic Reform*. Ed. Ray Bush. London: Zed 179.

¹⁷⁴ Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (2011) Labor. *Statistical Yearbook*. Retrieved from: <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>.

For these employees, who are trying to improve their life chances, the system provides another obstacle. With such a high competition for jobs, most applicants face heavy competition in the job market. In a recent study around 32% percent of firms in Egypt cited lack of the right skills to secure the job as a major problem they face when hiring.¹⁷⁵ The classes that the workers take on campus can help them in this regard; a benefit that few other jobs in Egypt would offer its employees. These employment searches can take a while, so being able to support oneself and family during this period is important. Another recent study has shown that those who grow up in families, in which the father is not in a white-collar position increases the likelihood that their progeny will either work in the same field, or take 50% longer to find the “right” job, estimated at about 12 years.¹⁷⁶ Responses such as, “it was a job,” given as the reason for working at AUC, demonstrate a lived understanding of the poor job prospects they face, but for workers like Layla and Ashraf who are working towards degrees for future careers, they see AUC as a way to enhance their prospects in the future.

The education that workers receive at AUC has another benefit; it helps out their family as a whole. Asking Badr, a housekeeper, about the benefits of AUC, he cited education as being very important. He said, “[the university] offers English classes to me, but also my wife. And there is something very special [about these classes], I can even bring my son.”¹⁷⁷ In this regard AUC provides an opportunity to improve the life chances of their entire family. This puts their children in a position that is better than most children in their economic class. Education in Egypt is expensive. Even those who

¹⁷⁵ Halime, Farah (10 February 2013) The Problem of the Arab World's Jobless Youth. *Rebel Economy*. Retrieved From <http://rebeleconomy.com>.

¹⁷⁶ Halime, Farah (13 March 2013) In Egypt, It Helps to Have the “Right” Parents. *Rebel Economy*. Retrieved From <http://rebeleconomy.com>.

¹⁷⁷ Interview Badr (22 October 2012).

send their children to the poorly funded public schools end up paying extra for private lessons, which can be around LE 250 a month.¹⁷⁸ By being able to take advantage of these English classes, the workers are either obtaining or providing a valuable skill that can be used later to obtain employment.

Health insurance is a similar issue. Technically there is a right to free medical care in Egypt, but this is seldom the case. Underfunded public hospitals leave equipment low, meaning that people are often forced to buy their own supplies, such as syringes, bedpans, and gauze. This is coupled with the fact that 70% of medical bills are out of pocket.¹⁷⁹ AUC provides both a clinic that anyone within the university can go to, plus there is also insurance for hospitals outside of the university.¹⁸⁰ Johannes Augel has pointed out that the poor have less of an ability to take advantage of public goods. The inability to fund what the state fails to provide can leave families in dire straights. In this regard, the benefits such as medical care and education subsidize, in a limited yet important, capacity area in which the state fails.

Throughout my entire study I did not hear a single complaint about the benefits themselves. As a landscaper, Abdelrahman told me about why he is satisfied with the work at AUC. He responded, “[the benefits] are better than other farm jobs.”¹⁸¹ In evaluating their position at AUC, many workers said that AUC had better benefits. One security guard, when I asked him if he was satisfied with the job, replied that the benefits at AUC are, “better than Pizza Hut,” which is where he worked before being employed by AUC.

¹⁷⁸ Hope, Bradley (26 August 2012) Giza Offers a Picture of Morsi's Challenges. *The National*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae>.

¹⁷⁹ Hope, Bradley (26 August 2012) Giza Offers a Picture of Morsi's Challenges. *The National*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae>.

¹⁸⁰ Interview Ashraf (22 October 2012).

¹⁸¹ Interview Abdelrahman.

The biggest complaint I heard from the workers was about wages and the fact that that they do not match the massive price increases, which have been an economic reality

Table 5: Price increases for 2010-2011.

Item per Kg	2010 Ave. in LE	2011 Ave. in LE	% Increase
Chicken	17.3	18.5	6.9
Tomato	2.56	4.02	57
Wheat	2.99	3.47	16.1
Sunflower Oil	10.11	12.44	23

of the last few years.

Layla told me that she

wants to get married

and have children, but

the salary is an issue.

“We must pay every month LE 500 rent, LE 200 or LE 300 for utilities, LE 200 for transportation. What can I get with the 600 left over? Meat is expensive. Vegetables are expensive.”¹⁸² The price of foodstuffs is only increasing. The chart above details¹⁸³ price increases for four daily use items; however, these raises have been across the board. For 2011, lentils were the only item that CAPMAS recorded as decreasing in price. This only worsened in 2012 as Egypt's foreign reserves plummeted. As a net importer of food—40 percent of Egypt's food and 60 percent of its wheat are imported.¹⁸⁴ A lack of foreign currency at the national level means increased expenses for families. My interlocutors were well aware of these increases and wanted salaries that matched such inflation. During the 2010 strike, the complaint over paying for benefits came from a lack of knowledge over the deductions and the already low wages. After the 2010, and especially after the 2011 strikes, these deductions were not devastating to the monthly incomes of the workers. In this way the strikes made the added benefits more appealing. In fact only those, for whom the benefits did not advance their career goals or family life

¹⁸² Interview Layla (21 February 2013).

¹⁸³ Data From: Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (2011) Prices. *Statistical Yearbook*. Retrieved from: <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>

¹⁸⁴ Weisenthal, Joe (31 January 2011) Egypt's Food Problem in a Nutshell. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from: <http://www.buisnessinsider.com>.

in any way, voiced their desire to leave their jobs at the university.

Among these workers was a young housekeeper, Fady, who stated that he was satisfied with the work at AUC, but did not like being told what to do all the time. He wanted to become a taxi driver instead. When I asked them if there was more money in driving a taxi, he said that he was unsure, but thought it was a more social job. He also stated that the only thing he wanted from the job was money, so he could get married, thus the benefits had less appeal than for the majority of workers I talked to who were either married and had children or were engaged.¹⁸⁵ There was, however, a group that decided to leave their work at AUC. During my fieldwork, a group of landscapers left to look for farm work in Libya. When I asked one of their colleagues who stayed behind why they left, he stated that there is more money in Libya for farm work. For this group of workers they wanted more money to be able to send to their families in Minya.

For them, ideas of what is possible differed from those of the housekeepers and security guards. The landscapers were already migrating to find work, so the decision to work abroad became an option that those in security and housekeeping would not have thought possible. Every worker I talked to in housekeeping and security told me that they live near their families and visit them regularly. Unlike these landscapers, who decided to find better opportunities abroad, housekeepers and security guards generally found the benefits of working at AUC much greater, because they more directly benefit their families.

This idea of satisfaction in the workplace does not come from AUC being an ideal work place, but rather an exceptional workplace. With poor prospects if they leave, the workers are aware that by staying there are benefits that aid individuals trying to improve

¹⁸⁵ Interview Fady.

their education, or those trying to provide for their family. While the strikes happened because of a collective sense of injustice and opportunities to challenge them, the workers were striking in order to improve their families' life chances. The strikes increased the salaries of some members of the workforce twofold, as well as improving workplace conditions, which gave them more stability, such as permanent contracts. Financial stability has thus allowed the workers to enjoy the benefits the university provides, making the university more salient than other job prospects, than the ones that exist.

Workers and the Syndicate

During one of my interviews in November 2012, I was talking to a housekeeper named Basma. Ashraf helped recruit her for the interview and the three of us were sitting in the syndicate room conducting it. I could tell that even though Basma had read the entire consent form, which stated that her identity was confidential, she was hesitant to say anything that could jeopardize her job. At these moments of hesitation Ashraf would reassure her that I could be trusted. Ashraf was always good at connecting me to workers and lending his trust. He normally sat in on the interviews with other housekeepers; however, during this meeting he had to talk with another worker who showed up at the office in the middle of the interview. When the worker arrived he excused himself and sat across the room from us. It was at this moment that I asked Basma about her membership in the syndicate. She was a member, but stated to me that the syndicate was not very useful. She explained that when it first started it was very active, but now it does nothing. This was the first time I had heard critiques of the independent syndicate. It was from this conversation that I started to pay more attention to the nuanced sentiments people hold of both syndicates. A few months later when I was

interviewing security guards I started to find that some were still in the AWU and actively upheld it as the better of the two syndicates. It started to become apparent that each group had varying degrees of support for the independent syndicate. This section examines why that is.

The Landscapers and Housekeepers.

Of the three groups in this study, the landscapers and housekeepers have the highest percentages of membership in the AIS. Ninety percent of the 250 housekeepers are in the independent syndicate and every landscaper, which did number 25, but has dropped in recent months to between 15 to 20, is a member in the syndicate. The history of relations of these groups to the syndicate are similar in that they received little to no support from the AWU and could not partake in their benefits, thus workers flocked to the independent syndicate when it was formed.

The concept of rights is important to the members of the AIS. Their ranks include those in some of the most precarious situations. For the landscapers, the syndicate has helped them to achieve a level of stability that is not normal for migrant workers. Due to the 2011 strike, the landscapers have a bus similar to those that the students take to the university. More important than comfortable transport is the stability of contracts.

Abdelrahman is a landscaper. With a smile he told me that he went to the strike three times in 2011. He went on to explain that the main thing he wanted was more pay and a permanent contract. Whilst he does not know the difference between the syndicates, he thinks the independent syndicate, of which he is a member, is “kowes” (good). He said that if he has a problem at work he talks to an engineer, but if he needs to, he talks to the syndicate.

Another landscaper, Ibrahim, told me that he is in the independent syndicate because the old syndicate is “wahesh” (“horrible”). He had worked at AUC for four years, but, like Abdelrahman, he has only had a contract for two years. For the landscapers, the independent syndicate has become important to their existence on campus because their ability to provide for their families has increased since the syndicate formed. For these landscapers the syndicate is able to look after their well-being. I saw many landscapers come to the syndicate during my time there. The syndicate took their concerns as they would any other member and gave them advice on how to rectify the problem. For the landscapers this is something they have never had before.

All of the landscapers are within a network of family and friends from Minya. When I was first learning about the Desert Development Center, I mentioned to one of the engineers, who was explaining to me the daily operations of the DDC, that I had heard that all of the landscapers were from Minya. This engineer, also from Minya, told me that this is because one of the former directors had been from Minya and had hired someone from Minya who spread the word about the job. He then joked that in Upper Egypt when someone gets a job, they bring their father, uncles cousins and brothers along.

Many of these landscapers have an intertwined history. All but one I talked to had farmed dates in Markez El Mattar in Minya for about six years before coming to AUC. They share housing together in New Cairo and when the working week is over they travel to Minya together for the weekend, where they visit family. Just as their lives are intertwined, so is their history to the independent syndicate. As I mention in chapter

three, the AWU was selective of who could be members. Since the landscapers did not have contracts, they were not allowed to be part of the AWU. It was only after the independent syndicate formed that the landscapers had avenues through which to levy grievances. Being in a precarious position, the landscapers gained a lot from this stability. Every single worker claimed that contracts and pay were the two most important reasons they went on strike in 2011.

This protection is important because the landscapers have a history of abuse on campus. When I asked the syndicate about the abuse, a member mentioned that one of the engineers had hit a landscaper during a shift.¹⁸⁶ The syndicate officials also stated that conditions for the landscapers have only improved by small degrees. This improvement has come from two factors. The first is the light shed on the abusive treatment that the landscapers were facing from certain engineers, which included at least one case of an engineer beating a worker. As mentioned earlier, the 2011 strike led to sensitivity training for supervisors. Another major change was that the university moved the landscapers from the auspices of the Desert Development Center to that of Planning and Administration like that of the Housekeepers. Since this change the syndicate states that the abusive treatment has decreased. The important aspect of the syndicate is that it gives the landscapers an avenue through which to complain, that they did not have when they could not talk to their engineer directly.

As we saw in chapter one, the housekeepers who took key roles during the strike, also took up key positions in the syndicate. Besides having a large membership amongst the housekeepers, they are also able maintain a high level of support. As Badr told me about working at AUC, “Because of the university there is a mental soundness. This is

¹⁸⁶ Syndicate Official (26 February 2013).

because there is a naqaba (syndicate) responsible for you. So if you have any complaints...(he pauses abruptly and concludes with) things are different than they were.”

For Badr, the syndicate becomes a protective barrier and an avenue for communication.

The ways in which workers communicate their problems or complaints comes from their feelings of what is useful. As a housekeeper Basma told me, “In the past [the administration] preferred to talk to team leaders. The workers had no rights. If there were any problems between worker and team leaders, the team leaders were right.”¹⁸⁷ Basma said this has changed since the strike wave. She was happy that her old supervisor left work because he was replaced by a supervisor that was less abusive. When I asked what her previous supervisor would do, she got embarrassed and said that she did not want to say. I did not press the question any further; however, later I asked if there was any difference between the treatment of men and women at AUC, and she stated that the difference in treatment is not bad, but, “is more than you would expect at a university.” Like the landscapers who faced abuse, talking to management is not an option when they are part of the problem. For Basma though, she prefers to talk to the ombuds if there is a problem and as I pointed out at the beginning of this section she thinks the syndicate was better in the past, but does little now.

However, this was not a majority opinion among the housekeepers. The male housekeepers had much more support for the syndicate. Whilst unable to provide a thorough explanation for this myself, the syndicate has noted that having a lack of women in its membership is an obstacle that they wish to overcome.¹⁸⁸ As stated in the introduction, women would talk to me, but not give me any way in which to contact them

¹⁸⁷ Interview Basma (7 October 2012).

¹⁸⁸ Gehad, Reem (17 march 2012) AUC's Independent Syndicate: One Year Later. *Caravan*. Retrieved from <http://academic.aucegypt.edu/caravan>.

for follow-up interviews. Thus I have no concrete evidence for why women seem to be less enthusiastic about the syndicate. It could be to do with the lack of female voices in the syndicate, thus issues of a sensitive nature are not brought up. It is important to note that Basma, like other women, prefer to talk to the university ombuds, possibly because the ombuds have been women with whom it is easier to talk about issues regarding treatment that would be embarrassing to talk about in front of men.

Whether it is the syndicate or the ombuds that people talk to, members of these two groups mostly said that things improved after the strike. Workers like Badr, who stated there is a mental soundness from having a group responsible for the workers, saw the strikes as bringing issues of money and workers rights to the forefront. This focus on financial and employment comes from housekeeping and landscaping having a history of low pay and few avenues of communication. For these workers, they have allowed the syndicate to steer the movement and how it takes up issues.

The security: a movement of their own.

Security has different notions about the changes brought to the workplace. These feelings come from their higher positions within the university and their own history of dealing with grievances. When talking to Ashraf about why the security guards want demands that are very different to those of the housekeepers and landscapers, he stated that they have a lack of leadership within the group. For Ashraf, lack of leadership meant people who could guide others in formulating demands that the syndicate can feasibly negotiate with the administration. Ashraf's answer underscores an important issue; the demands of the security staff do not match the types of grievance that the syndicate has chosen to pursue. This explains the

less enthusiastic support for the syndicate from security.

Many of the security guards are not happy with the syndicate. Layla stated that she is in neither syndicate. Her sentiment was that, “the syndicates are sleeping. They said they would secure our rights but they have done nothing.”¹⁸⁹ Most security guards shared similar feelings. For the security guards they have received less support from the syndicate. This issue comes from the 2011 strike. Between 2010 and 2011 many of the housekeepers and landscapers doubled their salaries between the minimum wage increase and the meal stipend. The security guards on the other hand received around a LE 250 increase. Most of them have stated that this was only a small amount. As one guard informed me, “the money comes in the right hand and leaves from the left”, meaning that it was not enough to pay for the rising prices.¹⁹⁰ The syndicate has been reluctant to support this goal. In 2012, the syndicate preferred to focus on the security guards’ issue of Mahmoud Zouq, making public statements in support of removing Zouq, rather than to mention their LE 2000 raise. More directly, a syndicate official told me in a mix of English and Arabic, “the men in amn (security) all the time want an increase in salary. We told them, 'please some logic', but they said, 'No, we want more money'. This is different than the DDC (landscapers) and housekeeping where it is about very minor steps.”¹⁹¹ This lack of focus on the salary concerns of the security guards has caused tension between the guards and the syndicate.

Despite the syndicate's statements to remove Zouq from his position during the 2012 strike, no security guard gave them credit for helping with this task. Part of this comes from the way in which events panned out. During the course of my research

¹⁸⁹ Interview Layla (21 February 2013).

¹⁹⁰ Interview Khaled (21 January 2013).

¹⁹¹ Interview Syndicate Official (February 2013).

Mahmoud Zouq left his position along with the head of the security wing of Public Safety, Mohammed Abdallah. This was met with happiness from both the syndicate and the security staff. Their departure from the university came at the same time that security was removed from the Public Safety Department. The problem for the syndicate is that they cannot claim credit for this change. In fact I was the one who informed the syndicate that Mohammed Abdallah had left. He had told me earlier that day when I stopped by the security office to talk to the secretary that it was his final day. The syndicate had been completely left in the dark. Because this was part of an institutional change initiated by the university, neither the syndicate nor the guards could take credit for it.

The story of Mahmoud Zouq tells us something very important. It was something I learned in the fall of 2012 when a faction of student strikers chained the gates of the university shut. I had climbed the fence that day to get from the gate the bus dropped me off at to the gate that the workers were at. When I found Ashraf, he stated the obvious, that we should reschedule the meeting. I decided that I did not want to stand in the sun, so I hopped the fence again to sit and wait for the announcement that classes were canceled and the buses would take everyone home. As I was walking a few cars pulled up to the gate and the students surrounded them. I asked the guard if that was Mahmoud Zouq, as I had heard rumors from the students that he was coming to check on the situation. Upon hearing his name she grimaced, stating her dislike for him. This was how Layla became part of the study and I learned of the guards' grievances towards him.

Throughout the research it was quite frequent to hear about the guards' dislike of Zouq. Much of the guards' discontent came from the fact that he was not a security guard

himself. Fuad told me that he was happy with the change because Zouq used to give memorandums but never put a signature on them. He told me, “we had no idea who was giving us orders.” He was happy to have a new director, who had been a security guard at AUC as a supervisor. The day that Mokhtar Ragab replaced Zouq as Director of Security, Public Safety was disbanded; a change that the guards felt was for the better. They thought that the guards would benefit from his leadership and past relations. Wael felt that because Mokhtar Ragab had been a general in the police and then worked as assistant director of security he knew how security works: “We wanted someone who specializes in security,” was how Wael stated his opinion of the change.¹⁹² Another security guard told me that because of the change, the guards have the chance to go for a 45-day training at the police academy. He stated that because Ragab was in the police he has connections, adding, “public relations are important in Egypt.” This idea of wanting someone who understands security is indicative of the way that security guards have approached attempting to change the conditions of their employment, namely working as a group without syndicate backing.

The guards are in many ways a movement of their own. Much of this comes from the fact that they have organized strikes on their own and have been able to create a strong narrative around them. Every worker I talked to stated that they went on strike because they wanted more pay, but that is not unusual for any worker to state. What is unique about security is the reasons they give for wanting more pay. The responses correspond to the ways in which security staff expressed their outrage at the Jobmaster evaluations and the ways they discussed their demands during the 2012 strike. As one

¹⁹² Interview Wael (21 February 2013).

security guard told me, “we are constantly given more tasks, but the pay does not match.”¹⁹³ Another guard told me that he felt that, “the level of pay is small compared to the supervisors.” These are similar to the ways in which the guards complained that Jobmaster evaluations were not fair because they did not look at all the tasks they perform and that they wanted their salary compared to the upper levels of security not other security firms.

The security guards place these demands within what they feel is their professionalism in protecting the university. Every security guard is required to be OSHA certified, something I found out when discussing the classes they take. Referring to computer and English classes, I asked if they take any classes at the university, but the security guards normally placed OSHA on the top of their list. Wael was so proud of these certifications that he took them out of his bag to show them to me. He had the general OSHA certificate, but also one that certified him to guard construction sites.

The security guards demonstrate a specific pride in the tasks that they perform. As one guard told me as we sat in the parking lot where he was patrolling, “we wanted more pay because there is a lot of work. If there is any indecent, security comes.”¹⁹⁴ This professionalism is often articulated by focusing on how they protect the university. Whether it is from damage during moments of violence, where clashes often encircle the downtown campus, or by protecting the buildings from theft, the security guards see these as exceptional tasks that deserve a higher salary.

The security guards also drew upon a lived experience of the revolution. Many of the security guards explained that when they went on strike they chanted “arhal

¹⁹³ Interview Wael (29 January 2013).

¹⁹⁴ Interview Wael (29 January 2013).

Mahmoud Zouq” (Leave! Mahoud Zouq). This is a play on the chant “arhal” used throughout the 18-days. In this way, the security guards were expressing an unwillingness to take the dictates of their general manager. Selbin has stated that the culture of revolution transcends time and space. For example the explosion of Che Guevara T-shirts sold after the 18-days is an expression of revolutionary spirit that connects a revolutionary of the past to a current revolution. For the workers, tying their struggle against what they felt were injustices caused by their boss to a revolutionary struggle, demonstrates ways that the revolution has influenced smaller struggles. Modifying the original chant was a way of justifying their cause and adding enthusiasm to the protest.

The security guards have created an active identity within the university. One that is based out of their history of discourse with the university administration, which was touched upon in chapter I. This identity exists for those in both syndicates and those who have decided not to join either. Unlike the landscapers and housekeepers, not a single security guard stated that they talk to either of the syndicates if they have a problem. Even Wael who left the AWU to join the independent syndicate stated that he talks to his manager and if the problem is not resolved he talks to the ombuds. The route that one takes to address grievances, whether security, landscaper, or housekeeper is directly associated with how a worker feels about the independent syndicate's effectiveness. The independent histories of these workers has determined what is possible, which is a history of the past few years. Whilst the syndicate became an avenue to communicate complaints, the office of the ombudsman also was created to serve that purpose. Whilst the syndicate uses the ombuds to advance the rights of the workers, it also creates

avenues of communication that circumvents both syndicates. But neither the ombuds nor the syndicate have been useful for security's most important demands. Due to this the security guards have worked slowly towards these goals by creating a movement. Whilst they have developed a culture around discussing their grievances, it is too early to know what future actions will come out of it.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen satisfaction of their jobs for workers at AUC does not mean a workplace without grievances, but rather satisfaction compared to other options. With a lack of opportunities in the job-market, a stable life means making the most of the employment at AUC. It was through the opportunity to address their grievances related to stability and pay that the benefits of working at AUC became more salient. The landscapers and housekeepers benefited the most from the strikes making them more content to let the syndicate take care of their grievances. With less support from the syndicate, the security have created a movement to address their issues, one which places a high value on their identities as security guards.

Conclusion

Two Years of Change

Since the housekeepers first sat down in front of the administration building at AUC's New Cairo campus, the relationship between the university and the workers has changed in fundamental ways. The AUC's employees are not alone in these gains. Throughout Egypt workers have been agitating for higher wages and independent associations. This study has demonstrated that the workers at AUC are not organizing in a vacuum. National politics and events influence, constrain, and provide opportunities for action just as they do for workers in the public factories. With this in mind we also cannot forget that AUC is a private, elite university, which provides its own constraints and opportunities. Through looking at the strikes and actions of the syndicate throughout the past two years we have been able to understand how both national politics and university policies have influenced AUC's labor movement.

The strikes not only changed university policy, but they also influenced one another. The 2010 housekeeping strike demonstrated that strikes are an effective tool for negotiations, institutionalizing a tactic that was technically illegal without the ETUF's consent. The 2011 and 2012 strikes show that strikes are now part of the workers' repertoire of contentious action. Each strike was different in its size and effectiveness. The 2011 strike was by far the most effective of the strikes, with most of the workers demands being met, but also institutional changes that gave workers more avenues to pursue grievances. The LROC and Office of the Ombudsman have given the workers more control over the way the university operates. By giving the workers a committee that understands the law, they are able to make sure their rights are not violated. The

ombuds on the other hand can act as a neutral arbitrator in disputes and promote changes to the university. This gives the workers a greater voice in changing policies that are perceived as unfair. Both of these changes are a form of control over the workplace that did not exist in the past.

The 2011 strike was successful because of the political opportunities that existed. Whilst student allies helped the housekeepers in 2010 and the security guards in 2012, the students were merely providing technical assistance for the workers. The 2011 strike was more successful because the workers and students were holding a joint strike, which allowed both sides to apply pressure in different ways. The students could be disruptive, while the workers could remove their labor power. Through this division of labor, the university was forced to concede to most of the student and workers' demands.

The independent syndicate also changed the dynamic of the strikes. Whilst the housekeepers could only pressure the university as long as they continued their strike, the syndicate was able to negotiate with the administration during the 2011 strike after the workers had gone back to work due to the risk of continuing to strike. The syndicate was also able to support the security guards in 2012 without a complete work-stoppage. Despite a failure to achieve the guards' key demands, this is a major change compared to the 2010 strike.

The formation of the independent syndicate is another example of political opportunities in the national context affecting the university. Forming due to the alienation the workers felt from the AWU, as well as a political opening caused by the revolution, the syndicate has been able to assert itself into university politics in ways that are unique, namely operating freely on campus and sitting on university committees, such

as the LROC. Co-sponsoring events and projects with the administration and the student union gives the AIS an advantage that most independent syndicates do not have. Because of the unique context of the university the AIS is able to initiate projects that are under the universities' auspices. Projects, such as the emergency fund, allow the syndicate to creatively circumvent the prohibitions on funds, which leaves the independent syndicate financially at a disadvantage. These projects also place the independent syndicate in a position to have partial control over them, but also gives the projects an ability to continue in the event that the AIS is outlawed in the future.

At an organizational level the AIS has competed with the AWU through how it organizes itself as an association. The AWU is bureaucratic; state controlled, and has not had an election since 2006. The AIS; however, is easily reached by the workers and flexible in the manner that a worker communicates with them, continually in contact with the administration over grievances or unresolved issues, works to clarify information relating to work, and maintains a democratic structure. Between these aspects of the syndicate and their success during the 2011 strike, the workers have been able to get membership from 100 percent of the landscapers, 90 percent of the housekeepers, and 40 percent of the security guards.

Whilst the AIS has been successful in gaining membership from the housekeepers and landscapers, the security guards have been less enthusiastic in their support. This disparity of membership and enthusiasm comes from each groups' own negotiations with the syndicate. The housekeepers and landscapers have gained the most from their connection to the AIS. Both groups have gained major pay raises, as well as permanent contracts with the university through the strikes. In other words, issues of stability have

been improved due to the syndicate's negotiations. As we saw in Chapter III, issues of pay and contracts were the main cause for the 2011 strike. Once these demands were met by the university, the workers felt more content with their work.

The security guards on the other hand did not achieve their key demand of LE 2000 a month. This left them unsatisfied with the AIS's work and feeling that it does not represent them as it does the housekeepers and landscapers. Instead, the security guards took it upon themselves to agitate for higher pay and the removal of Mahmoud Zouq in 2012. Despite only achieving minor successes compared to their stated demands, what has come from their own history of strikes is a nascent movement without an organization. The guards have placed a high importance on what it means to be a security guard; an identity that they stressed was relevant in both the 2012 strike and the ways in which they spoke about themselves. Whilst there has been little movement since the 2012 strike, this identity suggests that they could form their own syndicate in the future, or they may prefer to keep their organization informal in times of contention.

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