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Egypt

Solidarity with Egyptian Workers at Pirelli Tire Company

- News from around the world -

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Workers at the Alexandria Tire Company (Pirelli) in Egypt are on strike against management's arbitrary refusal to implement agreements that were concluded with workers in the presence of representatives of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), as well as their refusal to comply with workers' legal rights. Situated on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road, Pirelli has branches in numerous countries, including Turkey, Greece, Italy, Romania and Brazil.

The Union Committee at Pirelli, affiliated to the General Union of Chemical Workers (GUC), itself affiliated to the state-run Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), attempted to follow the complicated strike laws. On May 29, 2012, the Union Committee sent a memorandum to the minister of labor, the director of the manpower directorate in Alexandria, the company's executive director and the GUC informing them of the workers' intention to strike on June 10, 2012, and requesting that management respect the workers' rights in order to avoid a work stoppage. Workers' appeals were ignored and they were forced to take strike action.

The causes for the strike are the following:

1. The company's violation of article 85 of the Labor Law (Law 12 of 2003) concerning the calculation of workers' overtime pay. The company calculates overtime on the basis of the basic wage rather than the total wage, as stipulated by the law.
2. The company's violation of the incentive regulations, stipulating that the reduction in workers' incentive pay occur at a rate of 10% per 0.1% of damage, when damaged production reaches 2%. The company, however, applies the reduction in pay starting from a damage rate of 1.4%.
3. The company's violation of the national collective labor agreement between workers and employers. While the agreement provides for the payment of a worker's special allowance for 2011 on the basis of the basic wage, management calculates the allowance based on the portion of the wage subject to insurance severance, significantly less than the basic wage.
4. Management's violation of the companywide collective labor agreement signed in the presence of representatives of SCAF in February 2011. This agreement provides for workers' participation in decision-making regarding the services they are entitled to, such as medical care, restaurants, transportation, as well as the way in which incentives are paid. Management disregards this provision.
5. The amendment of regulations by rescheduling wages, without adoption of the alterations by the responsible administrative authority.
6. The non-application of workers' entitlement to 10% of profits. In 2011, for example, net profits of the company amounted to 130 million Egyptian pounds. Yet management only paid 9 million pounds to the workers instead of the 13 million pounds they deserved.
7. Lack of commitment by the company, contrary to its conduct in other countries, to its social responsibility for health care for workers and their families, allowances for the inflation rate and price increases, etc.

We must note that on the day after sending the memorandum, the company cut off steam and electricity from

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machines, initiated a maintenance operation for boilers and electricity stations and denounced the workers and their Union Committee in a statement to the police accusing them of obstructing production and inciting a strike. For their part, the workers made a complaint establishing that it was management that blocked production. Workers also provided evidence of the maintenance operation.

The company's management refused to negotiate. The Ministry of Labor did not reply to the workers' memorandum. As for the GUC, it replied to the Union Committee on June 9, announcing its approval of the strike starting June 10, 2012. Since then, the workers have been on strike; while management still refuses to negotiate, insisting that workers must return to their jobs before management considers their demands, which the workers reject.

Management did not stop here though. On June 21, 2012, management dismissed five of the workers' leaders accusing them of inciting the strike. The fired workers are: Shaaban Abdel-Latif Yusef, productive technician, grade one; Ashraf Khamis, a.k.a., Ashraf El-Gazzar, productive technician, grade one; engineer Ahmed Kandil, head of the Union Committee; engineer Ashraf Ashmawi, member of the Union Committee and president of the association of shareholders at the company; and Mohamed Jarrana, member of the Union Committee.

Pirelli is a company that makes huge profits in Egypt while totally disregarding Egyptian law and the rights of Egyptian workers. The workers have only resorted to a strike after making several attempts to resolve these disputes to no avail. Their strike is one of the rare "legal" stoppages in Egypt, fulfilling the strict conditions set by Egyptian law for the exercise of this basic workers' right, including approval of the strike by the GUC. Workers resorted to a strike only after responsible ministries ignored workers' legitimate demands, and in particular when the Ministry of Labor showed indifference to the workers' plight.

The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) expresses its solidarity with the Pirelli Tire Company workers in their strike and supports their legitimate demands. EFITU demands the reinstatement of those five workers, and calls upon political forces and youth in Egypt, as well as trade unions and trade union federations internationally—in particular, Pirelli workers in other countries—to take all possible forms of solidarity action with their Egyptian comrades so as to help them resist and persist in their struggle until the realization of their demands.

Pirelli's management is threatening not to pay the workers' wages, which are due now, in attempt to force them into submission, since management knows that workers' wages are the only means of subsistence for them and their families. Instead of fulfilling workers' legitimate demands, the company has resorted to arbitrary dismissal and suspension of pay.

Long Live the Struggle of Egyptian Workers!

Long Live the Egyptian Revolution!

The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions

June 21, 2012

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