

Social Justice in Egypt, a Fragile Role of the State

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Abstract

One of the three major objectives of January Egyptian revolution is social justice. Although most of the population suffers from social and economic injustices, three categories from the population witness harsh social and economic conditions. These are workers, women and children. Workers across Egypt are fighting for the basic demands of the revolutions. Egyptian women have struggled to establish their presence as full-fledged partners with men in the public sphere. Today's poor children are very likely to be tomorrow's poor parents, and thus perpetuating a cycle of poverty from generation to generation. First, this paper will give some definitions of social justice and its different aspects. Second, it will shed some lights on the injustices witnessed by Egyptian workers. Third, it focuses on the inequalities suffered by women in the Egyptian society. Fourth, it identifies some of the problems faced by children in Egypt.

Keywords: Economic Justice- Social Justice- Social Inclusion- Social Exclusion-Child Poverty-Women inequality

1. Social Justice

The problem of economic inequality resulting from economic injustice has been the major concern of those who are pursuing social justice. Two alternative notions of justice need to be considered: the “end state,” or outcome pattern concept of justice and its alternative, the “process” concept of justice.¹ The end-state concept basically characterizes social justice in terms of the outcome of the social process.² John Rawl's theory of justice belongs to this category and so too does the widely held egalitarian position. Rawls defines justice as fairness in terms of an admissible class of income distributions; the comparative fate of the lowest income group forms the criterion of admissibility.³ It is clear that the state is responsible for the fair distribution of income; if this doesn't happen, then the state isn't functioning well in this concern. Economic inequality and stagnation or poverty is frequently the joint result of policies that obstruct economic development. The policies of many Third World countries foster stagnation and, simultaneously, a redistribution of wealth to the ruling oligarchy and its clientele. Economic inequality will often result from institutional arrangements that obstruct economic growth.⁴ Rawls' concept of social justice is probably the most influential. Rawls criticized utilitarianism. Utilitarian's like John Stuart Mill argued that the distribution of societal goods should be for the ‘greatest net balance of satisfaction’ for society. Mill said that utilitarianism was actually a ‘standard of morality’ which used happiness of the greater number of people as its ultimate goal. In principle, utilitarianism advocates the greatest good for the greatest number of people in a society.⁵ Rawls criticized utilitarianism as being able to be used to justify concentration of goods benefiting privileged classes of society on the basis that it was for the greater good.⁶ Rawls' conception of distributive justice provided that “all social values are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these values is to everyone's advantage.

¹ Brunner, Karl,(1987), Economic Inequality and the Quest for Social Justice, Cato Journal, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 153-4.

² Ibid, pp. 153-4.

³ Rawls, John. A Theory of Justice, Harvard University Press, 1971

⁴ Brunner, Karl, Ibid, p.157.

⁵ Frederic G. Reamer, *Social work values and ethics* (2006) in Simon P. Funge, ‘Promoting the social justice orientation of students: the role of the educator’ (2011) 47(1) Journal of Social Work Education, pp. 73-90.

⁶ National Pro Bono Resource Centre Occasional Paper: What is Social Justice?, October (2011), p. 6.

As explained by Baldry, “Rawls asked what particular set of rules or laws would members of a society agree to obey if they made as their goal a fair social order – one in which no one is exploited or taken unfair advantage of.⁷The “process” concept offers an alternative approach to the problem of justice, as justice is defined not in terms of a specific outcome pattern but as general characteristics of a social process. Outcomes are just to the extent they result from a process that satisfies these broad characteristics representing justice. The process view may be somewhat modified with some redistributive constraints; such constraints would be designed to protect the lowest income groups in society and “buy” their participation in a social and political consensus.⁸

This paper adopts the end- state concept of justice. It examines the bad conditions of the three selected categories, workers, women and children and how state’s policies and institutions contributed to their deteriorating conditions.

2. Egyptian Workers : Striving for Dignity

In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution, the number of labor protests has increased sharply and added to an already dire economic situation. The Egyptian revolution was triggered by the Tunisian example, but for years beforehand workers, for example in the giant textile factory of Mahalla al-Kubra, had been striking and protesting for better wages and conditions and for independent trade unions. Since Mubarak was overthrown strikes by workers against privatization and for social justice have spread like wildfire.⁹Before the revolution of January 25, 2011, a normalization of workers’ collective protests had become apparent. Between 2004 and 2008, more than 1.7 million workers participated in contentious collective actions.¹⁰ In the absence of a credible body representing Egyptian labor, strikes and demonstrations had become the only influential tools for labor to exert pressure on employers (in the private sector) or the government (in the public sector); calls to focus attention on workers’ grievances were consistently ignored if they were not backed by contentious collective action. Labor activism had begun to emerge in Egypt in 2004 as a consequence of the economic policies established by the government of Ahmed Nazif (2004–2011); his government’s pro-motion of economic growth at the expense of social justice resulted in vast social in-equality.¹¹

Total Labor Protest per Year

Year	No. of worker protests
2006	222
2007	614
2008	609
2009	700
2010	584
May 2011 – April 2012 (i.e., after the revolution)	1.137

Source: SWAP Comments 32-October 2012

2.1 Wages and Working Conditions

In 1991 Egypt concluded Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) agreements with the IMF and World Bank. The ERSAP was implemented through Law 203 of 1991, which listed 314 public-sector enterprises eligible for privatization.¹²The ETUF¹³ had resisted privatization since the proclamation of the “Open Door” economic policy in 1974.

⁷ Eileen Baldry & Ruth McCausland, (2008), *Social Justice in Development*, p7.

⁸ Ibid, p 154

⁹ Maunder, Jonathan & Alexander, Anne, (2013) Still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice. How workers in the Middle East are resisting neo-liberalism, austerity and privatization, *MENA Solidarity*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Abdulla, Nadine, (2012) *Egypt’s Workers – From Protest Movement to Organized Labor A Major Challenge of the Transition Period*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, p.1.

¹¹ Ibid, p.1

¹² Arabic and unofficial English texts of recent laws relating to economic and social issues are available at, www.egyptlaws.com/companies.

¹³ The government authorized establishment of the Egyptian Workers Federation (EWF) on January 30, 1957. In 1961 the EWF was reorganized and became the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF).

However, the ETUF and its president, Sayyid Rashid, approved the 1991 legislation.¹⁴ By mid-2002, 190 firms were privatized.¹⁵ Law 203 forbade mass layoffs after privatization of a firm. But public-sector managers commonly made their enterprises more attractive to buyers by reducing the workforce before the sale. Moreover, many newly privatized firms did reduce their workforce. In July 2004 President Hosni Mubarak appointed a new cabinet headed by Dr. Ahmad Nazif. The Nazif government accelerated the sell-off of the public sector, privatizing a record 17 enterprises during its first year in office.¹⁶ Since 1984 the basic minimum wage has been E£35 a month (about US\$6.50). With an annual cost-of-living rise, the minimum wage reached E£108.50 a month (about US\$19.75) in 2008.¹⁷ The numerous allowances, bonuses, incentives, and profit shares make actual wages difficult to predict or calculate precisely.¹⁸ According to the American Egyptian Chamber of Commerce, the average basic monthly wage for textile and clothing workers (historically the largest, now the second largest, manufacturing sector after food and tobacco processing) before the strike wave that began in 2004 was E£250 (about US\$44.50).¹⁹ In the public sector, additions to the basic wage raised the gross monthly wage to E£400-450 (about US\$75.00).²⁰ Public-sector employees legally work daily shifts of eight hours, six days a week; overtime on Fridays, the official weekly day of rest, (at a 135 percent premium) is common. Private-sector textile workers typically work twelve-hour shifts, six days a week and also commonly work overtime. Anxieties about unemployment and other possible consequences of privatization prompted a renewal of strikes and collective action in the mid-1990s.²¹ These were not idle fears. The rate of unemployment climbed from about 8 percent in the 1990s to 12 percent in 2002-03. It declined to about 9 percent by early 2008 but began to rise again due to the global financial crisis that erupted in the second half of 2008. Most observers believe that the actual unemployment rate is considerably more than—perhaps double—the official figures.²²

In 2011, the then prime minister Kamal Al-Ganzouri set the minimum wage at LE700 a month, including bonuses and stipends, benefiting 1.9 million employees at a cost of LE7 billion. The commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces at the time, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, issued a decree, published in the Official Gazette, that stated that the maximum income of an employee within a state authority could not be more than 35 times the income of another employee within the same authority.²³ This was supposed to be put into effect on 1 January, 2012, but was delayed. In 2010, the NWC set the minimum monthly wage at LE400, and at the same time the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), an NGO, launched a campaign promoting the establishment of a minimum monthly wage of LE1,200.²⁴

As part of its pursuit of social justice, Egypt's interim government has decided to set a minimum wage of LE1,200 a month. Prime Minister Hazem Al-Beblawi announced at a press conference that the cabinet's decision on the minimum wage would be implemented starting in January 2014. Public-sector minimum wages would increase from LE700 to LE1,200 next year, he said. However, the decision has been disparaged by many economists, activists and members of the business community. While many deem the figure as being still too low, business groups frown upon it as an extra burden, saying that the decision will be impossible to implement under current economic conditions. Some fear that the already sluggish economy, still staggering from the effect of three years of recession, may be further hindered by added financial pressures on the private sector.²⁵

Many businesses have resisted the imposition of a minimum wage on the private sector, arguing that it does not take into account the negative impact of this on the labor market and saying that it will ultimately raise unemployment.

¹⁴ El Sayed Rashed: Equity Shop," Al-Ahram Weekly On-line, April 30-May 6, 1998, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/>

¹⁵ CARANA Corporation, "Privatization in Egypt Quarterly Review, April-June 2002," (Cairo), p. 8.

¹⁶ Justice For All, The Struggle For Workers Rights on Egypt, (2010, Solidarity Center, p.14.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.14.

¹⁸ Sabr Barakat, al-Haqq fi al-'amal wa-huquq al-'umma, l ((2007) Cairo: Hisham Mubarak Law Center, , pp. 170-80.

¹⁹ American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, The Textile and Clothing Industry in Egypt, (2004), (Cairo: The Chamber) p.33.

²⁰ Ibid, Justice for All, p. 14.

²¹ Christine Pratt, Nicola, (1998), The Legacy of the Corporatist State: Explaining Workers' Responses to Economic Liberalization in Egypt (University of Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies: Middle East Paper no. 60-

²² Ibid, Justice For All, p. 14.

²³ Controversy over the minimum wage, Al Ahram Weekly, Thursday, 03 October, 2013

²⁴ Mona El-Fiqi, Setting fair limits Thursday, 03 October, 2013 – Al Ahram Weekly Efforts are continuing to set minimum and maximum wages in Egypt.

²⁵ Ibid, Controversy over the minimum wage

They have called upon the government to tie wages to production, the number of working hours and standards of living in governorates across Egypt, in addition to considering the differences in wages between jobs and professions. Fatma Ramadan, a member of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions' executive office, said that "the wage system as a whole needs to be improved; we need to set a minimum basic salary in comparison to a variable salary," adding that the new minimum would not necessarily improve wages. Employers consistently reduce the basic wage and increase variable payments, such as allowances and bonuses. The basic wage only constitutes about 22 per cent of the gross salary in some cases," she said. "The aim of setting a minimum wage is to achieve a balance between wages and prices that will ensure a dignified life for workers." Ramadan described the new decision as "vague", saying that it was merely an announcement and was not backed by a law that would also guarantee an increase in pensions. No mention had been made of the resources to be used in funding the minimum wage. "Will they be extracted from the underprivileged sectors by cancelling subsidies for certain commodities, or reducing expenditure on health and education," she asked. "Or will the government impose more taxes?"²⁶

2.2 Demands for Laws for Trade Union Freedoms

With the 25th of January revolution, Egyptian workers, as a part of the Egyptian population, aspired to realize what they have lost before, but the Muslim Brotherhood and the Ikhwanī president Mohammed Morsi, his prime minister Hesham Kandil and his cabinet let them down. According to a report by the International Development Centre (IDC) (2013) in Cairo, Egypt saw a record number of 9427 protests during Mohamed Morsi's first year in office. On average there were more than 1100 protests per month during the 2013, compared to 176 per month during 2010. Just over 4,000 of these were strikes and protests by workers, and 67 percent of the total were driven by social and economic grievances. Egyptians adopted over 60 different methods of protest, among the most: strikes (1,013), sit-ins (811), marches (503), human chains (80), horn-blowing campaigns (21), nonpayment campaigns and road-blocks.²⁷ The major reason why there was a crisis between the Brotherhood and the workers was the party's failure to issue the law on trade union freedoms. However, demands for laws of freedoms didn't emerge with the rule of Muslim Brotherhood but it is a heritage of previous regimes. Although the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) was founded by Gamal Abd el-Nasser in 1957 as the only official representative body for workers, it has not adequately fulfilled its duties of labor representation in the past. The trade union has rather functioned as a mouthpiece for state or regime interests; therefore, while being forced to re-main officially under the umbrella of ETUF, workers have simultaneously organized in protest movements to express their dis-content. The workers' firm decision to establish new and un-compromised representative bodies that would represent their true interests came as a direct result of their sobering experience with ETUF.²⁸ Hosni Mubarak's regime carefully distinguished between peoples' demands – those referring to their socioeconomic situations and those touching on political issues. Any kind of linkage was considered a red line not to be crossed. Hence, labor movements consistently rejected alliances with political parties, because they were aware that a violation of the regime's unwritten rules of the game would result in systematic repression – but also because of the political parties' political weakness. The suppression of the Ghazel El-Mahalla labor movement strike – the Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving, located in Mahalla, the biggest of its kind with 24,000 workers on April 6, 2008, is an exemplary demonstration of how the authoritarian regime dealt with the politicization of social protest.²⁹

After the revolution, new trade unions had emerged and were mainly organized under two umbrella organizations: the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), which regroups 261 new trade unions with some 2.45 million members and the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC), which embraces 246 unions. However, the new trade unions' efficacy is constrained by several factors: first: legal obstacles: The legal framework regulating trade unions' affairs poses a huge obstacle for the formation of new trade unions. Law 35, promulgated in 1976 and amended by law 1 in 1981, recognizes ETUF as the only legitimate and legal federal body of labor representation, second, recognition and legitimacy: New trade unions face difficulties, both in the public and private sectors, in receiving recognition as legitimate representatives, third: resources and capacity: Two major obstacles hinder the capacity of new trade unions to turn into effective institutions.

²⁶ Dahlia Kholaf Public sector workers win minimum wage rise after years of neglect, but critics say it doesn't go far enough.

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²⁷ Maunder, Jonathan & Alexander, Anne, p.6.

²⁸ Ibid, Abdulla, Nadine, p.2

²⁹ Ibid, p.2

The first one is related to the new leaders' lack of experience in the most basic functions of a trade union. This is a shortcoming that largely results from the absence of any tradition of unionism in Egypt – at least outside of ETUF. Administrating a new trade union and managing it thus poses a major challenge. The second challenge is related to the lack of financial resources, due to the inability to collect regular membership fees.³⁰

3. Women and Social Injustice

Egyptian workers aren't the only people who suffer from social injustice Egyptian women suffers as well. This paper isn't concerned with human rights of women, their political or legal rights, rather it is concerned with women's economic rights which are curtailed to the extent that makes women suffer from social and economic injustice. Arab countries have some of the world's lowest female labor force rates. Traditionally, men have been responsible for the economic support of their families, and only minorities of very poor or very wealthy women were economically active in the public sphere.

3.1 Women's Deteriorating Economic Conditions in Egypt

After the 1952 revolution, opportunities were opened up for women, allowing them more space in the public sphere. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, including male unemployment, women's participation in the labor market has remained modest. The percentage of women in the labor force in Egypt has risen somewhat over the decade before the last, in 1995 the percent working for wages (not family workers) stood at 21% of urban women, 11% of rural women.³¹ Like men, women have suffered from authoritarianism and economic injustices. However, they have often suffered in specific ways. For example, as mothers and wives, women have found it increasingly difficult to balance the family budget and make ends meet in a context where food prices have been rising since 2008 and incomes have been eroded by inflation. According to an article in Al-Ahram Weekly last year, 'the minimum wage in Egypt has remained the same for the past 26 years, and with the rise in the prices of food and other commodities nearly half of Egyptian wage-earners are finding it difficult to meet basic food needs. Even families with two wage-earners have been driven below the LE12 [just over £1] per day poverty line.'

This has meant that even middle class families have had to cut back on eating meat and dairy food and even fresh fruits and vegetables.³² In addition, in rural areas women poverty is caused by different reasons including the following:

- (a) The time they spend in home and child care as well as care for elderly or disabled people is time which is not available for earning an income;
- (b) Their lower wage rates for casual work as well as reduced opportunities for(c) in some parts of Upper Egypt, many women are restricted to the home and to home based activities and this worsens their likelihood of poverty, as they cannot take up opportunities outside their homes;
- (d) The low income obtainable from the kind of handicrafts and other off-farm activities done by women;
- (e) Prevailing gender norms that give preference to early marriage of girls and deprives them of education; and
- (f) Recently the culling of chickens and other poultry has been a major blow to rural women, and particularly poorer rural women, depriving them of the single home based source of income which had been the mainstay of their very limited economic independence.³³

In a context of neoliberal reforms and structural adjustment, where state spending on health, education and other social services has been cut back, women often have to step in to fill the gaps left by the withdrawal of state welfare. Women are also present in significant numbers in the workplace.³⁴ Historically, the largest employer of women is the public sector due to good and conditions, including provisions on maternity leave.

As a result of 4 neoliberal economic reforms, the public sector has experienced a loss of jobs, whilst wages have failed to keep up with the cost of living, thereby pushing many women out of this sector of the workforce. Simultaneously, the number of women working in the private sector has increased over the last few decades.

³⁰Ibid, pp.3-5.

³¹NematGuenena and Nadia Wassef ,(1999), Unfulfilled Promises:Women's Rights, Population Council, p.34.

³²Amany Abdel-Moneim, 'Food prices shooting up', Al Ahram Weekly Online, 14-20 October 2010

³³ IFAD Report, (2012), Arab Republic of EgyptCountry strategic opportunities program, Enabling Poor Rural Area to overcome Poverty, pp. 11-12.

³⁴ Nicola Pratt, (12 July 2011), Women and the Egyptian Revolution, p. 5.

Women now make up a significant percentage of those employed in factories in free trade zones, many working for less than minimum wages. In Egypt, women workers were at the forefront of a strike wave in 2007-2008, calling for better pay and conditions, which involved hundreds of thousands of workers around the country.³⁵

3.2 Wage Discrimination against Women

Formal wage discrimination between men and women officially does not occur in the public sector. Some private-sector firms do practice wage discrimination between men and women. However, in both the public and the private sectors, de facto wage discrimination is common because women often work in segregated or overwhelmingly female departments with lower-paid job classifications than men with equivalent educational background and work experience. Public advertisements for jobs in newspapers commonly specify that an employer is seeking a male or a female to fill the position.³⁶ The more common problem of gender-segregated job classifications is evident at Ghazl al-Mahalla. All the production workers in the ready-to-wear department of the factory are women. Their basic wage is consistently lower than that of male production workers in other departments (spinning, weaving, bleaching, etc.).³⁷ According to Widad Dimirdash, formerly a production worker in the ready-to-wear clothing division, women receive E£150 (about US\$26.80) per month less than men who work the same number of hours per day doing work which required the same skill levels. But the jobs are classified differently to justify the disparity.³⁸ At the Hennawi Tobacco Company, a private-sector firm in Damanhur, all of the male workers process tobacco for water pipes and cigarettes. All the women work in scaling, packing, and wrapping the tobacco. The women's jobs all pay less than the men's.³⁹

The marginalization of women in the officially recognized trade union structures is very pronounced. In the 2001-2006 trade union elections women won 4 percent of the local union committee positions, 1.5 percent of the local union presidencies, and 2 percent of the positions on the executive boards of general unions.⁴⁰ There were no women on the ETUF executive committee for half the 2001-2006 term, and none were elected in 2006. The minimal representation of women at all levels of leadership in the officially recognized trade unions very likely explains why only 2.33 percent of the 600 women in the three industrial sectors (textiles, chemical products, and electronics) in the sample studied by the New Woman Foundation went to their local trade union committee if they had a grievance at work.⁴¹ On the other hand, nearly 27 percent had engaged in a strike or some form of collective action to make demands on their employers, showing a potentially significant pent-up demand for real labor organizing and activism that bodes well for the future.⁵³⁴²

Egypt has ratified both the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), Convention, 1958 (No. 111), in 1960. Egypt also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. Article 40 of the amended 1980 Constitution states: "All citizens are equal before the law. They have equal public rights and duties without discrimination between them based on race, ethnic origin, language, religion or creed." Article 35 of the Unified Labor Law, prohibits discrimination in wages on the basis of "sex, origin, language, religion, or creed" but does not specify a penalty for violation of the law. Egyptian women have fought throughout the twentieth century for equality in society and equal protection under the law. They have often set an example for women in neighboring Arab countries. Despite these struggles, violations of women's basic human rights continue in Egypt, regardless of the government's ratification of international conventions committed to ending such discrimination.⁴³

³⁵ Ibid, p. 7. Also Look at Carolyn Barnett, Egypt: Fighting for Women's Rights in the Aftermath of the Revolution, WLML June 2011, <http://www.wluml.org/node/7255> (accessed 26/6/11).

³⁶ Ibid, Justice for All, p. 70.

³⁷ Joel Beinin, (2008) interview with two women workers, Mahalla al-Kubra.

³⁸ Egyptian Trade Union and Workers Watch, report for November 2008, "I'tisam 'ummal al-mahallabi'l-ittihad al-'amm li-'ummalmistr."

³⁹ A'isha Abu Sammada, Testimony in the video. "Hikayatkullyawm."

⁴⁰ Badr, Nisa' fi suq al-'amal, p. 73

⁴¹ Ibid, p.206

⁴² Ibid, p. 209

⁴³ Ibid, Justice For All, p. 71.

4. Egyptian Children and Deprivation of Economic Rights

Children have a right to a childhood in which they can safely learn, play, enjoy full health and develop to their potential. These rights of children are part of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that Egypt ratified; however, nearly 20 years later and after years of market-led economic growth, we are still far from fulfilling children's rights and creating a world fit for children.

4.1 Children and Poverty

According to the 2008-09 Household Income Expenditure and Consumption Survey (HIECS) by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAP MAS), there are 7.03 million children who live in households that spend less than the minimum level needed to meet basic needs; that is one out of five Egyptian children is income poor.⁴⁴ "Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society" (UN ICEF, 2005). Egypt is among the first signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child being one of the six initiators of the first World Summit for Children. Over the past three decades, Egypt's economic and social indicators have improved significantly, and its Human Development Index ranking increased by almost 50 percent, moving it from the low to medium development group (120 out of 177 countries). However, economic growth has not yet translated into sustainable improvement of Egyptians' well-being, and poverty persists. In relation to children specifically, the Presidential Declaration of the Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child (2000-2010) placed children at the forefront of the development agenda. Despite this progress sub-national disparities persist, particularly in Upper Egypt, where 25 million people (37 percent of the population) reside.⁴⁵ Reports show that millions of Egyptian children live in poverty and are deprived of their rights to be children.

The number of children experiencing income poverty is increasing and in 2009 the number of poor households with children exceeded 1996 levels; 23 percent of children under age 15 years in Egypt were living in income poverty. This is even higher among children between 10-14 years (26 percent) and young adults between 15 and 19 years (28 percent). Furthermore, more than 7 million children live deprived of one or more of their rights to be children and enjoy their childhoods. Around 5 million children are deprived of appropriate housing conditions (including shelter, water and sanitation) and 1.6 million children under 5 years suffer health and food deprivation.⁴⁶ Studies showed that poverty is the main reason behind the child labor phenomena, where families send their children to work to help increase the family's income to a minimum that permits them to survive in most cases, while this only helps to increase poverty on the long-term since it prevents the children from getting a proper level of education that can enable them later to find more suitable working chances with a higher income, and better working conditions. Poverty also makes of the child a cheap goodie that attracts the employers, and hence increasing the unemployment rates among adults. They are considered as better workers than adults because they are more obedient and easier to control, accept lower wages and are the right height for inspecting cotton plants.⁴⁷ Poverty is also one of the main reasons for escaping education. Dropping out of schools and the deteriorated educations are among the reasons behind child labor in the country side. This phenomenon is wide spread in the Egyptian country side especially for girls, mainly because of the increase of the educational tools and expensive like school clothes, books, transportation, private lessons and in the addition to the classrooms which is packed with a lot of students (65 student in every class), which force the poor families to get their children out of school and driving them into the working market.⁴⁸

4.2 Child Labor

Egypt was one of the first 20 countries to ratify the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it was among the initiators of the 1990 Summit for Children.

⁴⁴Child Poverty and disparities in Egypt Building the Social Infrastructure for Egypt's Future, United Nations Children's Fund (UN ICEF), Egypt, February 2010

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷Itani, Nadia,(2009), Child Labor in Egypt, Master thesis (Abstract), University of Southern Denmark, Faculty of Humanities. Pp. 3-4.

⁴⁸Ibid, pp.3-4.

The ILO International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) has been active in Egypt since 1996.⁴⁹ In 1999 Egypt ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Work, which set the minimum employment age at 14 years.⁵⁰ Moreover, Egypt ratified and ILO convention No. 182 (convention concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor). Accurate statistical data on child labor in Egypt is limited the Official statistics vary but, in general the number of working children in Egypt is estimated to be between 1.3 to 3 million. They are accepting the lowest wages and the hard and inhuman working conditions. Child labors in Egypt are divided between different sectors with the agricultural sector representing the highest percentage 77.7 per cent. (In the industrial sector 14, 9 %, in the commercial 6 %, in the service sector 1.14%).⁵¹ In terms of absolute numbers, the workforce includes an estimated 2.7 million children aged 5-14 (out of approximately 40.3 million in that age group).⁵² The highest proportion of child labor is in the upper- Egyptian governorate of Fayyum, where 228,884 (44.17 percent) children work; seventy-eight percent of them work in agriculture.⁵³

According to ILO conventions on child labor, children aged 12-14 should perform only “light work,” as defined by the ILO. There are many aspects and forms of Child labor in the Egyptian country side as children work in farms especially in the cotton and rice farms during the harvest season; farming exposes them to deadly pesticides, as their bodies easily absorb these dangerous chemicals.⁵⁴ The children in the cotton fields work for about 5 to 7 pounds per day, and their ages vary from 7 to 15 years, they don’t enjoy legal protections, social insurance or official supervision. Most of the child workers in Egypt are employed in seasonal work in the cotton fields, during the summer holiday months of July and August. The minister of agriculture fails to uphold the legal minimum age of 12 for seasonal training. Each year over one million children between the ages of seven and twelve are hired by Egypt’s agricultural cooperatives to take part in cotton pest management.⁵⁵ Employed under the authority of Egypt’s agriculture ministry, most are well below Egypt’s minimum age of twelve for seasonal agricultural work. They work eleven hours a day, including a one to two hour break, seven days a week—far in excess of limits set by the Egyptian Child Law; they also face routine beatings by their foremen, as well as exposure to heat and pesticides.⁵⁶ These conditions violate Egypt’s obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children from ill treatment and hazardous employment. In the agricultural they work many hours that expand between sunrise and sunset, such as crops gathering and looking after domestic animals. About half of all working children are employed in the agricultural sector, mostly in cotton production.⁵⁷ In addition to potentially dangerous work in agriculture, children aged 4-15 make up 25 percent of the work force in leather tanneries in old Cairo.⁵⁸ Hundreds of children work making mud bricks at a site 50 kilometers south of Cairo, where they earn E£25 (about US\$4.45) a day loading bricks onto donkeys.⁵⁹ Children also work in pottery kilns, metal and copper workshops, automobile repair workshops, construction sites, and stone quarries.⁶⁰ Many children also work in the informal economy as domestic workers. They are not protected by any legislation, as the Unified Labor Law does not apply to domestic workers—adults or children.⁶¹

⁴⁹ International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor,” www.ilo.org/ipecc/programme/lang—en/index.htm

⁵⁰ ILO List of Ratifications of International Labor Conventions, <http://webfusion.ilo.org>

⁵¹ The annual activity report f (2007).

⁵² U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2008: Egypt*, February 25, 2009, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm.

⁵³ Egyptian Center for Development and Institutional Support and Save the Children, “Children Labour Distribution, Fayyum Governorate,” July 2008.

⁵⁴ Itani , Nadia, *ibid*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2

⁵⁷ Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, “Child Labour in Egypt,” July 8, 2008 <http://ecwronline.org/pub/childLabourInEgypt.pdf>

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, “Egypt,” www.dol.gov/ILAB/media/reports/iclp/tda2004/egypt.htm.

⁶¹ Unified Labor Law, Book 1, Article 4.

Rural families commonly send their daughters to cities to work as domestic servants in the homes of wealthy families whom they may know as their current or former land- lords or through a distant relationship. The girls are particularly susceptible to physical and sexual abuse, long work hours, and other forms of exploitation, because they work in private homes, often without explicit contractual arrangements. Their physical isolation removes them from public scrutiny.⁶² The girls are particularly susceptible to physical and sexual abuse, long work hours, and other forms of exploitation, because they work in private homes, often without explicit contractual arrangements. Their physical isolation removes them from public scrutiny.⁶³ Because children are often compelled to work by economic hardship to provide their families with additional income, they sometimes run away from their parents' homes to escape mistreatment by their employers.⁶⁴ The conditions endured by child quarry workers in the southern governorate of Minya (Minya is Egypt's second poorest governorate) speak volumes about child labor in Egypt. Agricultural land is scarce and unemployment is high, pushing men and boys to seek hazardous work in quarries, which are the leading centers of limestone production in Egypt. About 250 of the quarries are licensed by the Minya governorate. Work in the unlicensed quarries is unregulated and part of the informal economy; about 17,000 to 20,000 people work in 650 to 700 limestone quarries on the east bank of the Nile River in and around the governorate's capital of Minya city. Among them are 2,000-3,000 children under the age of 16, some as young as 7.⁶⁵ About 35 percent have dropped out of school to work full time; others try to combine work and schooling, but their education is jeopardized by their work in the quarries. Fifty of the quarry owners have signed a pledge not to employ children, but poverty impels many families to allow their children to work in the quarries. Quarry owners have an incentive to employ children, because they receive a wage of E£25-30 (about US\$4.50-5.35) for a 10-12-hour day, half as much as adult workers.⁶⁶

With assistance from the Nile Valley Organization, an Egyptian development and human rights organization focusing on Minya, the workers established a local union committee in 2003. Although it is duly registered with the national Mining and Mineral Workers' Federation, an ETUF affiliate, the committee is weak because its union does not have a local office. Moreover, there is no dues check-off for those employed in the informal economy, and since children under the age of 16 cannot join unions, the union cannot legally represent them.⁶⁷ Moreover, Egypt's adoption of the Child law in 1996 then the new amendment in 2003 represented an important step toward the fulfillment of its obligations as a party to the convention on the rights of the child; nevertheless, the government of Egypt undermined its commitment to the child laws enforcement by permitting cooperatives to employ children well below the minimum age for seasonal agricultural employment and without regard for the law's provisions governing the days and hours of children's work.⁶⁸ The child law passed in 1996 prohibits the employment of children below 14; however it allows governors in agreement with the minister of education to permit the employment of children between 12 to 14 years in seasonal work deemed not harmful to health or effecting school attendance and 12 to 14 years may also participate in vocational training.⁶⁹ However there are deficiencies in the contextual or theoretical legal protection because the law does not cover children's work in domestic service and family undertakings and the agricultural fields, hence there is also a clear weakness in the enforcement of the current law.

5. Conclusion

Similar to other revolutions, the triggering reasons of the 25th of January revolution were mainly the impacts economic turmoil caused mainly by social injustices incurred by a large proportion of the Egyptian population, specially workers, women and children. From 1952 to the 2011 the successive regimes were responsible for the increase of the increasing domestic and external debt which reached under former president Mohammed Morsi its highest. Egypt's gross domestic debts rose by almost 24 percent in the fiscal year (FY) 2012/13, reaching LE1.5 trillion (approximately \$217.8 billion), according to the Central Bank of Egypt's (CBE) September bulletin.

⁶²Rashed, Dena, "Born an Adult," Al-Ahram Weekly Online, June 19-25, 2003, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg>.

⁶³ UNICEF, Atfalkharj 'itar al-himaya: dirasata'miqiyya 'an atfal al-shawari' fi al-qahira al-kubra (Children Beyond the Boundaries of Protection, An In-depth Study of Street Children in Greater Cairo), pp. 14-15

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵ IRIN Report, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, www.irinnews.org/report.aspx

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, Child Poverty and disparities in Egypt

⁶⁸ Itani, Nadia, *ibid*, p. 2

⁶⁹ Ibid, p 2

CBE added that gross domestic debts amounted to 87.5% of the GDP for the same fiscal year. Egypt external debts registered some \$ 43.2 billion at the end of FY 2012/13, representing an approximate 25% rise from the previous FY21011/12.⁷⁰The resulting lack of fluidity split the population into two extreme groups: the majority of Egyptians, surviving at, below, or just above the poverty line, and members of the for me regime, accompanied by ultra-affluent business tycoons and another minority of second-tier nouveaux-riches who monopolized economic opportunities, power, and privileges.⁷¹Between 1990 and 2009, the unemployment rate in Egypt hovered at around 8 to 11 percent, due in large part to the appearance of disproportionately large cohorts of citizens between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.⁷² This youth bulge, making up such a large portion of those active in the labor market, exacerbated the impact of high unemployment in Egypt, pushing more and more Egyptians into the depths of poverty.

The concept of “social justice” is an umbrella term covering everything from civil rights to economic equality through the redistribution of wealth. Still, the idea of social justice is able to stand independent of the ideals of generous freedoms and a thriving economy because it refers not simply to an excellent state of being but an equal one.⁷³ According to the idea of social justice, all people are born with equal human dignity and therefore should share in both trial and triumph, whether social, economic, or political; this principle may be the most important contributor to the long-brewing fury of the Egyptian revolution because while most people, mainly workers, in fact were suffering the miserly existence described above, toiling for a meager wage and pursuing legitimate channels of representation, which could not even provide the most basic economic and political necessities, and being silenced for demanding change, others sat atop pedestals of gold and watched the great tapestry of Egypt unravel, thread by feeble thread.⁷⁴ Another examples of a lack of social justice in Egypt is found in its tremendous mistreatment of women though it is important to emphasize that this discrimination, something deeply ingrained in Middle Eastern society, came not so much as a conscious choice but as an accumulation of consequential aspects of Egyptian life, for example, women are concentrated in the lower-paid job classifications and lower-paying firms and typically make nearly 30 percent less than men, though this is due more to differences in education and experience than outright discrimination.⁷⁵

Taking this into account, it is easy to see how inflation, unemployment, and low wages came to impact women with a particular magnitude in the decay of the Egyptian economy, especially after the decline of the public sectors, with women experiencing “much higher rates of unemployment than men because public sector wage and employment policies are relatively woman-friendly.”⁷⁶ The inhumane treatment of one particular group extended well beyond women; children, for instance, suffer from large inequalities and growing disparities, growing child poverty, inadequate support to families and harsh working conditions with very low rate of wages. All of the above mentioned sufferings incurred by workers, women and children met very fragile response on behalf of the Egyptian successive governments. the grotesque picture is painted complete. The social, economic, and political atrocities that occurred in Egypt prior to the revolution were not random misfortunes made worse by “bad timing,” but a systematic and merciless power grab on the part of the ruling regime; it becomes apparent that “the issue was not simply low wages, or collapsing healthcare, or the failing education system, but perceptions that these phenomena were related to government failures, chronic corruption and an abandonment of state responsibilities.”⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Ahran Online, Thursday 24 Oct 2013.

⁷¹ Kandeel, A. A. (2011). Egypt at a Crossroads. Middle East Policy, pp 37-45.

⁷² LaGraffe, D. (2012). The Youth Bulge in Egypt: An Intersection of Demographics, Security, and the Arab Spring. Journal of Strategic Security, 65-80.

⁷³ Wright, Katie Bridget, (2102), Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice: Understanding the Egyptian Revolution, Lake Forest College Publications, pp.1-11.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Beinin, J. (2012). Egyptian Workers and January 25th: A Social Movement in a Historical Context. Social Research, pp.323-348.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kinninmont, J. (2012). ‘Bread, Dignity and Social Justice’: The Political Economy of Egypt's Transition. Middle East and North Africa Programme, pp. 1-20.

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