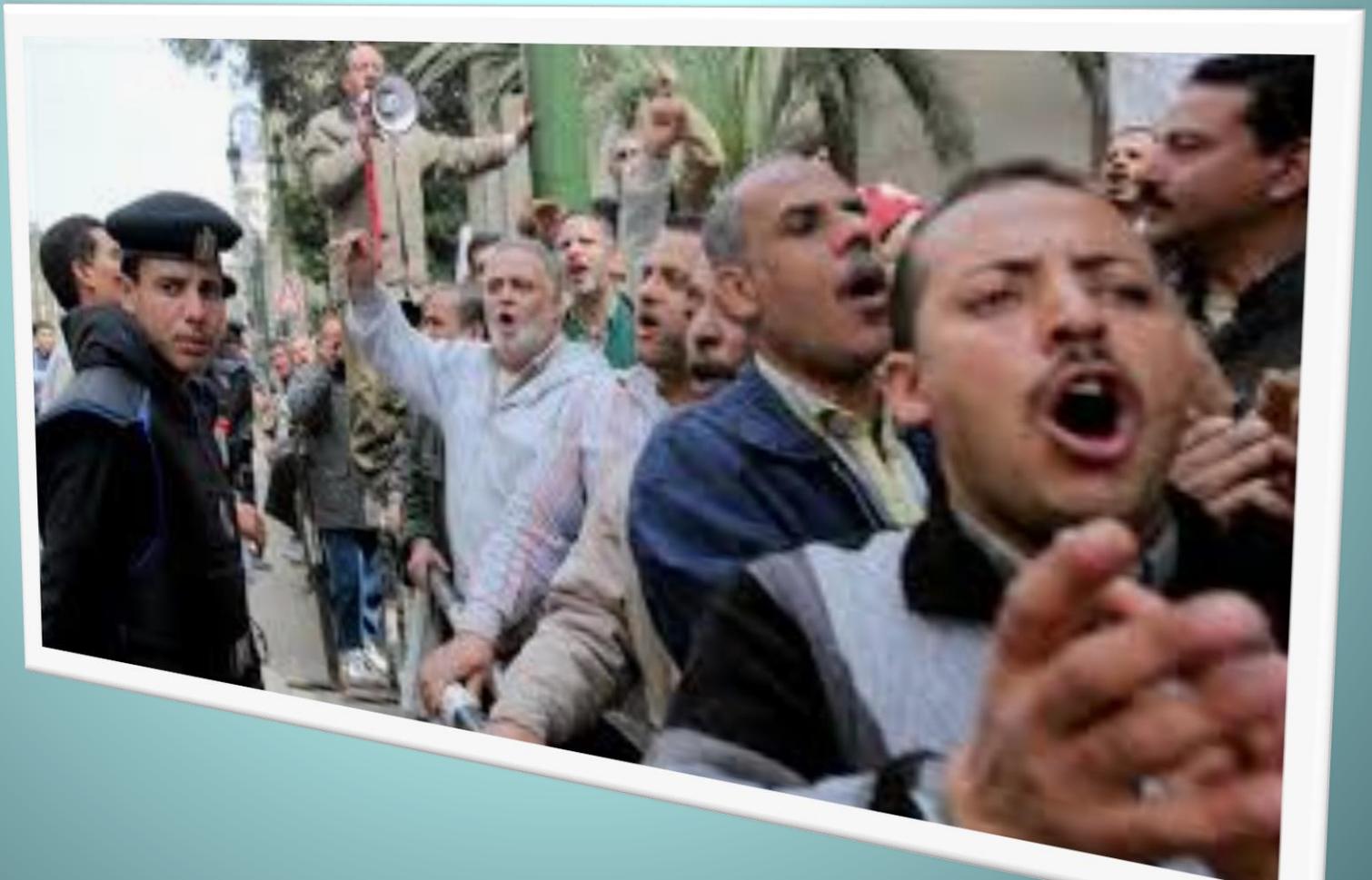


# Seeking an Illusion

**The New  
Trade Union  
Quest for a  
New Social  
Contract  
after 2011**



# Introduction



# Labor Protests before the 2011 Uprising:

- **The acceleration of the Neoliberal economics policies under Ahmed Nazif government (2004-2011) has led to the rise of inequalities.**
- **Thus starting from 2006 to 2010 Egypt has experienced the strongest wave of workers protests since the end of the 40s.**
- **This wave included blue-collar workers as well as State's employees.**

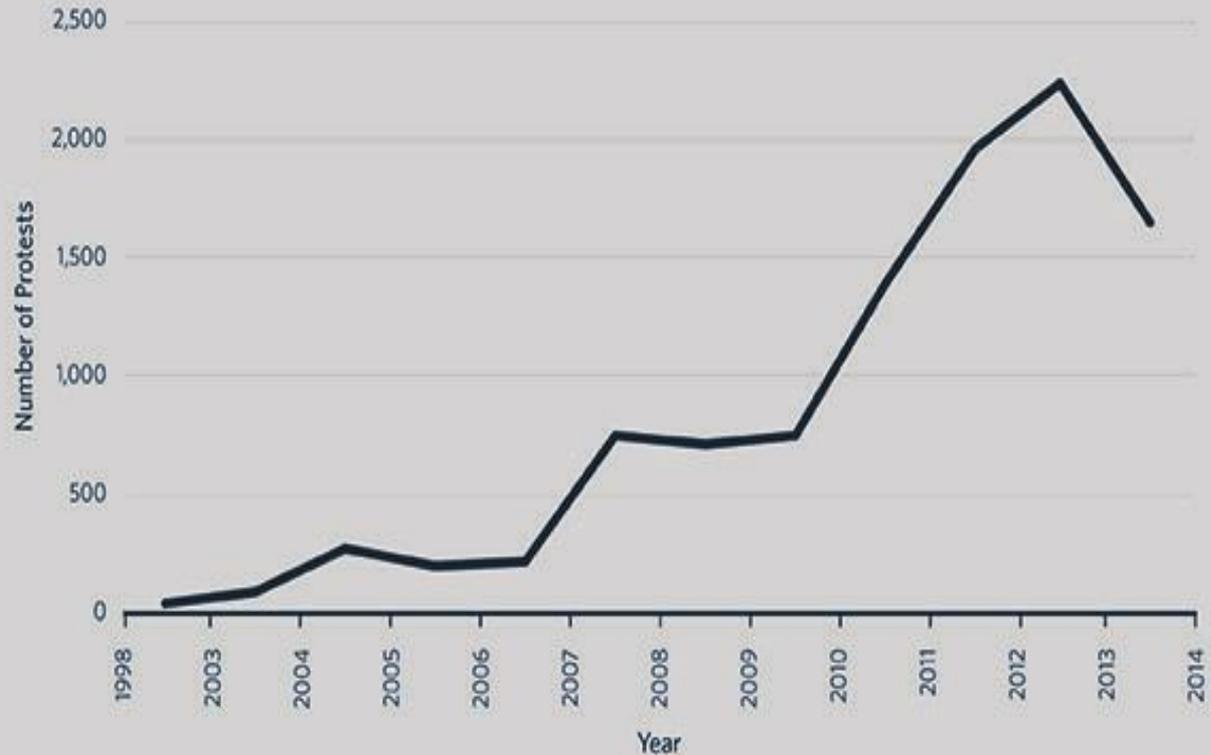


# Increase of Labor Protests starting from 2005/2006:

Year	Workers Protests
2005	202
2006	222
2007	614
2008	609
2009	700
2010	584

**2004- 2008, more than 1.7 million workers participated in collective actions.**

Figure 1. Labor Protests From 1998 to 2014



Sources: data collected by the authors from reports by the Land Center for Human Rights in Cairo: *Labor Protest in Egypt 1998-2000* [in Arabic] (June 2001); *Labor Condition in Egypt in 2003* [in Arabic] (January 2004); *Labor Strike in the Face of Looting and Corruption in 2006* [in Arabic] (July 2007); *Labor Protest: Government Negligence and the Reform Talk: The First Half of 2005* [in Arabic] (August 2005), and *What Have Workers Gained from Privatization: The Second Half of 2005* [in Arabic] (2006); see [www.lchr-og.org/archive](http://www.lchr-og.org/archive).

# State and Labor before 2011: Which Pact?

- The Post Colonial State Labour relations were based on a patron-client relationship : the State's role was to guarantee the workers a certain standard of living. In return, workers should provide the State with political support and production.
- For this purpose, a “State-Corporatist” structure was adopted. Nasser founded ETUF to regroup labour and also to co-opt them.



# Defective Cooptation...

- The disconnection between the coopted ETUF leaders and rank and file workers pushed the workers to search for alternative channels to address their grievances.
- Hence, few new trade unions have even emerged out of the frame of ETUF before the 2011 uprising.
- The most famous example is the foundation of the new trade union of the State employees of the real estate tax collector in 2009 by the movement's leader Kamal Abu-Eita.



# Labour and 2011 Uprising:

- The Egyptian labour movement has played a decisive role in the 2011 Uprising.
- When on Feb 7, 2011 the workers strikes escalated and spread, the political scene has fully changed in favour of the revolution.



## After 2011 ?

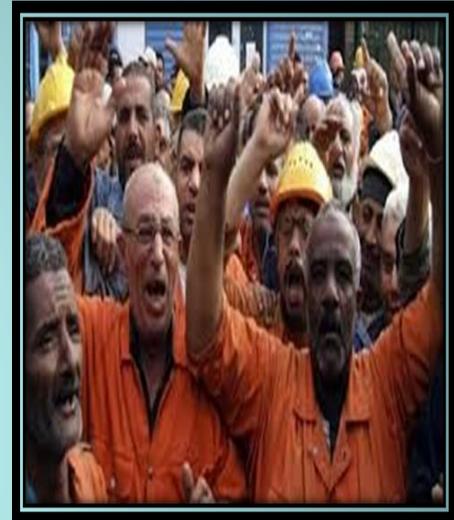
### Political Opportunities and Constraints:

- The relative opening of the political space that followed the uprising was a PO for the workers. Hundreds of New Trade Unions emerged quickly.
- However, the Egyptian labor movement turned from being an important driver of change during the destabilization of authoritarian rule to a weaker & politically marginalized actor during the post-revolutionary period after 2011.



# Main Question:

- Why was the new trade union movement unable, after 2011, to build a new inclusionary social contract (or a new pattern of State-labour relations)?



# Methodology:

- **Around 30 semi-structured interviews with labour leaders, labour activists and journalists (Period: 2011-2015).**
- **Qualitative content analysis of government statements & newspapers' data.**



## **Framework of Analysis:**

- **The Political Process Model (PPM) which is one of the prominent schools of the Social Movement Theory.**
- **This model was built around three concepts:**
  - **(1) The Structure of Political Opportunities,**
  - **(2) The Mobilization Structures & Internal Organization.**
  - **(3) The Collective Action Framing Process.**

# Outline:

- **(1) The Internal Characteristics of the New Trade Union Movement (Social Resources, Organizational Structures and Leadership).**
- **(2) Its Position in Relation to its “Competitor” ETUF. (Dynamics of Contentious Interaction between the Movement & the Political Authorities over the New Trade Union Law).**
- **(3) Its Relation to its “Socio-Political Allies”.**
- **(4) Its Collective Action Frame.**

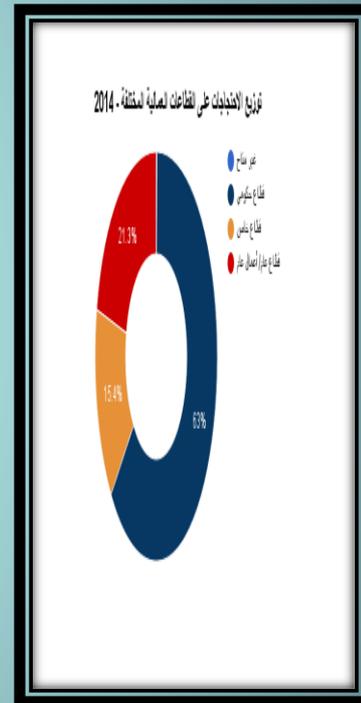
# (1) The Movement's Internal Characteristics :

- (a) Socio-economic Base.
- (b) Internal Organization.
- (c) Leadership.



## (a) Socio-economic Base:

- In fact, the New trade Union Movement has a strong presence (with a corresponding capacity of collective action) among civil servants and service public sector workers. However it remains weak among industrial workers and in the private sector.
- As the figure shows, in 2014, 63% of labor protests were organized by Civil Servants while 21,3% of labor protests were organized by service public sector and 15.4% were organized in the private sector.
- The strength of the civil servants' trade unions (such as the real estate tax collectors) can be explained by the fact that they rely on a previous organizational structure which is based on previous collective actions organized during the Mubarak era.



# A Success Story after 2011?

The organized civil servants (namely the real estate tax collectors) succeeded through organizing collective protests and lobbying on the parliament to push the later in Jan. 2016 to reject the draft Civil Service Law No. 18 of 2015 which was decreasing their wages.



# Obstacles in the Public Industrial Sector:

- **In the Public Industrial Sector, blue collars remain mostly organized under ETUF umbrella.**
- **Reasons:**
- **ETUF's Special assets (such as hospitals, clubs and facilitations for beach holidays).**
- **ETUF's Social funds (provide social security services to the affiliated members, and pensions for their retirement).**

# Obstacles for New Trade Unions in Private Sector:

- **The Private Sector regroups the majority of Egypt's workers (around 73 % of the Egyptian workforce in 2011). New unions have some significant presence in the textile private sector & in the petrol industrial private sector. However, the new labor movement faces several challenges in the private sector:**
- **Weakness of the State of Law** since workers risk of getting fired if they engage in any sort of labour activism.
- **Structure & Wage work** since the private sector is predominated by small firms which are likely to have irregular and informal employees.
- **Topography of the New Factories**, the fact of being smaller in size and geographically scattered makes it more difficult for the workers to exert influence in the national level.

# Result...?

- **This lack of social penetration reduces their capacity to defend the interests and rights of their members & their ability to push for change in terms of their relation with the State.**

## (b) Internal Organization:

- The New Union Federation suffers from a structural and democratic deficit as well as a lack of national funding.
- **Most important Labour Federations?**
  - (1) The Egyptian Federation for Independent Trade Unions (EFITU),
  - (2) The Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC).



# Constraints and Dilemmas:

- **(1) Structural Dilemma:** Their leader had to decide whether they should directly start to organize the newly emerging local unions into a nation-wide federation for the sake of being able to negotiate with the authorities in the name of a certain defined group; or whether they should focus first and for a certain period of time, on only building powerful local unions?
- **(2) Democratic Dilemma:** Here, the question was whether federations should conduct early elections with a view to building a democratic institution or if they should appoint experienced labor leaders and thus temporally sacrifice democracy for the sake of effectivity?
- **(3) Financial Dilemma:** They quickly had to decide whether to accept external support at the risk of being discredited by the authorities or whether to refuse such foreign help and thus lose needed technical and/or logistical assistance?

# Responses to Dilemmas :

Which choices?



## **(a) Structural Constraint:**

- **EFITU:** EFITU's chose a top-down approach and sought to incorporate as many as possible of the newly founded trade unions. However, this has created a lag between its institutional capacity for coordination and the increasing number of unions and splits occurred.

**By contrast,**

- **EDLC:** The NGO Center for Trade Unions and Workers' Services (CTUWS), that would later establish EDLC, pursued the opposite strategy. Yet, this hasn't protected the organization from continuous instability either.

## **(b) Democracy Constraint:**

- **In EFITU:** right after its official foundation, EFITU held internal elections. This short time frame privileged those labor leaders that were best known to the members but who were not necessarily the most efficient. As a result, the federation's legitimacy was affected and internal power struggles emerged.
- **By contrast,**
- **In EDLC:** pursued the opposite approach. This did not prevent power struggles, but it has provided the organization with better means to deal with internal differences.

## **(c) Foreign Support Dilemma:**

- **Both federations were hardly able to mobilize the funds needed to cover basic costs.**
- **While **Foreign Support** was crucial for new trade unions, it generated problems such as:**
  - **Direct financial support from the outside weakened the internal solidarity among the workers.**
  - **It has also increased internal competition for travel and training opportunities.**
- **Hence, the mechanism of dependency remained although the mentor has changed.**

## **(c) Leadership:**

The dependence of the movement on these two leaders constrained it because of several reasons:

**(1) Lack of Unity:** both have refused to unite in one national Federation.

**(2) Lack of Institutional Mechanisms:** EFITU was based on Abu Eita's Charisma who failed to establish institutional mechanism for dealing with conflicts which has especially increased when he was appointed Minister of Labor in July 2013.

**(3) Interference:** the interference of CTUWS headed by Abbas on its internal affairs prevented the development of internal mechanisms of democracy, and also hindered the capacity of the federation to work autonomously.



## Result...?

- **In sum these dilemmas help to understand why Egypt's new trade unions led - with different degrees- to an organizationally weak & only partially representative movement that lacks the institutional capacity to exert a significant influence on the authorities.**

## (2) The New Trade Union Movement Position in Relation to ETUF : its “Competitor”.

- (a) Dynamics of Contentious Interaction under the Morsi’s rule.
- (b) Dynamics of Contentious Interaction under the current Regime.



## State Corporatism & Constraints on New Unions after 2011:

- Although the 2011 uprising created an opportunity to re-negotiate the rules of labor representation and build a new Pattern of State- Labor relation,
- the successive governments have followed after 2011 the agenda of their predecessors: they combined a neoliberal agenda with labor containment through State corporatism.



# MB Strategy for Labor Containment:

- The Morsi gov. who adopted a liberal economic agenda was in need to take unpopular economic decisions and thus to constrain the labor's potential to resist them.
- Hence, the new Minister of Labour adopted a new draft law for trade unions that strengthened ETUF's position vis-à-vis the new unions.



# The New Trade Union Movement Counter-Strategy of Resistance :

- **(1) Organizing Press Conferences and Releasing Statements** where they their rejection of the Morsi's government new trade union law.
- **(2) Channelling their demand of an alternative law through Political Channels** namely through allying with the secular opposition (NSF) in order to ensure that the later will support the trade union law in the next parliament in March - April 2013. However, the parliamentary elections were postponed.

# The Military-led Regime Strategy:

- **Following President Morsi's ouster in July 2013, the new military-led gov. stances' made the balance of power even more unfavorable to the new trade union movement.**
- **The regime sought to liberalize some aspects of the economy at the expense of workers' interests & re-establishing ETUF's monopoly on labor representation.**



**July 2013:** despite the appointment of **Abu Eita** as Minister of Labour, he was not able to enforce the adoption of a new trade union law.

**Since then:** the successive ministers of labour qualified the new unions as illegal entities and proposed several versions of laws which constrained their right to organize.

# The Movement's Counter Strategy of Resistance:

- **(1) Channelling its claim through Political Channels:**
- Under the auspices of The NGO Center for Trade Unions and Workers' Services (CTUWS), the "Workers' Bloc" (membership of 120 unions) was formed July 2014. Its objective was to participate the the electoral lists (*sahwit masr*) and channel through it their demand of a new trade union law in the parliament.
- **(2) Lobbying and Exerting Pressure:**
- Lobbying Internally on Executive & Legislative Institutions.
- Lobbying Externally on Foreign Institution namely the ILO.

# Result.. ?

- **All remains pending! Neither the New Trade Union movement succeed to push the regime to issue a new trade union law nor the regime (who already faces a difficult economic situation) took the decision to send the trade union draft law restricting new trade unions to the Parliament.**
- **Today, the new trade unions remains “constitutional” but “illegal” organizations, while, a State-controlled ETUF re-turned to its pre-2011 dual role as representative to both the State and the Workers.**

### (3) Relation with Socio-Political Allies

- (a) Relations to Political Organizations under Morsi's Rule.
- (b) Relations to Political Organizations under Al-Sisi Regime.



# Relations with Political Organizations:

- In post-revolutionary times, the linkage between trade unions and political parties should be advantageous as it must provide the parties with political support and offer the labour a channel to advance its claims and push for their achievement.
- However, in Egypt, labor leaders remain cautious with regard to establishing broader political alliances. In fact, due to the weakness of the political parties, these alliances offer little to the new trade union federations in terms of channeling workers' demands in the political sphere.
- **Exceptions after 2011?** The new trade union movement has chosen to ally with political organizations under specific circumstances. **When?** (1) Communication and negotiation with the state broke down and/or, (2) When such an alliance was seen even temporarily as mutually beneficial.

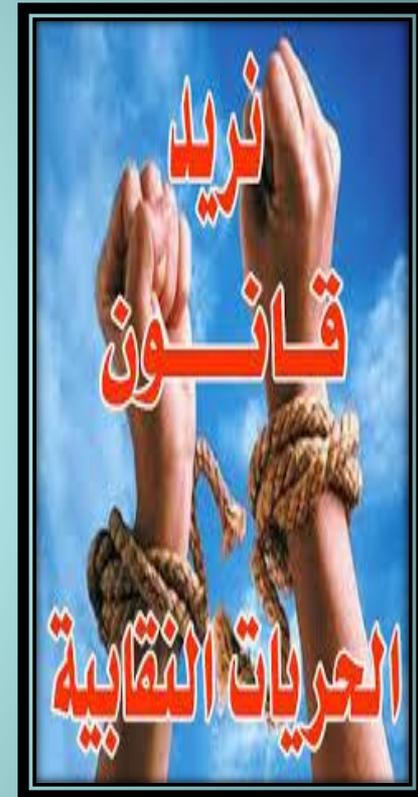
# Ephemeral change under Morsi?

- The break of all ways of negotiations between the Minister of Labour and the new trade unions with regards to new unions' freedoms,
- **Alliance with NSF:** pushed the new union movement to ally in early 2012 with the secular opposition in order to ensure that the later will support the trade union law in the next parliament.
- **30<sup>th</sup> of June Uprising:** as a consequence of the negotiations' blockage and the change of cost benefit analysis regarding the participation in street politics, the new trade unions federations responded, positively to the call launched by the (Tamarod) movement.



# Relative Change under Al-Sisi?

- Again with the deadlock of the negotiations with regard to the trade union law, several initiatives were launched by either the movement or by its political allies :
- **Workers' Bloc:** the “Workers’ Bloc” (with a membership of 120 unions) in July 2014.
- **The Campaign “Together for Unions’ Freedoms (*maa’n lel-huriat al-nikabyia*)** which was initially launched by (*al-eish wal horia*) leftist party. Actually, the campaign and the solidarity of the political forces was greeted by a new trade union movement that feels an existential threat.



# Result?

- **In sum, the new union movement's contentious interaction with the State after 2011 has led to a pragmatic, yet very gradual change in its relationship with political organizations.**
- **However, the fact that these alliances offer little to the new trade union federations in terms of a possibility to channel the workers' demands in the political sphere, is weakening the movement even more.**

## (4) Collective Action Frames:

- While the emergence of the new trade union movement was based in pre-2011 on a narrow agenda of specific socioeconomic demands, after 2011, the independent trade unions **broadened their agenda** to include politico-institutional demands and broader socioeconomic claims such as the demand for a new trade union law & the claim for a general minimum wage.
- These demands related to freedom of association and social justice enabled the **bridging of claims** with other oppositional organizations as previously mentioned.



## No Challenge to the State though?

Nevertheless the local new trade unions refrained from openly breaking with the State (especially after July 2013). They have continued to frame their demands in strictly economic terms that would not challenge the authorities.

For instance, in 2014, from the 1655 labor protests: 49% of them claimed wage claims whereas 1.5%, claimed right to freely organize and asked for the freedom of trade unionism (ECESR, 2015).



# Analyzing this Narrow Collective Action Frame.. :

- **(1) The relation to politics of Local Labor leaders :** while the top level of the New Unions' Federations includes politicized leaders, most local trade union leaders mainly focus on serving the short-term economic demands of the rank and file workers. Contrary to the 70s and 80s, during which leftist or Nasserite leaders led the labor movement, one can find that the new generation of leaders, at the level of the local federations, is largely depoliticized.
- **(2) The internal disconnection among the Labor's Federations different levels:** while local labor leaders rarely supported the national federations' push for a substantial change in State-labor relations, the weakness of the coordination's mechanisms between local & top levels within these federations, made it impossible to generate consensus around a broader collective action frame.

# Result?

- **The rather narrow nature of the demands raised by the new trade union movement reflects not only:**
  - **(1) the difficult political context in which it operates but also,**
  - **(2) the failure of the movement itself to establish reliable internal structures of coordination & representation.**
- **This situation both reflects and reinforces the relative political isolation of the new trade union movement.**

# Conclusive Remarks:

- **(1) Although the 2011 uprising offered a P.O for new unions, it has posed to the later huge organizational challenges which they were hardly able to confront as they lacked previous organizational structures.**
- **(2) Moreover, the New Unionist Movement emerged in a difficult conjuncture which obliged it not only to interact with rapid political changes but also & simultaneously stage resistance to austerity measures.**
- **(3) These two factors combined to produce a fragmented, organizationally weak and only partially representative movement that remain - until today - unable to resist the repressive State-corporatist State-labor relations.**
- **(4) Egypt's independent labor movement was not only intrinsically weak but also suffered from a lack of reliable alliances. The support its received from political organizations remained sporadic and issue-specific. Here, the movement's narrow collective action frame both reflected and reinforced its relative political isolation.**

# Future Scenarios:

- **(1) Statu quo scenario:** weakly organized labour movement versus a repressive regime.
- **(2) Pessimistic scenario:** social explosion because of lack of tools of channelling grievances while economic pressures on labour increases.
- **(3) Optimistic scenario:** a new generation of labour leaders succeed to organize the movement and change the balance of power.
- “Gramsci said: “The old remains alive and the new is not born yet” ! 😊

# Thanks

for your attention !!

