

A brief historical background about ENR:

On the 12th of July 1851, the first railway road was established in Egypt, it started operating after the Suez Canal opening ceremonies in 1854.

The railway network in Egypt which is still a public sector, joins the whole Nile River delta, and connects most of the inhabited and economic points on the Mediterranean and the Red Seas, with numerous cities in a huge network of extended modern railway roads. It measures approx 6700 km, 4872 km out of them are nonstop, while the rest are stations and block points.

ENR is one of the service sectors of the ministry of transportation, a working member in the Railways International Union, and a member in the Arab Asian Railways union.

ENR employs 86,000 persons in various fields; and is divided administratively into 7 regions, according to its expanding railway network. ENR conducts highly-productive workshops to satisfy the operating requirements and needs, such as maintaining and renovating mobilizing units, buildings, and furniture. ENR also has a printing house and telephone center linking all ENR centers together.

Train drivers:

"Train drivers' work conditions are terribly bad; we did not get our compensations or good wages, not even the commissions, which are estimated per piaster (1/100 EGP, 1\$=5.5 EGP). How could the ENR give us a driving commission with 9 piaster (less than 0.02\$) /kilometer, when a kilo of meat costs 40 pounds (7.5\$)? Prices are multiplied several times, while our salaries have stagnated for such a long time", said William Zaki, vice-president of the train drivers' league.

On Tuesday, the 20th of January 2009, train drivers decided, after several protests, notes and complaints, to strike to get their unpaid driving commissions, which were promised a year ago.

"Our first demand, for the next period, is to pay out the driving commission completely, not into two divisions, in the next July. Our second is to increase the driving commission to 25 piaster (0.05\$)/kilometer, instead of 9 piaster (less than 0.02\$) /kilometer. This commission should be increased because it is a substitute for the effort of the drivers" said William Zaki.

The drivers started a slowly strike, but nothing had been changed. Then, they struck completely, and laid themselves down on the rails, preventing the Turbine train, for 20 min, from getting in the platform no.1 to load passengers.

After the president of ENR had promised to pay the late commissions and monthly 100 pounds (18\$), as a driving commission from the beginning of the next July, The drivers ended their strike. They allotted the president of ENR 10 days as a time limited so that he may provide them the promised commissions, threatening to strike again if the promise was not fulfilled.

The second day, however, the president of ENR said to the press that he will apply only 50% of the driving commission, 100 pounds for first class train drivers and 75 pounds (13.6\$) for 2nd class drivers and 50 pounds (9\$) for 3rd class drivers, and 35 pounds (6.3\$) for 4th class drivers, starting from the next July. Challenging its drivers, ENR issued a strongly-worded press release, harshly admonishing the drivers for undertaking the strike. The press release described the strikers as a little group, and warned the drivers of committing such acts as it negatively affects the work process. ENR threatened that it will not hesitate to punish anyone who threatens to strike again.

The train drivers' league, instead of the official trade union leaders, presented to the Minister of transportation, on their behalf, a note, in which they clarified their refusal to his decision of paying out the driving commission into two divisions, 50% in July 2009 and 50% in January 2010.

"Labor leaders always tell us about the historical battles of the league, especially its role in the big strike in 1986." The member league, Karam Fouad said. The league, as Fouad explained, was under the security pressure since 1986. This weakened the role of the league until the state security ordered to dissolve it. Subsequently, a security order was issued by state security, the league re-carried out its activities. "Now our basic problem in the drivers' league is that there are no free elections. The state security intervenes in the league elections. They want us to talk according to their will, as if they say 'play your role as you want, but we will determine the limits.' It's our right to have free elections." Karam Fouad said.

An assistant to the Interior Minister, Colonel Sad Zaghlol, met the train drivers, in the presence of the chief of GRWTU, Ramadan El Gendy. During the meeting, Egyptian Labor Minister, Asha Abd el Hady called El Gendy and promised him to meet the Minister of Transportation, Mohamed Mansour, in order to convince him to handle the sum of the late driving commissions within ten days. El Gendy repeated to the drivers what the minister had promised. However, till now nothing has happened.

Towers and traffics workers:

"We are the most vulnerable sector in ENR. We spend every night 12 hours in the cold weather, taking the responsibility of watching train course and level crossings. We are looking after thousands of souls, but ENR refuses to improve our financial position," the league member, Akram Fahim said. His fellow in the league, a tower watcher, Reda Rashad explained that any worker who gets a chronic illness is transferred to guarding or cleaning service sector.

"Our demands are to raise the compensation for work risks from 70% to 90%. We asked also to increase our changeable wages and take the fair overtime, and overnight bonuses, plus the compensation for accommodation costs" a train course watcher, Ahmed Abd El Samad said.

"We have been presenting notes to the transportation minister to raise our commissions and compensations for five years, but there has been no response. We sent faxes and telegraphs to the president and prime minister, but no one responded", said Abd El Hafez Taher, a watcher in north Cairo tower.

"A week, before the strike, we presented an official request to the ENR president to raise our inducements equally like drivers, but he neglected it. His deputy came to negotiate with us. We explained to him how badly our financial position is with our wages not exceeding 600 pounds (110\$). He promised to discuss our request in the ENR managers meeting, on the next Monday. Tuesday morning, we got surprised that the managers applied, without a single reason, a 100 pounds (18\$) reduction on each watcher's wage, this led us to protest and strike for our rights," Abd El Hafez added.

Before the strike, 700 workers had protested inside the north and south Cairo operating towers in Ramses station. At 12:30pm, the protesters, with the other watchtowers, turned on the red light all over the railway roads from Alexandria to El Mania in Upper Egypt, announcing their strike. A great number of passengers assembled and returned their tickets back, due to the strike which

paralyzed all scheduled trips.

The negotiations, done by the vice-president of ENR, Hany Hegab, with the strikers, failed. Although Hegab had promised the strikers again to study their requests in the next managers meeting, they argued with him, all the while knowing his promises were hollow and not to be trusted.

The president of ENR, Mahmoud Samy said that ENR has no funds or surplus in cash satisfying the new requests of the workers. He emphasized that ENR was looking to collect 120,000 pounds in cash (approximately \$22,000), to be distributed among 2,500 workers.

At 3:40pm, the worker ended their strike after they received a promise from the Transportation Minister's consultant to answer their requests within two days. If this promise is unfulfilled, the workers threatened to re-strike next Thursday.

The towers and traffics workers' league played a main role in leading the strike. "Sure, the league played a main role, because it was created by the workers themselves. For example Abu Rady workshops strikes in Bani Swief city, were poorly organized and reactionary, because the workers have no league there" Karam Fouad said.

Kum Abu Rady workshops:

On the 2nd of this February, after the towers and traffics workers strike had broken up, another sector of ENR, the workshops and separation sector, was touched with fire. 2,000 workers struck in the Kum Abu Rady workshops managed by Arums, a dependent company of ENR in Bani Swief City. Heads of the company ordered to close the gates of the workshops with chains to prevent the workers from walking to El Wasta, one of Bani Sweif main stations. The strikers laid siege to the administrative building in the workshops, carrying an empty tomb symbolizing the death of the GRWTU committee (a committee carries out general trade union activities in each region, or city) whom they accused of having colluded with Arums.

"We had been oppressed for 30 years. Our commissions never exceeded over 50 pounds (9\$), while a buffeter takes a 2000 pounds (364\$) salary" said Saed Abd El Twab a technician. "Arums took over 180 acres, which ENR specified for our accommodation." Saed added. His fellow, Mahrous Sultan pointed that the engineers of Arums use the workshops, as if they were their own private properties, in designing doors, ploughs and agricultural equipments for their own farms.

The workers asked the central accounting body to monitor commissions' lists before sending them to Cairo. Abd El Twab El Sayed, a worker, complained that supervisors distribute the inducements as they want, which evidently leads to huge gaps between workers and engineers' commissions. Sayed El Gamal, a worker, explained that the engineer's commission, is proximately 4,000 pounds (725\$), while the worker's commission does not exceeded over 50 pounds (9\$).

The workers denied what the president of ENR, Mahmud Samy said, describing them as "Abu Rady riffraff." (Kum Abu Rady workshops are controlled by Mahmud Samy with an iron hand.) Ramadan El Gendy, the chief of GRWTU also failed to convince the workers to stop their strike. Nevertheless, the strikers insisted on attaining their rights before breaking up.

A tower watcher of the Monof – Kafer EL Zayat railroad, Mohammed Sayed Shazly said that 140 signatures had been collected in El Monfeya Governorate, El Kaluybia Governorate and El Gharbiya Governorate to freeze the activities of the trade union committees, because of their

failure in supporting the workers.

“What makes things worse, is that they (the trade union committee) gave a list with the names of labor leaders to the state security, transportation police, and president of ENR to stop them leading the strike,” added Shazly. Waheed El Gandy, a tower technician in El Shohda station, accused the trade union committee of wasting the money of the workers on publishing advertisements in the national newspapers, thanking the transportation minister, ENR heads, and state security for achieving their rights.

The strikers’ demands are to increase commissions, dissolve the trade union committee, return the republic stamp back from Cairo, and cancel the contract with Arums to run the workshops. They asked also to settle the wages of the workers who continued their education, apply the risk and desert compensations like others workshops, and increase the usual subsidy per 7% to the basic wage. The strikers emphasized preparing the medical clinics for emergencies, contracting with Bani Swief and el Fayum hospitals to receive injured or sick cases among workers, no change in official work times, and application of overtime commissions. They requested the removal of the general manager of the workshops and chief of the company for compromising workers .interests and corruption

The strike paralyzed train trips for more than two hours, especially Cairo- Aswan train number 80 and Aswan- Cairo tourist sleeping train number 3163.

Train conductors:

Adel Potrous A train conductor from Asuit city in Upper Egypt, outlined the bad situation of 7,000 train conductors forming the most vulnerable sector in ENR. “Sometimes, I spend continuously 3 days on the train, during which I eat 6 meals. I have been working in ENR for 25 years. I have 6 children, and my salary has never exceeded up 600 pounds (almost 100\$). If I have a problem with a passenger I am subject to a penalty. Whether I leave my work and go for editing a statement or “.release him, my salary will be discounted

“The dangers train conductors are exposed to are many, especially on Menof rail line (a rail line in the Delta). Theft, and attacks with hands, knives, or liquid acid have occurred with a lack of police response. The cops themselves attack any conductor objecting if one of them travels without a ticket. On each train, about 200 policemen travel in groups without tickets or permissions. For instance, on train no.922 departing from Alexandria, there were 300 passengers associated to the interiors ministry who travel daily in a similar manner. There are many statements issued by conductors exposed to such attacks, but nothing changes. Two months ago, our colleague, Mohammed Yousf had been injured in his face; a policeman in the train no.555 attacked him with a knife when he asked him to pay a penalty, and he is still in Menof hospital for recovery. Our colleague Sayed Lotfy was injured too, a rogue attacked him with a knife in Elkalg station, the same thing had happened to our colleague, Yahya Sayed, and no one protected them,” said Gamal Saeed, a train conductor.

“Our financial rights are not attained and we do not even get the infection compensation estimated with 50% to the basic salary. We are walking among lots of people and are exposed to infectious diseases”, Saeed said.

“What ENR leaders talk about waste money, it is ironic because actually they are themselves the reason of the waste due to their haphazard decision-making,” a train conductor, Fathy Mahmud, said. Fathy explained how ENR, after an accident Kalub, a big train accident which took place in the Delta, cancelled 130 trains. “How much would the daily revenues of these trains be now,” he wondered. ENR let the shipping partition to be run by a private company. Although the annual revenues of this partition reached up 15 million pounds, this company raised the shipping fees up to 500%, which led customers to stop dealing with ENR.

In the middle of this corrupted atmosphere and bad work conditions, the role of GRWTU is almost invisible before train conductors who have no supporter except the league. The train conductors’ league guardian, Abd El Raswal El Deeb explained how workers are belonging more to the league than trade union or labor ministry. “Workers trust who is looking after their rights, and the league has a great honored old history in workers struggle for achieving their rights. The league coordinates with the regional trade union committee and GRWTU, and negotiates on behalf of the conductors with ENR heads and trade union representatives,” El Deeb said.

The league plays generally a great role in the life of the worker, not only because of its organizing role, but also for its social role. “The league has a social care fund supervised by the Egyptian institute for insurance censorship, offering financial aids for retired, sick workers, or any worker, or one of his family members, is going to marry. The subscriptions for this fund are not obligatory, 3 pounds (0.5\$) for the assistant worker and 5 pounds (almost 1\$) for the conductor. We collect the subscriptions and put them in an account under the name of the league, in the central bank. We send a representative to withdraw what we need in most cases,” El Deeb said.