

Egypt's Mahalla textile workers say will continue strike on Saturday

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Striking workers say that this is the first time that they have been denied their annual social bonus since 1987

Workers at Egypt's largest textile factory, Mahalla spinning and weaving factory, will continue their strike despite a promise to meet their demands until an official statement is published, workers say. Since last week, around 14,000 workers have been on strike to demand payment of their annual social bonus, denied by the Ministry of Finance for the first time in almost three decades.

"We have been entitled to the social bonus since 1987 and we do not understand why the finance ministry excluded us this year," Mohamed El-Attar, a worker at the factory, told Ahram Online in a phone interview.

In September, President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi issued a decree to pay state employees a social bonus of 10 percent of their basic salaries, starting from July salaries. The decree excludes the six million employees who are subject to the social services law.

The regulations and specifications of the decree were issued by the Ministry of Finance the same week, excluding public sector workers from the bonus.

But the government later announced the social bonus would include textile workers with the exception of Mahalla spinning and weaving and Kafr El-Dawar who later joined the strike, unless they end their strikes.

"We would end our strike once an official pamphlet is published," Faisal Laqousha, another worker at the factory, told Ahram Online by phone.

"Work will not return tomorrow unless workers see an official pamphlet with the decision to include us in this year's social bonus," said El-Attar on Friday when the factory normally stops its operations for the regular weekend.

The Mahalla factory management was not immediately available to comment on Friday but in a phone interview last week the factory's commissioner general told Ahram Online that the strike is threatening the company's obligations to its buyers, adding to its losses.

Workers at the Mahalla spinning and weaving factory get a 7 percent annual raise besides the social bonus, workers clarified.

Egypt's annual inflation rate hit 9.2 percent in September.

Mahalla workers began a wave of strikes in 2006, and again in 2008, in one of the most significant challenges to the Hosni Mubarak regime before the 2011 revolution.

P.S.

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