From Driver of Change to Marginalized Actor: Egypt's New Unionism from a comparative perspective

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Nadine Abdalla and Jonas Wolff[1]

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes why Egypt's labor movement, while having played a significant role in the run-up to the 2011 revolution, has been increasingly marginalized politically ever since, failing to achieve either significant labor-specific gains and/or broader objectives related to the overall process of political transformation. It does so by investigating Egypt's movement of independent trade unions, the most dynamic element within the country's labor movement, from a comparative perspective. Specifically, the paper uses the experience of Brazil's New Unionism in the 1980s as a contrasting case, identifies the factors that have enabled and constrained what is arguably the most successful example of a New Unionist movement in the Global South, and applies this explanatory framework in an in-depth study on the trajectory of Egypt's New Unionism since 2011.

1   INTRODUCTION

In analyzing the wave of popular mobilization that preceded the 2011 revolution in Egypt, scholars have pointed to the crucial role played by labor protests (Abdalla 2012; Beinin 2011; Beinin and Duboc 2013; Bishara 2012). This is in line with an important research tradition in comparative politics that has emphasized the working class in general and organized labor in particular as an important agent in processes of democratization (cf. Collier 1999; Levitsky and Mainwaring 2006; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Valenzuela 1989). With a view to Egypt's post-revolutionary trajectory since 2011, however, observers – while emphasizing a persistent level of labor protests – have noted the weakness of organized labor as well as its failure to either achieve significant labor-specific gains or to influence the country's overall political transformation (cf. Abdalla 2012; Bishara 2014; Ramadan and Adly 2015).

In this paper, we try to make sense of this shift of the Egyptian labor movement from an important driver of change during the destabilization of authoritarian rule to a weak, fragmented and politically marginalized actor during the post-revolutionary negotiation of the transformation process. We do so by analyzing Egypt's New Unionism, the most dynamic element within the country's labor movement, from a comparative perspective that places contemporary experiences in Egypt in the context of social movement research. In particular, we use Brazil in the 1980s as a contrasting case in which independent labor organizations succeeded in emancipating themselves from a state-controlled, corporatist trade union structure to become a prominent social and political actor during the process of democratization (cf. Alexander 2003: 171–202; Antunes and Santana 2014: 11–16; Keck 1992; Rodrigues 1991; Sluyter-Beltrão, Jeffrey 2010; Swavely 1990). Given that Brazil's *novo sindicalismo*, which emerged in the late 1970s in the context of a military dictatorship and rose to prominence in the 1980s during the country's protracted process of controlled democratization, can plausibly be considered the most successful case of a New Unionist movement in the Global South, we make use of the extensive research on this case in order to identify the factors

that have enabled and constrained the emergence and development of this movement. This set of factors is, then, applied as an explanatory framework in order to analyze the trajectory of Egypt's New Unionism since 2011.[2]

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section (2.), the existing scholarship on Brazil's New Unionism is reviewed in order to identify, based on established social movement theories, the factors that have been crucial in shaping the rise of independent labor organizations in this country since the late 1970s and, thereby, develop the explanatory framework that is, then, applied to the case of Egypt. In this section, also, general commonalities and differences between Brazil in the 1980s and contemporary Egypt are discussed in order to justify the comparison of the two cases, while acknowledging its limits. The empirical sections, then, focus on Egypt. Following an overview of the emergence of a New Unionist movement before 2011 and the role of labor protests in the run-up to the Egyptian revolution (3.), we turn to the core of our analysis. Here, we first summarize the development of Egypt's New Unionist movement since 2011, before analyzing, separately, the different factors that we suggest help explain the observed pattern of decline and failure (4.). The final section (5.) summarizes our findings and draws some overall conclusions for the comparative analysis of organized labor in times of political change.

2   TOWARDS AN EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK: THE CASE OF BRAZIL'S NEW UNIONISM

Brazil's independent labor movement emerged in the late 1970s with a series of strike waves. As part of a broader grassroots movement, these labor protests increasingly challenged the military regime that had ruled the country since the 1964 military coup. Important steps in the rise of Brazil's novo sindicalismo included the creation of the Workers' Party (PT) in 1979 and the establishment of a national labor confederation, the Single Workers' Central (CUT), in 1983. The military dictatorship responded to these challenges with a gradual process of controlled liberalization and democratization that passed through the indirect election of a civilian government in 1984, the adoption of a new constitution in 1988, and first direct presidential elections in 1989. The new constitution also abolished core elements of the state corporatist structure of labor control. Brazil's New Unionist movement is generally considered a key player during this decade-long process of democratization, even if the PT played only a limited role in the actual negotiation of political change and narrowly lost the 1989 presidential elections (cf. Collier 1999: 134–138; Keck 1992; Levitsky and Mainwaring 2006: 33; Sandoval 1998; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 9–14). In terms of protest activities, the 1980s saw extraordinary levels of labor militancy and an almost continuous rise in strike activity and strength, with key episodes including the initial strike waves between 1978 and 1980, labor participation in the (failed) campaign for direct presidential elections in 1983–1984 as well as massive general strikes in 1986, 1987 and 1989 (Sandoval 1998: 174–194; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 178–179).[3]

Drawing on established approaches in social movement research, the factors that have shaped Brazil's New Unionist movement can be divided into four dimensions. In line with the political opportunity structure approach, we consider (1) the political opportunities and constraints as established by the (shifting) regime context. In terms of resource mobilization theory, (2) the movement's internal characteristics (socioeconomic base, internal organization, movement entrepreneurs) as well as (3) its relations with competitors and allies are key in defining resources and

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2   Several studies have emphasized the role of Egypt's new trade unionism before, during and after the 2011 uprising. While some empirical studies exist that assess the state of these new trade unions (Beinin 2012) and the challenges they are facing (Abdalla 2012, 2015a) in the post-revolutionary period, no research to date systematically analyzes the factors that explain their weakness and marginalization.

3   In focusing on the rise of Brazil's New Unionism, its later development in the 1990s and, then, during the government led by the very Workers' Party since 2002 is deliberately ignored (cf. Antunes and Santana 2014; Hunter 2010; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010).

mobilizing structures. Finally, (4) the framing approach highlights the discursive/ideological dimension of mobilization processes and, in particular, the relevance of collective action frames.[4]

(1) When it comes to the political opportunities and constraints that have shaped the emergence and political rise of Brazil's New Unionist movement, we have to distinguish between the structural context defined by the strong legacy of state corporatism and dynamic features of the political order that changed over the years (and were, themselves, shaped by the New Unionist movement).

(a) State corporatism: The hierarchical, state-controlled organization of the trade union sector that persisted throughout the 1980s and was complemented by very restrictive labor laws that were only gradually liberalized had ambivalent effects on Brazil's New Unionist movement.[5] On the one hand, it obviously had restrictive effects on the autonomous organization and collective action of workers; for instance, the very creation of the Single Workers' Central CUT in 1983 was itself illegal as were all strikes organized by the New Unionist movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 53–65, 145). The state-corporatist union structure also forced New Unionist labor activists to establish a parallel structure thereby creating a lasting division of the labor movement (see below). On the other hand, however, it was the very restrictive context of state corporatism that pushed union activities "inward", towards the rank-and-file and their immediate concerns on the shop floor, thereby creating new links between workers and union representatives (Skidmore 1988: 204; cf. Swavely 1990: 269). Also, the emphases on trade union autonomy and internal democracy, which became crucial features in the rise of New Unionism (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 6; see below), were clearly driven by the experience with the state-corporatist structure (cf. Skidmore 1988: 220; Swavely 1990: 259). Furthermore, the pattern of "state-developmentalist economic policymaking" that largely persisted throughout the 1980s "tended to 'universalize' rank-and-file militancy by casting the state as the central arbiter of worker livelihoods" (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 407).

(b) Gradual liberalization: Steps that opened spaces for public protest and signaled a gradual opening-up (abertura) of the authoritarian regime established after the 1964 military coup clearly enabled the emergence of Brazil's New Unionist movement – which, then, itself contributed to pushing for further steps towards democracy (cf. Keck 1992: 79–81; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 4; Antunes and Santana 2014: 14). For instance, it was the reform of the party law that facilitated the creation of the Workers' Party (PT) in 1979 (Keck 1992: Chapter 5; Swavely 1990: 267). At the same time, the authoritarian characteristics of the political regime that persisted throughout the 1980s enabled the New Unionist movement and its political arm, the PT, to preserve its independent course, avoid cooptation and use the mobilization against an illegitimate government and for democracy as means to unify the movement (cf. Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: xiii). Therefore, even during the first civilian-led (but not directly elected) government (1985–1990), the New Unionist movement "continued to exercise its independence" and, for instance, resisted the government's call for a "social pact" (Swavely 1990: 259).

(2) In terms of the New Unionist movement's internal characteristics, the existing scholarship emphasizes its socioeconomic support base, its internal organization and the role of movement entrepreneurs.

(a) Socioeconomic base: When it comes to the resources on which Brazil's New Unionism could draw, the first thing to mention is the far-reaching changes in the country's socioeconomic structure that preceded the movement's emergence. These include, most notably, important advances in industrial development which "resulted in a significant growth of a new industrial proletariat heavily concentrated in the automotive and metallurgical industrial belt of the ABC region of São Paulo" (Antunes and Santana 2014: 13; cf. Keck 1992: 78; Swavely 1990: 265) and characterized by high

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4   In line with the contentious politics approach as proposed, in particular, by Tilly and Tarrow, we do not consider these different theories, mechanisms and factors as competing, but as complementary. For overviews, see McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 2011.

5   On Brazil's state corporatism and the corresponding trade union structure, see Alexander (2003), Boito (1994), Skidmore (1988), Sluyter-Beltrão (2010: 53–65).

levels of unionization (Valenzuela 1989: 453).[6] At the same time, the 1980s saw an important growth in "white-collar unionism" which made "the service sector (liberal professionals, bank workers, and transportation workers) and public employees" increasingly important forces within the CUT (Keck 1992: 191; cf. Antunes and Santana 2014: 13; Rodrigues 1991: 41; Swavely 1990 269).

(b) Internal organization: A crucial factor that concerns the internal operation of the New Unionist movement and that is generally considered key to its success in mobilizing an increasing share of Brazil's labor force is related to its combining of the establishment of a central labor organization capable of acting collectively at the national level with a consistent commitment to grass-roots participation and internal democracy. The former feature refers to the creation of the CUT as an independent labor confederation that, in operating outside the state-controlled trade union structure and cutting across geographical and sectoral divides, made the New Unionist movement capable of acting collectively and representing the independent labor movement at the national level (cf. Alexander 2003: 181–185; Keck 1992: 3, 188–190; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 9–14). At the same time, the commitment to "internal democracy", in particular, implied a "priority of active rank-and-file participation, which worked to maintain movement solidarity by involving and empowering members" (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 6). This "strategy based on grassroots activism" (Skidmore 1988: 297) proved very successful. The years immediately following its creation in 1983 saw an "unmatched organizational expansion" of the CUT (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 181): from 500 affiliated unions (1983) to over 1,000 (1985) to nearly 1,400 (1986) (Swavely 1990: 269).

(c) Movement entrepreneurs: In her study on the Workers' Party, Keck has emphasized the "nationally known labor leadership associated with the new unionism" as a crucial factor that enabled the successful formation of the PT (Keck 1992: 72). This generally holds true for the New Unionist movement as well. From the very beginning, labor leader Luís Inácio Lula da Silva was "the key figure", having been "primarily responsible for sparking the campaigns and strikes that increased the power of the whole Brazilian labor movement" (Keck 1992: 77; cf. Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 2, 49; Swavely 1990: 266–268).

(3) When it comes to labor movements, particular features that shape their strength and behavior concern the unity or division of the trade union sector, organized labor's partisan linkages and broader social alliances (cf. Levitsky and Mainwaring 2006; Valenzuela 1989). In the case of Brazil's New Unionist movement, a persistent division of the overall labor movement contrasted with the successful construction of broad coalition of social allies that became manifest in the creation of the Workers' Party.

(a) Unity/division of the labor movement: The very emergence of New Unionism produced a division of Brazil's overall labor movement into an official and an independent wing that has persisted ever since.[7] Throughout the 1980s, the official, pyramidal structure that consisted of unions (at the municipal level, not at the individual company-level!), federations and confederations that were organized along the lines of different sectors remained. Given that the New Unionist movement emerged precisely in opposition to this hierarchical and state-controlled structure, it meant constructing an alternative "from the base" (Swavely 1990: 268; cf. Antunes and Santana 2014: 14). At the level of national politics, this division was reflected in the rivalry between the National Coordinator of the Working Class (CONCLAT), later General Workers' Confederation (CGT), which represented the former wing, and the CUT, which represented the latter. Programmatically, the main differences dividing the two labor confederations consisted in the CONCLAT/CGT's willingness to work within the official trade union structure, to accept a gradualist approach towards political reforms and to negotiate with the government, which contrasted with the CUT's aim to construct an autonomous labor movement and to push for a radical process of political change

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6   According to Keck (1992: 12), between 1960 and 1980 combined employment in manufacturing, mining, construction, and transportation "tripled in absolute terms", rising from 20 to almost 30 percent of the economically active population.

7   The actual divisions within the Brazilian labor movements in the 1980s were certainly much more complex than this notion of a confrontation between two wings suggests (cf. Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 39–53).

through a strategy of mobilization and confrontation (cf. Alexander 2003: 181–190; Keck 1992: 171–177; Swavely 1990: 268–269). These differences, at the same time, reflected, and were reinforced by, partisan divisions: While CONCLAT/CGT was dominated by the traditional parties of the organized left, the group of CUT labor leaders largely overlapped with the leadership of the newly formed PT (Keck 1992; 177–190; cf. Rodrigues 1991; Skidmore 1988: 289, see below). In 1986, well over half of Brazil's then 5,500 labor unions were "affiliated with either the CGT or the CUT", with both organizing between 1,300 and 1,400 unions (Swavely 1990: 269).[8] Only under very particular circumstances, such as in the case of the 1986 general strike, CGT and CUT cooperated (Swavely 1990: 260).

(b) Partisan linkages and sociopolitical allies: The New Unionist movement's emphasis on autonomy was not only directed against the state and the state-controlled trade union structure, but also meant deep-seated distrust of the whole range of established parties, including those on the left, that were generally considered to be "enemies" in the fight for independent unions and seen as not genuinely speaking for the workers (Skidmore 1988: 220). At the same time, however, New Unionism in Brazil benefited from relations with a broad set of old and new social movements that during the 1970s started to experience a general upsurge. From the very beginning of the New Unionist movement, therefore, labor activists could connect with other social organizations including "increasingly active 'Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs)'" as well as "a plethora of local movements around such issues as transport, sewers, housing, and health care" at the local neighborhood level (Keck 1992: 78–79). According to Sluyter-Beltrão (2010: 11–12), "it was the New Unionism's success at this intermediate level – building cross-cutting, interwoven activist networks – that ultimately assured the expansion and consolidation of the New Unionist project both 'downward' into previously marginalized, disengaged communities and 'upward' into the mainstream political system." (Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 11–12) The most important political expression of this broad sociopolitical alliance built around the New Unionist leadership was certainly the Workers' Party that had been created in 1979 (cf. Keck 1992). The PT brought together a "mix" "between 'old' and 'new' types of movements", with the "glue" holding all these elements together being "their common condition of exclusion from the political agenda in Brazil" (Keck 1992: 15; cf. Alexander 2003: 177–181; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 4). While there was no formal link between the labor movement/CUT and the PT, de facto the relationship was very close and the party's role was clearly "to support initiatives taken by the unions" (Keck 1992: 168).[9] Initially, the PT was rather unsuccessful election-wise, but this changed towards the end of the 1980s and in 1989, in the country's first direct presidential elections since 1960, the PT candidate Lula only narrowly lost the runoff election (Keck 1992: 123–166). In general, the PT gave the New Unionist labor movement a public voice in the country's political debate, including in parliament and the Constituent Assembly (cf. Keck 1992: 225; Swavely 1990: 260).

(4) Collective action frame: At the discursive/ideological level, the New Unionist movement's success in Brazil cannot be understood without considering the mutually reinforcing elements of its collective action frame that only enabled it to seize political opportunities, appropriate resources and establish sociopolitical alliances as outlined above. This collective action frame, most notably, combined (a) a focus on concrete workers' needs that helped mobilize the rank-and-file at the shop floor levels[10] and popular sectors in general;[11] (b) a broader trade union-specific agenda directed

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8   It is, however, important to add that, at that time, "only 10 to 20 percent of the Brazilian work force" was unionized. In addition, 'the rural workers' confederation, CONTAG, which is independent of the *centrals,* has many more members than the CUT and CGT combined" (Swavely 1990: 269).

9   "The PT was founded largely at the initiative of labor leaders, who continued to dominate its leadership and remained the key spokespersons for the party; the national image of the party was inextricably linked to the figure of Lula. […] The party's enumeration of its political demands has always been heavily centered around the question of trade union rights." (Keck 1992: 167–168) "The overlap in leadership personnel in the major unions identified with PT positions, the labor leaders involved in the party, and the heads of the Central Labor Organization (CUT) created in São Bernardo in 1983 was virtually complete." (Keck 1992: 181)

10   As in the "wage recovery campaign" and the first New Unionist strikes of the late 1970s (cf. Keck 1992: 64–67; Skidmore 1988: 204–206; 212–215; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010: 9–14; Swavely 1990: 266).

11   As during the general strikes of the 1980s (cf. Skidmore 1988: 289–298; Swavely 1990: 260, 268, 274).

against state-corporatist institutions and restrictions on labor freedom that united the overall movement of independent trade unions (CUT);[12] (c) a general pro-democracy and social justice agenda that enabled claim bridging with a larger set of oppositional organizations and movements;[13] and (d) a belief that these aims were to be achieved basically through mobilizing people and confronting the powers-that-be[14] (cf. Keck 1992: Chapter 4; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010; Swavely 1990).

Before applying this explanatory framework to the case at hand it is important to briefly assess commonalities and differences between Brazil in the 1980s and contemporary Egypt. The most important common feature that makes it promising to use insights from Brazil in order to analyze Egypt is the starting point that bears some interesting parallels. In both cases, the New Unionist movement emerges in the context of an authoritarian regime that, in the terminology used by Valenzuela (1989: 462) to describe Brazil between 1973 and 1985, can be characterized as "syndically harsh and politically open". Also, in both instances, the upsurge in labor protests led by the New Unionist movement played an important role in destabilizing the existing authoritarian regime (cf. Beinin and Duboc 2013; Collier 1999: 135–138). Furthermore, the gradual liberalization and ultimately successful democratization in the case of Brazil certainly differs from the ruptures and the back-and-forth that have characterized the still far from settled process of political transformation in Egypt since 2011. Still, even if we can, for the time being, not talk about a transition to democracy in Egypt, the crucial role that the Egyptian military has played in steering the process of change means that the post-revolutionary pattern in Egypt bears resemblance to the "transition game" à la Brazil, which has been characterized by "a protracted series of moves and countermoves and formal and informal negotiations between authoritarian incumbents and moderate opposition party actors" (Collier 1999: 132). The reestablishment of an authoritarian rule in Egypt and a top-down attempt to legitimize the military rule in the aftermath of Morsi's ouster is, at least in some regards, similar to the strategy of Brazil's military rulers in the 1980s which "sought legitimation through a façade of civilian rule operating through a chosen set of politicians and a restricted electoral arena" (Collier 1999: 133). While the starting point and the overall context in the two countries are, thus, characterized by an important number of commonalities, the trajectory of the New Unionist movements in Brazil in the 1980s and in Egypt since 2011 are remarkably different. Nothing resembling the Brazilian New Unionist movement's rise in social and political organization, contentious action and political participation can be observed in the case of Egypt, quite the contrary. This makes it promising to systematically investigate which differences between the two cases help explain the apparent failure of the New Unionist challenge in contemporary Egypt.

3   BRIEF OVERVIEW: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW UNIONISM IN EGYPT AND ITS ROLE IN THE RUN-UP TO THE 2011 REVOLUTION

Egypt has a long history of labor activism (Beinin and Luckman 1998). Starting in 2006, however, the country experienced the "longest and strongest wave of workers protest since the end of World War II" (Benin and El-Hamalawi 2007). These protests responded to the neoliberal economic reforms implemented by the government of Ahmed Nazif (2004–2011) which dramatically deepened socioeconomic inequality (Abdalla 2012: 1). The workers' protests which had increased since the end of 2004 doubled after the labor strike at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra, "a public-sector firm and one of the largest enterprises in Egypt with about 24,000 workers" in December 2006 (Abdalla 2012: 86). In the following years, the number of labor protests increased from 266 in 2006, to 614 in 2007, to 630 in 2008 and 700 in 2009 (Beinin

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12 On the CUT agenda in this regard, cf. Skidmore (1998: 289–298); Sluyter-Beltrão (2010: 53–65); Swavely (1990: 271–272).

13 As, for instance, in the 1985 campaign for direct presidential elections (cf. Antunes and Santana 2014: 14–15; Swavely 1990: 268).

14 On the New Unionist's militancy, combativeness and radical agenda, cf. Sluyter-Beltrão (2010: 10, 173–174, 179–180).

2011:191). In this context, the Center of Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS) (Dar el-Khadamat al-Nekabeya wel Omaleya), an NGO founded in 1999, played an important role in providing legal and technical support for the labor protestors in Mahalla Al-Kubra as well as in other regions.[15] This wave of protests involved not only traditionally militant blue-collar workers, but also previously quiescent employees and workers from within the state's own administrative apparatus, such as ministries and government agencies. Given that the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) was fully under the control of the regime, these labor protests emerged at the grassroots level and outside the official trade union structure.

As a result, at the time of the 2011 uprising, an incipient independent labor movement had emerged – even if only very few independent trade unions had already been established prior to January 2011. In late 2008, the leader of the real estate tax collectors' movement, Kamal Abu Eita, established the first independent union, thereby directly challenging the state corporatist system in place. Before the ouster of Mubarak, three groups – namely pensioners, teachers, and health technicians – followed this example and likewise founded new, independent unions. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, however, new trade unions emerged at lightning speed. Hundreds of new unions were regrouped under the umbrella of several trade unions federations. Two of them stand out: First, the Egyptian Federation for Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) whose existence was announced on by its founder, Abu Eita, at a press conference on 30 January 2011 in Cairo's Tahrir Square, and which was officially launched on 2 March 2011; second, the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC) which was also formed in 2011 by the head of the CTUWS, Kamal Abbas, but was formally established as a trade union federation only on 24 April 2013.

Scholars have offered competing explanations of the remarkable emergence of labor protests in Egypt prior to the 2011 uprising. From a traditional Marxist perspective, Beinin (2009) has analyzed the recent cycle of labor mobilization as expressing an ongoing class struggle that is historically shaped by industrial modernism, colonialism and nationalism and currently triggered by neoliberal economic policies (cf. Benin and Duboc 2013). From a Gramscian point of view, El-Mahdi (2011) has argued that the adoption of neoliberal policies meant the rupture of the old pact between the state and the workers that had previously prevented broader labor resistance. Others have applied social movement theory, emphasizing the role of political opportunities and mobilizing structures. The liberalization of the mass media in 2005, for instance, has been identified as an example of increasing political opportunities that facilitated the emergence of labor protests prior to the 2011 uprising (Al-Shobaki 2010; Shehata 2010).

During the 2011 uprising, organized labor was neither at the forefront of a pro-democracy movement nor did it uniformly articulate a pro-democracy stance (Bishara 2012). Yet, workers and, finally, also the incipient independent labor movement still played a decisive role in bringing down the authoritarian regime. In the demonstrations on 25 January 2011, many workers as well as the majority of labor leaders participated, but did so on an individual basis, as normal citizens and not as members of particular organization. On 30 January, however, a group of independent trade unions formed EFITU in what has been described as "a revolutionary act" that openly challenged both ETUF's monopoly on union representation and the regime as such (Beinin and Duboc 2013: 223). When, in early February, demonstrations decreased and the masses began to leave Tahrir square, workers across many sectors began to strike, refusing to work until their rights were duly recognized. Their protests quickly spread across the country.[16] Participants came from several sectors and included farmers, employees as well as workers from different companies and factories in both the private and the public sector. Their demands focused on improving living conditions, increasing wages and salaries, and bonuses. These labor protests paralyzed the economy, along with main state facilities, and thereby created a setting of large-scale civil disobedience that pre-

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15 At that time, the CTUWS had headquarters in the industrial cities of Mahalla Al-Kobra and Helwan. After the 2011 uprising, it established a third headquarter in Cairo.

16 According to "Al-Masry Al-Youm" newspaper, protests increased from few protests on 7 February in a number of governorates to 20 protests on 8 February in 9 governorates, to 35 protests on 10 February in 14 governorates, and to 65 protests on 11 February, that is, on the day the president stepped down.

pared the ground for the revolution (Abdalla 2012: 89). As a result, even if the independent labor movement was still lacking an organizational structure, labor protests did play a crucial role in the 2011 uprising (Bishara 2012, Beinin 2011).

4 EGYPT'S NEW UNIONISM SINCE 2011: EXPLAINING THE POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE COUNTRY'S LABOR MOVEMENT AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The uprising and the successful ouster of Mubarak initially led to a rapid growth and consolidation of the new labor movement made up of independent trade unions. Across different sectors of the economy, farmers, private-sector workers, public transport drivers, and employees established new trade unions outside the official ETUF structure (Abdalla 2012: 90). In the course of 2011 and 2012, several new labor federations were founded in order to organize this new sector of independent unions, the most important ones being the already mentioned EFITU and its main competitor, EDLC. At the same time, the number of labor protests continued to increase: from 580 protests in 2010 to 1,400 in 2011 and 3,400 in 2012 (Beinin 2013).

In principle, the 2011 uprising opened up an opportunity to renegotiate the rules of labor representation with a view to establishing a new pattern of state-labor relations in Egypt. The different governments that emerged from the uprising, however, generally stuck both to the neoliberal agenda and to the state-corporatist politics of labor control established by their predecessors. Similar to the Mubarak regime, governments continued to contain the labor movement through ETUF and prevent any attempt to emancipate itself from state control. On its part, the new trade union movement was not able to resist this strategy and effectively push for changes in either state-labor relations or the socioeconomic situation of the workers. In this section, we try to explain this failure of the new labor movement. In line with the explanatory framework developed above, we start by analyzing the political opportunities and constraints that shaped the emergence and development of the new trade union movement in Egypt. Second, we turn to the movement's internal characteristics, including its fragmentation and organizational weakness. Third, we look at the new labor movement's relationships (both supportive and obstructive) with other social and political organizations. Finally, we analyze the collective action frames that have enabled and constrained the new Unionist movement since 2011.

4.1 Political opportunities and constraints

Similar to the Brazilian case, the state corporatist structure established by the post-colonial state shaped the emergence and the development of Egypt's new trade union movement in an ambivalent way: On the one hand, Law 35 promulgated in 1976, by recognizing ETUF as the only legal federal body of labor representation, severely restricted the emergence of independent trade unions. On the other hand, the disconnection between the coopted ETUF leaders and rank-and-file workers enabled and legitimized the search for alternative channels to address grievances and make claims. In this context, the opening up of the political space following the 2011 uprising presented a golden opportunity for workers, which was reflected in the rapid spread of new trade unions.

(a) State corporatism

Egypt's state corporatism, as established in the post-colonial era by Nasser, provided organized workers (and other social sectors) with certain benefits such as the job security, better working conditions, free education and health. In return, workers had to give up their political freedoms (Ayubi, cited in Pratt 1998: 4). This regime of controlled labor representation took shape on 30 January 1957 when Nasser created ETUF and appointed the entire executive board. During the Nasser era, state-labor relations were characterized by an explicit agreement between union leaders and the regime (Beinin and Lockman 1998: 444) in which labor leaders agreed to support the Nas-

ser regime and abandoned their right to strike in exchange for a guaranteed fulfillment of certain socioeconomic demands, especially job security.

Nasser's successors Sadat (1970–1981) and Mubarak (1981–2011) turned to economic liberalization and, thereby, generated a gradual retreat of the state from socio-economic activities. Still, state cooptation of organized labor through ETUF persisted as did the authoritarian regime. Mubarak even increased the state's control over the union federation by means of a series of legal reforms designed to co-opt the Federation's leadership while preventing vertical rotation within the organization (Pratt 2001: 117–118). Although state intervention in the union's internal elections was a well-known practice, the intervention by Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif's technocratic government (2004–2011) in ETUF's internal elections in 2006 was remarkably higher than in the 1980s and the 1990s. Reportedly, between 10,000 and 30,000 candidates were prevented from participating in the elections and fraud took place at all levels of the organization, in contrast to previous elections in which fraud was limited to leadership positions at the top of the Federation's hierarchy (Clement 2006: 109). A prominent case included Kamal Abu Eita, the leading figure of the real estate tax collectors' movement and pioneer of Egypt's new trade unionism, whose electoral victory was prevented through the direct interference on the part of state security.[17]

In the end, the exceptionally high level of interference negatively affected the government's ability to exercise effective co-optation. While the number of regime supporters in the corporatist structure increased, the union structure was delegitimized and the rift between the official labor leadership and regular workers deepened. The extensive fraud of 2006 closed all existing mediation channels between the workers and the regime. In order to make their demands heard, workers had therefore to resist and bypass the official trade union structure. The result was the wave of labor protests mentioned above. At the same time, the electoral fraud pushed militant labor leaders to renounce their previous strategy of "reform from within". They, thus, started to opt for the foundation of new trade unions.[18] In late 2008, the leader of the real estate tax collectors' movement, Kamal Abu Eita, established the first independent union, thereby directly challenging the state corporatist system in place. Before the ouster of Mubarak, three groups – namely pensioners, teachers, and health technicians – followed this example and likewise founded new, independent unions.

(b) The 2011 uprising and the temporary opening of the political space

Under the chairmanship of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Minister of Labor Ahmed El-Borei issued a decree in March 2011 that established the right for independent trade unions to register with the Ministry of Labor. This was followed by a social dialogue that involved representatives of the new unions and labor activists of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as representatives of the chambers of commerce and industry. In this dialogue, a draft law was debated that would have guaranteed the freedom of association for labor unions. In the end, however, the SCAF refused to promulgate the law (Abdalla 2015a).

As already mentioned above, the temporary opening up of political space that was forced upon the regime by the 2011 uprising significantly facilitated the spread of independent trade unions, the establishment of new labor federations as well as the continuing increase in labor protests. At the same time, as will be discussed below (4.2, 4.3), the new context, in which hopes for change combined with strong continuities (e.g., in terms of state corporatist control of organized labor) and a re-stabilization of authoritarian rule, posed a series of dilemmas to the new labor movement and produced important splits within the sector of independent trade unions and complicated their relations with sociopolitical rivals and allies.

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17   Interview with Kamal Abu Eita, the head of the real estate tax collector movement, Cairo, summer 2011.

18   Ibid.

4.2 Internal characteristics of the New Unionist movement in Egypt

In this section, we analyze the socioeconomic base, the internal organization and the leadership of the new labor movement. Compared with Brazil's New Unionism in the 1980s, Egypt's independent labor movement has lacked penetration, independence and internal democracy. Furthermore, while prominent movement leaders did exist and played important roles, the dependence of the movement on them has weakened the latter.

(a) Socioeconomic base

Economic liberalization, as accelerated under Mubarak, has negatively affected the social conditions of the workers and the employees in the public sector, thereby provoking an increase of labor mobilization. These policies have also pushed for the emergence of labor militancy in some parts of the private sector.

Labor protests, in particular, responded to the neoliberal policies adopted by the Nazif government after 2004, which resulted in a dramatic decline of real wages: In 2007, for instance, the monthly basic salary of industrial workers was around USD 19 (Beinin 2011: 187), while the average base salary for textile workers in the first half of the 2000s was USD 36 (El-Naggar 2009: 49).[19] As these losses affected both industrial workers in the public sector and civil servants, protests increased among both blue- and white-collar workers. Yet, independent trade unions emerged mostly among civil servants and service public sector workers. In contrast to Brazil's New Unionism, Egypt's new labor movement remained weak among industrial workers (whether public or private) as well as, in general, in the private sector.

In Egypt, strongly representative new trade unions with a corresponding capacity of collective action exist among civil servants. This includes the real-estate tax collectors and the teachers (whose news unions are affiliated to EFITU) as well as sales tax collectors (whose new union is affiliated to EDLC). These new trade unions were built upon the protests organized during the Mubarak era. With the experience of collective action, increasingly strong bonds were built between the labor leader and the rank and file. This capacity of the organized civil servants to exert pressure was proven in January 2016, when they managed to lobby and push parliament to reject the draft Civil Service Law No. 18 of 2015 (which was meant to replace the Civil Service Law No. 47 of 1976).[20] In the public service sector, strong new trade unions also exist among public transport and post office workers (whose unions are affiliated to EDLC) as well as in the Egyptian telecommunication sector (whose union was affiliated to EFITU and joined EDLC in early 2016). Again, the strength and representativeness of these new trade unions stem from their previous collective experience during the Mubarak era.[21]

In contrast, blue-collar workers in the public industrial sector mostly continued to remain organized under the ETUF umbrella. This is mainly because of material benefits associated with participation in the official union structure. ETUF still holds a monopoly on the social funds that provide social security services and pensions to union members. Contributions to these funds are part of the workers' membership fees for ETUF, which are usually deducted automatically from their salaries (Beinin 2012: 13). In addition, ETUF owns assets such as hospitals and clubs and offers entertainment such as beach holidays to its members. These are important incentives that prevent workers from leaving ETUF despite of its lack of responsiveness to workers' claims.[22]

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19 Thus, according to El-Naggar, most public sector workers and their families could be considered "poor" by the standards of the World Bank (living on less than USD 2 per day per person).

20 This new law, in particular, aimed at significantly decreasing the salaries of the state employees by reducing the rate of annual increase of the civil servants' salaries (Adly and Ramadan 2015).

21 Strikes by the public transportation workers and the telecommunication workers on 8 February 2011 significantly contributed to the ouster of Mubarak (Abdalla 2012: 89). While no specific laws related to the public sector were issues of special contention in the aftermath of the 2011, these unions engaged in several contentious episodes with the state/employer in order to push for their socioeconomic demands.

22 While these funds go mostly to the industrial workers, some of the civil servants also benefit from them.

With the intensification of privatizations since 2004, the private sector has come to play an increasingly important role in the Egyptian economy. In 2010/2011, it represented 73 percent of the Egyptian workforce (Roll 2013:7). However, the private sector is characterized by small and medium-sized companies.[23] As a consequence, wage work in the private sector is predominantly irregular and informal (Assaad and Kraft 2013:10).[24] Under such conditions, private employers make use of their powerful position vis-à-vis their employees, often depriving them entirely of their labor rights to association, strike as well as to legal and social protection. Therefore, workers face a high risk of getting fired if they engage in labor activism.[25] In contrast to the public sector, 44.2% of the workers in the private sector have no legal contract and only 25% have health security (CAPMAS, 2014). Furthermore, the "topography" of the factories in the private sector which are not only small but also geographically scattered make it more difficult for workers to organize.

As a consequence, the presence of the new trade unions remains weak precisely in the private sector which currently employs the majority of Egyptian workers. Exceptions include a few specific industrial areas: With support of the Industrial Global Union (IGU), trade unions affiliated with the EDLC have consolidated a significant presence in the textile sector in *Madinat El-Sadat & El-Asher men Ramadan* and in the petrol industrial sector in the Suez Canal Cities.[26] But generally, the incapacity of the new trade union movement to defend those who lose their job because of their activism reduces its legitimacy among private sector workers.

In sum, even if precise data is lacking, only a tiny minority of the national workforce is organized by the new trade unions. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS 2014), in 2014 there were 23.9 million workers in Egypt and 61.1% of them were salaried. The new trade unions' federations together can be estimated to represent around 8% of the total work force, as compared to around 16% organized by ETUF.[27] Compared with the Brazilian experience, Egypt's new trade unions particularly suffer from a weak presence in work places in the industrial sector (public and private), including in those (public sector) industries characterized by a high concentration of workers in the same factory as well as in those (private sector) companies that hire the majority of the people. This clearly reduces their capacity not only to defend the interests and rights of their fellow members but also their ability to push for genuine change in terms of their relation with the state.

(b) Internal organization

Similar to Brazil, the new trade unions tried to unite in nation-wide federations in order to increase their political impact. But in the case of Egypt, they were not able to build one unitary federation for the New Unionist movement at the national level but split into several organizations. This

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23 In 2006, just 0.1 % of private companies in Egypt employed more than 100 workers (Roll 2013:8), and only 4% of employment in the private sector in 2012 was in firms with 50–99 employees. Employment in the private sector continues to be dominated by firms with 1–4 employees (Assaad and Kraft 2013:9–10).

24 Moreover, from 2006 to 2012, the irregular wage work increased substantially. Irregular work is seasonal or intermittent work. While 12% of the employed were irregular wage workers in 1998, this had fallen to 8% in 2006, but had more than doubled to 17% of the employed in 2012 (Assaad and Kraft 2013:3–4).

25 CTUWS has documented several cases in which workers were fired just after organizing protests. In other cases, according to CTUWS, newly hired workers were obliged to sign an un-dated document in which they submit their resignations, giving the employer the liberty to fire workers at any given moment and with no legal protection whatsoever (Abdalla 2012).

26 Interview with Mohamed Mostafa, ILO officer in Egypt, January 2016, Cairo.

27 ETUF claims to represent 3.8 million workers, while EDLC claims to have 886,000 members. According to EFITU's head Kamal Abu Eita, 2.4 million workers are affiliated with his organization. However, because of the splits that occurred during the last years as well as EFITU's incorporation of trade unions that were rather shallow organizations representing only a small share of the workers in their respective sector, this number can hardly be considered accurate. Therefore, this research assumes that EFITU has currently roughly the same number of members as EDLC. In addition, it is worth noting that there is a significant overlap between the membership in the old and the new trade union federations because many workers who joined the new trade unions did not withdraw from ETUF in order to avoid losing their rights to social funds.

division, at least in part, resulted from a series of dilemmas that the new trade unions had to deal with since early 2011.

First, the new trade unions faced a 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, for a certain period of time, on building powerful local union that could serve as a basis for a reliable bottom-up construction. EFITU represents the group of independent trade unions that chose the former option, EDLC those that went for the latter choice.

Right after the 2011 uprising, EFITU decided to seize the opportunity offered by the relatively open and fluid political setting in post-revolutionary Egypt and adopted a top-down approach for the promotion of workers' interests. From the very beginning, EFITU has been led by Kamal Abu Eita, founder of the independent union of the real-estate tax collectors, leader of the nationalist "Karama" party and member of the post-revolutionary parliament until it was dissolved in June 2012. To raise its political leverage, EFITU sought to incorporate as many of the newly founded trade unions as possible (Abdalla 2012: 6). Hence, it quickly accepted all new trade unions that asked to take part in the federation. Many of these new unions, however, were rather shallow organizations that represented only a small share of the workers in their respective sector.[28] Moreover, EFITU's top-down approach created a lag between its institutional capacity for coordination and the rapidly increasing number of unions that had to be integrated within the new structure. Given EFITU's limited staff and resources, neither the federation nor its affiliated unions were able to build the necessary administrative capacities. As a consequence, EFITU suffered from a lack of professionalism (and sometimes transparency). This contributed to splits among EFITU's member organizations. In September 2013 and February 2015, two of the 25 members of EFITU's executive board left the organization to build two separate trade unions federations: the General Federation for Egyptian Trade Unions *(el-itihad al-a'm lil nikabat al-masria)* and the National Federation for Trade Unions (al-*itihad al-watani lil nikabat*). By the end of 2015, several member organizations left EFITU and joined EDLC, including the new trade union of the Egyptian communication (*nikabit al-masryia lel itisalat*) and the Prosecutors and courts' new trade union (*nikabit al-niyabat wal mahakim*).[29]

CTUWS, which would later establish EDLC, pursued the opposite strategy, prioritizing an educational bottom-up approach of organizing workers at the grassroots level to the participation in national politics. A key figure, here, has been Kamal Abbas, a former labor leader at the Helwan Iron and Steel factory and the president of CTUWS. Since the end of the 1990s, CTUWS had played an important role in supporting labor leaders legally and technically. This work was guided by the belief that slowly teaching workers about democratic trade unionism was the only long-term guarantee for a sustainable and effective institutionalization of labor representation. A national federation should be based on strong relations between the affiliated unions, and such stable ties needed time and continuous joint activities to develop. In the course of 2011, therefore, CTUWS broke with EFITU and established the EDLC. Yet, it was not until April 2013 that EDLC was officially launched as a national trade union federation. In the meantime, CTUWS worked on enhancing union capacities and on coordinating joint activities (Abdalla 2012: 5–6). This approach of strengthening local unions first has provided the EDLC with a better capacity to sustain itself despite of internal differences. Yet, it hasn't protected the organization from continuous instability either.

Second, the new trade unions faced a democracy dilemma. Here, the question was whether federations should conduct early elections with a view to building a democratic institution or if they

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28 Interview with Noha Roshdi, leader in the real estate tax collector union and member of EFITU's executive board, Januay 2016, Cairo.

29 Interview with Saad Shaaban, the president of EDLC, Januray 2016, Cairo.

should preliminarily appoint experienced labor leaders and thus temporally sacrifice democracy for the sake of effectivity. Again, EFITU chose the first option, EDLC the latter.

On 28 January 2011, that is only one month after its official foundation, EFITU held internal elections. Predictably, this timeframe meant that union members could hardly get to know each other. This privileged those labor leaders that were best known to the members due to their extensive presence in the federation headquarters as well as because of their efforts to facilitate the paperwork and logistics for new unions that were seeking to join EFITU. These were, however, not necessarily the most experienced or the most effective leaders. The resulting lack of experience and effectiveness of EFITU's executive board harmed the federation's legitimacy and quickly produced internal power struggles.[30] These internal conflicts led to changes in EFITU's national leadership. As these reshuffles were not the result of democratic electoral processes, they further reduced the internal legitimacy of the federation and generated a state of continuous instability. As a consequence, EFITU became increasingly unable to genuinely represent its affiliated workers and defend their interests and rights.

In the case of EDLC, by contrast, the affiliated unions had much more time to get to know each other and were, thus, able to take an informed decision in the internal elections that took place with the official launching of EDLC in April 2013. This did not prevent power struggles – in particular, the presidency has been seriously contested between competing factions – but it provided the organization with better means to deal with internal differences. Later, in February 2014, the holding of a general assembly meeting prevented the division of the federation.[31] In this meeting, EDLC democratically decided to dismiss the elected president and convoke new elections for the presidency. This capacity to solve internal crises in its early years of existence, again, was also due to the supportive role of CTUWS, which supported the holding of this general assembly and approved the dismissal of EDLC's president. CTUWS's interference in EDLC's affairs, however, also put a strain on the federation's independency and internal democracy.

Third, both new trade union federations encountered a foreign support 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 sorely needed technical and/or logistical assistance.

In terms of resources, both EFITU and EDLC saw themselves entrapped in a vicious circle. Both federations were hardly able to mobilize the funds needed to cover basic costs such as the salaries of their administrative employees, the rent of their offices, and costs for flyers etc. As previously mentioned, the new federations suffered from the fact that part of their affiliated members continued to belong to ETUF in order to keep their access to social funds and, therefore, did not pay membership fees to either EFITU or EDLC. At the same time, this lack of financial resources has limited the federations' capacity to act on behalf of their affiliated local unions. This perception of ineffectiveness further reduced the interest among the member unions to financially support the federations.[32]

In this context, support by foreign institutions was obviously most welcome. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, a wide range of foreign institutions decided to support the new trade union movement.[33] They mostly offered technical support in terms of capacity building, but sometimes

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30 Interview with Fatma Ramada, leader in the new trade union of the employees of the Ministry of Labor in Giza and ex-member of EFITU's executive board, January 2016, Cairo.

31 Seham Shouada, An urgent meeting in EDLC to dismiss its President, *Al-Shououk,* 3 January 2014, available at: http://bit.ly/29droUh.

32 Interview with Noha Roshdi, leader in the real estate tax collector union and member of EFITU's executive board, Januray 2016, Cairo.

33 Interview with Mohamed Mostafa, ILO officer in Egypt, January 2016, Cairo. These include international organizations (such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), the Public Services International (PSI) and the Industrial Global Union (IGU)) as well as organizations affiliated to certain European countries (such as the Danish Development Assistance

also directly helped by covering financial costs (for flyers or headquarters). While crucial in sustaining the rise and organization of the new trade unions, this foreign support generated several problems that, in effect, hindered a sustainable development of the national federations. Direct financial support from the outside weakened the internal solidarity among the workers, the main source of cohesion of the independent trade unions.[34] The capacity building workshops offered to labor leaders contributed to deepen the split between the leadership and the rank and file and produced internal competition for travel and training opportunities. For disappointed labor leaders, establishing a new trade union or even building a new federation became a way to attract funds and travelling opportunities. In general, the reliance on foreign support (or on support by local NGOs that were, on their part, funded by foreign institution) made the new trade union movement dependent, in some ways resembling the state dependency of the official trade union federation.[35]

In sum, these dilemmas help understand why the rise of Egypt's new trade unions has led to an institutionally fragmented, organizationally weak and only partially representative movement. To date, EFITU suffers from splits among its affiliated unions and the disengagement of its members. In comparison, EDLC is more stable and less effected by internal splits but, still, far from a consolidated organization. Both federations continue to lack the institutional capacity to exert a significant influence on the authorities.

(c) Movement entrepreneurs

Similar to the Brazilian experience, well-known labor leaders have been crucial in the emergence of independent trade unions and the construction of new trade union federations. Abu Eita, who led the real-estate tax collector mobilization in 2007 and was key in the foundation of the real-estate tax collectors' union in 2009, can be regarded as a pioneer of Egypt's new unionism. As leading member of the Karama Nasseriste Party as well as of the Kefaya movement, Abu Eita was widely known also at the level of national politics. A second key figure is Kamal Abbas, a former labor leader at the Helwan Iron and Steel factory and president of CTUWS. Through CTUWS, Abbas lent major support to the labor mobilizations prior to 2011 and played an important role in Egyptian civil society on the national level. While these leaders were important in the emergence of the new trade union movement prior to the 2011 uprising, the dependence of the movement on these two persons has also harmed its capacity to act democratically and effectively in the post-revolutionary period.

Most notably, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, Kamal Abbas and Kamal Abu Eita refused to unite and establish one national federation which would organize all independent trade unions. While the organizational split into two (and more) new labor federations also resulted from different strategic visions (as explained earlier), the competition between the two powerful labor leaders – and their inability to cooperate – certainly contributed to dividing the movement. This is confirmed by the fact that programmatic differences between EFITU and EDLC can hardly account for their separation: They both, for instance, demanded to increase the minimum wage to 1,200 Egyptian pounds and supported Ahmed El-Borei's trade union law (Abdalla 2012). For ephemeral times, the two federations worked together for instance in the framework of "The National Front for the Defense of Labor Rights and Trade Unions' Freedoms" established in October 2012 to achieve these objectives.[36] In the aftermath of the uprising, the split of the new trade union move-

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Programs (DANIDA), the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (FTF) and the German political foundation Friedrich Ebert (FES)).

34 Interview with Mostafa Bassiouni, journalist specialized in labor issues, July 2015, Cairo.

35 Interview with Fatma Ramada, leader in the new trade union of the employees of the Ministry of Labor in Giza and ex-member of EFITU's executive board, op.cit.

36 The New Trade Unions announce the Foundation of The National Front for the Defense of Labor Rights, 15 October 2012, *Al-Youm al-Sabei*, available at: http://www.youm7.com/story/0000/0/0/-/817064

ment has severely limited its capacity to shape the political debate and put pressure on the successive governments.

Within EFITU, Abu Eita's key role became particularly problematic when he accepted the appointment as Minister of Labor in July 2013 – just after the military intervention in early July that deposed President Morsi. The fact that Abu Eita, along with other members of EFITU's executive board, lent explicit support to the al-Sisi regime without gaining any significant concessions in terms of worker demands deepened the split between the federation's leaders on one hand and between the latter and the local unions on the other. For instance, despite acting as the responsible minister, Abu Eita still failed to enact the law on trade union freedoms – one of the main demands of the new trade union movement. Moreover, the minimum wage was exclusively adopted for government workers, excluding both the general public and the entire private sector. As a result, workers lost confidence in their leader, who provided political support to the regime without receiving anything in return (Abdalla 2015a). Within EFITU, Abu Eita failed to establish institutional mechanism for dealing with conflicts between unions and labor leaders. Conflict resolution, therefore, solely depended on Abu Eita's charisma.[37]

Within EDLC, the interference of CTUWS leader Abbas in EDLC affairs likewise proved harmful to the development of the federation. As mentioned earlier, in its early stages, EDLC clearly benefited from the legal and technical support provided by CTUWS. But at later stages, the continuous interference of CTUWS in EDLC's affairs prevented the development of internal mechanisms of democracy, while the permanent tutoring hindered the capacity of the federation to work autonomously.

4.3 Unity/division, linkages and allies of the independent labor movement

In this section, we analyze how the division of organized labor in Egypt has weakened the New Unionist movement. During the entire post-revolutionary period but particularly since the military intervention of July 2013, the successive governments have supported the official trade union federation that was, therefore, well positioned to compete with the new trade union federations for the representation of the workers. ETUF also benefited from the fact that the authorities continued to rely on the established state-corporatist structure. Furthermore, this section looks at the linkages between the new trade unions and their traditional allies from leftist political organization. While the Brazilian experience, inter alia, suggests that alliances with leftist parties should have helped the labor movement in the post-revolutionary period to voice socioeconomic demands and challenge the state-corporatist structure of relations with the state, a fruitful alliance between the New Unionist movement and an inclusive workers' party was prevented in the Egyptian case because of the weakness of political parties and the fragile alliance between trade unions and parties.

(a) Division and competition

The legal framework governing trade union affairs, traditionally determined by the Law 35, promulgated in 1976, and amended by law 1 promulgated in 1981, recognizes ETUF as the only legitimate and legal federal body of labor representation. Although the 2011 uprising created an opportunity for re-negotiating the rules of labor representation, the governments that have ruled Egypt since 2011 basically continued the agenda of their predecessors and combined a neoliberal agenda with labor containment through state corporatism. This continued reliance on ETUF significantly constrained the aspiration of the new trade union federations to legalize its independent structures of labor representation.

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37 Interview with Noha Roshdi, leader in the real estate tax collector union and member of EFITU's executive board, op. cit.

Following the elections of May/June 2012, the Morsi government adopted a neoliberal economic agenda that was quite similar to the one pursued by the Mubarak regime.[38] The corresponding need to take unpopular economic decisions – including the reduction of the subsidies on fuel, as suggested by the IMF – meant that the Morsi government was keen to constrain labor's potential to resist these policies. Strengthening ETUF vis-à-vis the movement of independent trade unions proved useful in this regard. This was all the more the case because leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) had gained some leadership positions within ETUF's transitional administration committee, including the treasurer (Yousry Bayoumi) and the vice-president (Khaled El-Azhari).[39] When Khaled El-Azhari, who had also served as vice-president of the parliamentary labor committee, was appointed as Minister of Labor in August 2012,[40] the FJP consolidated its control over ETUF. The new minister supported the FJP's draft for the new trade union law which, unlike El-Borei's draft, would strengthen ETUF's position vis-à-vis the new unions. This draft, for example, did refrain from allowing workers that leave ETUF to retain their share of the social funds controlled by the federation. Hence, as explained above, workers willing to establish or join independent unions would continue to lose their social benefits. If adopted, this law would, thus, directly benefit ETUF vis-à-vis the competing trade union federations.

Following President Morsi's ouster in July 2013, the new military-led government and the new president Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi adopted policies that made the balance of power even more unfavorable to the new trade union movement. The overall formula was based on the idea of keeping political nasserism while ignoring economic nasserism (Adly and Ramadan 2015). Thus, the Al-Sisi government's strategy consisted in liberalizing the economy at the expense of workers' interests, re-establishing ETUF's monopoly on labor representation and increasing repression of labor protests while calling for national unity in support of the regime.[41] In order to guarantee its control over ETUF, the new government endorsed the replacement of 80% of ETUF's executive board members, which of course included all FJP members, by labor leaders loyal to the regime (Bishara 2014). In consultancy with the heads of ETUF's General Unions, this replacement has been conducted by Abdel Fathah Ibrahim, the head of the General Union for Spinning and Waving who later became ETUF's president.[42] At the same time, the Al-Sisi government also tried to contain EFITU by appointing Kamal Abu Eita as the Minister of Labor. As mentioned above, Abu Eita was not able to enforce the adoption of a new trade union law against resistance in the council of ministers and also failed to convince interim president Adly Mansour to promulgate it (Abdalla 2015a).

When, in February 2014, Abu Eita was replaced in the Ministry of Labor by Nahed Al-Asheri, ETUF returned as the official interlocutor and sole representative of Egypt's workers. Al-Asheri invited only ETUF to discuss labor-related legislation, the draft trade union law included, and entirely ignored the claims made by the new trade unions federations. In November 2015, under yet another minister of labor (Gamal Sourour),[43] the government further tightened its rejection of

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38 This agenda was further consolidated by the negotiations that President Morsi pursued with the IMF in late August 2012, in return for a \$4.8 billion IMF loan (Abdalla 2015a).

39 Following a corresponding court decision, the Council of Ministers in August 2011 dissolved ETUF's administration board and replaced it by a "transitional administration committee" whose role was to manage the institution until new internal elections could take place. This transitional committee was formed by former Minister of Labor Ahmed El-Borei and brought together former trade unionists rather close to the old regime with several militant labor leaders that had openly opposed the old regime. In this transition board, the Muslim Brotherhood was given three seats.

40 For a complete profile of the Minister of Labor, please see *Al-Youm Al-Sabaei* Egyptian newspaper: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=747634&

41 The Al-Sisi government's economic orientation was confirmed, for instance, by the unpopular decision in July 2014 to reduce subsidies on fuel as suggested by the IMF (Abdalla 2014).

42 Abdel Fathah Ibrahim: The Dismissal of Gebally Al-Margahi is 100% Legitimate, 7 September 2013, *Masress,* available at: http://bit.ly/29t9QpH.

43 For more information about Gamal Sourrour, see: Aya Al-Wahy, seven informations about Gamal Sourour the new Minister of Labor, September 19 2015, *Al-Watan,* available on: http://bit.ly/29hlu7g.

the independent trade union federations and issued a declaration qualifying the new trade unions as illegal entities. Employers were urged not to deal with them and only recognize trade unions affiliated with ETUF.[44] In February 2016, the Minister of Labor announced that the new trade union law will not admit the presence of more than one union per workplace, which would effectively prevent independent trade unions from competing with ETUF in workplaces where the latter already exists.[45] At the time of writing, however, the draft new trade union law had yet to be sent to parliament.

In sum, trade union affairs in post-Mubarak Egypt have emerged as a major arena of political struggle, rendering the new trade unions targets of political contestation rather than drivers of reform (Bishara 2014:4). As a part of their overall aim to liberalize the economy while de-liberalizing the political sphere, the successive governments have sought to marginalize the new labor movement. In particular, following Morsi's ouster, they did so by consolidating governmental control over ETUF and delaying a new trade union law that would legalize the structures of an independent labor movement. As a result, the state-controlled ETUF finally reestablished the position it had held before the 2011 uprising, while the new trade unions saw themselves relegated to illegal organizations disregarded by the political regime.

(b) Partisan linkages and sociopolitical allies

Similar to its Brazilian counterpart, Egypt's new trade union movement was characterized by distrust in established leftist organizations. This reflected near Egyptian history such as the crackdown of the 2008 Mahalla labor strike. For many labor leaders and workers, the brutally repressed protest at the Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving, located in Mahalla, on 6 April 2008 demonstrated what happens when political actors use the labor movement for their own political purposes and, thereby, prevent workers from achieving their own economic demands. In this case, cyber activists transformed labor's call for a strike and sit-in inside the factory into a call for a "national" strike. Supported by several opposition parties and movements, the economic demands of the labor movement were, thus, turned into a harsh critique of the broader social and political situation in the country – including a critique of continuous price increases, wide-spread corruption, and the torture of political activists by the police. While since 2005 the regime had rarely resorted to violence in response to workers' protests, this politicization arguably led the security apparatus to demand a demobilization of the workers, oblige labor leaders to call off the strike and arrest all leaders that would not give in. This experience at Mahalla deepened the split between labor organizations and political opposition groups, and until today the labor movement, particularly the rank and file, remains suspicious of an involvement in politics (Abdalla 2012: 2).

During the transitional period and despite the temporary political opening in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, this skepticism of an explicitly political engagement remained the norm for labor leaders especially at the local level. Workers mistrusted parties because of their potential to divide them according to competing ideological approaches. In addition, the weakness of leftist parties meant that workers and unions could hardly benefit from such alliances. For instance, in the 2011 and 2012 elections, the leftist coalition "Revolution Continues" achieved only 8 of 508 parliamentary seats. The two remaining leftist parties that were not part of this coalition, tajammu' Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, won 3 and 16 seats, respectively. As parties remain unable to provide the workers with concrete political impact, the latter feel that they are being used by parties to exploit their leverage (Abdalla 2012). The lack of an effective channel to voice political opposition, furthermore, pushed labor leaders (especially on the local level) to engage in direct negotiations with state authorities.

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44   Mostafa Al-Nigar, The Independent Trade Unions provide the Council of Minister with a Report affirming the legal proves of its legitimacy, 24 December 2015, *Al-Youm al-Sabei'*, available at: http://bit.ly/29ibxYs.

45   Ghada Abdel Hafiz, Gamal Sourour: I won't Recognize Independent Trade Unions, 4 February 2016, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, available at: http://bit.ly/29l6m9E.

In the years since 2011, therefore, the new trade union movement has chosen to ally with political organizations only under specific circumstances, namely when communication and negotiation with the state broke down entirely and/or when such alliances were temporarily seen as mutually beneficial. In this sense, for example, the reluctance of the FJP Minister of Labor, Khaled Al-Azhari, to promulgate a new trade union law pushed EDLC and EFITU to ally with the National Salvation Front (NSF), an alliance of the non-Islamist parties, in order to ensure the latter's support to Ahmed El-Borei's draft law in the next parliament (which was, however, never elected). With the worsening of the relations with the Morsi government, the new union movement started to believe that it had nothing more to lose and that the price of activism was not too high anymore and, consequently, resorted to street politics. In fact, labor leaders responded positively to the call by the "Rebellion" (Tamarod) youth movement, and in June 2013 the new union movement joined the anti-Morsi protests. The two federations issued press releases officially announcing their solidarity and their participation in the demonstrations that pushed for early presidential elections.[46]

During the Al-Sisi regime, it was again a deadlock in the negotiations with the state that pushed the new trade unions to form a "Workers' Bloc" (*al-kutla al-'ummaliya*). Under the auspices of the CTUWS, this bloc was formed in July 2014 with a membership of around 120 new trade unions, including members of both EFITU and EDLC. The new trade union leaders that are members of this bloc were supposed to explicitly express their support for the electoral list of "Egypt Awakening" (*sahwit masr*) during the parliamentary elections of 2015. This electoral list was formed by a coalition of independent candidates as well as leftist political parties that support the demands of the new trade unions (Abdalla 2015b). However, due to logistical complications, *Sahwit masr* withdrew from the elections in the last minute.

Under increasing pressure from the political regime, the new trade union movement welcomed the solidarity of political forces that supported their resistance against the Al-Sisi government's attempt to de-legalize the new trade unionism in Egypt. Hence, the campaign in support of independent trade unions which was launched by the Bread and Freedom Leftist Party (*Al-Eish wal Horeyia*) (under foundation), under the motto "Together for Unions' Freedoms" (*maa'an min agl al-huriyat al-nikabia*),[47] was greeted by the new trade union movement.[48]

In sum, the new union movement's contentious interaction with the state in the post-revolutionary period has led to a pragmatic, yet very gradual change in the relationship with political parties and movements. Still, as labor leaders are struggling hard with preventing a further disintegration of the movement, the attempts to strike broader political alliances are at best cautious – when compared to the experience of the Brazilian Workers' Party, for instance. For the time being, these alliances offer little to the new trade union federations in terms of a possibility to channel the workers' demands into the political system.

4.4 Collective action frame

The emergence of the new trade union movement was based on a rather narrow agenda of specific, socioeconomic demands. With the relative opening of the political space in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, however, the independent trade unions seized the opportunity and – similarly to the Brazilian experience – broadened their agenda to include politico-institutional claims for labor freedom and a new, democratic structure of state-labor relations. At the same time, however, and contrary to the Brazilian case, the new unions' collective action frame has largely remained labor-specific and stopped short of openly challenging the respective political authorities, with the tem-

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46   For further information, see: Heba EL-SHAZLI, Where were the Egyptian Workers in the June 2013 Peoples' Coup?, July 2013, *Jadaliyya,* available at: http://bit.ly/29qfj34.

47   Another campaign having the same name was launched by CTUWS as well.

48   Interview with Talal Shukr, former head of the new trade union for pensioners and current coordinator of CTUWS branch in Cairo, Cairo, January 2016, and interview with Fatma Ramadan, labor activist and leader in the new trade union of the employees of the Labor Ministry in Giza, op. cit.

porary exception of the anti-Morsi protests in 2013. This strategy reflected the perceived weakness of the new labor movement as well as the increasingly authoritarian setting in which it operated, in particular following the military intervention of July 2013. As we will argue, this fairly narrow collective action frame has further reduced the capacity of the New Unionist movement to building linkages (by bridging frames) with other sociopolitical forces.

Under the repressive Mubarak regime, the wave of labor protests that responded to the policies of economic liberalization were characterized by a collective action frame that deliberately refrained from challenging the political regime. On the one hand, labor protests at that time did not challenge the regime's legitimacy, rejected any politicization and framed their claims in strictly economic terms. These claims mostly included tangible and short-term demands such as bonuses and allowances or, at most, wage increases. On the other hand, labor protests also refused to question the state-corporatist, patron-client relationship with the state. Thus, the existing structure of labor representation and the official trade union federation were not questioned. The only exception was the (successful) attempt of the real-estate tax collector movement to establish an independent trade union. This overall refusal to challenge the state arguably reflected both a fear of repression and the deep-seated, Nasserist belief among public and governmental workers in their partnership with the state.

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, the deteriorating socio-economic situation led not only to an expansion in the number of labor protests. The uprising also provided the new trade union movement with the political space to challenge the old pattern of state-labor relations. As a consequence, hundreds of newly emerging trade unions questioned the state-corporatist structure. While new trade unions leaders focused on butter and bread demands in response to their rank and file, the demand for a new trade union law that would legalize independent unions and the claim for a general minimum wage became parts of a broader collective action frame that united the new trade union movement. These demands related to freedom of association and social justice also enabling the bridging of claims with other oppositional organizations. As mentioned above, under the Morsi government, the new trade union federations allied with the secular NSF around this claim. And under the As-Sisi government, the struggle for a new trade unions law generated some solidarity among leftist politicians and parties and led to the above-mentioned campaigns that linked the general freedom of association with labor freedoms.

Nevertheless, given the fragmentation of the new trade union movement on the national level, the unfavorable balance of power (in particular after the military intervention of July 2013) as well as the weakness of the political parties, the local new trade unions refrained from openly breaking with the state. Thus, in the context of specific labor protests, they have largely continued to frame their demands in ways that would not challenge the authorities. Examples include the unions of the real estate tax collectors and of the sales tax collectors that both fought against a new civil servant law but refused to link up with any political force.[49] In order to prevent parliamentary approval of this law, these two unions organized protests against it and tried to on exert pressure on members of parliament,[50] but they did so in far from confrontational ways. Rather, the leaders of these trade unions have framed the employees' claims in a way that stressed their partnership with the state and emphasized their refusal to challenge the latter.

Such narrow collective action frames that focus on rather specific and short-term demands also reflected the thinking of important labor leaders and their relation to politics as well as the relative disconnection between the different trade union levels within the labor federations. While the top level of the new trade union federations has included politicized leaders such as Kamal Abu Eita (in the case of EFITU), most local trade union leaders can rather be described as "service leaders" or "natural leaders": Their status as leaders is directly linked to their capacity to serve the short-

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49   Interview with Noha Roshdi, leader at the real estate tax collector new trade union, January 2016, Cairo.

50   Interview with Tarek Koaib, the head of the Real Estate Tax Collector New Trade Union, January 2016, Cairo.

term, economic demands of the local rank and file. Contrary to the 1970s and 1980s, during which politicized, leftist or Nasserite leaders led the labor movement, the new generation of leaders at the level of the local federations is largely depoliticized. These local labor leaders, therefore, hardly support the national federations' push for a more substantial change in state-labor relations but are much more interested in achieving some tangible results for their social bases (Abdalla 2015b). In this context, the horizontal and vertical mechanisms of coordination within the new trade union federations have been too weak to generate consensus around a broader collective action frame. The rather narrow nature of the demands raised by the new trade union movement, therefore, reflects not only the increasingly difficult political context in which it once again operates and the weakness of the movement's potential sociopolitical allies but also the failure of the movement itself to establish reliable internal structures of coordination and representation.

5   CONCLUSION

Although the 2011 uprising opened up significant political space for a thriving movement of independent labor organizations, Egypt's new trade unions were not able to seize the opportunity and renegotiate the rules of labor representation with a view to establishing a new pattern of state-labor relations. Contrary to the New Unionist movement in Brazil, which was able to exert a significant political influence during the protracted process of democratization in this country, its Egyptian counterpart has been unable to achieve any of its objectives following Mubarak's downfall, despite the role it has played in the run-up to the uprising. A brief period of impressive organizational growth and continuing protests notwithstanding, the movement of independent trade unions in the end turned from being a driver of change during the destabilization of the Mubarak regime into a fairly weak and politically marginalized actor during the post- revolutionary period. Our analysis of the Egyptian case, as compared to the experience of the Brazilian New Unionist movement in the 1980s, suggests that four main factors help explain this process of political marginalization.

First, economically, the structural basis of Egypt's New Unionism was much weaker than in the case of Brazil. This is a result of a different sequence of political liberalization and neoliberal economic reforms. In Brazil, political liberalization and the emergence of an independent labor movement preceded the economic crises, austerity measures and neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. As a consequence, organized labor in Brazil could still rely on a relatively strong socioeconomic basis when it confronted the dual challenge of pushing for political change while staging resistance to austerity measures and neoliberal structural adjustment. In Egypt, the sequence has been reversed so that the independent trade union movement emerged in a much more difficult socioeconomic context.

Second, politically, the revolutionary character of the Egyptian uprising, although initially stimulating as assumed by the political opportunity structure approach, posed a series of organizational challenges to the New Unionist movement. In Brazil, the gradual process of political liberalization and democratization has meant that independent labor organizations there had several years to grow from the bottom up and build a powerful, grassroots-based movement with a political arm before direct presidential elections introduced potentially divisive political dynamics. In Egypt, in contrast, the independent labor movement, in early 2011, had to respond collectively to the dramatic political changes while it lacked any organizational structure and was simultaneously experiencing a rapid emergence of new unions. The comparison with Brazil suggests that it was this all-too swift change in political opportunities that overwhelmed the incipient New Unionist movement rather than the continuities in terms of state corporatism and repression – the latter also characterized the Brazilian context throughout the 1980s and, in this case, proved rather stimulating to sustained confrontational mobilization. Repression as such, obviously, can either discourage or provoke contentious action.

These two factors combined to produce a new trade union movement in Egypt that lacked social penetration and a consolidated structure of grassroots organization and was incapable of establishing an organizational structure at the national level that would have enabled internal democracy and the capacity to act collectively, unitedly and independently. The result was an institutionally fragmented, organizationally weak and only partially representative movement that proved unable to resist the continuity, and even deepening, of repressive, state-corporatist state-labor relations. But for this result, third, agency also mattered as was demonstrated by the ambivalent role of key movement entrepreneurs. In Brazil, the role of the most prominent labor leader, Lula da Silva, was crucial in creating the broad alliance of sociopolitical forces that formed the PT and the CUT. The rivalry between Abu Eita and Kamal Abbas in Egypt, in contrast, contributed to the division of the movement. The overall risk that was implied by labor movements' dependence on individual leaders became manifest in Egypt when Abu Keita became Minister of Labor, whereas in the case of Brazil similar problems would emerge only much later when Lula was elected president of Brazil in 2002 (cf. Sluyter-Beltrão 2010).

Fourth, Egypt's independent labor movement was not only intrinsically weak but also suffered from a lack of reliable alliances with other social or political organizations. This is perhaps the starkest contrast to Brazil's New Unionism which, from the very beginning, emerged in direct relationship with a whole set of like-minded grassroots movements, which included close personal ties and overlaps. The PT was, therefore, never only a workers' party, and the collective action frame always combined a labor-specific and a general political and social justice-related agenda. Even the rival, traditional trade union sector in Brazil was much closer to the new labor movement, shared a series of basic objectives, and was never as fully coopted by the state as ETUF in Egypt; in specific episodes, the two labor federations also joined forces. In contrast, the New Unionist movement in Egypt was fairly isolated most of the times, and support from other sociopolitical organizations remained sporadic and issue-specific. The movement's fairly narrow collective action frame both reflected and reinforced this relative isolation. As a result, the Egyptian government could easily use ETUF to marginalize the independent trade unions. At the same time, the potential allies of the movement from leftist political organizations were hardly able to provide support to the new trade union movement and/or to channel New Unionist demands into the political system.

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