

# Professors review their options

Al Ahram Weekly  
22-28 November 2007

University teachers have decided to escalate their protests, warning that the current policy threatens to render higher education meaningless, writes [Mona El-Nahhas](#)

---

Professors from Egyptian universities and scientific research centres gathered at Al-Azhar University campus yesterday to protest against the government's non-response to demands that include an end to security interference in university affairs, an increase in salaries and the annulment of Law 82/2000 which ended tenure for teaching staff over the age of 70 and banned them from supervising post-graduate theses or even undertaking research.

Negotiations with senior officials, meetings with chairmen of the People's Assembly and Shura Council and petitions to the president's office have proved fruitless, say university teachers, and the 9 March Movement for the Independence of Universities, formed in 2004, has made little, if any progress, in pursuit of its goals. The security apparatus continues its interference in university affairs, on a daily basis, the appointment of university chairmen remains subject to security approval as does the appointment of new members of the teaching staff, and university professors continue to struggle on monthly salaries of no more than LE 3,000.

University teaching staff increasingly feels negotiations will get them nowhere.

"Demonstrations staged by workers and teachers demanding the government honour their financial rights have proved successful, demonstrating that the state will respond when confronted with a strong stance," Adel Abdel-Gawwad, chairman of the Cairo University Teaching Staff Club, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

His views are echoed by Hussein Eweida, chairman of Al-Azhar University's Teaching Staff Club, the hosts of yesterday's gathering. He told the *Weekly* that "sit-ins, street demonstrations and work stoppages are all possible options", adding that Wednesday's gathering will soon be followed by other measures.

Yesterday's gathering was the second in less than two weeks. On 5 November, 150 university professors stood for an hour in a symbolic demonstration to mourn the lost dignity of their profession. On 30 November, hundreds of university professors are expected to attend a meeting at the headquarters of the Cairo University Teaching Staff Club to decide how best to escalate their protest.

"The issue of raising university professors' salaries is expected to top the agenda during the 30 November conference," says Abdel-Gawwad. They are asking that their salaries of LE3,000 be tripled, arguing that the increase is necessary to halt further deterioration in the standards of public sector higher education. Many university teachers, having seen their living standards eroded by inflation, have abandoned state universities for private institutions, leading to severe staff shortages. Others work for several institutions simultaneously, rushing between different institutions to deliver lectures. Cases have been reported of professors offering

private off-campus tuition, in violation of university statutes, and even selling copies of examination papers to students.

Teaching in several institutions "has a negative impact on the professor's performance and on the educational process as a whole" says Abdel-Gawwad, yet it is necessary simply so that university staff can survive. "How do they expect university professors to lead a dignified life while getting such salaries?" he asks, noting that after buying books and periodicals professors are left with only a minimal sum.

The conference will also press for the pensions of university staff to be raised from the current LE800 a month, and working papers will be presented outlining possible strategies to force the government's hand over Law 82/2000 which, say many professors, effectively bans communication between different generations.

"We are embarked on the first stage of our struggle and will not rest until our demands are met," says Eweida. Otherwise, he warns, university education in Egypt will be rendered meaningless.