

Palestinian Teachers on Strike for 6 weeks Now

Palestinian public sector teachers said Thursday they will continue their strike after an offer by Palestinian Authority (PA) was rejected.

Teachers launched a general strike in the occupied West Bank in early February, demanding the implementation of an agreement between the PA and teachers last year ending another two-month strike.

The agreement included a 15 percent pay rise for teachers from the first salary of 2023 and allowed for the formation of an independent union.

Teachers went on strike in early February after their January salaries didn't include the agreed raise while the union was still waiting for approval from the PA.

Ibrahim Milhem, the spokesperson of the PA, said Thursday that the government will agree to a 5 percent raise to teachers' salaries in March while ten percent will be added when the resources become available.

Milhem added that all punitive measures against striking teachers will be ended, in exchange for an end to the industrial action. This offer has since been rejected by the teachers.

Since the most recent round of strikes, teachers from across the West Bank have rallied three times in Ramallah, voicing their demands. ([New Arab](#), March 24, 2023)

A 50-day strike which began in April 2022 ended when the government promised to meet the teachers' demands, but the government did not keep its word. ([MEMO](#), March 20, 2023)

Newly hired teachers and teachers without tenure are required to show up in the classroom and teach their students, whereas long-time teachers are on strike since the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance have failed to meet their demands. Some vicinities have complete school shutdowns resulting in thousands of students without education including the Tawjeehi classes or the preparation for this pivotal exam. Further outraging the teachers are the ME's threats of legal action and higher pay deduction for the number of days missed, the teacher's union organized a massive strike in Ramallah estimating over 42,000 teachers who came out in protest against the PA and the ME. Resulting in the PA prime minister to hold a press conference to address the issue. Prime Minister Dr. Muhammad Shtayyeh confirmed, the government's commitment to the agreements signed with unions, including the Teachers' Union, but the "Teachers' Movement" (Al-Hirrak) rejected that, and stressed the necessity of fully implementing the provisions of the agreement, and announced the continuation of the protest steps, including its fifth strike since last month.

The teachers' demands include 5 items, namely: returning discounts to teachers, professionalizing education, issuing a teacher protection law, working to "democratize the union", and depositing a 15% bonus for the nature of work on the salary slip, starting from the first month of the new year 2023. ([Al Quds Press](#))

The PA and the ME have defied their demands and began to make harsher threats including early retirement notices to the striking teachers.

Tactics now spread to involving the students' parents to unleash their frustration on their teachers instead of the ME itself. For example, heated remarks are being posted to social

media including the official ME pages, like parents suggest taking legal action against teachers who don't teach, others include demanding that they be terminated immediately and substitute teachers enter the classrooms to prevent further educational delay as it has been nearly two months since the standoff.

Trying to involve the parents is like pouring oil to the fire, since it proves to the children that teachers have no rights or status or respect. Sowing resentment and hatred is the last thing teachers need right now.

However the vast majority of the people of Palestine are sympathetic and supportive of the teachers and their demands as the economic burdens can be felt on everyone. High cost of living and inflation are not accommodated accordingly on the current teacher salary. Even more jarring is the PA withholds about 15-20% of the teachers' salary and their promised salary increase of the 15%. Teacher's Union has said that teachers know that if they return to work without their demands being met, the situation will only get worse.

It is a known fact that teachers in Palestine especially male teachers need to supplement their salary with side jobs in order to make ends meet from labor jobs like laying tile, beekeeping, construction work to afterschool tutoring or working as a barber or in retail. Making their lives even more exhausting under the PA yet the PA and the ME refuse to consider these dual lifestyles and people trying to make a decent livelihood for themselves and families who can barely afford the basics today.

This is not the first time teachers have gone on strike, also calling for better salaries and support in the school environment. In a statement, the Teachers' Union warned that they would not invigilate or mark secondary school exam papers. "No one is able to bring the Palestinian teacher on his knees," the statement said, "even through inciting against him." Adding that attempts to end the strike by threatening teachers with losing their jobs will not force them to return to work. Sadly, the length of the strike not only affects the teachers but the students and the society at large which spills over into the Tawjeehi study materials that becomes shortened or chapters simply omitted from the exams then the consequences are witnessed when these students enter university and experience hardships since university courses are not reflective of the high school classes due to the omitted study materials and missed school days. Now shocked and struggling students are trying to keep afloat and university professors are highly concerned for the wide gaps in the academic levels currently being seen especially after the COVID lockdowns and recurrent teacher strikes, may have expressed their alarming finds of their university classrooms and teacher-student experiences. Their complaints range from students' lack of basic reading, writing and math skills to them being unable to continue in the program prerequisite classes let alone the advanced classes to calling for raising the entrance scores to various programs to ensure proper gauge and quality. So when these teachers' strikes and their demands not being met in the most urgent and rapid manner, it affects school students who in turn affect incoming college students and then society at large. Where the society of Palestine suffers in the short and long range as a whole.

The Palestinian Authority and its Ministry of Education earnestly strive to make the lives of the Palestinian people as miserable as possible, people expressing their views widely, we are living under an occupation under the "Israeli" occupation. Until then it is a matter of time where the pressure valve will be released due to the harsh conditions that the people of Palestine are currently living under.

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