



Jordanian Security Forces Detain Teachers' Union Leaders

Jordan has detained the leaders of a teachers' union amid a crackdown on dissent of the government. Jordan's teachers' union has become a leading governmental critic, and Jordanian security forces shut the union down for a period of two years in an effort to silence the criticism. The acting head of Jordan's teachers syndicate, Nasser Nawasreh, was charged with incitement in relation to a speech to supporters last week in which he criticized Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz and his government. Jordanian state media also reported that Nawasreh's fellow leaders of the union were charged with financial and administrative misconduct. In response, the teachers' union called for a mass demonstration, during which the government was called upon to honor their previous commitments to the opposition. It is estimated that Jordan's Teachers' Association represents upward of 100,000 teachers, making it highly influential.

Jordan's teachers syndicate previously made headlines in the fall of 2019 when the union organized a strike to demand a pay raise for teachers. The Jordanian government agreed to give teachers a pay raise between 35% and 75% after a month-long strike. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted Jordan's financial situation, and the government is now claiming to be unable to honor the commitment. In April, the government announced public sector pay would be frozen as a result of the financial fallout from the pandemic.

On Saturday, Amman's prosecutor-general Hassan Abdallat ordered the teachers' union to close for two years, and also ordered the imprisonment of the leaders of the organization for one week. 13 members of the union's council were summoned for questioning on "criminal and corruption charges." This action was precipitated by a large turnout of people demonstrating against the government at a protest organized by the union. Upon the arrest of the syndicate's leaders, the government announced it would be appointing a temporary committee to lead the union, effectively completing a governmental takeover of the organization.

Supporters of the union and Jordan's opposition have claimed that the crackdown on teachers is part of the Jordanian government's broader goal of silencing all dissent. The head of Jordan's largest opposition party said the government's actions to disband the teachers' union would only "further aggravate political tensions by the government." The opposition has also accused the government of enacting draconian security laws throughout the duration of the pandemic. Additionally, activists who have been critical of the government on social media have been arrested in recent weeks, providing further evidence of a governmental crackdown on opposition.

Organizations such as Human Rights Watch have come out against the Jordanian government's actions and questioned the government's respect for the rule of law. The teachers' union is one of only a few independent labor unions across Jordan, and there is concern that citizens' rights are being trampled on. Eyewitness accounts from people who were inside the union's office when it was raided by police indicate that there was no judicial order shown to justify the closing of the offices. Additionally, Jordan's attorney general has failed to demonstrate his justification for closing the teachers' union within the context of Jordanian law.