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Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil received the Minister of Labor, Kamil Abu Sleiman, and the President of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, Bechara Asmar. During the meeting, they discussed issues related to some items in the Budget.

After the meeting, Asmar stated the following:

"I would like to thank H.E. the Minister of Labor, Kamil Abu Sleiman, for taking the initiative to request a dialogue session, which is the only thing we are demanding as a labor movement, in the light of a reform Budget of this size. Indeed, a dialogue is supposed to take place between the production parties, the General Confederation of Workers, economic bodies and the banks. This is what we have called for.

Minister Khalil responded by starting the dialogue that should take place at the level of the government. PM Saad Hariri should call for a dialogue as soon as possible and everyone should respond because we are going through a difficult economic situation.

Concerning our campaign, we have raised a number of issues, notably the matter of the National Social Security Fund and its items that are mentioned in the State Budget. I would like to confirm that the Minister of Labor has suggested a very advanced idea on which the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers and the Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil might agree and tackle. It consists of the scheduling of the debt owed to the NSSF by the State and keeping the principle of interest on debts, in addition to other specific technical matters related to the NSSF. Things might be moving toward a consensus.

As for items related to public administration, independent interests and veterans, the Minister of Finance has put forward several proposals to be discussed; and if a consensus is not reached, they can be cancelled.

Consequently, as a Confederation, we take part in the dialogue with the Minister of Finance and ask for a dialogue with all the components of society. I shall convey the positive feedback from the Minister of Finance to the Confederation to take the appropriate stance, since the beginning of the

dialogue seems positive in this sense.

Q: Will you suspend the strike?

The strike is part of an outcry and concerns the fundamental achievements made in the public sector over the years. We launched an outcry and warned about the strike. We did not receive any response, except for that of the Minister of Labor, Kamil Abu Sleiman. We are not fond of blocking streets or organizing strikes. We are the first to be affected by strikes; our workers are the first to be affected by strikes. As we were asked to contribute, let others also contribute.

Q: Your strike is directed against the government and the Budget items

A: We are with the government, but let the government talk to us. There should be dialogue, not coercion. We are facing collective labor contracts and internal regulations. They have to talk to us.

Q: Did you not understand that the salaries will not be touched?

A: I want to start a dialogue on some items in the Budget that will affect certain matters. I will not add anything else.

Kamil Abu Sleiman:

The Minister of Labor Kamil Abu Sleiman, answered a question on whether he could ask the Confederation to postpone its action until the government's decisions are clarified:

A: The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers has conveyed today its concerns to the Minister of Finance, who responded to them. The meeting was positive and the Confederation has the right to express its opinion.