



Biographies of Visiting Iraqi Labor Leaders and their Organizations

Faleh Abood Umara, General Secretary, Southern Oil Company Union, Iraqi Federation of Oil Workers' Unions

Faleh Abood Umara was one of the six Iraqi trade union leaders who visited 26 cities in the U.S. in June 2005, in a tour sponsored by USLAW. He is 48 years old, married with two sons and two daughters. He is a founding member of the oil workers union and worked for the Southern Oil Company in Basra for 28 years. He is also a member of the local council in the Al-Hadi district in Basra. In 1998, he was detained by the Hussein regime for his activities on behalf of his coworkers. He has served on the union's negotiating team with both the Oil Ministry and British occupation authorities to defend the rights and interests of oil industry workers in the post-Saddam era.

General Union of Oil Employees (Basra) and Iraq Federation of Oil Unions

The GUOE is an independent, secular union representing 23,000 oil workers in Basra, Amara, and Nassirriyah. The union grew out of the Southern Oil Company Union and now encompasses ten trade union councils in nine Iraqi oil companies. GUOE forced KBR, the Halliburton subsidiary, out of refinery workplaces shortly after the invasion despite Cheney's award of a 'no bid' contract. Members also went on a two-day strike last August, winning their demands for higher pay. The union has taken a strong stand against any plans for privatization and foreign domination of the oil sector. It is leading the fight to prevent imposition of a "hydrocarbon law" drafted by the Bush administration that would lead to foreign corporate control of more than two-thirds of Iraq's oil reserves. After GUOE's first anti-privatization conference last summer, the U.S. and Iraqi governments responded by freezing the union's bank accounts.

Hashmeya Muhsin Hussein, President, Electrical Utility Workers Union- GFIW

Hashmeya Muhsin Hussein is the first woman to head a national union in Iraq. She was born in Basra in 1955. Following high school, she went to work at the Southern Company for Electricity. There she became active in the labor movement. She rose to leadership of the Electricity Workers Union in Basra and recently was elected its national president. She serves on the executive committee of the Basra Work Unions Coalition. She is head of the Women Workers' Bureau and is a leader in the Iraqi Women's Association. She and her 7-year old son have received death threats as a result of her activism.

General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW)

Her union is affiliated with the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW). In January 2004, workers in the Najibeeya, Haartha and Al Zubeir electrical generating stations mounted a wildcat strike, stormed the administration buildings, declared the lower September wage schedule void, and vowed to shut off power if salaries were not raised. The ministry agreed to return to the old scale. Last June the union organized large demonstrations to protest government decisions to hire private contractors to do reconstruction work, replacing the industry's own employees. The problem persists.

In the late 1970s Saddam outlawed independent unions and forced union leaders underground or into exile. In their place, he imposed state-controlled unions. The GFIW grew out of an underground workers' organization, the Workers' Democratic Trade Union Movement (WDTUM), which resisted Ba'athism. The WDTUM publicized Hussein's crimes from exile until the collapse of his regime. Shortly after the collapse, the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) was formed; it was later renamed the General Federation of Iraqi Workers. The GFIW now claims 200,000 members from Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious population, representing Iraq's core industries. The GFIW is committed to creating independent trade unions and improved conditions for working people.

