

the Zionist colonial enterprise. One of its original tasks was enforcing the slogan «Jewish labor only». Not until 1966 did it open its membership to the Palestinians who were considered Israeli citizens after 1948. Even then it has done nothing to protect their rights. Of course, eligible Palestinians began to join the Histadrut nonetheless, as the only means of securing health and employment insurance. After almost twenty years, this had a perceivable impact: In the May 1985 Histadrut elections, the dominant Zionist Labor Party lost ground in 46 Palestinian Arab communities to the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality which got 50% of the Palestinian vote in 22 communities and 30% in 24 others. Given Histadrut's nature, this will not lead to any dramatic change in its policy. Rather it shows something about Palestinian workers' political sentiments. It is a result of the struggle to defend their rights against all odds, employing the structures available to them. More important, it is part of the trend of more overt politicization marked by the 1976 Day of the Land uprising and local elections that brought Democratic Front for Peace and Equality candidates into Galilee and Triangle townhalls.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian trade union movement was severely repressed, first under Jordanian rule, (1948-67), then under Israeli military rule. In the Gaza Strip, the General Federation of Trade Unions was banned with the 1967 occupation, and only allowed to reopen in 1980 under a local capitalist appointed by the occupation authorities; it is forbidden to recruit new members. This is no coincidence, for the Strip is the most extreme example of Zionism's super exploitation of Palestinian labor, due to its small size, high population density and the fact the two-thirds of the residents are refugees. These factors, combined with Israeli restrictions on local industry and fishing, make it almost impossible for the Gaza Palestinians to sustain themselves independently.

The West Bank General Federation of Trade Unions functions despite severe repression against its leaders, cadres and component unions - arrests and house/town arrests, closure of locales, etc. In addition, several labor blocs have been formed in close affiliation to Palestinian resistance organizations and progressive parties. Their activity resulted in the opening of many new unions for previously unorganized workers in the early eighties. This reacti-

vation of the trade union movement cannot be separated from the overall escalation of the Palestinian mass movement in the same period, resisting occupation and especially the plans of Camp David and 'autonomy'.

Zionist policy has severely hampered the trade unions from fulfilling their specific role. Approximately 49% of the active West Bank labor force has been driven to work in 'Israel', but West Bank trade unions are not recognized by the Israeli authorities and therefore lack negotiating rights. Concerning those who work for Palestinian employers, the national question interjects itself. Zionist policy aims to undermine the Palestinian national economy as a whole. It would therefore be counterproductive, economically as well as politically, for Palestinian workers to wage labor disputes against the Palestinian employers to the extent of contributing to this undermining. West Bank trade unions therefore chart a careful course of defending workers' interests in the context of preserving what is left of the local economy, for its further destruction would leave the entire population even more vulnerable to Zionism's exploitation. An increase in strikes was, however, noted in the West Bank from early 1985, as Palestinian workers refused austerity measures imposed as a result of the Israeli economic crisis being shoved into the occupied territories. Workers in some

enterprises have been successful in gearing their struggle against the national and class enemy. The best example is the workers at the Jerusalem District Electric Company who have defended themselves and the national company against Israeli and royal Jordanian encroachments. Another example was the Hotel Workers Union strike in October 1985, protesting the decision of owner Samia Maroun to sell the Shepherds Hotel, in the Jerusalem district, to the Jewish National Fund.

An important component of the West Bank trade unions' work is socially oriented. Projects such as consumer cooperatives aim to meet the needs of laborers and their families in the absence of other social security programs. This work is closely linked to political mobilization and aims to bolster Palestinian steadfastness, national identity and resistance to the occupation, and assert the role of the working class in this struggle. As a result of their effective work in this field, trade unionists have figured prominently among the political activists targeted by the Israeli occupation's iron fist.

Racist discrimination

An Israeli education minister in the fifties once said that he preferred to see Arabs as «woodcutters and gardeners only.» This kind of thinking determined how the Palestinians who remained in

Slave market - Palestinians line up for day labor.

