

consistent with the sacrifices and aspirations of the working masses.» At a press conference in East Jerusalem, Shaher Saad, general secretary of the reunited federation, said that the executive committee will focus on reaching collective agreements with employers and seek «ways to help our workers defend their rights while promoting the economy.» Another primary task is to found new productive projects in order to provide work for the unemployed, especially those who were given green cards by the Israeli authorities, preventing them from entering Israel. The federation will also work to have employers provide health insurance for all workers and their families, and to secure academic scholarships for them. The federation will seek financial support from Arab and international trade unions, because lack of funds for starting any of the planned projects is one of the main obstacles to its work at present.

In an interview with *Al Fajr*, March 5th, George Hazboun, the deputy general secretary of the federation, stressed the importance of trade union cooperation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip: «First we have to be united, then we can proceed to unify the entire union movement in all of Palestine.» Trade union work has always been even more difficult in Gaza than in the West Bank. Until 1980, the trade unions were totally banned by the occupation authorities. When trade unions were allowed to start functioning in 1980, the authorities appointed the leadership. In the ensuing years, however, the nationalist forces have gained ground in union work.

At a time when Israeli and part of the international media are trying to show that the Islamic forces are overtaking the nationalists, especially in Gaza, the results of elections in three Gaza professional unions give a more objective picture of the balance of forces. In the January 19th elections of the Gaza Medical Association, the nationalist list won nine of 11 seats in the leadership; in the Engineers' Association elections on January 26th, the nationalists won four seats, while the Islamic forces won five; the Gaza

Bar Association elected six nationalists and one from an Islamic group to serve in the leadership council.

Free the trade unionists!

An important political task of the federation is exposing Israeli repression against the Palestinian people and unionists in particular. Indeed, union leaders and activists figure prominently among those who have been arrested, expelled or martyred during the intifada. A recent case is that of Hani Baidoun who was arrested in Jerusalem on March 20th, brutally beaten and dragged to an Israeli military vehicle. Since then, there's been no information about him; no charges were specified and he was not allowed to see his wife, attorney or an ICRC representative.

Hani is 35 years old, the father of three children and a UNRWA officer. He was prominent in the formation of the West Bank Trade Union Federation and the founder of the Hotel

Workers' Union in Jerusalem. Hani has been imprisoned by the occupation authorities before. In 1985, he was arrested and tortured, as a result of which he developed an ulcer, had a heart attack and lost hearing in his left ear. For this reason, his recent arrest is doubly alarming.

Hani may be known to some of our readers, since he visited the US in June 1989 as a guest speaker at the NGO convention, and toured 18 US and Canadian cities to speak about the Palestinian trade unions. He met with congressmen, and other politicians, such as Jesse Jackson, as well as with activists from the peace and human rights movements.

The reunification of the trade unions gives new impetus for more international solidarity with Palestinian workers to materially support the work of their federation, and to demand the release of imprisoned unionists, along with all political detainees in Israeli jails.

