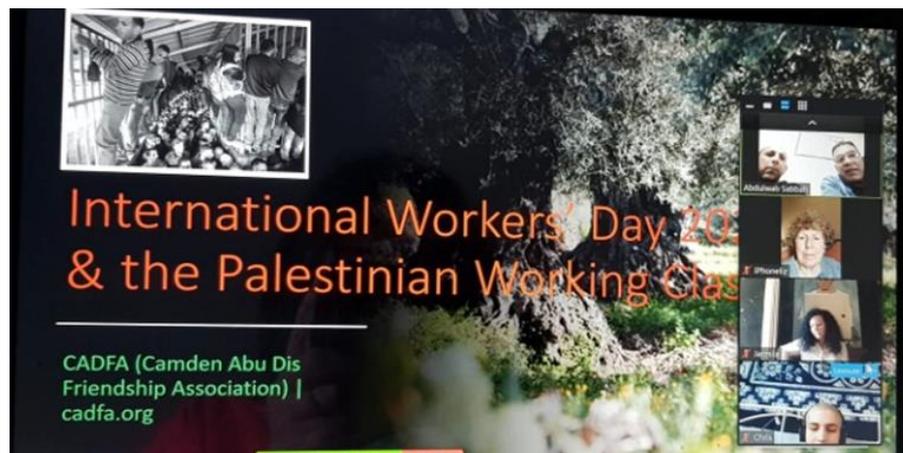


1st May 2020
CADFA
Zoom event
International
Workers' Day
with a focus
on Palestinian
workers



CADFA would like to thank all the speakers who took part in a Zoom event for International Workers' Day on 1st May 2020. In the discussion, we all decided that the points were strong and that we wanted to gather the main points put by the Palestinian speakers and send them to trade unionists and other friends in the UK for information and to encourage them to support our work.

During this meeting, Lee Coveney from Unite the Community explained the current situation in the UK and in particular the precarious employment of many people doing temporary work or on zero hours contracts, and gave solidarity greetings to Palestinian workers on International Workers' Day on behalf of millions of UK workers.

We also explained the work that we do in CADFA to link people at grassroots level in the two countries to encourage people to raise their voices for human rights in Palestine.

We encourage union branches to join us - More information from contact@cadfa.org

Abdulwahab Sabbah – The Palestinian working class

- Palestinian society a hundred years ago: Also had towns and cities, but agriculture was the most important sector.
- The country was also rich in water resources: seas all round, big water resources in the hills (now in the West Bank)
- First Palestinian trade union was in the 1920s: tramline workers to connect Palestine with Syria, Jordan and Mecca
- After 1948, Palestinians lost a lot of their land or were not able to reach land
- Working in Israeli factories, building sector and Israeli agriculture became a big employment sector
- In the West Bank, the Jordanian regime which controlled the area for 19 years gave access to employment in its government sector- there were TUs from 1965 but not allowed to act in West Bank or Jordan up to 1967
- Similar in Gaza – Egypt that controlled the area till 1967 was open to employment in the government and

other sectors for Palestinians. High percentage of refugees: UNRFA set up to provide jobs and work

- After 1967 war, Israel occupied both of these areas and Israel took over major areas of land, (eg Jordan Valley), blocking people from big swathes of agricultural land
- Israelis made their own produce cheaper than local Palestinian produce, which was another push from the land
- Meanwhile Israel opened a wide door for Gazans and West Bankers to work in Israel. The building sector was important, both in Israel and (despite controversy) the settlements.
- The first intifada started in 1987 because of bad treatment of workers by Israel. In the Gaza Strip, an Israeli driver drove into and killed 4 workers in Rafah
- There were 200,000 Palestinian workers in Israel. The General Command of the Intifada called a General Strike which hit the whole Israeli economy. However Israel learned that its dependence on Palestinian workers made it vulnerable.
- First step of the siege: Israel built fences and walls around Gaza from about 1988 to stop movement between Gaza and Israel.
- During the first Gulf War, 1991, Israel imposed checkpoints and military permission across the West Bank, opening Civil Department offices in all towns and connecting their permissions to pass with security files
- Checkpoints and giving passes were points at which Israel attempted to blackmail people and get them to work with them
- Following the Oslo agreement in 1993, things changed. Israel created

further movement restrictions for Palestinian workers.

- Israel brought workers from Jordan and Egypt and other places, believing that they wouldn't be a security risk, and rejecting many Palestinian workers.
- The Palestinian Authority became the first labour market for Palestinian workers (Palestinian security, education, some public services).
- In Palestine, Israel built the Separation Wall and regularly stopped people entering Jerusalem and the 48 areas.
- Currently there are around 350,000 Palestinians registered in the Palestinian trade unions, 210,000 in the West Bank and Jerusalem and the rest in the West Bank. Of these, 40.000 are women

Ali Salah – The struggles of Palestinian workers in Jerusalem/ 1948

- Palestinian workers who are working in the West Bank find it hard to raise enough money. There is a minimum wage in Palestine defined by the Palestinian authority, but it is scarcely enough for one individual, certainly not for a family
- Although most West Bank Palestinians find it hard to get to Jerusalem and the 1948 lands, tens of thousands of Palestinians go daily from the West Bank to work there either with special permission or without permission – though going with no permission is seen by Israel as a crime
- There are very few Gazans also working in Jerusalem/1948 because of the siege.

- In order to get permission, a worker has to have proof that he has a job offer and then go to the Civil Department and wait and pay for permission
- But this means that people are open to middlemen (agents) who can offer a job if you pay them – the job offer can lead to the permission but this leaves the work in the hands of the middle man.
- It is difficult to get permission – not automatic. It can be refused if anyone in the worker’s wider family has a ‘security file’ however close to the worker - or if the worker has been asked to spy for Israel or for many other reasons.
- Neither Israel nor the Palestinian authority say that the system of middlemen is legal, but who is profiting from them? Meanwhile the workers have to pay a percentage of their income regularly to the people who found them a job and get them the permission to do it.
- A permission to go to Jerusalem/ 48 will be temporary: it will have fixed times and dates and be typically (but not always) for three months only.
- Getting to Jerusalem is very difficult because of the system of checkpoints in the Separation Wall. (We looked at film of the humiliating situation at the big checkpoints which are extremely crowded and shut whenever Israel wants to shut them).
- Palestinian workers suffer extreme racism during their work with Israelis who don’t look at Palestinians as equal human beings on any level.
- Their rights as workers are not respected on any level. They are regularly asked to work in extremely poor conditions with no protection or facilities and no guaranteed employment. Working often in the building sector, there can be any kind of awful accident, and Palestinian workers bear the price of this themselves: if in the worst case they become disabled, they will not have insurance to cover their costs while they will lose their ability to go on earning a living.
- The racism is clear. Israeli workers have proper insurance and a claim to workers’ rights, but not Palestinians.
- Palestinians who have permission have 10% of their pay docked to pay their trade union dues. 40% of this money goes to the Palestinian Authority trade union (PGFTU) but they have no jurisdiction in Jerusalem/ 48 so cannot help if there is an issue.
- 60% goes to Histadrut, the Israeli trade union, but it is also institutionally racist: it provides services for Israeli workers but not for the Palestinians who work in Israel.

the Palestinians who work in Israel.

- Palestinian workers in the time of Corona have been wanted by Israel when they are fit and well – encouraged more than before to come in through the checkpoints, although the Palestinian Authority is asking them



to stay at home – but when they get sick, they are literally thrown out-taken and dumped on the West Bank side of checkpoints (we showed a film of a worker dumped in this way), and not provided with any health services

- The Palestinian working class are targeted by the Occupation – there are very many martyrs and many prisoners. The working class are always on the front line.

Fadwa al-Labadi –Palestinian women workers on Israeli agricultural settlements

- In 2019, 18% of Palestinian women worked formally in the labour market, while 70% of men were working.
- 41% of women in the labour force were unemployed, compared with 21% of men
- Women earn less than men – an average wage (including a big span of amounts) for women is around 98 shekels a day where for men it is 102 – in each case, this will cover some very low wages as well as some much higher.
- The Palestinian minimum wage is 1450 shekels a month. But 29% of working men do not get this much, and 35% of working women do not get so much.
- A quarter of female workers work in the private sector without job contract, and less than half of them do not receive any contribution to the retirement pension / end-of-service rewarding or any paid maternity leave.
- The most exploited and abused and violated are the Palestinian women who work in the Israeli settlements

particularly the Jordan Valley agricultural settlements.

- The harsh situation and widespread unemployment in general and men in particular, outside of the main Palestinian cities have forced women to work in settlements. The Palestinian Authority ask people not to work in settlements but women get work in settlements illegally, contracted orally by an agent, and they are open to exploitation and poor working conditions ,
- The estimate is around 1800 women, constantly increasing as a result of Palestinians’ poor socioeconomic situation, but this is an underestimate: firstly, women so not like to say that they work in the settlements, and secondly, employers and agents try to avoid accountability.
- Most of these women workers are from Jericho and the Jordanian valley, employed in farms or as domestic servants. They usually leave home at 4am and get back home at 5pm. And earn only 50-80 shekels.
- There is no social protection or social security, and women working in Israeli settlements are exposed to unjust violations of their rights: they have unpaid leave, no health insurance system and they do not receive any health care treatment for work injuries.
- As they work with no contract and cannot hold agents or employers to account, they do not receive end-of-service benefits (which is what Palestinians usually get in lieu of pension)
- In addition to this irregular work which provides neither job nor economic security. they always suffer from anxiety and fear and a feeling of vulnerability. This is caused by the Occupation’s unjust measures and practices, by the fact that many in

Palestinian society lockdown on women working in the settlements and by the fear of sexual harassment by operators and brokers.