

Occupied Basra 19/1/2004

The Invisible Fire - Public Sector Worker Struggle and Trade Unionism in British-Occupied Basra - by Ewa Jasiewicz

Forward: this article was written initially for Occupation Watch but due to political and editorial differences has since been reclaimed by the author and is being distributed in its original form. Original editing was done by Labour Historian Marge Linsky, much of which has been kept.

This author spent 3 months in British-Occupied Basra between November 2003 and January 2004 investigating the conditions of Public Sector workers in Iraq's biggest oil companies - The Basra Oil Company and The Southern Oil Company - plus those of workers in the region's electricity sector and the country's key port, Umm Qsr. OW studied the level of organization, attitudes towards unions, and the actions of existing unions in the region.

Another objective of the visit was to investigate the effect and operations of the corporations that were the main awardees of contracts to reconstruct/privatize Iraq -- Stevedoring Services of America (SSA was the first company to be awarded a USAID contract in Iraq), Bechtel, and Halliburton. SSA received \$4.8m to run the port of Umm Qsr), Bechtel received \$34.6m and Halliburton through its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root received \$680m. OW also investigated various foreign subcontractors of these companies.

Furthermore, this author sought to provide information, ideas, solidarity and practical support to Iraqi workers, namely by holding seminars on ILO conventions, the background of foreign companies privatizing Iraq and Occupation Administration Orders. By providing this material, I sought to further empower the workers.

Naming this report 'The Invisible Fire' attests to the fact that workers' struggle is alive and on fire in British-Occupied Basra; however, the struggle is invisible due to the lack of journalistic reports and the absence of other outside activists supporting this struggle. Today's corporate correspondents have little interest in the social and autonomous worker's reconstruction and resistance to the Occupation.

Obstacles

The internal workings of these sensitive industrial sectors are difficult to research for several reasons:

- A fluctuating power struggle exists between the British forces and ex-Baathists, the British and the Shiite-based Daawa Party, the Daawa Party and ex-Baathists, and the Communist Party and former Baathists.
- Internal struggles permeate all of these groupings since most contain former Baathists of varying levels of influence
- Unaligned, unorganized workers who are instigating strike actions separate from their company's union are clashing with the unions trying to control them.

- Individual unions recognized by the Federation of Trade Unions in Iraq are unhappy with the Federation, which they see as a front for the Communist Party.

Gathering information was also complicated because of a legacy of the past regime, the suspicion of foreigners, and the gender of the researcher, a woman whom the male-dominated unions initially did not take seriously. However, after a short time, people accepted the researcher into their homes and she lived with and accompanied union families in/to some of Basra's poorest areas: Hayaniya and Jhoomouria

Background – Labor and industry under the Baathist regime

The Public Sector

In 1964, Tahar Yahya's republican regime brought the first wave of nationalization to Iraq, nationalizing most large and medium scale manufacturing, trading and financial companies. In 1972, the oil industry's nationalization sealed the government's role as the biggest employer in Iraq. Oil is the lifeblood of the Iraqi economy; oil revenue was 95% of Iraq's foreign exchange earnings. As a result, the regime ensured that among all laborers, oil workers were the most guarded, manipulated, and repressed. An oil strike against the regime would amount to a deathblow – as witnessed in Iran when striking oil workers were key in overthrowing the Shah.

In 1984 the total industrial labor force consisted of about 170,000 workers. State-operated factories employed slightly more than 80 percent of these workers, while 13 percent worked in the private sector. The remaining 7 percent worked in the mixed economy, factories operated jointly by the state--which held a major share of the common stock--and the private sector.

Iraq's military-industrial apparatus was forever expanding in order to support the regime's totalitarianism. Control was enforced by five separate special security forces, 1.5 million army soldiers, a police force numbering hundreds of thousands and 22 factory complexes throughout the country producing everything from cluster bombs, Polish and Czech-licensed tanks, wheeled APCs, liquid nitrogen, Ababil rockets, aerial bombs and small naval boats. (Source: www.globalsecurity.org). Workers in these sectors were also placed under heavy surveillance due to the government's dependence on their products to maintain its authority and the threat that the resistance might steal ammunitions, plans or substances.

All in all, among all workers, public sector workers were economically better off since wages under the public sector were better regulated and not as susceptible to the fluctuating Market. Repression of workers was also not as concentrated as it was in the private sector because the public sector workforce was larger and the worker's autonomy was thus enhanced. But, as in all sectors, the regime allowed no protest or strike activity. Workers had no rights or voice. The final nail in the coffin of workers' struggles was the 1987 Trade Union Organization Law that banned unions in the public sector, converted all government sector workers into "civil servants" and saw the birth of The General Federation of Trade Unions in Iraq – an Orwellian nightmare of a union-turned-all-pervasive surveillance and torture tool. The crack-down on

workers in 1987 was part of the general escalation of Baath terrorism that also led to the genocidal three-year Anfal campaign against the Kurds. The economic depletion, national fatigue, and corrosion of authority due to six years of war with Iran along with the massive loss of life in Basra in 1987 (40,000 from both sides added to an estimated million deaths the previous five years), and Khomeni's looming threat of a final offensive indicated the Baathist state was weakening. To reassert its power, the Baathist state responded with a wave of unbridled social and physical violence against the population.

The Private Sector

In Iraq, the private sector was any business that the state hadn't nationalized or controlled. This included the service sector, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes, the private construction industry, workshops, timber mills, nail, cement, pipe, and textile factories, farms, supermarkets, and markets. There were and still are, in order of size, the following private sector unions: The Union of Transportation, representing drivers, assistant drivers, and garage attendants; the Union of Building and Wood Workers, small shop and construction workers and apprentices; The Public Service Sector Union, hotel and restaurant workers, waiters, and barbers; The Union of Tailors, representing tailor shop owners and workers, plus textile workers; and lastly, the Agriculture and Food Supplies Union, supermarket workers, bakers, farmers, and market stall holders.

According to the Vice Chairman of the Basra Federation of Iraqi Trades Unions Samir Hanoon, under the dictatorship these unions were "structured without anything inside, picture unions, yellow unions, empty unions," loyal to and used by the regime to promote and secure the regime.

Private sector workers under the regime were completely unprotected, forced into joining the fake unions, and coerced into participating in stage-managed elections where a Baathist would always win. They were paid less than their Public Sector counterparts, subject to severe working conditions – polluted environments, long hours, exposure to hazardous substances etc. Strikes or protests were out of the question and if attempted were met with torture and repression (by the boss or the union head) in order to deter further disobedience. Depending on the enterprise and the level of Baath party membership, workers might receive bonuses and extras or bribes. From the 1980s onward, most bosses in the large private sector industrial enterprises were inner-circle Saddam family members or regime loyalists from the same Al Tikriti tribe as Saddam. These same bosses continue to hold their positions under the Occupation and to use the same methods of intimidation and exploitation.

In the private sector, I spoke to security guards employed by the South African private security company Erinys, that currently trains/employs 14,000 personnel to guard Iraq's oil installations and private corporate HQs. The guards' wage is \$100 per month with no extras for accompanying dangerous convoys between Basra and Baghdad. Erinys' Boss in the South Gary Whitty called the wages "generous," but Iraqi workers are furious and want a raise. They are risking their lives protecting the very companies which have come to exploit their country. No union exists in Erinys but Whitty said "Whatever the CPA has said, we will follow;" he would recognize a union "if it was legal" according to the CPA.

Public-Private Sector

During the Iran-Iraq War, many of Saddam Hussein's relatives and tribal collaborators started their own businesses, using bloodied capital gleaned from the steady nationalization of assets and resources. These entrepreneurs joined forces with existing businessmen and merchants, forming in effect a public-private sector, with the State owning 51% of the business and the friends of the state or political figures themselves owning 49%

One of the most obvious regime-finagled sectors was oil and more precisely its transportation business. The state had its own oil transportation company. Yet, the regime created at least four more companies in order to “drum up competition” (the official excuse) or in reality to provide the means by which the regime secretly traded and smuggled crude oil and oil-related products out of the country. The dictatorship thus established public-private companies like Baghdad-based Gaylani to glean extra profits in order to support its apparatuses of repression. In the 1970s and ‘80s, with its so-called “explosive plan,” the Baath inner circle built a rash of monuments, luxury villas, statues, palaces, and ambitious military projects that robbed the economy and, in turn, created urban eyesores. During this period, the public sector shrank and the private/public sector soared, expanding and strengthening the regime.

In the 1980s, when the ID was worth \$3.3, the average wage for a cleaner in Iraq was \$900 per month. As a result of the US/UK-influenced sanctions during the 1990s, hyperinflation saw the dinar plummet in 1993 to 4000ID for \$1. The purchasing power of the dinar fluctuated between prohibitively low to almost useless. Since the 1980s, the regime had provided workers with food, family, location, risk, and longevity of service payments, which helped workers survive and bound them to the regime.

In Basra, I spoke to former Sheraton employees, over 300 of whom became wage less following the collapse of the regime. In Iraq, Sheraton was 51% state owned, 49% private. Workers have been campaigning for back payments for the past nine months. Their former bosses have refused to pay them anything and the Occupation Administration has refused to compensate them. As a result, some of the Sheraton workers now guard the burned-out, charred shell of the hotel, warming themselves around debris that smolders day after day. CPA South's Sergeant Major Clement, Civil-Military Centre Officer for Basra, said that “the coalition won't take (their case)” and that the Iraqi treasury was now responsible for their wages. Many workers previously employed in the Private-Public sector have lost their jobs because businesses were looted or destroyed after the war and the Iraqi economy under occupation has crashed

Al Kattall Ista'mer – The Killing Continues – Neo-Baathism in Basra

The effect of the previous 35-year regime on workers' capacity to organize has been devastating. Basic social relationships between people are still fraught and filled with distrust and suspicion. In Basra, neo-Baathism is firmly securing itself as an

underground political force with people still being watched, reports still being written, and investigations into the activities of any prominent people or outsiders. Former Baathists are using the capital they previously accrued through their obedience and activism within the regime to start up new businesses and NGOs, and are infiltrating if not already present in all the Islamic parties, trade unions and some international NGOs. This presence follows the last orders of the Dictator who ordered Baathists to attain positions of influence in such organizations so as to steer and prepare those organizations for a future Baath revival. The result is a well-organized, skilled in social control and manipulation, neo-Baathist underground movement, connecting itself to foreigners, parties, businesses and the occupation administration itself.

Political parties, whose members are active in the Governing Council, are imitating their former oppressors, copying old Baathist tactics; each political party maintains an intelligence unit responsible for surveillance and elimination of potential opponents or suspicious outsiders. One of the present-day union Federation members went to Baghdad to appear in a documentary film and didn't tell any other members for fear of being seen as working against the Federation. OW wanted to hold a seminar on women's rights for female trade unionists but a high ranking and progressive female trade unionist said that this would be impossible since it would be viewed as a threat to the federation and could be targeted by either Islamic groups or the Communist Party. When I suggested a small casual meeting at her home with two other female trade unionists, she and her husband refused, visibly afraid that it would bring suspicion and potential harm to all participants. I settled for handing over information.

Each political party represented in the Governing Council has members who monitor and in some cases try to influence the work of every union. Everyone understands that whoever controls the workers of Iraq effectively controls Iraq. Surveillance, corruption, violence, manipulation, slander and intimidation exists beyond the industrial sector, permeating every level of society and social intercourse. Fear, distrust, double or hidden agendas, lies, self/family/tribal/party interest, and sectarianism, are strong and deep-seated in the social psyche. Iraq is still (and will for generations be) recovering from the social psychosis created by an entrenched culture of paranoia, denial and acceptance of and participation in and state and self-internalized terror.

The Relationship between Unions, Ministry of Social Affairs and the CPA

Three key CPA-issued Orders and two Public Notices (being implemented as orders) have had the greatest impact on workers' capacity to organize, strike, and dissent. In chronological order, these are:

- **Bremer's Public Notice regarding "Public Incitement to Violence and Disorder"** issued June 5, 2003 gives the occupying army the right to detain anyone suspected of "inciting civil disorder, rioting or damage to property" or "inciting violence against Coalition forces or CPA personnel." The Notice is designed to "discourage pronouncements or the distribution of materials which could destabilize the sensitive environment that currently exists in Iraq." The term "incitement" can be broadly interpreted and could be used in the event of

a strike or picket that the CPA deems to be destabilizing, especially in the oil sector.

- Secondly, and most importantly, **The Public Notice on Organization in the Workplace** issued June 6, 2003, states that the Coalition “respects Iraqi Law” (meaning previous Baath law). “This extends to Iraqi labor laws prescribing the conditions under which employees of government instrumentalities and enterprises continue to work under the CPA on behalf of the people of Iraq. Legislation with regards to organization within the workplace remains unchanged and any changes will be ultimately up to the new Iraqi government to decide.” With the handover of power scheduled to take place in July 2004, the military will therefore enforce Baathist anti-worker, anti-strike legislation for several months. In the meantime, the CPA has issued notices to all relevant government ministries informing them that the former laws still apply and public-sector workers’ organizations are prohibited. Violation of this Notice however, is not, according to the CPA's own rules on Public Notices, “a detainable or punishable offence.”
- Third is **Order 19 on Freedom of Assembly, issued July 10**, which forbids: “The practice of multiple demonstrations on the same day in different locations in municipalities.” Under Order 19, any public assembly means any action taken by anybody in any place, be it a private roadway (e.g the approach to a refinery or within a refinery) without permission is illegal and punishable by up to one year’s imprisonment. “It is unlawful for any person, group or organization to conduct or participate in any march, assembly, meeting or gathering on roadways, public thoroughfares or public places in more than one specific area of or location in, any municipality on any given day, unless acting under authority of the Coalition Force Commander or a Divisional or Brigade Commander. The use of typical English language such as 'thoroughfares' echoes British Public Order law, which Order 19 may well have been modeled on.
- **Order Number 30, Reform of Salaries and Employment and Employment Conditions of State Employees** issued September 9, set wage levels for all state employees. Since the Iraqi state is a non-entity and the CPA determines all funds and budget allocations, the CPA is now technically the boss of all public sector workers in Iraq. The scale sets forth 10 steps and 13 grades. The base pay for step one, grade one workers is 69,000 Iraqi Dinar per month - approximately \$40. (By contrast, the recommended monthly wage for a sweatshop worker in a neighboring Iranian Free Trade Zone is \$100.) The top rate of pay, Step 10, Grade 1, is 3 million Iraqi Dinar. All special pay (including family allowances, accommodation subsidies, isolated location or risky work bonuses, and university service allowances) is suspended. Many workers relied on their family allowances in order to survive. Most workers to whom OW spoke were receiving their pay haphazardly in Dinars one month and dollars the other. The base rate appeared to be \$60, followed by \$120, \$180, \$220 and \$300, a continuation of the CPA’s initial Emergency Payment.

- Finally, we have **Order 39 on Foreign Investment**, issued September 2. The Order is notorious for privatizing everything above ground level in Iraq and for violating Hague Regulations (Articles 47 on Pillage and 55 on Usufruct, forbidding the administration of anything which alters its natural substance) and Geneva Convention 53 on destroying property. Natural resources (e.g. oil) remain Iraqi, however foreign companies have the right to process, refine, market and transport products. Foreigners cannot purchase land but can lease it for up to 40 years. Order 39 also allows for 100% foreign investment and 100% immediate repatriation of profits. Iraq's highest tax rate was slashed from 45% to a flat 15%. Deposits of \$100,000 must be made in Iraqi banks, but anybody can take their profit and run. Orders 39 and 30 technically transformed the whole of Iraq into one massive Free Trade Zone.

When I spoke to the Federation of Trade Unions Basra Branch and workers in general, we found they were only aware of Order 30 on Employment and Salaries (really only the wage table at the end of it) and unaware of the other Orders. This lack of knowledge reflects the CPA's control of the single TV channel and other press, the undeveloped private press, and the fact that most Iraqis are financially and technically alienated from the internet.

New Iraqi Labor Law?

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is currently working with an unidentified group of lawyers, secretly developing new labor relations legislation. No one has been allowed to meet these lawyers or know what criteria they are using for the new legislation. The Federation has tried several times to provide input but has been denied at every turn. Irene Findley, a British advisor employed by Centcom (United States Central Command, a Pentagon-backed Department of Defense body responsible for planning and conducting military operations) told trade unionists that no one could attend or participate in the forging of new Labor Laws. OW was told three times that the lawyers were simply "too busy to see us." OW submitted a set of questions to the Ministry asking who these lawyers were, what their experience was in terms of labor legislation or arbitration, and which bodies (such as the ILO, the General Federation of Iraq Trade Unions, foreign trade unions or governmental ministries) were involved in the process. We were promised a reply within one week but never received one.

The Ministry of Finance, or rather the CPA Director of Management and Budget, has confiscated and frozen all the funds (2 billion Iraq Dinars, or \$1 million) and assets, such as computers and furniture, belonging to the original Baathist trade union federation. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, four other trade union federations claim to be heirs to the bloodstained fortune: the Worker Communist Party's Committee for the Preparation of Independent Workers Councils, the Free Society Party, the Islamic Workers Movement (which is related to the Al Wafaq and Daawa Parties), and the old Baathist federation.

This friction provides the CPA with an excuse to continue to "disorganize", procrastinate and deny unionization so that foreign investors can firmly establish

themselves and profiteer without interference from workers. Bremer's response to this inter-organizational conflict over the old union booty was "let the flowers grow and we will see which blooms the best." One prominent unionist, who wished to remain anonymous, said that Baathists were still controlling the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and still discriminating against workers.

The Ministry did, however, abolish child labor (illegal now for those under 15), and thus address the weakest industrial sector in Iraq and the most insignificant in terms of power, organization or presence in key industrial sites. This was a cosmetic public relations move rather than any significant sign of progress towards workers rights in Iraq.

The Federation of Iraqi Trade Unions

Immediately following the fall of the dictatorship, activists from the Iraqi Democratic Trade Union Movement (a highly respected underground workers' organization active since 1980) established the Federation of Iraqi Trade Unions, the biggest and most authoritative network of trade unions in Iraq. The Federation represents workers in the Oil and Gas Union, the Railway Union, the Vegetable Oil and Food Staff Union, the Transport Union, the Textile Union, the Leather Products Union, the Construction and Carpentry Union, the Transport and Communication Union, the Electrician and Municipalities Union, the Printing Union, the Mechanics Union, the Service Industry Union and the Agriculture and Irrigation Workers Union. These unions organize in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Wasset, Dyla, Kurbala, Al Najif, Babel and Mesan.

In Basra, the headquarters is located in the old Baathist Union building, now home to the Communist Party, Women's Organization and at least 15 homeless families (paying rent to the Communist Party). The Federation has apparently signed a contract allowing the Communist Party to stay in the building for another 10 years. This Federation did not consult its member unions in making this decision. The head of the Basra Branch of the Federation is Hussein Fadhil Hassan; Samir Hanoon Kuhaiyet is Vice Chairman and head of the Transport Union.

Elections for the Federation's leaders took place in May, at a conference attended by approximately 120 worker activists. Ten representatives and the Chairman of the Federation were elected. Of the ten representatives, all are Communist Party members. The elected term is four years with no re-election.

The Federation's chairman, Hussein Fadhil Hassan, said the biggest obstacles to organizing were:

'Illegality' - resulting in a lack of confidence by the Federation and workers and no means to force managers or the CPA to listen to their demands.

Repression - In Baghdad on December 10, 2003, U.S. troops raided and trashed the Federation's headquarters and arrested ten leaders who were held overnight and released without charge or explanation. In Basra, during September's fuel price hike demonstrations, troops seized Samir Hanoon, acting as negotiator for the

demonstrating crowd, and bundled him into a jeep, The crowd later de-arrested him but his ID has yet to be returned.

Distrust of unions following past trauma at the hands of Baathist unions

Lack of funds to buy essential computer and communications equipment

No knowledge of their rights as enshrined in ILO conventions. Noone had ever even seen an ILO Convention, despite being aware of the Organisation, before Occupation watch began working through key conventions in Arabic with Federation leaders.

The unemployment crisis - Hussein noted that the foreign companies and subcontractors working on reconstruction were ignoring Iraqi workers and giving jobs to foreign labor.

In November 2003 the Basra Federation branch notified the Mayor, the local council, the Governing Council and all political parties active in the area that the Federation branch did not agree with the Governing Council decision to delay the recognition of independent Iraqi trade unions. The statement called upon the Governing Council to quickly legalize unions and union organizing, recognize the existence of workers rather than 'employees' and to free up frozen union and pension funds. The idea was to avoid confronting the real source of the repression of Iraqi workers today, i.e. the CPA.

The Federation also issued a statement to the above-mentioned authorities declaring that if any trade unionists are victimized or targeted, every trade union will take action, including striking, to support the unionists and their union. Although sure to be accepted by all member unions, unions such as the SOC one were not consulted on this statement; SOC trade unionists stated that the issuance of this statement pointed to the need for more Federation meetings, collective decision-making and information sharing.

However, the Federation's power within the labor movement is not monolithic.

Islamic Unions in Basra

Following the fall of the regime, Islamic parties through workers councils organized around their affiliation to various Islamic leaders began organizing unions in the oil sector. The most popular Islamic union is organized around the "quietest democrat" the Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who rejects the formation of political parties and militias and all who join them. By calling on people to keep away from warring parties, secret militias, brigades and opponents, the Shia cleric has gained a reputation as an elusive honorable visionary. At the same time that Islamic workers were forming leaderless unions at a grassroots level in the oil sector, the Communist Party was creating a top-down union Federation, selecting a leadership based on existing communist Party hierarchies. The Party was seeking to build an apparatus to control and administer unions; it then attempted to build a base of support.

Both groups reached a point in organizing where neither could progress without co-operating with the other. Although the Islamic workers tried to form an alternate Federation to challenge the CP Federation, the CP controlled all private sector and most public sector unions, and was able to effectively block the formation of a viable Islamic Federation. This caused the Islamic workers to back off.

In its race to beat the Islamic unions from organizing parallel unions, the Federation accepted workers as trade union leaders without investigating the workers' backgrounds. For the Federation, it was important that it actually began to look like a Federation, containing a variety of unions. Old Baathists took advantage of the situation to become involved in forming unions in different sectors. Because of these contradictions and power struggles, the Islamic and communist activists mutually agreed to officially define all the unions and the federation itself as temporary.

Unions? What Unions? – Unaligned Workers' Struggle

Most if not all the workers I met did **not** clearly understand what a union was or why it would be in their interest to join one. They did not comprehend union structures, the right to strike, the right of free association and collective bargaining and the idea of challenging the boss in a sustainable way (rather than just rioting or kicking him). The idea of organizing, holding meetings, and making plans with other workers was a new concept since such activity was virtually impossible under the all-seeing eye of the fascist Baath. We heard comments such as "We don't even know what a union is;" and "Our union isn't real, it's just something for the media" (Najebeeya Electricity Plant Workers) and "We never even thought of having a union;" and "Why should we lie to ourselves? We've lived through 35-years of fear, do we know what is organization? 25 people can't even decide on one word." –(Umm Qasr workers in response to the suggestion of forming a union).

From this researcher's perspective, the biggest obstacles to unionization are:

Distrust of all unions due to their past Baathist function as tools of surveillance and repression

No perception or frame of reference to view a union as anything but a tool of repression and surveillance due the dictatorship's success in crushing worker solidarity

Suspicion of the Trade Union Federation as a tool of Communist Party empowerment

The Federation's Centralization of information and command and lack of discussion or agreement among member unions

Former high ranking Baathists with managerial power who intimidate workers through their old Baathist connections and the new militia forces that protect them – no party in the GC functions without some level of settlement/agreement/co-operation with former Baathists – e.g the Supreme

Council for the Islamic Revolution protection agreements with The Badr Brigades

Inter-party fighting and the exploitation of trade unions by political parties seeking to consolidate the parties' power bases. Since this is occurring throughout Iraq, unorganized workers are suspicious of unions and hopeless about their own economic situations.

Struggle and Strike Action in Basra So Far

Despite the Occupation Administration's attempts to strangle workers' struggles, workers' courage and combativeness in the face of unfair wages and working conditions have forced bosses and the CPA to recognize trade unions in Basra. It's easy to officially deny and pay no heed to unions on paper but one cannot ignore livid workers trashing their bosses' offices, attacking corrupt administration officials, walking out, rioting for days, and declaring their intention to "shut down" Iraq in critical sectors such as oil.

Here we shall mention one great victory. For details of other struggles and strike actions see the *Appendix I*.

Beginning in mid-December, electricity and oil sector workers had called for a general strike over the low pay imposed by Order 30. Around mid December, Southern Oil Company Union reps held two days of meetings with the company's management to discuss alternatives to the CPA wage table. Taking into consideration current market prices of everything from rent, baby milk and vegetables to gas, petrol, clothing and medicines, the union devised a new wage table. The lowest minimum wage was set at approximately 155,000 ID, a leap of almost three levels from the CPA wage table. Both SOC's General Director and the company's administration agreed with the Union's table. The table was also backed by threats of "total shut-down" if the table wasn't considered and a remedy reached. And if troops were called in take over the pumps, union reps said that workers would join the armed resistance in reprisal and defense of the strike. The threats prompted the Minister of Oil himself to come Basra, meet with union leaders, and agree to the CPA's emergency wage scale which starts at \$60. This concession has proved hollow following actions by the Central Bank of Iraq and Occupation Administration to devalue of the Dollar (an old Baathist technique) from 1650 dinar to 1150 in a period of two weeks. The Dollar is currently stagnating at 1150-1350 ID per dollar, compared to its \$1 to 2000 ID level five months ago.

On January 20, the GC agreed to implement a new negotiated SOC wage table which all oil sector workers in Iraq – numbering well over 25,000 – will be receiving in this month's wage packets. It was a historical victory and the new wage table will most likely be applied to Iraqi public sector workers in the Electricity, Gas and Ministry sectors within the next two months. The lowest minimum wage for an Iraqi oil worker is now 102,000 ID and workers will receive an 18-30% in their wages according to risk and location of work.

Summary

Workers key demands, identified through research and interviews are as follows:

Workers key demands are as follows:

Higher Wages:

Due to market prices doubling in some areas, the price of gas more than tripling and all previous subsidies being cut, workers' families are still suffering. A worker with 30 years experience working in SOC gets just 390,000 ID(\$180) per month to house, feed, clothe, school and heal if sick, a family of on average 6 children. A worker with 11 years company service and with as big a family potentially has 200,000 ID (\$100) to do the same. The CPA wagescale under Order 30 is reviled by workers across the board.

Social Benefits:

Many workers articulated a desire for family aid and a return to social housing, provided by the government and also benefits for the unemployed (standing at 70%), currently promised at a future fantasy false \$60 per month by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

All Former High Ranking Baathists Out of Management and Administration Positions

Chosen for removal by workers and union reps themselves

Decent Safety Equipment for All Workers

Sanctions and Baath dictatorship attack and punishment of the Iraqi working class means that all industrial workplaces in Iraq have a chronic lack of safety equipment.

Recognition of Trade Unions by the Governing Council

Compelling managers to listen to and negotiate with workers and their representatives and legalizing and protecting those representatives from intimidation and violence by management. Ratification of ILO Convention 87 would consolidate this.

Involvement and Transparency in the Process of Defining New Labour Legislation

Participation and consultation in the process of writing up laws which will have a significant effect on guiding and shaping workers struggle for achieving and securing better conditions and worker-management relations in the future Iraq. Recognition and active implementation of all previous ILO conventions secured by Iraqi workers' struggles is fundamentally necessary.

Control of the reconstruction process

Iraqi workers want to be the ones to reconstruct their own workplaces and industries.

Training of workers in new engineering technologies

Training was something restricted to high ranking Baath party loyalists in the past and the same desires were echoed from Najeebeeya to Rumeilla 'We need help to learn skills which the sanctions and Saddam denied us', 'We need skilled Iraqi workers - technicians and engineers - to come back to Iraq and help us and help us rebuild our country'. Despite the sanctions turning many Iraqi workers into experimental inventive geniuses recycling and cannibalizing any parts they could get their hands on in order to keep industry running, the need to learn how to use new equipment and new technologies is strong, as much for reasons of personal creative growth and skills enhancement and exploration as much as for enabling industry sites to function more reliably, smoothly and safely.

Practical Support

- This researcher printed out and distributed copies of ILO Conventions 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (to which Iraq is not a signatory), which grants workers the right to form their own representative organizations. I also distributed copies of ILO Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, which guarantees workers the right to strike. Iraq is a signatory to this convention.

Thanks to the decades-long struggle of Iraqi workers, sometimes paid for in lives and blood, Iraq today is a signatory to 66 ILO conventions, all of which the CPA should enforce since the CPA still respects previous Iraqi labor laws. These conventions range from the key Convention 1 (1919) on Hours of Work guaranteeing the 8-hourday, Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention 1962 guaranteeing some form of medical care, sickness, maternity, invalid, old-age, survivors, employment injury, unemployment and family benefits; Convention 148 on Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) safeguarding workers from physical hazards and Convention 152 on Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) 1979 insuring the same with regards to dock work; and Convention 151 which protects trade unionists from discrimination and allows them to carry out organizing activities freely.

(For specific ILO conventions that will aid Iraqi workers, see *Appendix II*.)

- re-printed the Arabic version of the excellent US Labor Against The War booklet entitled “Corporate Invasion of Iraq”, which details the histories and labor relations of corporations awarded US contracts in Iraq and gave this out to workers and trade unionists. This was an eye-opener to many and made the workers eager for more knowledge about the contracts with the companies controlling their workplaces. We helped provide more information from news sources gleaned from the internet;

- printed out and burned discs dealing with the relevant CPA Orders and Public Notices that affect labor organizing as examples of the CPA's unilateral decision-making power over their livelihoods;
- made compact discs, in Arabic, with all the ILO conventions to which Iraq is a signatory and all the conventions it hasn't signed and gave these to trade union activists and leaders. We flagged non-ratified conventions such as No.175 on Part Time Work (1994) because of the lack of shift workers' rights and in anticipation of potential new cutbacks. We also drew workers' attention to Convention 155 (1981) on Occupational Safety and Health, which lays out workers' rights to a safe and healthy workplace;
- held seminars on all of the above with trade union leaders;
- held a joint Federation and OW conference. OW presented a paper on "Workers Rights in Occupied Iraq and Reclaiming ILO Conventions." The response of trade unionists was overwhelmingly positive with demands for the speech to be translated into Arabic and distributed to all the unions in the Federation;
- asked SOC Union if international solidarity activists would be welcome on picket lines in order to try to deter and de-escalate violence from Occupation Troops and act as peace observers monitoring troop responses. The union treated the offer with respect but it was deemed "un-necessary" according to Hassan Jum'a who said "So if we get killed, so? Shaheed (Martyr)." The present writer believes that such action would hurt the pride and honor that Iraqi workers have in defending themselves. It could also be seen as buying into a "white-skin privilege savior complex" which is already a well-worn stereotype cultivated by decades of colonial domination as well Saddam's 13-year vitriol against sanctions-propelled Westerners. Observers rather than front-line activists are probably more suitable as foreign activists might become targets of aggression in strikes or inhibit Iraqi workers from expressing their rage against the occupation;
- accompanied trade unionists to meetings with their bosses and advocated on their behalf for better conditions. This researcher informed bosses about the ILO Conventions to which Iraq was a signatory;
- arranged meetings between trade union activists and the head of Al Jawad Trading and Contracting Company (a Kuwaiti firm winning a sizable portion of construction work from KBR), representatives from Kuwaiti-Iraqi Dehdari Trading and Contracting company (specializing in hiring manpower), and the massive Kuwaiti firm Al Khoraffi in order to help find work for unemployed workers;
- Supported trade unionists in their efforts at grassroots de-Baathification by putting activists currently compiling lists of former Baath loyalists in touch with recruitment contacts in companies involved in reconstructing Iraq. This was to help prevent Baathists from gaining positions of authority to intimidate

workers and to reproduce the Baathists' previous power, and to fight for justice in opportunities for the talented non-Baathist or Baath renouncing workers who might be cut out from any career development by the neo-Baathists.

- gave internet navigation lessons to trade unionists and created email accounts for them, as well as arranging inexpensive computer lessons for them in the local computer college;
- provided the Iraqi unionists with a database of international trade union contacts, web-addresses and emails of labor rights activists in order to stimulate information exchanges and solidarity campaigns with Iraqi workers;
- created a database of media contacts and a template of a mock press release template for the SOC union in order to encourage the union to use the international media to raise the profile of their struggles, get on the news agenda, and alert media to critical situations so as to deter the assassinations of workers, e.g. troops or the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps taking over oil pumping and exporting facilities.

Practical Solidarity Suggestions for Activists on the Outside

Practical Solidarity Suggestions for Activists on the Outside

Iraqi Ex-Pat Skills Sharing Delegations:

This has been called for by a number of unions and would be in this author's opinion the most practically useful and empowering form of solidarity for Iraqi workers. Delegations would involve bringing together talented Iraqi engineers and technicians active at the forefront of their relevant fields and have them visit Iraqi electricians, technicians, engineers and workers craving new skills, identify their needs and hold practical workshops to help them develop their talents. This would promote new and sustain existent autonomous workplace reconstruction by Iraqi workers, building on the generations of Iraqi workers' inventiveness. Delegates too would undoubtedly also learn a lot from Iraqi survival-needs-spurred ingenuity, cultivated under the 13-years of collectively punishing, genocidal sanctions.

International Trade Union Delegations Sharing Strike and Struggle Experiences and Offering Advice on Organising and the Necessity of Trade Unions

Delegations of trade unions with a **history of struggle, loss and victory under dictatorships and authoritarian governments** would be ideal for inspiring and understanding Iraqi workers, having lived a similar hell to the hell Iraq workers went through and the new hell they are navigating. Colombian trade unionists, such as the radical SINTRAEMCALI union (the contact details of which were included in the OW trade union database) are an ideal example. Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. Since 1986, 4000 Colombian trade unionists have been murdered by state sanctioned paramilitaries; 201 were assassinated or disappeared in 2001, 184 in 2002, and 178 in 2003. Despite the massive attacks on

the Colombian working class, workers from unions such as SINRAEMCALI have challenged the Colombian government, in particular its' plans to privatize their industries. In December 2001, 800 male and female workers occupied the central communications, water and electricity tower (The CAM Tower), in Cali, Colombia's second largest city, for over 30 days. Following threats to storm the building with paramilitaries after the government generated a slander campaign stating FARC guerillas were hiding inside, a hundred workers occupied the 8 storey headquarters of the Superintendent of Public Services in Bogotá. The workers' occupations succeeded in reeling back the plans for privatization. International delegations of workers who can speak about organizing under pressure, suffering the loss of comrades and tactics of organization in environments where trust is scarce and people are being victimized would lend great support and solidarity to Iraq workers. Trade Unionists from the Gulf states should also come and speak out about their own repression and struggle in an effort to build on the already widespread and mighty sentiments of pan-Arabism (important not as an absolute or nationalist force but a way of consolidating solidarity with workers in neighbouring countries with similar colonial histories) which exist amongst Iraq trade unionists met so far. Workers involved in Lebanon's October General Strike. Saudi Arabian oil workers, Jordanian sweatshop worker organizers etc etc The Arab Labour Organization (ALO) could have a role in supporting such a delegation. Trade unionists from Guatemala, Venezuela, Costa Rica, China, South Korea, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Belarus where the persecution and prosecution of trade unionists, repression, arrests, killings and attacks on Free Trade Zone workers could also offer an insight into some of the potential futures Iraq workers could face if Bush's Middle East Free Trade Agreement comes into force. The main drawbacks to such delegations are risk of death to the participants if they even allowed out of their countries in the first place and repression against them upon their return.

Awareness Raising

Solidarity demonstrations and protests can be undertaken by activists on behalf of Iraqi workers articulating and advocating for their demands. With the growth in communication possibilities and skills within by trade unionists, speedier and easier exchanges of information can occur and strike solidarity actions can be held in support of workers, as can vigils and responsive actions should strikes, in particular with the oil sector, be met with armed resistance from the Occupation Forces resulting in worker-deaths.

Fund Raising

Where these funds would go in the end could be problematic due to the Federation not being forthcoming regarding fund allocation yet giving money to individual unions could be very helpful in terms of buying computer and communication equipment and collecting money for strike support funds.

Solidarity Workers Strikes

If a union such as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union ILWU is able to use their rules of taking a day off for a mass meeting and using this as a symbolic strike as was performed in solidarity with jailed black human rights activist/journalist

Mumia Abu Jamal, perhaps similar action can be taken by the ILWU and other unions in tandem with Iraqi workers' strikes.

Popular Strikes (office occupations/factory blockades)

For those with no labour power to withdraw and as a pressure-tool, 'people's strikes' involving blockades or office/workplace occupations which effectively shut businesses down such as potentially offending companies such as SSA or KBR for a day or more, can be highly effective. Both practically by causing a significant amount of profit loss equal to an employee strike by employees being prevented from attending work or workplaces becoming un-operational and also by drawing media and local attention to the needs of Iraqi workers.

Conclusion

Iraqi public sector workers are exhausted, controlled by the CPA, still intimidated and traumatized by oppressive Baathist managers, and facing new challenges. These include pressure from different political parties to join a specific party in order to get a job. Some political parties, particularly the religious ones, control employment opportunities through their contacts within subcontracting companies or by intimidating contract awarders. Several workers mentioned this practice to this writer.

Workers must also deal with non-democratic authoritarianism within trade unions. Such methods may have been internalized because of lack of experience in open organizing or because of operating underground and secretly during the previous regime. Current fears of sabotage by Baathist loyalists or rival party activists may also feed into these authoritarian tendencies.

Despite all odds, Iraqi workers, unionized or not, are fighting back against corrupt administrative officials and account managers and the CPA itself. For example, at the beginning of December the Southern Oil Company union and company management rejected the CPA's pay scale and created their own, stating their own demands, refusing the authority of the occupation, refusing foreign corporate interference and privatization, taking reconstruction into their own hands and in the process, dissolving the myths of Western expertise and "foreigners as saviors". What workers and social justice activists in Iraq and abroad now need to do is, paraphrasing the words of Bergeseeya oil workers, "send their voices not just to the company gates but all the way to Washington" and also from Washington back to Iraq. We must help make the workers' voices heard by the new government of Iraq, whatever that will eventually be, and we must continue to support the workers' demands for empowerment and social justice.

Appendix I

General actions

In early October, a two-day wildcat strike took place in Bergeseeya Oil Refinery, part of the Southern Oil Company, Iraq's largest crude oil pumping and refining company. The strike occurred because the KBR-subcontracted and Kuwaiti-based Al Khorafi construction company had employed foreign workers (Indian and Pakistani). Foreign workers were 60-70% of the workforce. Iraqi workers physically threw out the foreign workers and protested noisily outside the company's offices. Saying the strike "wasn't well organized" and had taken place "before the arranged time," the Federation stopped the strike and protest. The Federation also said it did not want the strike to harm the Iraqi economy.

Tribal leaders representing the workers eventually resolved the dispute. The tribal leaders told Al Khorafi's boss that if he didn't start employing more Iraqi workers, they would bomb his offices. The boss immediately reversed the ratio of foreign to indigenous workers.

Also in late September, workers struck in Maqal port because they were being paid in Iraqi dinar rather than dollars. Dockers had gone from receiving \$60-\$120 wages (in dollars) to 60,000 to 120,000 Dinar, in 10,000 Dinar notes, which at a time could only be exchanged for 7,500 Dinar. A riot ensued, involving hundreds of workers. Following the trashing of the port's offices and the accounting department, the accountant was dismissed. The accountant was blamed for the discrepancy in pay. The Federation accused the accountant of being a Baathist who wanted to create disturbances in order to undermine security in Basra. A 120-strong Badr Brigade militia now protects the General Director of the Iraqi Port Authority, Abdel Razzaq,.

The Federation leader said that the British army had been called in to quell the strike and riot and that had it not been for the Federation's intervention in negotiating with the CPA, the situation could have escalated. In the end, workers received their full pay in dollars.

In late October, a Christian woman working in the accounts department of the Iraqi Port Authority led a total workforce walkout over the issue of wages being paid 7-14 days late. Some criticized the walkout as being poorly organized since the manager of the IPA was absent from work that day. However, the following day, the workers received their pay.

In September 150 workers participated in an autonomous strike in the She'eva refinery (part of the Basra Oil Company). The strike was over low wages and the abolition of all supplementary benefits.

August and September were the "hot months" of strikes in Basra. These included a totally autonomous governorate-wide walkout demanding gas, water and electricity, started by transportation workers marching through the streets with thousands joining them. One strike also included demands for the lowering of the price of cooking gas, which had skyrocketed from 1,500 Dinars to 12,000 Dinars (\$6 or four days work on

minimum wage). Workers also demanded the sacking of Baathist managers and an end to the stealing and smuggling of oil, widely believed to have been taking place with the tacit permission of the occupying troops. Oil trucks now travel with British convoys to prevent stealing.

There have been three general strikes over wages. The CPA has been varying the payment from dinars to dollars, resulting in earnings fluctuating with the fluctuating exchange rate. This, as well as late wage payments, led to the strikes.

Field Work: Trade Union Conditions

Haartha Electricity Plant

Union - Yes

Supported by management - in words only

Baathist Management - unknown

Autonomous Reconstruction Work - Yes

Strikes - Yes

Key Problems: extensive damages caused by war and sanctions, low wages, all government subsidies demolished, long hours, practically no safety equipment.

Haartha Power Station, Basra's largest, was built in 1978. During the 1990 Gulf War, it was 95% destroyed, and was then damaged and looted in the last war. It is currently running at 25% capacity and expected to reach full capacity by July 2004. British soldiers did not supply the plant with adequate protection despite persistent looting and requests for help from plant managers. Instead the soldiers guarded only the front gate, telling the managers that they didn't have enough troops or tanks.

The urgently needed reconstruction on Haartha is incomplete because the station's makers, Mitsubishi, refuse to enter Iraq out of security concerns. Only Mitsubishi owns all the drawings, plans, and the spare parts for the plant and since Mitsubishi's refusal is supposedly for two years, the chances for providing Basra with sufficient electricity in the near future appear slim.

Abdul Razzaq Majeed, the Plant's Director General, told OW that Bechtel had won the main contract to refurbish the plant's transmission lines and was subcontracting local and foreign companies to carry out the work. He told us an Indian engineering team had been hired to carry out maintenance on the transmission line from Haartha to Kut.

None of the workers receive any special payments for overtime, emergency, location, or high-risk work (should be 30% higher). Family pay has also been cancelled.

The Director General said that due to looting, safety equipment is only available for 50% of the workforce. Dangerous chemicals handled at the plant include liquid ammonia, hydrochloric acid and liquid hydrazine.

Strike action took place at this plant in November because of the non-payment of wages. The Director allegedly accused workers of not working hard enough and not

showing up on time and withheld wages as punishment. Following the strike, the company paid the overdue wages.

Workers in the plant's operations room were very disgruntled with their conditions. Health risks ranged from long hours to boiler room overheating. We saw mud caked around the boiler turbine in order to cool it down. All the workers complained about low wages and long hours, including 15-hour shifts without any official breaks.

All bonuses and special payments had been cancelled, but wages were now twice as high as previously. But considering the lack of family bonuses, overtime pay and food bonuses and the inflation of market prices (up 30-50%), the wage increase didn't make that much difference in their lives.

Workers said there was no ventilation, no safety equipment, no automatic system against overheating and sections of the plant were incredibly noisy. There was no TV, no break room and no rest room. If there is any error in the tower section, workers must climb six floors to check it out; there are no telecommunications or elevators.

The entire boiler room staff of 25 shares one breathing mask, and that mask expired in the 1980s. In the eighties this wasn't so important but now conditions are much worse. Overalls are two years old and there are no safety boots. Previously, workers had access to walkie-talkies but now none exist and communications exist by the time-consuming and dangerous method of sending workers from area to area.

Last month, extensive reconstruction work was carried out on a power line that exploded. Workers carried out the reconstruction work using spare parts from the local market. The local papers declared that Bechtel had carried out the work. In fact, workers say that Bechtel has not been involved in anything although company representatives have visited to ask about worker needs but have produced nothing so far.

Najibeeya Electrical Plant

Union - Yes

Recognized by Management- in words only

Baathist Management - Yes

Autonomous Reconstruction work - unknown

Strikes - no

Key Problems: management resistance to meeting worker needs including a union meeting place, gender discrimination in wages, no nursery, all past government subsidies demolished, low wages, lack of safety equipment and essential spare parts for reconstruction.

The General Director Hammad Salem Raaghdbaan states that he supports the union but is abiding by the CPA's June Public Notice and not officially recognizing the union. He has instructed workers renovating a space for union offices to stop work. He also only gave workers 5,000 Dinar for Ramadan bonuses, while other public sector workers received up to 70,000. This, he said, sitting in his vast office complete

with a massive satellite television set and large leather chair, was due to a lack of funds.

Initially there was no room available for the union's use, but following Occupation Watch's advocating for the union, management provided a space.

Gender discrimination in pay means that the company pays female administrative employees 10,000-20,000 Dinar less per month than their male counterparts doing exactly the same job. The director has said he will take action but has yet to do so, despite extensive complaints and requests for pay equity.

The plant's former childcare space was turned into housing for high-ranking employees (thought to be former Baathists) directly after the war, leaving women with no safe place for their children during the day. Women can be seen walking around the plant either carrying their small children or with the children trotting beside them. The company promised women workers a new nursery space but the space has yet to materialize.

Mechanical operations workers were receiving only 2,000 Dinar a day and elderly workers, deprived of their pensions by the new CPA order on Salaries and Employment, are receiving just 1,000 Dinar per day. Workers said they were highly experienced but were not receiving any reconstruction work which was going to foreign workers.

Similar to the situation in Haarth, Bechtel initially inventoried what was needed, including safety equipment, but workers said the company has not provided any new equipment or materials. Unionists told us "Bechtel is the talk of the hour; all the workers are talking about Bechtel"; people were conscious of how Bechtel was being awarded multi-million dollar contracts, subcontractors were being paid hundreds of thousands of dollars, and ordinary workers got next to nothing

Southern Oil Company

North Rumeilla: Crude oil pumping station, gas and drilling company

Union - Yes

Recognized by Management - Yes

Baathist Management - Yes

Strikes - No

Autonomous Reconstruction - Yes

Key Problems: management intimidation, late and low wages, decrepit safety equipment, insufficient transport to and from the refinery, shoddy equipment and all subsidies cancelled.

Workers told us that their managers and bosses were all still the same Baathists that were terrorizing them before and that if they said anything against the British, they would be punished. They said they felt very uncomfortable with their current situation and that nothing had really changed.

They demanded that the administration be changed totally and that they receive company housing (now currently occupied mostly by engineers and former Baathists), better wages (enough to live on given soaring market prices), safety equipment (all bad quality or expired), a functioning plant hospital, decent transportation to and from workplaces, and the same benefits as their counterpart oil workers in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They also stressed their fears about rations being cut and demanded that the level of rations be kept as it is if not raised higher.

The workers said the General Director supported the union and although he is an ex-Baathist, they considered him clean. He had provided the union with a building for their meetings and organizational needs, plus minibuses to travel from location to location.

No strike actions have taken place so far, but if privatization occurs, the workers say they will shut down Iraq from North to South, and that it will occur “over their dead bodies.”

Autonomous reconstruction work took place in June in the water injection section using materials brought from the market and workers' own tools. Workers also built their own rest accommodation. We were told that plant workers had completed about 40 percent of the reconstruction at North Rumeilla. KBR had been to visit and took an inventory but did not supply any materials.

Workers were told that KBR was directly paying their wages (although oftentimes late) and was directly responsible for them. KBR had made IDs for all employees.

Bergeseeya Crude Oil Export Station

Union - Yes

Supported by Management - Yes, office and vehicles provided, Union head says 'full co-operation' is in effect

Baathist Management - Yes

Strikes - Yes

Key Problems: low wages, all government subsidies cut, long hours, shifters not given enough breaks, fluctuating wages from dollars to dinars.

A strike took place in September over low, late wages that were paid in dinars, not dollars, as well as 24-hour shifts, no overtime, and no bonuses or benefits. According to some participants, workers also wanted to send a message to Washington that Iraq is theirs, it belongs to them, and they and their resources will not be exploited. A 6-hour strike costs the CPA approximately \$4.5 million.

Workers reconstructed much of the station immediately following the looting which they would have been able to stop if troops surrounding the location had not barred the workers from entering.

Basra Oil Company – She'iba Refinery

Union - No

Baathist Management - Yes

Strikes - Yes

Autonomous Reconstruction - Unknown

Key Problems: no union, fluctuating wages, hospital only open in the mornings, no key safety equipment such as covers for the gas and oil pumps cooling system, long hours, no knowledge of workers' rights.

A strike took place in September over low and late wages paid in dinars. Wages are supposed to be paid on the 23rd of every month but they are always 10 days late. Workers said that when you take into account the cuts in food, housing and family subsidies, their current wages are equal to their previous wages.

Workers also mentioned that wages were higher for workers in the Southern Oil Company, where a worker with 15 years on the job earns \$234 dollars a month while the same worker only earns \$156 in the Basra Oil Company. A complaint was filed with the local council but there was no response.

When workers were told KBR was involved in running their refinery, and that the company had also built the cages for internees at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, one worker responded, "Well, that makes sense as this place is like one big prison."

Port of Umm Qasr and Maq'al Port

Union - No

Baathist Management - Yes

Strikes - Yes

Autonomous Reconstruction - Unknown

Key Problems: no union, repression of anyone trying to organize a union or even talk to workers, fluctuating, low, and late wages, no transport for port workers at Umm Qasr

OW tried five times to obtain permission from the Iraqi Port Authority General Director Abdul Razzaq to gain access to workers (numbering some 3,500) at Iraq's biggest and most significant port. The first time we went to the Authority, we were told he was not at work, despite other staff confirming he was indeed present. The next two times we visited, we were told he was in the United Arab Emirates on business.

In the end, OW managed to enter Umm Qsr through a distant friend and succeeded in interviewing clerks and loaders. We discovered that wages were changed from the dollarized emergency scale to 100,000, 200,000 and 300,000 dinar in October, with most workers receiving 100,000; one could obtain 200,000 with 15 years of service. Workers were hard hit. Occupation wages were lower in real terms due to the elimination of profit sharing that had occurred before the regime fell. All IPA workers had been paid 2% of the profits accrued from unloading fees. The loading fee per container is \$150 with two ships docking per week, unloading approximately 250 containers each; thus the annual profit for every port worker in the IPA would be significant.

Workers were angry at the discrepancy in wages according to years of service. They repeatedly told us, “It’s too big a jump, we don’t understand it.”

Umm Qasr workers also expressed a need for transport to work as the road to Umm Qsr is dangerous – in mid-January looter killed a Port employee who was on his way home from work. Out of the six buses that the port had prior to the war, only one remains functional; corrupt managers looted or stole the others.

On October 25, Abdel Razzaq issued a notice banning any employee working for the Port Authority from speaking to any press or NGO without his permission. Staff who spoke briefly in an unspecified location and on condition of anonymity said that CPA pressure had influenced Razzaq’s notice. They also said that the workers attempted to form a union but when elections had taken place, the manager removed the banner announcing the elections. Workers have been told, “If you want to form a legal recognized union, you must wait for governmental policy and law to be passed.” The head of the Basra Federation of Trade Unions told us that Razzaq had fired three port workers for trying to form a union in November.

Occupation Watch interviewed Stevedoring Services of America's John Walsh, Operations Manager at Umm Qasr. Walsh assured us that he was just a “humble operations manager” and stressed several times that Abdel Razzaq was his boss, yet no permission was requested from Razzaq before Walsh spoke to us.

Walsh asserted that there had been no firings at the Port Authority (aside from the previous General Director), meaning that former high-ranking Baathists were still in power. He said there had been no strikes, but stoppages had taken place on container ships after workers demanded subsidies and bonuses. Walsh said it was SSA's job to mentor, advise and assist the Authority but he could give no examples of how this was being done. He described SSA as a “union-friendly company” despite the company’s lockouts of the West Coast International Longshoreman’s and Warehouse Union in the U.S. He also said that if labor unrest occurred, it was not his problem, it was “the Port Authority's call” and that if any unrest occurred he would sit in his compound and play cards all day. A strike would not affect SSA, since the company has already been paid \$4.8 million by USAID to operate Umm Qasr.

Walsh admitted that he felt that the Port Authority was not capable of running the port autonomously and needed help to adjust to the international market. In May, USAID will either extend SSA's contract to operate the port, or the Port Authority may lease Um Qsar to SSA. The leasing arrangement is highly likely due to SSA’s experience and capital. In this case, SSA would resolve labor disputes and deal with trade unions.

In mid-January workers held a picket/strike over the low and arbitrary wage scale, closing and blocking the main gate into Umm Qasr and refusing entry to any vehicles or people. The picket, despite being organized and maintained by just 7 workers, lasted six hours. British troops and private security guards made no reprisals, and the dispute was resolved through the (false) promise of an unspecified raise.

In the same week, workers attacked Abdul Razzaq in front of the Minister of Transport who was touring the port on a regular visit. There was no retaliation from the IPA General Director because “he’s too afraid.”

Razzaq bought the protection of a 125-man strong Badr Brigades Militia (armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution) following riots in Maqal port over delayed wages paid in 10,000 dinar notes that could be exchanged for just 7,500 dinar on the market. Workers trashed the account department and his offices before being confronted by Occupation Troops.

Summary:

All in all, OW found that The Southern Oil Company Union, headed by Hassan Ju'ma, was the best organized of the unions we visited. It had banned all foreign workers from its facilities following the Bergeseeya Plant action against foreign laborers in October. KBR tried to get indigenous workers to accept its foreign staff at all its locations but the local workers refused to budge. Bargaining attempts to accept 50 percent of KBR's foreign staff were rejected, as were concessions of 5 percent, 2 percent and even 1 percent. "Iraq will be reconstructed by Iraqis, we don't need any foreign interference," union leader Jum'a told us.

All that KBR has provided is materials and these provisions have only occurred in the last two months. However, KBR, which is only paying for materials, is profiting since it is not paying subcontractors; in the meantime plant workers work independently and are paid the average CPA wage.

Autonomous reconstruction also took place at the following SOC sites: Majnoon, Bergeseeya, North and South Rumeilla,

Appendix II

The ILO conventions singled out for particular attention in terms of fighting against the dismissal of unions, repression of trade unionists, unemployment and unequal wages were as follows:

ILO Conventions 98, 135, 100, and 118

Convention 135 (1971) The Workers' Representatives Convention was designed to protect trade union representatives, to safeguard them from intimidation and discrimination. It allows unionists to conduct their duties safely. Combined with Convention 98, the two form the best means of confronting and challenging the CPA's order against unions. They can be used to challenge bosses and ministers to name the Baathist legislation they are recycling. It states:

"Workers' representatives in the undertaking shall enjoy effective protection against any act prejudicial to them, including dismissal, based on their status or activities as a workers' representative or on union membership or participation in union activities, in so far as they act in conformity with existing laws or collective agreements or other jointly agreed arrangements."

Representatives are defined as:

(a) trade union representatives, namely, representatives designated or elected by trade unions or by members of such unions; or

(b) elected representatives, namely, representatives who are freely elected by the workers of the undertaking in accordance with provisions of national laws or regulations or of collective agreements and whose functions do not include activities which are recognized as the exclusive prerogative of trade unions in the country concerned.

Conventions 98 and 135 can be used most effectively to defend and re-affirm the existence of trade unions.

Convention 100 (1951) on Equal Remuneration enshrines equal pay for men and women. Stating “*equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value* refers to rates of remuneration established without discrimination based on sex.”

Convention 118 (1962) Equality of Treatment (Social Security Convention) institutes benefits with regards to any one or all of the following:

- a) medical care;
- (b) sickness benefit;
- (c) maternity benefit;
- (d) invalidity benefit;
- (e) old-age benefit;
- (f) survivors' benefit;
- (g) employment injury benefit;
- (h) unemployment benefit; and
- (i) family benefit.

Iraq had provisions for all of these in some form except for unemployment benefit.

Resources

<http://www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/index.html#Orders> - page detailing all CPA Regulations, Orders, Public Notices and Memoranda, as passed high over the Iraqi peoples' heads since the beginning of the Occupation

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/rights/rights11con.htm> - table of all International Labour Organisation conventions ratified by middle eastern countries. Includes Iraq.

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm> - databse of all 185 International Labour Organisation conventions from 1919 to 2003

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm> - International Labour Organisation databse on International Labour Standards as ratified country by country. Full details on Iraq are available (its interesting to compare the labour standards of US workers with those of Iraqi's and

then with some of the Scandinavian countries which have the best labour rights in the world)

<http://www.arab-labor.org/> - the homepage of the Arab Labour Organisation which recently passed a series of motions at its annual general meeting denouncing the occupation, its attacks on Iraqi workers and calling for immediate recognition of unions and a swift end to the occupation. Section on Iraq details a history of Iraqi labour and social legislation.

http://www.arab-labor.org/e_arablabor/e_main.asp - English version. Not fully functional.

<http://www.uslaboragainstar.org> - homepage of USLAW, an umbrella movement of hundreds of trade unions, local chapters and labour rights groups in the States.

<http://www.labournet.de/internationales/ig/arrest.html> - article by US labour rights activist and journalist David Bacon on the arrest of Iraqi trade union leaders early December.

<http://www.occupationwatch.org/article.php?id=2180> – SOC Workers Throw Out KBR, Reconstruct Their workplaces Autonomously article by Ewa Jasiewicz

<http://www.labournet.net/world/0312/Iraq3.html> - Iraqi Workers Threaten General Strike, Armed resistance – article by Ewa Jasiewicz

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/01/283668.html> - Basra Braces Itself for Industrial Shut-Down - article by Ewa Jasiewicz on

http://www.kclabor.org/occupied_basra_electricity_workers.htm - Update on Electricity Workers' Strike article by Ewa Jasiewicz

<http://www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=04/02/09/2722630> - Umm Qasr workers decide to form union