

Discussion Paper

Islamists and Trade Unions

Abdel Rahim A. Belal
FES - Sudan

December 2005

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Methodology.....	2
3	Islamic Schools of Thought and Trade Unions	3
4	Trade Unions in Islamist Thought	5
5..	The Islamist Aversion to Workers' Trade Unions and Affinity to Professional Association.....	11
5.1	Anti-Communism	11
5.2	Social Based Interpretation.....	12
5.3	Conceptual Interpretation.....	12
5.4	Substantive and Organizational Issues	13
5.5	Women and Trade Unions.....	14
6	Islamic Trade Unions versus Non-Islamic Trade Unions: Where do the Differences Lie?	14
7	The Developmental Crisis and the Social Base of Islamists	16
7.1	Heterogeneous Social Base of Islamists	16
7.2	Oil Boom, the Rentier States and Islamic Business	19
7.3	Islamists and Trade Unions at Present, Case Studies	22
8	Prospects and Conclusions.....	28
8.1	Social and Political Differentiation	28
8.2	A Rise of Social Islam?	29
	References	31

1 Introduction

The subject of this paper was an outcome of a regional conference on Trade Unions and Arab States, organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) at the Department of Middle and Near East in 2004. The discussions at this conference addressed the stance of Islamists towards workers' trade unions and professional associations in Arab states. The author of the paper was assigned to present a paper on this issue at the Regional Conference of the MENA Department in Morocco scheduled for January 2006.

Methodologically the paper differentiates two discourses to interpret the rise of Islamists: the cultural and the developmental. The paper adopts the developmental approach.

Four Islamic streams are distinguished: Scholars' Islam; Sufist, or popular Islam; *Salafist*, or Literalists; and Political Islam, as regards the status quo, societal change and trade unions in the conceptual framework and course of action of these streams.

Five interpretations of Islamists' aversion to workers and workers' trade unions and their affinity towards professionals and professional associations are presented. The anti-communism of Islamists and the drive of Communists to dominate and lead workers and their trade unions made Islamists oppose trade unions and drift away from them. The social background of the leading Islamists, being a segment of the lower-middle class, alienated them to the problems and sufferings of workers. This social background reinforces the conceptual interpretation, namely, a literalist interpretation, in the sense that there are no references to trade unions in Islamic jurisprudence. Therefore Islamists draw the conclusion that trade unions are not compatible with Islamic principles.

Substantive issues and organisational issues are also active obscuring workers from Islamists' perception and their turn to professionals and intellectuals as the most articulate advocates of Islamic revivalism are more interested in ideals of modernization. Therefore, according to Islamic leaders, they are attracted by secular western and modern thought and thus they are the ones to reverse these trends of thought if guided to Islamism, whose renewal and outreach as a cultural revolution can be shouldered by intellectuals and professionals. Given the importance of the written word and publications and the inappropriateness of traditional Islamic approaches, i.e. preaching and face-to-face relations, the literacy of these groups further recommends them. Professionals are thus better positioned than workers to adopt modern methods of communication to advocate for Islamic revival.

Generally, Islamists advocate a family based on the supremacy of male patriarchy and, therefore, they oppose the working of women outside the

house and their entrance into trade unions, which would guarantee more economic independence and equality, therefore the Islamic discourse of keeping women out of the workforce is threatened by trade unions, which organize women and men in mixed workplaces, which are a source of evil. Islamists have different views about the difference between Islamic and non-Islamic trade unions, but they agree that they are materialistic, individualistic and egotistic in Capitalism and that non-Islamic unions are controlled by the repressive states in Communism. Harmonious Islamic states are free from conflicts and particular group interests and so the objectives of trade unions are to adopt and to promote the spirituality and social harmony.

The result of the developmental crisis in Arab states is a heterogeneous structure in which clear social class demarcations are indistinct. The social base of Islam cuts across a wide spectrum of social strata, which are subject to the socio-economic impact of the developmental crisis and alienated from the repressive state, which lacks legitimacy and efficiency. According to the stages of development, there are shifts within the social bases of the Islamists, namely, from the lower-middle class of merchants, well-to-do artisans to the impoverished poor, intellectuals and the unemployed youth and graduates. The Oil Boom of the 1970s gave a strong push to Islamists and their organizations through different channels of financial transfers from the oil producing states, so therefore they could provide services to the poor and credit facilities to back Islamists and their sympathisers and employ Islamist professionals and graduates, and this consolidated their social base.

Conclusions from the case studies indicate that the Islamists' rise and penetration of professional associations is a result of the support of governments given to them to counteract Leftists, both Marxists and nationalist. Their involvement in professional associations is not based on conceptual and programmatic frameworks, but is politically and tactically motivated. The same is true of alliances formed.

The prospects of Islamists are analysed in the socio-economic context of the social differentiation, generally, and that within the Islamists. The conclusion drawn is that a shift to a moderate 'social Islam' is possible, which would bring about alliances between Islamists, secularists, nationalists as well as Leftists to address issues of poverty, unemployment and the deep social disparities from which wide segments of Islamists suffer.

2 Methodology

The relationship of Islamist movements, e.g. Muslim Brothers, to trade unions has not been a subject of intensive research. In most research on Islamism, trade unionism is touched on in analysing Islamic movements' programmes of action, less so as an element of their conceptual frameworks.

Modernist and Developmentalist Interpretations of the Resurgence of Islam

Academic and research studies dealing with the resurgence of Islam and the rise of Islamist movements fall mainly into two main categories of interpretation and discourse: Cultural-modernist and developmentalist.¹

Cultural-Modernist Discourse

The difficult path of modernization which Muslim societies have had to traverse since the 19th Century causes cultural disorientation, alienation, psychological anxiety and identity crisis. Therefore, Muslims take refuge in the spiritual world and religious morality of Islam. Interpretations based on conflict of cultures (e.g. Huntington), are supported by Islamist movements, which adopt a conflictual cultural approach, rather than a socio-economic approach, to explain their own crisis and the crisis of Muslim societies.²

Developmentalist Discourse

This discourse departs from the paradigm that sees distorted and interrupted development as caused by the colonial interruption of Muslim societies. The developmentalist approach links socio-economic development and the nature of the national developmental state in the Arab world to social stratification and conceptual frameworks, i.e. political ideologies, to analyse the relation of Islamist movements to workers trade unions and professional associations. This paradigm account for the varied interpretations of Islamist movements, from social movements to fascist movements and of leading Islamist actors, from the parasitic bourgeoisie to power blocs commanding the productive and commercial forces of a peripheral capitalism.³

This paper takes the conceptual frameworks of Islamists as a point of departure and context to analyze their stance towards trade unions, as well as the programmes of action of these movements, both of which are related to, and embedded in, the societal socio-economic development and broader environment of Arab societies, in general, with their relatively common historical backgrounds.

3 Islamic Schools of Thought and Trade Unions

It is becoming common knowledge that there is no single coherent Islam. In fact, there are several quite distinct Islamic schools of thought, manifested in different movements. Critical Muslims speak even of different 'Islams', because of the huge number of discrepancies between them. These Muslims refer to the wars between *Sunnis* and *Shiites* and within the two orthodoxies throughout Islamic history, as well as the recent history of assassinations of

¹ Atta El-Battahani, *Economic Transformation and Political Islam in Sudan, 1975 – 1989*, Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, 1996.

² Michael Field, *Militant Islam, will it Control the Middle East*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Analyses, Bonn, 1997; and Chris Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, Journal of International Socialism #64, Autumn 1994.

³ El-Battahani. *ibid*,

Muslims by Muslims (e.g. Sadat, Farag Fawda) as proof of their point of view. At present, there are quite distinct Islamic movements and schools of thought, in terms of their conceptual frameworks and programmes of action. A broad schema would distinguish at least the following:

1. Scholars' Islam (State Islam).
2. *Sufists*, or popular Islam.
3. *Salafists*, or literalists, whose history originates in the *Wahabi* movement of Saudi Arabia.
4. Political Islam, which originated in Egypt and embraces several streams, some advocating reform, others, the radicals, advocating change through violence.

Of these, only Islamists, who advocate societal transformation, express an interest in trade unions. The first two schools of thought are thus disqualified as subjects of this paper, since they are not protagonists of change; they are more or less supporters of the status quo. The *Salafists* are advocates of change, but given their extreme fractional discourse they disdain achieving change through social organizations, such as trade unions, in fact in their literalism they paint unions as an evil (*Bidaa'*). They advocate change through Islamic education and Islamic codes of behaviour, which they would even enforce individually with violence.

Political Islam is itself manifest in different streams of thought and programmes of action and, therefore, embraces a wide spectrum of movements as well as individuals, ranging from reform movements and leftist thinkers to subsets of Islamism, which are willing to use violence to impose their vision of Islam. All these movements are committed to the goal of restructuring society in accordance with their different visions of Islam, their differences relate to means and not to ends.

Since the Muslim Brothers' movement in Egypt is the oldest and most influential of these movements in the Arab region, it will be taken as a case study to analyse the relationship of Political Islam with trade unions. This approach also recommends itself given the fact that the Muslim Brothers' organizations and movements in other Arab states are offshoots to a large extent of this movement, irrespective of local specificities that reflect different socio-political milieux.

The Muslim Brothers' conceptual framework, given their long history and programmes of action, has gone through different phases of development. Originally, the Brotherhood was constituted as a reform movement, later some of the younger groups developed into a radical Islamic movement, proclaiming *Jihad (Holy War)* and committed to revolutionizing the secularist un-Islamic state.⁴ While the Muslim Brotherhood later adopted a more

⁴ See publications of Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (1949) and *Signposts along the Way* (1964) and Mohammed Qutb, *The Pagan Ignorance of the Twentieth Century*, (in Arabic, *Jahiliyat al-garn al-ishrin*), p. 19, Cairo.

moderate line in the 1970s, when it followed a reformist programme to achieve societal change in accordance with its Islamic vision. The most important constituent of this programme was the willingness to work through the institutions of the existing political regime.

The radical movements constituted of young Islamists, which came up in the mid-seventies, criticised the Muslim Brothers as hypocritical for accepting to work through established political channels. The *Jihad* movement attacked this course of action as a radical departure from an Islamic conceptual framework and deemed it utter deceit and a cheapening of Islam to gain false legitimacy, and an extension of legitimacy to illegitimate regimes.⁵ Their attack on the Muslim Brothers was actually an attack on democracy and pluralism. The *Jihad* movement called for the destruction of the *Arab League*, which is a system based on secular regimes.⁶

The Egyptian leftist Islamist thinker, Gamal Al-Banna, although not a Muslim Brother, may be considered a Reform Islamist, as a long-time Islamic labour activist and theoretician he is the main reference and source in this paper. Gamal Al-Banna's writings on trade unions have not received any attention from researchers on Islamists. Gamal Al-Banna was the brother of Hassan Al-Banna the founder of the largest Islamic movement, the Muslim Brothers in 1928. Gamal Al-Banna's concept was different from the orthodox concept Hassan Al-Banna, being himself a trade unionist. In the 1950s, after retiring from active trade union leadership, he devoted himself to studies and writing on trade unions, which at the time exceeded twenty. In the 1960, and thereafter, he became a lecturer at the *Workers Cultural Corporation* in Cairo. In 1969, the *Arab Labour Organization* commissioned him to revise the Arabic translation of the *International Labour Standards*. In 1973, the *Arab Labour Organization* was established and appointed Al-Banna as an expert advisor. In June of 1981, the Founding Congress of the *International Islamic Confederation of Labour*, held in Geneva, elected him President. The Confederation was deprived of support by the state-controlled Arab trade unions and Arab states and therefore could not continue to exist.

4 Trade Unions in Islamist Thought

As mentioned previously, there are many discrepancies between Islamic schools of thought, each advocating different roles and interpretations of Islam according to the social strata, and or, ideological inclinations in which they are grounded. These interpretations "may range anywhere from being on the one hand a tool of legitimation and preservation of the status quo, to being a vehicle for protest and a spearhead for revolution on the other".⁷

⁵ Ola A. Abou Zied (Editor), *Islamic Movements in a Changing World*, pp. 35-42, Centre for Political Research and Studies, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Cairo, 1995.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.13.

⁷ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam, Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, p.61, Canada and New York, 1991.

These differences are explained by the fact that Islam has neither one political theory, nor one economic theory.

This hypothesis can clearly be proved if the stance of different Islamist scholars with respect to trade unions is analyzed. In one of the rare books written by Islamic scholars on Islam and Trade Unions, entitled "*Towards Islamic Labour and Unionism*"⁸, written by Gamal Al-Banna⁹ and Ismail Faruqi¹⁰, these Islamic scholars present different, almost opposing viewpoints on trade unions, although they are both protagonists and founders of the *International Islamic Confederation of Labour* in 1981.

Faruqi's entry point to an Islamist trade union analysis is 'work', in a broad Islamic sense a form of worship. According to this perspective, the rituals of worship in Islam are not exhausted in prayer, almsgiving (*Zakat*), fasting and pilgrimage, but include work in any legitimate field. Faruqi cites several *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed) to argue this point of view. One of the *Hadith* he cites is:

"Whoever returns home at the end of the day exhausted from his application and effort of his handwork, will be forgiven ..., the hand which shows the effort of hard work is worthy of being kissed"

He points out that Islam does not discriminate or draw distinctions between manual work and mental work, the factory worker and the ruler (*Caliph*) are supposed to be equal, since Islam repudiates social stratification of people based on employment or occupation and condemns the western classification of people into working and ruling classes. The main category in Faruqi's conceptual framework is egalitarianism, which is expressed in Islam as the injunction that all humans are subject to the same laws governing life on earth.¹¹ The egalitarian concept derives from the one-ness of human beings, which according to his concept reward of work is governed by Islamic ethics, which are based on the concept of justice, so he applies the concept of justice in reward of work i.e. wages, which falls under the comprehensive concept of justice of Al-Banna.

While egalitarianism is the main category in Faruqi's conceptual framework, justice in the broader sense is the key category for Al-Banna's discourse. Al-Banna's concept of 'Justice' is a relational, or socio-economic one, that is

⁸ Gamal Al-Banna and Isamil Faruqi, *Towards Islamic Labour and Unionism*,

⁹ Gamal Al-Banna, An Egyptian born in 1920. Founder and President of the *International Islamic Confederation of Labour*. In 1950, he was one of the leaders of the Egyptian *Textile Trade Union*. Author of several books on trade unions. Advisory expert to the *Arab Labour Organization* established in 1973. Lecturer at *The Egyptian Workers' Educational Association*, established 1963. In 1953, he established *The Egyptian Society for Prisoners*, which initiated prison reforms.

¹⁰ Ismail Faruqi, a Palestinian by birth and American by naturalization, was the last Arab Governor of Galilee 1945 – 1948; Co-founder of the *International Institute of Islamic Thought*; first Vice-President of the *American Islamic College* in Chicago; and Professor and Head of the *Islamic Studies Program* at Temple University. Faruqi's publications are important references in the Muslim Brotherhood corpus, e.g. in Sudan, while Al-Banna is seen as a dissident, because of his late drift to secularism, his publications are banned in Sudan!!

¹¹ *Towards Islamic Labour and Unionism*, pp. 12-14.

capable of capturing classes and strata and the inequalities among them, in contrast with the traditional Islamic idealization of justice as an abstract moral principle of social harmony. The word 'Justice', according to Al-Banna, crystallizes the primary aims of trade unions. He links justice with exploitation, "All the world knows that workers are still exploited, that the conditions of work are inhumane, that trade unions were established to prevent these gross outrages and enable workers to live a decent life"¹²

In pointing to political and economic rules and principles, Al-Banna's discourse, which clearly underlines satisfaction of material needs, is distinct from Faruqi's discourse with its focus on ethical values. He states that the primary aim of both Islam and Trade Unions is Justice. He sees Islam, not simply as a religion of worship and prayer, but as having social, political and economic dimensions, which he considers integral to Islam. The prohibitions on despotism and usury (*Al Riba*), imposition of consensus (*Al Shura*) and *Zakat*, are but a few clear examples of Islamic principles of politics and economics¹³. He cites a saying of some Muslim scholars: "... the just non-Muslim is better than the unjust Muslim Ruler"¹⁴ This materialistic inclination becomes clearer when Al-Banna writes about the right to a decent life by Islam and cites, "Let them adore the Lord of his house who provides them with food against hunger and security against fear"¹⁵. He considers the essential struggle of trade unions specifically over these two material needs: 'Food against Hunger' and 'Security against Fear'. Contrary to Islamist discourse, which regards Islamic morals and behaviour as the ultimate concern of Islamists and the state, Al-Banna deviates from this discourse of morals priorities to make the state's utmost responsibility the poor, rather than custodianship of morals:

"The scene of the poor in tatters must make an Islamic state blush even worse than a scene of women in bathing costumes. After all it is the exclusive duty of the state to apply justice by law, whereas any individual or association can preach decency".¹⁶

It is worth noting that traditional Islamic scholars refer to the justification of worship in an idealistic and metaphysical way, listing this verse: "I created human beings and devils to worship me". It is also worth mentioning Sayyid Qutb's apprehension over the basic needs of human beings as advocated in Communism, which according to him undermines the spirituality of humans in that it equates their basic needs with those of animals, namely: food, drink, clothes, housing and sex, so depriving humans of their spiritual needs, which differentiate humans from animals.¹⁷

¹² *ibid*, p.67.

¹³ *ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.69.

¹⁵ Suraat Quriesh.

¹⁶ G. Al-Banna, p. 69.

¹⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Signpost along the Way* (In Arabic, *Maalim fi al Tarig*), pp. 98-99.

Faruqi sees Islam as neutral in its stance to employers and employees, saying: "Islam is neither pro-worker against employer, nor pro-employer against workers. It stands for justice for both; and it regards all members of society as equally entitled to live in sufficiency and dignity. All employees, be they *Caliphs*, ditch diggers or governors are "equally obligated to fulfil what their employers and society have hired them to do".¹⁸ In contrast to Faruqi, for Al-Banna Islam takes a position, and in what he calls the great social problem, i.e. the poor versus the rich, the haves against the have-nots, the position of Islam is clear and decisive - it stands by the poor¹⁹.

This stand becomes even clearer when Al-Banna elaborates on the contract concept in Islam and its application to trade unionism. Prerequisites of a contract in Islam are: the full freedom and equality of the contracting parties; the non-existence of any coercion; and conformity of the contract subject matter with general Islamic values. Al-Banna states that in the case of employer-employee relations, the employee is not equal to the employer and does not enjoy real freedom, even though s/he has legal, i.e. formal equality, workers are always under real pressure to earn a living and therefore accept the employer's terms, because of limited opportunities, or even their absence. Al-Banna terms such contracts 'Submission Contracts', because the employer dictates the contract in violation of Islamic rules. According to these Islamic rules, if a party to a contract is in a greater position due to intellectual or physical advantage or economic position, a guardian should be entrusted with negotiating the conditions of the contract on behalf of the party or worker in the context of employer-employee relations. He concludes: "No such guardian can be found other than the trade union", he further states: "... a collective contract negotiated by a trade union with an employer contains all the Islamic merits, advantages and guarantees sought in such a contract"²⁰.

Gamal Al-Banna compares trade unions in Islamic society, on the one hand, and in communist and capitalist societies on the other hand. Islamic societies will be free of class struggle, because of the common goal of both labour and management. In capitalist society struggles arise due to the contradiction between the pursuit of self interests by both labour and management, Al-Banna envisages an Islamic society that is free of polarization along self-centred self-interests or class conflicts lines, although he previously noted the exploitative relations between employer and employee. In Communist countries conflict exists between workers and the ruling party, which has a monopoly on power.²¹ Thus, Al-Banna resorts to a political interpretation of conflict rather than an economic interpretation, this conceptual framework is therefore eclectic and neither consistent, nor coherent.

¹⁸ al-Faruqi, p. 16.

¹⁹ Al-Banna, p. 69.

²⁰ Al-Banna, pp. 77 -78.

²¹ *ibid*, p.106.

The Guilds

Referring to the aversion of Islamic scholars and Islamic movements to trade unions, Al-Banna mentions guilds in Islamic history to prove the compatibility of trade unions with Islam. He dates the establishment of guilds in Islamic societies to the third century *Hijria* (while western scholars date their existence to the ninth century). Al-Banna describes the guilds as having laid traditions, which trade unions should call back, rather than analyzing them in the context of the historical development of Arab societies of the time.²²

There are several Islamist scholars and thinkers who, like G. Al-Banna, are sensitive to working class concerns and inclined to take them into consideration, for example, al-Ghanushi, the Tunisian Islamist leader, and Abdallah Al-Nafisi, who is an Islamic scholar and Islamist sympathiser.²³ Both of these scholars emphasize that Islamic movements have failed to mobilize workers because their conceptual frameworks are restricted to moral and normative dimensions. The two also confirm the criticism of leftist researchers as regards this moral discourse, as the two can be considered authorities and may represent a turning point in Islamist thought, we cite them in detail:

al-Ghanushi has written:

*'This group (the workers) came to represent a huge problem for many capitalist regimes and even socialist onesand yet the Islamists have failed to mobilize it The reason behind the weakness of Islamist influence in this sector goes back to their (Islamists) ignorance and insensitivity regarding political and social problems of the working class'*²⁴

al-Ghanoushi, who also condemns violence and advocates democracy, has not only showed concern for workers' conditions, but also advocates forging a united democratic opposition composed of Islamists and secularists to effect democratization. Such a front, according to him, will enjoy the support of civil society organizations in western countries. This position would be a departure from a former antagonism to secularists, in general, and leftists in particular, and eventually from the exclusionist Islamic moralizing rhetoric.²⁵

Al-Nafisi has expressed a similar critique:

²² John Esposito, (Editorial Chief), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, pp. 74-77, New York and Oxford, 1995.; G. Al-Banna, *Islam and Trade Unions*, pp. 37-61.

²³ In Ayubi, p. 233.

²⁴ Cited in Aybui, p. 235.

²⁵ Rashid al-Ghanoushi, *The Violence problem – the Causes and Remedies*, Website of the Democratic Progressive Party (Tunis), posted 8th December 2005.

*'The follower of what the Islamic revival pens write would notice that (the movement) in general concentrates on the normative and moral dimension in Islam. Yet to emphasize this side and neglect others will have no justification. If the Islamic revival wants to maintain the broad masses it will have to pay attention in the future to the importance of emphasising a social dimension to Islam and of taking the side of the needy and oppressed masses'*²⁶

Al-Nafisi goes even further and says that Islam is "... against private ownership as it is practiced in Capitalists societies" and "Islam is against class societies"²⁷

²⁶ In Abdalla al-Nafisi, *et al*, *The Future of the Islamic Revival*, p. 327. (in Arabic, Mustagbal al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya), Centre for Arab Unity Studies and United Nations University, Beirut, 1987.

²⁷ *ibid*.

5 The Islamist Aversion to Workers' Trade Unions and Affinity to Professional Association

There are five interpretations for the aversion of traditional Islamic thinkers, in general and new Islamists, in particular, to trade unions and their affinity for professionals and professional associations:

- i. Anti-communism
- ii. Social based
- iii. Conceptual
- iv. Organizational
- v. Societal / developmental

5.1 Anti-Communism

A conceptual aspect of Islamic thinkers and Islamists' aversion to unions lies in their anti-communism, since they considered unions as politically and materialistically oriented instruments in the hands of Communists after the Second World War. They also perceived the unions as controlled by opportunistic and immoral leaders who supported the secular and nationalist states in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Al-Banna, as mentioned above, some Islamist leaders therefore consider unions as an evil.

The anti-communism of the Islamists and their opposition to unions in the 1950s and 1960s took place in the context of an environment dominated by the Truman Doctrine and the policy of containment of secular and pro-Soviet Arab states, Islamist discourse was therefore considered as a bulwark against communism and socialism.²⁸

The Communists, Arab Nationalist and Islamists have differing conceptions of agents of change, arising out of their conceptual frameworks. It has been noted that Communists concerned with broad social change targeted workers; Nationalists interested in power, organized among the army; and Islamists with their normative and moral behavioural concerns engaged in educational institutions and students and youth.²⁹

The Muslim Brothers, in particular, envisage Islam as a religion above conflicts and economic interests that should be based on solid morals, private ownership, almsgiving and solidarity rather than class conflict, therefore, their sympathy towards workers remains of a moral nature. In this perspective, workers are not viewed as a distinct social class and therefore,

²⁸ Chris Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, Journal of International Socialism #64, Autumn 1994.

²⁹ Mohammed Abdel Baggi Al-Harmasi, citing al-Ghanoushi in, *Protest Islam in Tunis*, Chapter 7, in *Contemporary Islam in the Arab World*, p.253, (In Arabic) Centre for Arab Unity Studies and United Nations University, Beirut, 1987.

the Muslim Brothers are hostile to the concept of class struggle and organized labour, they emphasise a focus on cultural identity and authenticity, because of this culturalist discourse, they see conflicts along cultural lines and not along economic lines. Workers are held to be individual Muslims, who suffer from cultural alienation and suppression, and less so from economic exploitation, to Islamists conflictual employee–employer relations make sense when employers or managers are foreigners, more specifically foreigners.³⁰

The Islamist hostility to the concept of class struggle is not due only to their culturalist discourse, but also draws on the abstract moral conception of justice. Thus, they resort to establishing social networks, service provision organizations, mosques, joint prayers and readings of the *Quran* and interpretation in neighbourhoods rather than labour organizations in the work place, which are controlled by the security and are dominated by trade unionists loyal to totalitarian undemocratic governments.

5.2 Social Based Interpretation

According to Gamal Al-Banna, the majority of Islamic thinkers belong to intellectuals from the lower-middle class, many of whom have their origin in rural societies. They are mainly petty traders and white-collar employees, who are ignorant of the hardships of living and working conditions of (blue-collar) wage labourers. He writes 'The difference between ignorance and aversion is minimal and human beings oppose what they ignore'.³¹ The Sudanese Islamist scholar, Hassan Mekki, refers to the social gap between Islamists in Sudan, especially in the later stage of their development after the Oil Boom, and workers, expressed in the demand for *Sahria*' implementation and neglect of poverty, unemployment and workers' conditions.³² This socially based interpretation of the aversion of Islamists to trade unionism explains their affinity for professionals and professional associations.

5.3 Conceptual Interpretation

Al-Banna further characterises the attitude of contemporary Islamic thought towards labour and unions as erroneous for conceptual reasons, namely that they know little about labour in its technical sense and in the context of industrial relations. To prove the merit and value of work and protection of

³⁰Ayubi, pp. 172-173.

³¹ Gamal Al-Banna, *Islam and the Trade Union Movement*, p. 15 and 25, (In Arabic), Cairo 1981.

³² Hassan Mekki, *The Islamist Movement in the Sudan, 1969 – 1985, History and Political Discourse*, pp. 212–213, Second Edition, Khartoum, 1999.

workers in Islam, several thinkers simplistically and naively cite the *Hadith* (the sayings of the prophet):

‘Give the worker his due before his sweat dries’; ‘There is no better or nobler food than that which is provided by the worker’s own hand’; and ‘I myself shall be the prosecutor of the employer who does not give the worker his dues’*

Islamists repeat that Noah was a carpenter, Moses and Mohammed were Shepards and Idris a tailor, to prove the moral value of work.

Gamal Al-Banna criticises literalist traditional thinkers who are mainly concerned with worship, prayers and rites. He attributes the aversion of these thinkers to unions because they do not find any mention to trade unions in the classic books of *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Hadith* and *Tafsir* (interpretation of the verses of the Holy *Quran*), not because unions are incompatible with Islamic principles.³³

5.4 Substantive and Organizational Issues

For organizational and conceptual considerations, professionals are considered by Islamists, according to El Turabi, as agents of change in the Islamic context for the following reasons³⁴:

- Advocates of revivalism usually come from the urban elites who divorced themselves from the bulk of traditional society and are interested in modern issues and ideals.
- The need for a better established and contemporary leadership, since Islamic work will see wider expansion.
- The fear that concepts and models may be distorted by the common people.
- The importance of the written word and publications. In the past *Da’wa* (missionary call) relied on personal methods and face-to-face contact as a means of communication.
- Support for systematic and organizational approaches to the question of leadership and reform.
- Since Islam is an all-embracing way of personal and collective life, the movement needed to address economic, cultural, social and international issues.

Sudanese Islamists acknowledge having borrowed organizational tactics and the conception of an elite vanguard (Lenin’s theory of the vanguard party) to lead the Islamist movement, from the Communist Party.

* See also the Hadith on page 6.

³³ G. Al-Banna, *Islam and The Trade Union Movement*, (Arabic and English), Cairo, 1981.

³⁴ Mohammed E. Hamdi, *The Making of an Islamic Political Leader, Conversations with Hassan al-Turabi*, section: *Elitism and Populism*, pp. 111 – 123, London, 1998.

5.5 Societal / developmental

In general, because of the lack of industrialization, the industrial working class has no place as an agent of change and consequently no interest, or even opportunity, to mobilize along class lines for political support or change.³⁵

In a distorted and interrupted pattern of economic development with little, or almost absent, industrialization and an economy dominated by trade and speculation labour force need not be mobilized .

This is manifested in the attitude of Islamists towards women and their work outside the house.

Family is a main concern of Islamists; therefore, they are hostile to women working outside the house. Work makes women an easy target for evil and family life is sacrosanct. The ruler is the guardian of the moral code. Equality of the sexes is a prescription for moral laxity. Unions promote women's equality and economic independence, which undermines the family based on the supremacy of male patriarchy.

6 Islamic Trade Unions versus Non-Islamic Trade Unions: Where do the Differences Lie?

Gamal Al-Banna and Ismail Al-Faruqi were the driving force behind the foundation of the *International Islamic Confederation of Labour* (I.I.C.L). In 1981 they explained in detail the motives for establishing the I.I.C.L, comparing Islamic trade unionism to non-Islamic trade unionism in the context of their perspectives of Islam and work in Islam. They affirmed the importance of the trade union movement, as one of the most influential movements in the history of nations. Nevertheless, they pointed to what they claim to be a weakness and the crisis of this movement. Therefore, they advocated a new conceptualization of trade unionism based upon Islam. This criticism and conceptualization is summarized as follows:

- ❖ Present unions are influenced by either capitalist or Communist ideology. Western trade unionism accepts capitalism and the status quo, though they represent workers and fight for their rights and the mitigation of capitalist exploitation, they do not aim at the elimination of capitalism. In fact, unions would defend capitalism if it faced a communist threat, because the end of capitalism would mean the end of trade unions. Regarding Communism, they consider trade union movements as conscious of the tyranny of totalitarian states, which is more brutal than capitalist exploitation.
- ❖ Further, communist parties instrumentalize trade unions to serve their objectives, since Communist Parties consider these trade unions as a

³⁵ Atta El-Battahani, p. 19.

transmission belt, which carries decision making from the dynamo of the party to the working class.

- ❖ A third point is what they call the 'sectional structure' of trade unions, which makes unions limit their objectives and activities to the interests of their members, in disregard of the entire society. Their concept of Islamic trade unionism is based on their call for trade unions to take into consideration the public interest, i.e. unions should take responsibility for the welfare of the whole society and not only their membership. They see the crisis of trade unions in that they pursue the interests of members without regard to public interest and society as a whole.

This critique embodies the Islamic concept of society as a harmonious community free of conflicts and conflicts of interest in which the parties to labour conflict develop mechanisms to resolve these conflicts. In spite of this their parties as regard sectional interest. Gamal Al-Banna confirms the right of trade unions to strike and achieve justice – a main objective of Islam. He does not criticize unions for pursuing sectional interests, as capitalism is responsible for injustice, but takes issue with the lack of 'ethics' and 'objectivity' in trade unionism.

According to Al-Banna the very nature of trade unions compels them to deal primarily with the employer-employee relationship and, therefore, unions are governed by expediency and utilitarianism rather than ethics and objective principles, therefore, opportunism becomes a characteristic of unions. He concludes that human beings need bread but not bread alone, they need ethics, values and principles, which guide human actions to be satisfied and in line with inner peace and harmony. These values and principles should have absolute objectivity, so it becomes clear that the values and principles are free of interests and they are absolute and objective. As Islamists see the state as the guardian of values so trade unions should fulfil the same function, namely they should be guardians of values, specifically those values that accord with Islamic morals and ethics and that have a higher priority than material needs.

Gamal Al-Banna is trapped in the same perception of middle class Islamists who are not aware of the hardships of living and working conditions of the workers. He concludes that trade union relationships lack warmth because they are materialistic; therefore, trade union members resort to Islamic associations to fulfil their non-materialistic aspirations. Trade unionism's lack of ethics according to his argument makes trade unions submissive to governments and so become tools of regimes to execute their policies.

7 The Developmental Crisis and the Social Base of Islamists

7.1 Heterogeneous Social Base of Islamists

There is almost a consensus among researchers on the social base of Islamist movements, the analysis in this section draws on the analyses of Chris Harman and N.N Ayubi³⁶.

Islamism arose in the process of a distorted transformation into capitalism by the newly independent Arab states, this transformation developed in stages, which have shaped the development and character of Islamist movements. The results of this distorted transformation were threefold: a) internal social relations which lead to the incomplete transformation of the entrepreneurial class, because of the limited emergence of industrial entrepreneurship, b) 'independent' non-participatory states that are inefficient, lacking in legitimacy and entangled and embedded in dependency relations with the capitalist state system and world market relations, this non-participatory state is lead and managed by an insular bureaucracy, c) a heterogeneous mass of population from different strata in which a defined working class is absent, but instead masses of 'sub-proletariat' and lumpenproletariat exist alongside a wide range of lower middle classes, the upper bureaucracy and a fettered entrepreneurial class forming the upper class.

The three main phases of Islamist movements' evolution, their social stratification and social base, as well as the characteristics of the national developmental state can be distinguished in this distorted transformation. There are similarities in these movements' development and functioning, irrespective of country specific peculiarities and socio-economic conditions, Egypt is the prime case study.

First Phase (1920s – 1940s)

In the earlier phase of capitalist transformation, the three decades of the twenties, thirties and forties, when the rate of rural – urban migration was relatively low and the service and artisan sectors were able to undergo restricted expansion. The *Sufi* orders, traditional oriented Bazaars and craft oriented guilds formed associations, later to disappear, which lessened the suffering of the new urbanites and ensured that the social fabric remained relatively well-ordered. Islamist constituencies during this period were represented in the recently urbanized lower-middle class, employees, well-

³⁶ Chris Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, 1994, International Socialism, Archive at: www.pi.org.uk and www.marxsime.dx; Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam, Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London and New York, 1991.

to-do artisans, civil servants, teachers, white collar workers and petty merchants.³⁷

In this situation Islamist movements were infused with 'populist' and 'corporatist' tendencies³⁸, because of the unfulfilled modernization and incomplete industrialization; the changes in social relations were modest. The Muslim Brothers were attentive to economic and social problems, workers and workers' living and working conditions, but were opposed to the Communist conflictual class struggle theory. To counteract the Communist thought and the socialistic ideas of nationalist regimes, S. Qutb wrote his book *Social Justice in Islam (1945)* and Al Subaai wrote *The Socialism of Islam*³⁹, interventions in which these Islamist intellectuals addressed social themes. The support of these two leading lights of the Islamist movement for workers was of a moral nature - they never supported strikes. Employer-employee relations were seen as conflictual in foreign enterprises.

To improve the conditions of the workers was to incorporate trade unions directly into the state under the auspices of a corporatist nationalism.⁴⁰ The working class, its social and political power circumscribed by incomplete industrialization, was then organized in state controlled trade unions.

Second Phase (1960s – 1970s)

During the second stage of the uneven and deformed capitalist process, in the sixties and seventies, developmental rates of growth, urbanization, education and bureaucratization did not meet the rate of growth of migration. The growing monetization and commercialization of the agricultural sector drove large numbers of people out of their villages and into the big towns where they lost their social and family support networks. The national secularist state was authoritarian, bureaucratic and exclusive (e.g. the Nasserite state and attendant state ideologies: Nasserism, Baathism and Bourgaibaism),⁴¹ and failed to fulfil expectations and sustain processes of comprehensive long-term development.

The developmental and urban crises of these states were quite manifest and Islamic populist theory was to make a spectacular appearance as a critique and alternative to the failed developmental model pursued by these illegitimate and inefficient states.⁴² Qutb wrote his book *Signposts Along the Way* in 1964, which included thoughts on state and society and a programme of action. Qutb's perspective was encapsulated in the statement: 'the kingdom of god is to be established by struggle (*Jihad*)'. This critique found

³⁷ Ayubi, p.171.

³⁸ Ayubi, p. 174; and Habib al-Ganahani, *Islamic Revivalism in Al-Sham, a case study of Syria*, in Ismail Sabri, *Islamic Movements in the Arab World*, pp. 135-137.

³⁹ Ayubi, p.172.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.174.

⁴¹ .. p. 234

⁴² Ayubi, p. 174.

supporters and resonance among the petty bureaucracy: minor civil servants, clerks, typists, accountants ...etc and assorted blue collar workers: taxi drivers, metal workers, grocers and skilled workers.

Third Phase (1974 -)

The seventies led to important developments in education, urbanization and industrialization, and these developments were accompanied by social hopes and aspirations among wide sectors of the population, especially the middle strata.

But the states were defeated militarily (1967 Arab – Israeli War), poor and inefficient and unable to offer youth jobs, housing or avenues for political participation. Youth, whose expectations had been raised and later shattered, formed the mainstay of the militant Islamic movement. This rapidly expanding demographic group who were upwardly mobile, educated and recently urbanized, were created by the social mobilization and transformation initiated by states, but failed to be completely absorbed and rewarded by the national state, because of incomplete industrialization and unfulfilled modernization.

In place of this disillusionment religion was adopted as a goal-replacement mechanism. The Islamists do not reject 'modernity', i.e. they are not angry because 'the aeroplane has replaced the camel', but rather because there is no seat for them on the aeroplane.⁴³

The distorted interrupted development has had several results, which are reflected in the social structure generally and consequently on the social base of Islamists. Although large scale state owned modern industry developed in the later stages, it operated inefficiently and could not provide enough job opportunities, a vast number of small workshops remained. Commercialization of agriculture and land reform caused social differentiation and intense rural out-migration and the growth of a new class of agricultural entrepreneurs.

The massive expansion of education turned out large numbers of school and college graduates who could not be absorbed by the limited labour market, the consequence was an urban sub-proletariat and declining middle class and social frustration of huge numbers of those left out of the benefits of the social and economic system.

The moralistic idiom of Islamists allows them to converge with a broad spectrum of social groups in their quest for authenticity and a cultural identity. Three main social groups make up the social base of the Islamists as regards socio-economic position in the production hierarchy.⁴⁴

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Harman, *The Prophet, Part III – The Class Base of the Islamists*; Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 158 – 177.

- i. Business groups:
 - a. The group of traditionally privileged classes who are frightened by modernization; they are composed of merchants, workshops owners, merchants and farmers who used to be the traditional financiers of Mosques. This group sees its traditional way of life being threatened by social change.
 - b. The newly privileged businesses classes emerging from the old privileged classes. This group has benefited from Islamic banks and companies and climbed the social ladder.
- ii. The poor who are forced to the cities, desperately looking for livelihoods, but are not integrated into urban life and are the beneficiaries of the Islamic charity organizations and service institutions. An important segment of this group is composed of the unemployed youth with some degree of education. These groups can be a politically destabilizing factor, but they cannot be agents of change, since they are receptive to the messages of Islamists hostile to the inefficient state.
- iii. The educated lower-middle class which emerged because of the massive expansion of education, but whose expectations remain unfulfilled because of unemployment. Among these are the graduates of engineering schools and faculties of natural sciences and who are morally frustrated because of unfulfilled high expectations. They find satisfaction in adhering to and retreating into Islam as a refuge for self-esteem, identity and dignity and in response to their desperate situation. Some segments of these groups benefit from employment opportunities provided by Islamic banks, companies and NGOs. These segments easily run the risks of imprisonment and even death, which they believe would guarantee them a better life after death.

7.2 Oil Boom, the Rentier States and Islamic Business

The Islamist movements came to the fore in the mid and late seventies, due to several new developments, which compounded the impact of interrupted development and state illegitimacy, namely, structural adjustment programmes, whose results were the following:

- Minimalization of the state's role in the economy and society, its role became reduced to administration and policing the effects of deregulation.
- The free market economy and the pressures on national industries and industrial sector, while the service sectors developed more quickly than the industrial sector.
- Weakened working class and trade unions, which were already controlled by the corporatist and paternalist state (State paternalism) in totalitarian regimes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Aziz al Azmeh, *Postmodern Obscurantism and the Muslim Question*, p.8,

While this process weakened the blue collar working class and the trade unions, it boosted the role of the white collar workers and professionals. In this context of free market economies and privatization, large numbers of professionals: doctors, engineers and lawyers, moved from the state sector and para-statal to the private sector, where they were free from state control.

Structural adjustment programmes also added professionals to the unemployed university graduates.

Islamic enterprises, which came to the fore following the Oil Boom found potential recruits in the increased numbers of unemployed professionals and university graduates. These enterprises became a financial support system for the Islamic movement, replacing the merchants and well-to-do artisans of the forties and fifties, whose craft economy had declined due to the rising import business.

The information and communication technologies of the nineties enhanced the role of private sector professionals in general and had a positive impact on the Islamic movement, as regards both financing and improving the organizational capacity and connectedness of the movements, aspects to which the weak working class could barely contribute. This conspicuous presence of professionals in the political and developmental scene was not confined only to professional associations, but also in business, into which Islamists entered en-mass, this structural transformation of the economy would contribute to the aversion of Islamists to workers' trade unions. Mass social and economic marginalization would increase the poor who are recipients of Islamic charity organizations' services and social welfare, which the state had ceased to provide under the pressure and by design of the free market economy. Thus, the poor have become potentially, and actually, the constituency of the Islamists.

The Oil Boom (1973/4) had a strong positive impact, not only on the oil producing Arab rentier states, but also on non-oil producing Arab countries. Although Islamic banking started earlier, in the 1960s, the Oil Boom gave this banking system a strong push, because of the cash surplus produced. As a result of financial transfers from the oil producing rentier states by migrants and the wealthy citizens of these states to Islamic organizations in non-oil producing countries, the latter became semi-rentier states.⁴⁶ Islamists benefited from these transfers in business and transactions.

The following aspects of these relations between rentier states and semi-rentier states can be identified from our own observations in Sudan:

⁴⁶ Hazim Bibrawi, *The Rentier State in the Arab World*, in *The Nation State and Integration in the Arab World*, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut (in Arabic).

- I. A significant number of Islamists had travelled to the oil producing countries and to western countries in the fifties and mostly in the sixties and seventies, prior to the Oil Boom, fleeing the repressive totalitarian regimes in their countries of origin, in the wake of the Oil Boom the number of Islamist migrants increased dramatically.
- II. Islamists' financial transfers to their countries were not only to relatives for household consumption, but also for investment in their countries of origin.
- III. Islamic banks, which were founded in the seventies following the boom, provided savings and investment opportunities to these migrants and their families.
- IV. These banks also provided employment to Islamists, especially professionals.
- V. Islamic banks supported Islamists and their enterprises through soft credit facilities* and therefore helped the formation of a new entrepreneurial class.
- VI. Since, Islamic banks started financing small artisans and traders they contributed to developing these strata, mainly among the Islamists, albeit they ended up supporting well-to-do entrepreneurs. The Islamic banks were mainly involved in short and medium commercial lending and not in industrial and agricultural credit, which contributed to the distorted development pattern. Islamists were also heavily involved in illegal foreign currency and trade transactions which brought them huge profits and contributed to the distorted development.
- VII. These credit facilities attracted supporters to the Islamist cause, even from the well-to-do.
- VIII. Transfers from citizens and organizations from oil producing states to Islamist organisations, e.g. charity societies, health and educational institutions, enabled Islamists to provide services to a wide spectrum of poor groups, creating a pool of potential supporters of Islamism.
- IX. Transfers from citizens and organizations in the oil producing states were also channelled to Islamist organizations in western countries.
- X. Islamic banks functioned as a conduit of Zakat (Islamic tax) from Islamists in oil producing countries and non-oil producing countries. These were, and are, paid to Islamist organizations, under the guise of Islamic charitable duty.

But since the number of the poor is continuously increasing and outstripping the capacities of Islamist charity organizations some Islamist factions may advocate structural and radical changes in organization of the state, a polarization in the Islamist movement may be the result. The development of an Islamic ideology of the left is then a possibility, although this will perhaps be slow as Maxime Rodinson predicts.⁴⁷ A merger of such Islamist factions

* Islamist scholars do not use the terms: credit, rate of interest and debtor/creditor relation. Instead they use the terms: Islamic modes of finance, profit margin and profit and loss sharing respectively. Some Islamic reformers do use the terms credit, rate of interest etc., and consider these transactions as conform with Islam, e.g. **Alsadig Almahdi**.

⁴⁷ Maxime Rodinson, cited in Ayubi, p.

⁴⁷ Report of FES Office – Algeria, September 2005.

and schools of thought with leftist Islamist thinkers and leftist streams outside the mainstream may take place.

7.3 Islamists and Trade Unions at Present, Case Studies

*Algeria*⁴⁸

Algerian Islamists are the most aggressive opponents of trade unions, Trade Unionists are declared to be enemies of Islam and they were the main targets of Islamists terrorists in the nineties, for example the assassination of a General Secretary of the UGTA.

Nonetheless, the Islamist organization FIS established Islamic Trade Unions in the 1990s, these were based on a conception of reconciling the rich and poor and included workers and management. This step followed the change from the one trade union system to political and trade union pluralism. This Islamist Trade Union was banned along with the FIS in the mid-nineties.⁴⁸ The establishment of this Islamic trade union organization should not distort sight of the aversion of Algerian Islamists to workers and their trade unions, which can be traced through their history since the seventies.

In the late 1960s – 1970s, the totalitarian regime of Boumedienne encouraged Islamists to counterbalance the Left, the historic opponents of Boumedienne in the liberation movement. Islamists were opposed to the agrarian reforms proposed by leftists and, therefore, they enjoyed the support and financing of landowners. The main thrust of Islamist mobilization was against "moral decadence and moral degradation", focusing on closing down bars, banning musical festivals, attacking unveiled women and westernized elites. They could mobilize the unemployed, youth and the impoverished middle class. They succeeded in building a base in the neighbourhoods, but not in the factories, since they are not after restructuring society and affecting socio-economic change, but dedicated to combating 'moral degradation'.

Although the FIS won the local elections in important Municipalities in the 1990s, it did not adopt a socio-economic programme, but focused on religious and public morality as mentioned above. The FIS even showed opposition to improved wages and the strike of dust workers in 1991, contending that the strike forced "respectable people like doctors and professional employees to sweep up"⁴⁹. They condemned trade unions as being influenced, and led by, "corruptors, the enemies of Allah and the Nation, Communists and others ...".⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Chris Harman, p.3 – *Part V: The Contradiction of Islamists: Algeria*.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.4.

*Egypt*⁵¹

After the confrontation between the 1952 Revolution's leadership and Islamic groups, Islamists, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, were put under extreme control, their activities were closely monitored and leadership detained, several were even executed (S. Qutb and A. Aouda in 1964).

Over the years the Egyptian government strictly controlled all civil society organizations, specifically trade unions, cooperatives, chambers of commerce ...etc. but ignored the professional associations of doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers ...etc, since they were of no important political significance, as they concentrated on providing services to their members. Because of government measures to hinder the penetration of these organizations by Muslim extremists, they could not influence these organizations in any way.

In the late seventies, President Sadat encouraged Islamists to counteract a presumed growing socialist influence, with this government support the Islamist movements gained substantial strength. This government neglect and countenance enabled radical Islamists to assassinate Sadat himself in 1981. Sadat's successor, President Mubarak's made one of his government's main objectives to eliminate the fast growing Islamist movements; nevertheless he continued to ignore the professional associations, as his predecessors before him. Therefore, Islamists could easily penetrate and gain ground in these associations. Finally, in 1993, the government amended the laws and regulations governing these organizations to hinder Islamist control of these organizations.

But Islamists could, and still can, work through their charity organizations and services: health and educational institutions in poor neighbourhoods and around Mosques. These welfare activities garnered them political support, winning them more than 15% of parliamentary seats in the elections of December 2005, despite the fact that they did not put forward a clear cut socio-political programme. The Islamists also gained popular support from the repression, exclusiveness and corruption of the regime, its lack of legitimacy, inefficiency and experimentation with liberalization policies and the 'Normalization Policy' with Israel.

Professionals, being the backbone of the Islamists' institutions and services, have been active in professional associations irrespective of all restrictions, since the early eighties, but are not active in trade unions, which are highly controlled by the state. Their conceptual framework which is blind to workers' concerns and the socio-economic changes, in which workers unions are important agents of change, reinforces this neglect.

*Jordan*⁵²

⁵¹ Report of FES Office – Egypt, August 2005.

⁵² Report of FES Office –Jordan, October 2005.

Islamists in Jordan have no influence in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), which is weak and under the control of the government. Notwithstanding this fact, Islamists became influential in the eighties in professional associations, which were dominated by leftists, pan-arabists and nationalists. These associations were a substitute for political parties, as parties and even parliament were banned at the time.

The rise of the Islamists in general is due to worsening social conditions and the failure of state-controlled trade unions to address the social conditions of their members. Therefore, Islamists have stepped in with their charity organizations and social institutions, providing services to the oppressed sectors of the society. Another reason for the rise of Islamists is a political one, namely their so-called "Anti-normalization policy" opposing normal relations with Israel, drawing therein on the support of citizens of Palestinian origin.

At present the Islamists control all but 3 of the 12 Professional Association Boards, among these associations are the powerful Engineers' Association and the Bar Association. The three that are out of the Islamist control are the medical doctors', geologists' and journalists' associations.

It is worth noting that although Islamism is on the rise in controlling professional associations, these associations are losing importance because of economic and social changes, this may be due to the decline and impoverishment of the middle class or the declining influence of professionals among the middle class.

It is difficult to draw conclusions as regards the impact of this decline on the conceptual framework and course of action of Islamists, some Islamists may be radicalized and resort to armed struggle, or another scenario is that the political polarization due to social polarization may take place among the Islamists and a trend to social Islam may emerge.

Lebanon⁵³

Islamists' trade unions involvement in Lebanon revolves around Hizbullah, which has been active in professional associations since 1995. In the same year, Hizbullah established trade union federation constituted of four individual trade unions. Islamists' penetration of other trade unions is not known. Despite these efforts of the Hizbullah Islamists, their influence in professional associations is negligible, as well as their impact on trade unions as a whole.

Hizbullah tries to establish relations with regional and international federations, e.g. the IFTU, from a politically pragmatic point of view,

irrespective of ideological differences. Its main contact at this level is with the International Islamic Worker's Union⁵³, which is inspired by the FIS in Algeria.⁵⁴

Morocco⁵⁵

The presence of Islamists in the Moroccan trade union movement goes back to the sixties when King Hassan II used them to counterbalance the left within the university campuses and in the trade union movement. The Islamist trade union (Union Nationale du Travail du Maroc – UNTM) which was established in 1973 was well linked to Islamist Nationalist Party (MPDC). This Party evolved to *Partie de la Justice et du Developpement* (PJD) in the nineties. The influence of UNTM is derived from the professional networks of the PJD.

Although the UNTM representation (5.7%) among personnel delegates is below the minimum threshold of 6%, the government imposed UNTM in all negotiations on social agreements and in tripartite social dialogue. This shows that the government recognizes the real influence of the Islamists, since the 5.7% is fictitious because of manipulation.

The UNTM is becoming almost the strongest representative in the health sector which was the strong hold of other trade unions. This is manifested in the veiled nurses and other segments of the health sector staff members.

After phases of planning and hibernation, the growing expansion and influence of UNTM became clear in 1992 when the UNTM was no longer banned. It then witnessed a massive flow of Islamist trade union activists who aspired recognition as representatives of their claimed Islamic values. Since 1992 the UNTM strategy is to invest in education being their favourite sector in which they were already strongly present. In 1997 they accessed the upper house of parliament through the electoral college for trade unions. In the professional elections of 2002 UNTM continued to expand. Being backed by the professional networks of PJD which became officially incorporated into the political and institutional system. The UNTM consequently became allied with the political authorities. Thus paving the way of opportunities for moderate Islamism which renders services to the government by tempering heated demands of the classical labour organizations.

At present UNTM is strongly represented in the most important services delivery sectors of health and education as well as in ports and railways, agriculture, finance and local government. The UNTM fought battles to

⁵³ Report of FES Office Lebanon August 2005

⁵⁴ See www.medeab.be/index.

⁵⁵ Report of FES Office – Morocco, August 2005.

establish 'prayer rooms' and enforce "prayer break" in workplaces claiming to link the supposed concerns of the community with those of the workplace.

Islamists' involvement in trade unions support is both pragmatic and ideological. From a pragmatic viewpoint, the Islamists gain legal recognition when negotiating with employers and the State; especially when they control the reputable professional associations (the Bar, Medical Doctors, etc.).

Ideologically the engagement in trade unions supports the Islamist "society project" since they can rally the masses around their "alternative system" and "project". Thus their influence becomes more visible in all walks of life; they can openly practice demarcation vis-à-vis culture and classical union demands. They can also broaden their social base on the base of this cultural demarcation using the Islamist rhetoric inspired by populism drawn from Islamic notions of justice, equity, morality and dignity of the "genuine folk". Consequently complexity of societies and problems become oversimplified. Thus, the Islamists use these arguments to counteract the conflictual discourse of other trade unions. Islamists claim that these trade unions are mouthpieces of the political establishment.

In their pragmatism, Islamists and their trade unions can readily compromise and build alliances with different trade unions and political organizations. They seek to appear as a "normal party" to avoid provocation. Their keywords are constructive opposition, moderation and gradual accomplishment. Their trade union leaders reaffirm the importance of social dialogue as the only means to resolve conflicts and create better conditions for labourers, i.e. away from the violent and confrontational discourse of the Algerian Islamists model which is still engraved in the minds of the Moroccan Islamists.

At the international level, the Moroccan Islamists trade unions show no hostility towards the GUFs, the ICFTU or ILO. They are quite willing to join international trade union bodies to gain international recognition and integration. But they have not yet got access to the international trade union movement.

Sudan

Following the Islamists rise to power, through the June 1989 Coup d'état, they organized the so called 'Conference for Trade Union Dialogue' in which they coined a definition of 'Worker', as being every 'Wage Earner', from the watchman and driver to the engineer, the medical doctor and university professor. Based on this definition of the worker, one of the main objectives of the trade unions was defined as to be a partner to the state in development and construction. The new Islamic regime then amalgamated all employees in each enterprise into one trade union, thus the enterprise being a factory or a university comprised all employees: workers and

professionals. The motive for this amalgamation was to dilute or undermine the role of the professionals and their associations, which were dominated by leftist employees from different government departments and the private sector, despite the large numbers dismissed or pensioned off in the early days of the regime. Another motive was to streamline the workers and bring them under control of Islamic professionals, as the Islamists did not enjoy majorities in workers' trade unions. The Islamists, afraid of the influence of the leftist professionals, who had spearheaded the October 1964 and 1985 uprisings, recruited inexperienced professionals to the leadership of these sectors and the trade unions, though this created a credibility gap, as the new cadres could not provide experienced leadership.

At present the Islamist regime has a strong grip on the trades' union umbrella organization, the Sudanese Workers Trade Unions' Federation (SWTUF), whose president is a university professor. The Islamists managed to mobilize women professionals to be members in the high ranks of trade unions. The SWTUF is accused of not defending the interests of its members, both workers and professionals, since the wages of wide segments of state employees, especially in the peripheries outside the Capital, are not paid for months, back wages are estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. Since the professionals are quite passive in the amalgamated trade unions, there is a tendency to reinstitute the sectoral trade unions organizational structures in which professionals will have their own associations.

Since political democratization is not taking place, or only very slowly, despite the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), it is not expected that the tight grip of the regime and the ruling party will weaken, taking into consideration the financial and other resources the Islamists have. But workers' trade unions and professional associations continue to be a danger for the Islamists, who because of their new privileged position in the social stratification, especially after their coup, can hardly represent the workers and wage earners in general. Vast groups of well-to-do Islamists form at present the backbone of the new middle class. Also new aggressive Islamist business groups from the peripheral regions are constituents of this middle class. But social differentiation among Islamists can result in political differentiation, the call of some Islamists in Sudan to combat corruption and poverty gives some signals for this differentiation.

From the above case studies, the following can be concluded:

The developmental crises in the Arab states culminated in the 1970s. The totalitarianism and repressive states, which lacked legitimacy and efficiency, gave the Islamists support to counteract Leftists of all shades, Marxists and nationalists. This support was one factor that enabled Islamists to corner the previous left and progressive leaderships and take over different organizations.

The motivation of the Islamists to get involved in professional associations and trade unions as a course of action is not derived from their moral orientation, desire for socio-economic change, nor from conceptual programmatic and ideological frameworks, though partially from their anti-communism, but is politically and tactically motivated. The alliances Islamists formed within these organizations were also tactical and only entered into after competing factions abandoned their ideological reluctance to work with the other.

Tunisia 55

Compared to the other Arab countries, in Tunisia the involvement of Islamists in professional associations cannot be distinctly marked, which implies that they do not have a presence and influence in these associations. Tunisian Islamists have, contrary to other countries, great influence in the construction sector and some industrial enterprises and in construction sectors and in the regional offices of teachers organizations in Kebilli, Zaghouan, Tataouine and Beja. They also have easy access to the offices of the UGTT in all sectors. This influence is due to the support given to them by the trade union leaders of the day, specifically Habib Achour (1985 – 1987), added to this is the support given to them by the present Prime Minister. This support of the trade union leaders and the prime minister is motivated and driven by their policy to weaken the Left within the UGTT, an interest shared with the Islamists.

Tunisian Islamists established their own student union, the UGTE, proving that the student movement is a domain of their influence as in the case of Sudan. In the nineties the Islamists suffered from heavy arrests, but benefited from alliances to remain strong.

8 Prospects and Conclusions

8.1 Social and Political Differentiation

The developmental crisis is aggravated by its social dimension in the whole societies and the societal crisis is in turn exacerbated by globalization and liberalization policies. This is manifested in increasing poverty and unemployment, specifically among the youth, and in social disparities and rampant corruption. The Islamists too have been overtaken by this social crisis, in particular the younger generation. The call of leading Islamists, such as al-Ghanoushi, for the Islamist movement to be more sensitive to problems of workers, their stress on the social dimension of Islam and the need to take the side of the poor and oppressed is a reflection of this social crisis. A decline in the status of the middle class and deepening social differentiation accompany these disparities generally, which in the post-Oil Boom era has struck the Islamists as well. This social differentiation will lead to political

differentiation among the Islamists, it is only a matter of time before distinct political demarcation lines over these issues develop among Islamists, Rodinson foresaw this in the longer term evolution of the Islamist movement. This will have an impact on the conceptual framework and course of action.

8.2 A Rise of Social Islam?

It will be a challenge for Islamists to formulate a conceptual framework in which the role of the state, public ownership, the private sectors, the market and the role of civil society actors in good governance and sustainable development are clearly defined. This framework should be based on a socio-economic analysis of root causes of poverty, unemployment and social disparities to identify structures and policies to combat poverty, overcome mass unemployment and to balance the deep and wide social disparities. This should be linked with practical action, to theorize workable economic and governance systems (an economic and political theory), which are currently lacking in Islamist thought.

The generalities of Islamist slogans like 'Islam is the Solution' and the exclusive concentration on normative and moral dimensions of Islam cannot address social and economic crises and the structural root causes of poverty and unemployment. The Islamists must begin to develop a socio-economic analysis which addresses contemporary problems and offers solutions in the form of socio-economic programmes, rather than the current charity services. Governance and constitutional issues as components of this programme should consider specifically human rights, freedom of belief and the issue of apostasy, culture pluralism, religious diversity, since slogans advocating the implementation of *Sharia* and combating moral decadence cannot be a basis for political, economic and social analysis and resolution of the contemporary social malaise.

The ability of Islamist movements to effect this intellectual reorientation and workout a practical programme to address concrete social problems would open up several possibilities. If they are able to make this transformation to a 'social and liberal Islam', Islamist movements could emerge from their ineffectiveness, as regards structural socio-economic issues, and:

1. Identify 'agents of change' within the disaffected and disgruntled segments of society (struggling workers urban poor, ...etc) who bear the brunt of the social crisis.
2. Offer their current disillusioned constituencies: youth, students and unemployed graduates, practical solutions to their problems.
3. Forge alliances and common fronts with political forces, including those with leftist inclinations / orientations around a social programme that addresses working class concerns and more broadly the social crisis. Naturally, key allies here would be trade unions and other civil society organizations.

A key requirement of this transformation is an internal dialogue within the Islamist movements and the acceptance of critical voices, such as al-Ghanoushi and Al-Nafisi, and the so-called leftist / liberal Islamists. It is observed that some moderate Islamists refrain from critiquing their movement for fear of being accused of sedition (*Fitna*), but also because of naked economic interests. Gamal Al-Banna's powerful critique and provisional 'Islamist' working class programme would be fruitful resources and references for these developments. Finally, an external dialogue with progressive forces already concerned with social change and the social crisis in the Arab world must be conducted, with opposing blocs finding the willingness to search for common ground. Failing this, a potential scenario is a return to extremism and violence by the more radical ideological currents within the Islamist movements.

The characteristics of the different Arab countries and Islamist movements should be thoroughly analyzed. On the basis of this analysis, different scenarios of future developments of the relation of Islamists to trade unions and professionals associations as strategic actors and agents of change in the context of social Islam called for by some Islamists can be worked out. Consequently the position of different actors, including FES, to Islamists, in general, and protagonists of social Islam can be defined and thereupon a supportive course of action for social Islam can be adopted.

References

1. Abdalla al-Nafisi, et al, *The Future of the Islamic Revival*, p. 327. (in Arabic, Mustagbal al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya), Centre for Arab Unity Studies and United Nations University, Beirut, 1987.
2. Atta El-Battahani, *Economic Transformation and Political Islam in Sudan, 1975 – 1989*, Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, 1996.
3. Aziz Al Azmeh, *In Consideration*, [www.iran – bulletin.org/ political-islam/azmeh 2](http://www.iran-bulletin.org/political-islam/azmeh2).
4. Aziz al Azmeh, *Postmodern Obscurantism and the Muslim Question*, .
5. Chris Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, 1994, International Socialism, Archive at: www.pi.org.uk and www.marxsime.dx.
6. FES Country Office Analyses, Middle East.
7. Gamal Al-Banna, *Islam and the Trade Union Movement*, Cairo 1981 (in Arabic).
8. Gamal Al-Banna and Isamil Faruqi, *Towards Islamic Labour and Unionism*,
9. Habib al-Ganahani, *Islamic Revivalism in Al-Sham, a case study of Syria*, in Ismail Sabri, *Islamic Movements in the Arab World*, pp. 135-137.
10. Hassan Mekki, *The Islamist Movement in the Sudan, 1969 – 1985, History and Political Discourse*, pp. 212–213, (In Arabic, Al-Haraka al-

- Islamiyya fi al-Sudan, 1969 – 1985, Tarikh wa), Second Edition, Khartoum, 1999.
11. Hazim Bibrawi, *The Rentier State in the Arab World, in The Nation State and Integration in the Arab World*, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut (in Arabic).
 12. Mohammed E. Hamdi, *The Making of an Islamic Political Leader, Conversations with Hassan al-Turabi*, Section: Elitism and Populism, London 1998.
 13. Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam, Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London and New York, 1991.
 14. Ola A. Abou Zied (Editor), *Islamic Movements in a Changing World*, pp. 35-42, Centre for Political Research and Studies, Cairo, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1995.
 15. Rashid al-Ghanoushi, *Protest Islam in Tunis*, Chapter 7, in Mohammed Abdel Baggi Al-Harmasi, *Contemporary Islam in the Arab World*, p.253, (In Arabic) Centre for Arab Unity Studies and United Nations University, Beirut, 1987.
 16. Sadik J. Al-Azm, *Islam and Secular Humanism*, J.C.B. Mohr, 2005.
 17. Sayyid Outb, *Signposts along the Way*,