

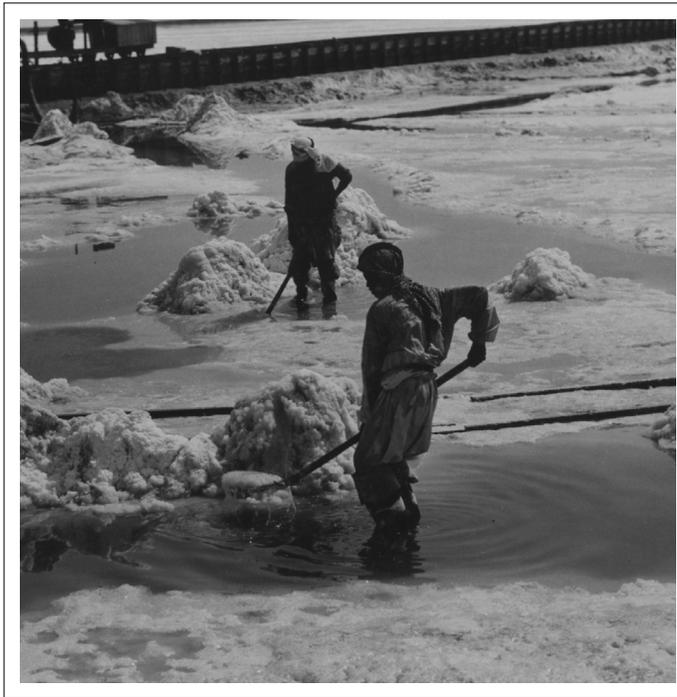


*Jordanian Labour Movement
A Visual History*

Hani Hourani

Jordanian Labour Movement

A Visual History



1. Local workers drying Dead Sea salt, Palestine Potash Company, 1940, from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

(2025/3/1356)

Primary Indexing data for the book

Book title: The Jordanian Labour Movement: A Visual History

Author: Hourani, Hani Mahmoud Othman

Publication Data: Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2025

Physical Description: 187 pages

Classification number: 331.8809565

Descriptors: /Labour Unions//Labour Law//Jordan

Edition data: First Edition

The author bears full legal responsibility for the content of their work, and this work does not reflect the opinion of the National Library Department or any other governmental entity.

Publisher:

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung - Amman office

Sven Schwersensky, Resident Representative

FES Amman office P.O. Box 941876 Amman 11194 Jordan

Email: amman@fes.de

Website: <https://jordan.fes.de/>

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ISBN 978-9923-759-46-2

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الأردن الجديد للأبحاث
AL URDUN AL JADID
RESEARCH CENTER (UJRC)



Jordanian Labour Movement

A Visual History

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1st edition.1 2025



About Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)'s work focuses on the core ideas and values of social democracy, freedom, justice, solidarity, peace and security, as well as the environmental sustainability. FES engages in extensive activities in Jordan that support civil institutions in partnership with various civil society organizations, political groups, and trade unions to promote democratic dialogue, organize conferences and workshops, and publish materials on social issues and current affairs.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition in social democracy dating back to its foundation in 1925. The foundation owes its formation and its mission to the political legacy of its namesake Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German President.



Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center

The Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center (UJRC) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in 1990 as an extension of the quarterly “*Al Urdun Al Jadid*” magazine (1984-1990). UJRC commenced its work in 1993 and is registered with the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Press and Publications Department under Law No. 10 of 1993.

In 1996, UJRC launched Jordan's Social and Oral History Program. The aim of the Program was to direct attention toward the history of social movements and institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. Between 1998 and 2012, the Program held five international conferences on Jordan's social history and published more than ten books on Jordan's social and political history.

The Program has also shown keen interest in utilizing photographs and other visual materials as sources for historical documentation. Its most recent contributions include “*Jordan in a Hundred Years 1921-2021: Illustrated History*”, released in 2022, and “*The Jordanian Labour Movement: Illustrated History*”, released in 2024.

*To the first generation of leaders and founders
of the Jordanian labour union movement:*

Zidan Younis

Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin

Mustafa Askalan

Wajeeh Mangou

Musa Qwaider

Acknowledgments and Appreciation

This book draws its strength from the wide range of photographic images, including historical and modern photos, which were obtained thanks to the cooperation of a large number of unionist Labour figures and their families. These individuals generously provided these images, visual materials, and written documents to the author of the book. Many unionists, whether those who are still in their positions or those who have recently left, played a significant role in providing us with the images they have.

This book is based on the fundamental idea that photographic images and visual materials such as artworks, badges, maps, and drawings constitute visual documents capable of narrating a complete history. When we decided to document the history of the Jordanian Labour movement through images, we received a positive response from dozens of unionists and the families of late unionist leaders, who provided us with their images either for reproduction or donation to the archive of the New Jordan Research Center (Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center), the center has long been preserving a collection of photographic images and minutes of meetings of Jordanian Labour unions in their early stages, in addition to a dozens of magazines, reports, studies, and books that document the history of the Labour movement.

Now, after this book has become a tangible visual and historical product, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has contributed to providing us with images and printed materials, foremost among them:

- **Mr. Alaa Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari**, who kindly presented a large collection of photos gathered by his father, the prominent unionist who chaired the General Union of Private Education Workers during the period from 1969 to 1976, and contributed to the activities of other Labour unions before that.
- **Mr. Yousef Musa Yousef Qwaidar**, who provided us with a large collection of photos gathered by his father, the prominent union leader, one of the leaders of the Labour unionist movement in Palestine and Jordan since the 1940s, and one of the founders of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) in the early 1950s.

Our thanks also go to:

- **Mr. Ghassan Askalan**, who provided us with photos of his father Mustafa Askalan, one of the founders of the “Union of Workers and Employees of Institutions, Municipalities, and Free Commercial Establishments” in 1954, and one of the pioneers who contributed to building the Labour unionist movement in Jordan in the early 1950s.
- **Mr. Talal Husni Al-Khuffash**, who facilitated our access to the electronic archive of photos of his father, the prominent Palestinian unionist Labour leader Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash (1917-1972).
- **Mr. Fathallah Al-Omrani**, president of the General Union of Textile Workers, who kindly allowed us to access the archive of his union’s photos, in addition to his personal archive.
- **Mr. Fahmi Al-Katout**, a leader in the Jordanian Communist Party and an economic researcher, who provided us with a collection of photos that document unionist activities during the 1970s, when he was then a unionist activist and party figure.
- **Mr. Yousef Hourani**, vice-president of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers for several terms and its president between 1982 and 1984, who provided us with a distinctive collection of photos of the Banks Union.
- **Mr. Ahmad Haider Rashid**, the son of the unionist leader Haider Rashid, president of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers, who provided us with a collection of photos of his father.
- **The family of the late unionist Ahmad Abu Khadra**, president of the General Union of Food Industry Workers, who provided us with photographic images as well.
- **Mr. Khaled Shraim**, president of the GFJTU during the many years 1992-1994, and president of the General Union of Mines and Mining Workers for years, who provided us with many photographic images that document his unionist activities extending from the 1960s to the early 1990s.

- **Mr. Ahed Quntar**, who provided us with photographic images that document his period of work as president of the GFJTU (1974-76), and president of the General Union of Air Transport and Tourism (71/1976).
- **Mr. Khaled Zaher Al-Fanatasa**, the current president of the GFJTU, and president of the General Union of Mines and Mining Workers between 2022 and 2027, who provided us with a large collection of union photos.
- **Ms. Bushra Al-Salman**, president of the General Union of Workers in Food Industries, Agriculture, and Water, who kindly provided us with a large number of photographic images that document the union's activities during different time periods.
- **Mr. Ali Al-Hadid**, member of the administrative body of the General Union of Electricity Workers since 1990, and its president during the period from 2011 to 2022, who gave us access to the archive of photos of the union's activities during his presidency.
- **Mr. Samara Al-Khateeb**, president of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers, who kindly provided us with the archive of union photos spanning several decades, and allowed us to utilise a large number of them.
- **Mr. Fakhri Al-Ajarmah**, who served as president of the General Union of Electricity Workers for the 2022/2027 cycle, and provided us with a large number of photos of the union's activities.
- **Mr. Yousef Qanab**, president of the General Union of Air Transport Workers, who kindly allowed us access to the archive of union photos.
- **Mr. Mahmoud Al-Hiyari**, president of the General Union of Construction Workers, who allowed us to copy photos of several cycles of the Construction Workers' Union since the early 1950s.
- **Mr. Mahmoud Al-Maayta**, president of the General Union of Land Transport and Mechanics Workers, who provided us with a number of photographic images that document the union's activities.

- **Mr. Nabil Salem**, member of the administrative body of the General Union of Air Transport and Tourism Workers, who provided us with photographic images that document the union's achievements and activities.
- **Engineer Azzam Al-Smadi**, president of the Jordanian Independent Trade Union Federation, who kindly provided us with a collection of images and documents that record different stages of the federation activities.

This book built on its narrative content on a variety of valuable sources. It was based on the personal archive of the book's author related to the Labour movement, in addition to the archive of Mr. Ahmad Al-Akhrass. It also benefited from the images preserved in the National Library, in addition to photos provided by the late Muhammad Jawhar, president of the GFJTU during the period from 1962 to 1971.

We also have to acknowledge the role of the photographers; Saher Qaddara, Hassan Al-Tamimi, and Ahmad Abdo, who provided the project with large members of images that document Labour movements, protests sit-ins, and strikes that took place between 2008 and 2013.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the technical team that contributed to preparing this book. Here I would like to thank the lawyer Ms. Tahani Da'na and the prominent journalist Mr. Jihad Al Mansi for their efforts in communicating and researching with Labour union leaders. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Ali Al-Bashar, who undertook the process of scanning hard copy images, and worked on their restoration and processing for publication.

Special thanks go to Dr. may Al- revising and editing the english version of this book.

Hani Hourani

Foreword

In late 2023, the FES Amman office approached the eminent Jordanian intellectual and social critic Hani Hourani with the question whether he could imagine to write a history of the Jordanian labour movement. This question was based on a long history of association and partnership between him and FES dating back to the 1990s. In the ensuing conversations it quickly emerged that what we were thinking of together was not an academic publication but rather a book which would reach out to a wider audience and have the power to sensitize especially the younger generations to the history of the struggles of workers and trade unions in Jordan.

This is how the coffee table book format was decided on, documenting this history primarily with photos and visual material with the text being supportive of the imagery of the various stages of development of trade unionism and working-class organization in the country. The collection of the visual material thus became the first priority and was guiding the writing of the text.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Hani Hourani for all the tremendous work which was achieved in the process and I am sure that this book will contribute immensely to raise and broaden the awareness of the achievements and challenges of the labour movement in Jordan. I also wish to thank my colleagues Esraa Abu Hussain, Abdulhameed Khatib and Yousef Ibrahim for the unrelenting efforts they made to achieve this feat to produce the first history of the Jordanian labour movement in such an original format

Sven Schwersensky

Resident Director – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Jordan & Iraq

Introduction

This book aims to provide a visual history of the journey of the Jordanian labour movement, starting from the emergence of paid labour in Jordan in the late Ottoman era, passing through the attempts of labour and trade union organisation during the Transjordan and the British Mandate, and reaching the great leap in the 1950s, which witnessed the establishment of the first labour unions and the formation of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU). In July 1954 Notably, the GFJTU last year in 2024, celebrated the seventieth anniversary of its founding.

This book differs from previously published works about the Jordanian labour movement by presenting a history that relies on visual materials, especially photographs, in addition to printed documents, drawings, badges, and symbols from the publications of trade union organisations in Jordan. This approach illustrates the great richness of the experience of the Jordanian labour movement and the efforts made during its various stages of struggle.

The book does not claim to present a complete history of the development of the Jordanian labour movement, but it attempts to provide an in-depth look at this rich history. To achieve this, a particular arduous task was to identify individuals and institutions which were holding the materials and to constitute a visual repository documenting each stage of the labour struggle.

We hope that this book will encourage trade unions and professional associations, as well as social and political organisations, to build their own archives of images to preserve their history from neglect and their photographic memory from loss. This effort is unprecedented in the Arabic tradi-

tions of writing the history of social movements, as local books works have been accustomed to relying on text documents only. As for us, we encourage looking at photographs and other visual materials as equally important sources of information.

The methodology of pictorial history allows the interested reader to embark on a “time travel” experience to explore the course of the Jordanian labour movement from its beginnings to the present day, to see through the images its stages of growth and development, and to get to know the challenges it faced.

The book also reveals the bright moments in the journey of the labour movement in Jordan over the past seven decades, as well as the periods that witnessed a decline, especially in the last two decades, as well as the continuous efforts to overcome such challenges.

An important objective in publishing this book is to inspire the young generations of the Jordanian working class and unionists, and to enable them to see a comprehensive picture of the struggles of the labour movement and the prominent achievements it has made in public, political, social, and economic life. The desired message is a call to the new generations to continue the struggle for labour rights and a decent livelihood.

This book is divided into twelve chapters, each of which describes the main features of each stage of the development of the Jordanian labour movement, and its Figures relying on images and texts. The reader will find at the end of the book a section with all sources and references, both textual and visual.

Hani Hourani

October 2024

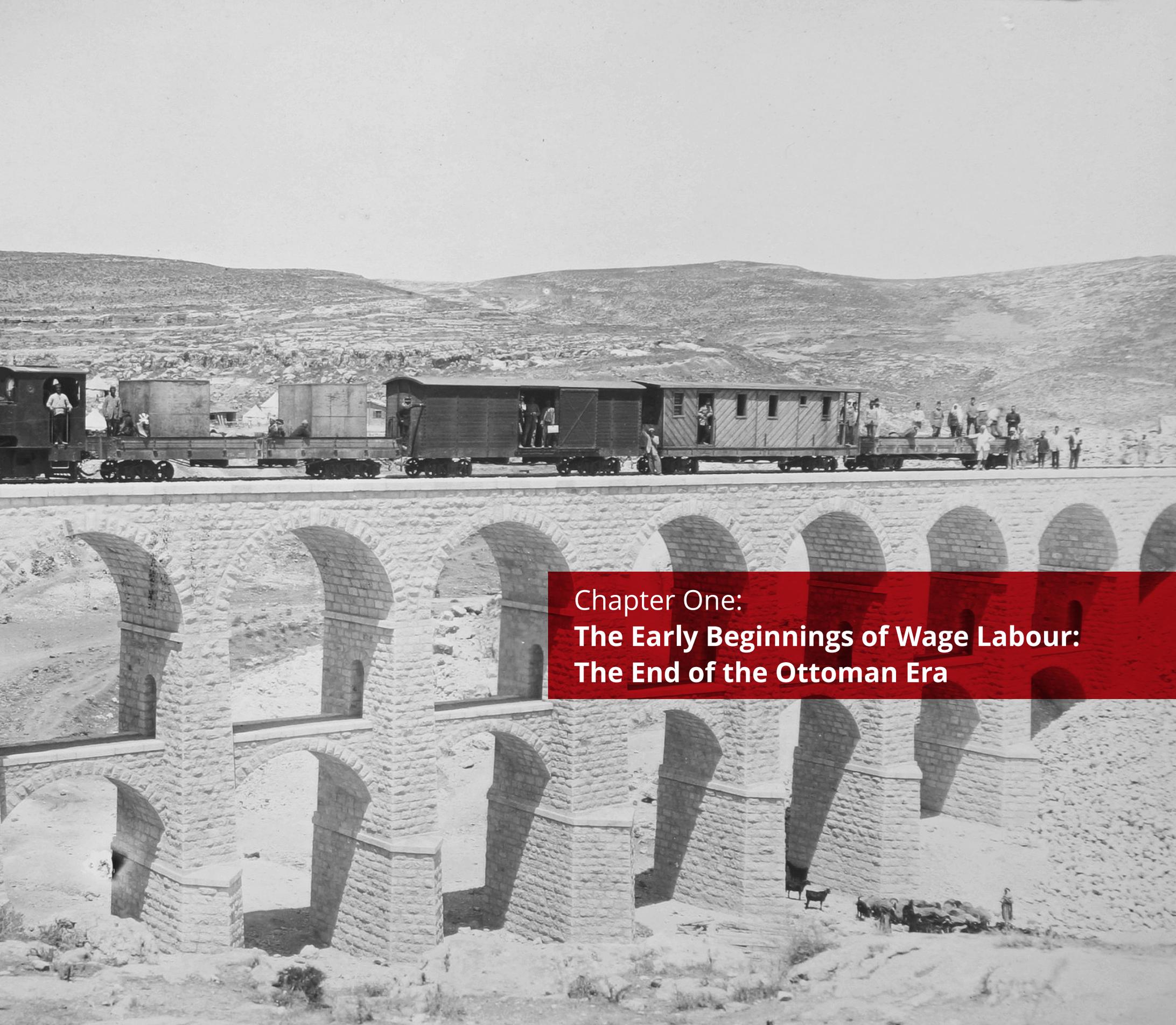
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2. Ottoman train crossing the “Ten Bridges” built in Al-Quweismeh area, Amman, 1908, which connects the railway between Amman and Ma’an to the south (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).





Chapter One:
**The Early Beginnings of Wage Labour:
The End of the Ottoman Era**

Chapter One:

The Early Beginnings of Wage Labour

The End of the Ottoman Era

Since 1516, Jordan came under Ottoman rule, similar to the rest of the region, for nearly 400 years. In 1921, the Emirate of Transjordan was established as an independent entity for the first time, but it was always an integral part of the Levant (Bilad al-Sham) or Greater Syria.

During the Ottoman period, Jordan gained significant importance as a major route for pilgrims from the Levant heading to the holy places. However, the country suffered from chaos and insecurity, especially after the withdrawal of Muhammad Ali's forces, the ruler of Egypt, from the Levant, which he had invaded in 1831.

In the forties of the 19th century, central control in Jordan weakened, and the power of Bedouin tribes increased. These tribes imposed a system of "khawat" (tribute) on agricultural areas, taking control of their surplus production, which led to a decline in agriculture and a decrease in the number of inhabited villages.

Starting from the fifties of the 19th century, the Ottoman authorities began to regain control over northern and central Jordan. The northern region between the Yarmouk and Zarqa rivers was connected to the Hauran Governorate, while the central region between the Zarqa and Mujib rivers became part of the Salt District, under the jurisdiction of the Nablus Province. Southern Jordan, south of the Mujib River, remained outside Ottoman control until 1894, when the Ottoman state ordered the governor of Damascus to subdue the area. He sent a military campaign that entered Karak peacefully, and es-

tablished the Karak Governorate there, which joined the Levant Province. Aqaba, on the other hand, remained under Egyptian control until 1892, before joining the Hejaz Province.

The restoration of Ottoman control over northern and central Jordan in the second half of the 19th century led to a revival of the agricultural economy, an expansion of cultivated areas, and an increase in urban settlements.

Despite the increased tax burdens on land and livestock, the late 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century were marked a noticeable boom in agriculture and livestock farming. Agriculture activities increasingly related to regional and global markets, with Jordanian products being exported Palestine and then beyond to European and Asian markets.

Some cities, such as Salt and Amman, experienced commercial and urban prosperity, attracting traders, artisans, and agricultural workers from neighboring districts. One of the most significant developments was the construction of the Hejaz Railway in the first decade of the 20th century, which stretched across Jordan from north to south, covering a distance of over 400 kilometers. Thirty-four stations were built along the Hejaz Railway, transforming many of them into urban centers and markets for agricultural and animal product distribution. During the construction phase, these stations also provided temporary employment opportunities for local residents.





3. Groups of workers laying tracks for the Hejaz Railway (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).

The Role of the Hejaz Railway in the Emergence of New Professions and Crafts

In September 1900, Sultan Abdul Hamid II announced his plan to build a new railway line. The section between Amman and Daraa was opened on September 1, 1903. This was followed by the opening of the section connecting Amman and Ma'an in September 1904. In the same month of 1907, the section between Ma'an and Karak stations was inaugurated.

The construction of the railway on Jordanian land created new job opportunities in professions which had previously not existed. This occurred in sectors such as accounting, medical services, and financial services or employment positions for police officers and station officers as well as for mechanics in railcar maintenance and repair workshops. It also led to the establishment of bakeries, cafes, and guesthouses, as seen at the Amman station.

In Zarqa, a hotel and accommodation facilities were

built to cater to the needs of workers at low prices. The area also witnessed the emergence of a leather industry, which benefited from the abundance of animal skins. These products could now be exported easily to Damascus.

The development of the railway also marked the emergence of wage labour in its early forms in Jordan. Although the railway construction primarily relied on the Ottoman army, some construction tasks were assigned to local workers all along the railway line. For instance, individuals from the Bani Sakhr tribe transported six thousand telegraph poles from Al-Mzeireeb station to Ma'an, along with all the necessary equipment, boxes, and wires. The Bani Atiyah tribe, on the other hand, was responsible for delivering the poles from Ma'an to Madain Saleh, using over 200 camels for transportation, and completing the task in just fifteen days. At the train stations, the number of porters and carriers increased.



4. Ottoman train crossing the “Seven Bridges”, near Amman, 1903 (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



5. Hejaz Railway Station in Ma'an (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



6. Ottoman authorities seeking the help of the inhabitants along the Hejaz Railway to pave the road and transport materials to the work sites (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



7. Local workers laying the tracks for the Hejaz Railway (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



8. Groups of local workers laying the tracks for the Hejaz Railway
(photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



9. Photo of local workers laying the tracks for the Hejaz Railway
(photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).

Emergence of Paid Labour in Eastern Jordan

Until the mid-19th century, the economy of Eastern Jordan heavily relied on barter. However, by the end of the century, gradually money transactions were becoming the norm. Ottoman tax policies and increased trade with regional and European markets contributed to this transition to a monetised economy.

By the late 19th century, the main cities and towns of Eastern Jordan, including Ajloun, Salt, Karak, Tafilah, and Ma'an, were using coins such as the Majidiya and gold lira, including the Ottoman, French, and English currencies.

During the last half of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, Jordan underwent profound economic and social transformations. One of the prominent features of this change was the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners, traders, and moneylenders. At the same time, many farmers lost ownership of their lands due to their inability to repay debts, contributing to the emergence of local wage labour.

With the rapid expansion of land reclamation for agriculture, Eastern Jordan attracted more migrant workers from Egypt, Palestine, and Hauran. Working for a cash wage began to spread. For example, at the Abu Jaber farm in Al-Yadudah, workers from Nablus, Jerusalem, and Ramallah in Palestine, as well as from Hauran in southern Syria, were employed. Workers were classified

according to their employment contracts; those who ploughed the land worked for a daily wage from November to February and during the harvest months from May to August. The quaternary workers, on the other hand, received a quarter of the crop produced by their labour, along with food and accommodation.

However, working conditions were affected by the availability of a surplus of local labour, which led to a decrease in workers' earnings. The author Eugene Rogan noted that the share of the quaternary workers decreased from a quarter of the crop after the deduction of the tithes tax, which equaled 21.9% of the total crop before 1903, to 16.7% in 1911.

Workers who were paid a wage, and who lacked any legal protection, saw their wages affected by demand and supply or the nature and quantity of the crop. As the records of the Al-Yadudah farm show, the wage for wheat harvesting was eight piastres per day, while barley harvesting was five piastres. The wage for a woman working in bean and pulse picking did not exceed three piastres per day.

Eugene Rogan also provides similar examples of wages for livestock herding workers, noting that their wages were very low, and that there was a surplus of labour in this field, similar to the surplus in agricultural labour.



10. A workshop established by the Ottomans in Aqaba during the laying of the Hejaz Railway tracks (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



11. Workers pulling a wooden boat on the shore of Aqaba (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).

Establishing ships' dock on the shores of the Dead Sea

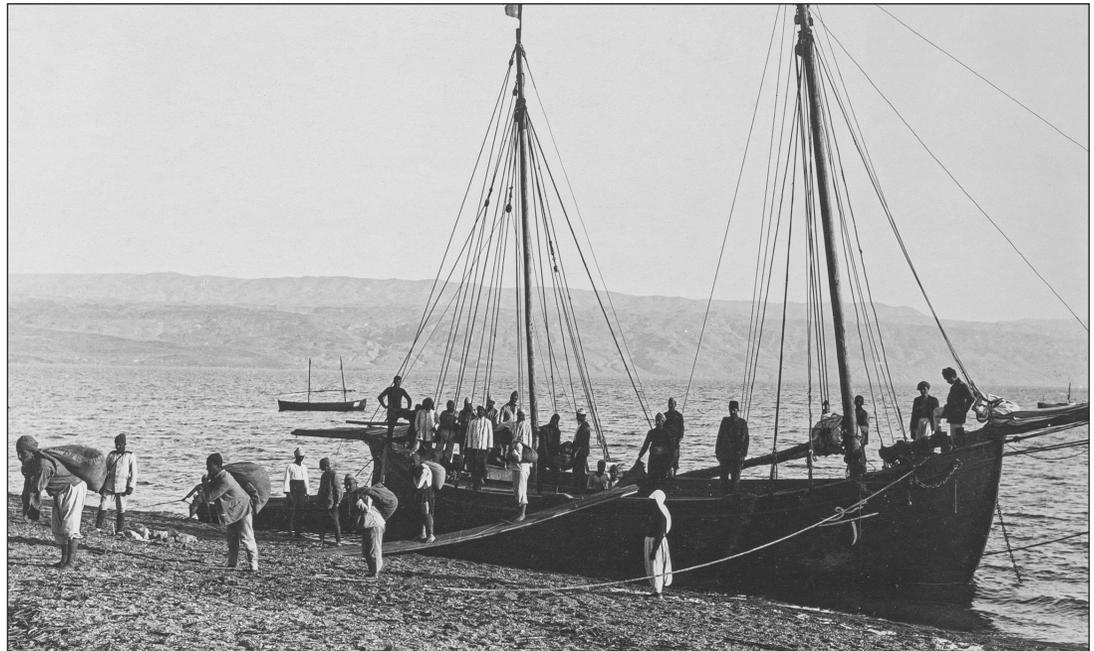
In 1895, the Ottoman authorities considered linking Karak and Ma'an to Jerusalem by establishing the Jericho-Dead Sea road and then to the Mediterranean coast. Sidqi Effendi, an Ottoman naval officer, was sent to conduct a technical survey of the road to be built between Karak city and the Dead Sea and the ships' dock on the Dead Sea shore. After checking the depth of the Dead Sea water, the aforementioned officer prepared a detailed report and requested the construction of a ship with specifications that were consistent with the nature of the Dead Sea. The report also showed the cost of its construction and the other boats used there.

A report prepared by the Military General Staff on April 8, 1895, based on a report by two of its inspectors, states that it was decided that the Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem would undertake the construction of the ten-kilometres-long Jericho-Dead Sea shore road. According to the report, the Ottoman Province of Syria would construct the road section extending from Ghor Al-Mazra'a, at the end of the Dead Sea, to Karak, which is a six-hour drive. The Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem, according to the report, would operate a number of boats on the Dead Sea, and build a wooden dock for boats on the northern shore of the Dead Sea, and another one on the southern shore, which was called Karak dock.

,”See: “*Jordan in Ottoman Archive Documents* Prepared by Fazil Bayat, Istanbul, 2022. pp. 244 and 248



12. The wooden boat dock on the shore of the Dead Sea, near Ghor Al-Mazra'a (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



13. Workers carrying sacks of grain onto the deck of a boat (photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



14. A camel caravan transporting grain to a boat on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea
(photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).



15. Boats waiting to be loaded with goods before transporting them to the Palestinian shore of the Dead Sea
(photo from Ottoman Imperial Archives).

16. British soldiers and local workers working on the construction of Allenby Bridge on the Jordan River
(from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).





**Chapter Two:
Formation of the Wage-Labour Force in Eastern
Jordan and the Early Labour Organisation**

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Formation of the Wage-Labour Force in Eastern Jordan and the Early Labour Organisation

The modern state of Jordan, initially known as the “Emirate of Transjordan” and later as the “Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” emerged after the withdrawal of Ottoman forces from the Levant (Bilad al-Sham) in 1918. Britain and France divided control over the region, with Palestine and Transjordan falling under British mandate, and France obtaining control over Lebanon and northern Syria, overthrowing King Faisal’s government that had been established in Damascus following the Ottoman withdrawal.

The Emirate of Transjordan was formed from three districts that were part of King Faisal’s government: Karak, Balqa, and southern Hauran. In 1925, Ma’an and Aqaba joined Transjordan, having previously been part of the Kingdom of Hejaz, thus forming the modern borders of the kingdom as we know it today.

Prince Abdullah bin al-Hussein assumed the rulership of Transjordan in April 1921, following three days of negotiations in Jerusalem with Sir Winston Churchill. Accordingly, he was to rule under British protectorate and bound by the terms of the British mandate, which included maintaining border security with Palestine and Syria.

In the early 1920s, the population of Eastern Jordan ranged between 225,000 and 230,000. Nomadic and semi-nomadic Bedouins constituted approximately 46% of the population, while rural and urban dwellers made up around 54%.

Britain viewed Eastern Jordan as a strategic region connecting its vital interests in Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt. Consequently, it focused on developing the infrastructure there, constructing roads, airports, and military bases, and establishing borders with neighbouring

countries. It set up crossing points to control population movement, prevent the infiltration of rebels, and protect the region.

These policies impacted the Bedouins’ economy, which relied on herding and mobility. Over time, Bedouins transitioned to agriculture, and their numbers decreased, accounting for approximately 22% of the population by 1946.

Rural inhabitants faced challenges due to their dependence on rain-fed agriculture, leading to crop fluctuations. Some experienced famines during drought years, forcing them to mortgage their lands, which subsequently passed into the hands of merchants and usurers.

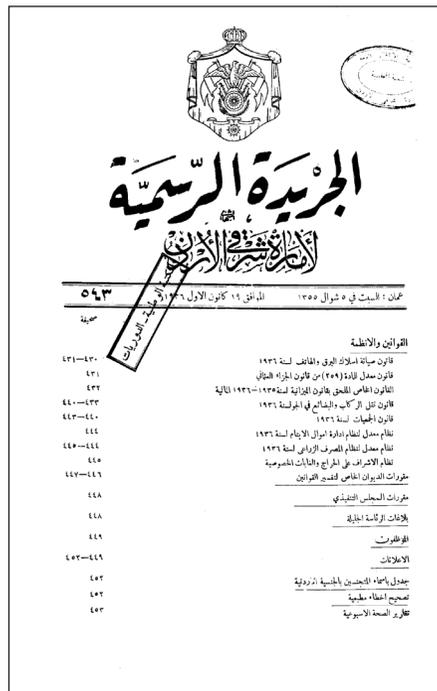
British policies encouraged the dismantling of communal ownership and the promotion of individual ownership, resulting in more land transferring to large landowners. Small farmers became either workers or sharecroppers.

Simultaneously, Britain aimed to foster mutual economic dependence between Eastern Jordan and Palestine, removing customs barriers between the two countries. This enabled Eastern Jordan to supply the Palestinian market with agricultural and animal products, while Palestine provided Eastern Jordan with manufactured goods.

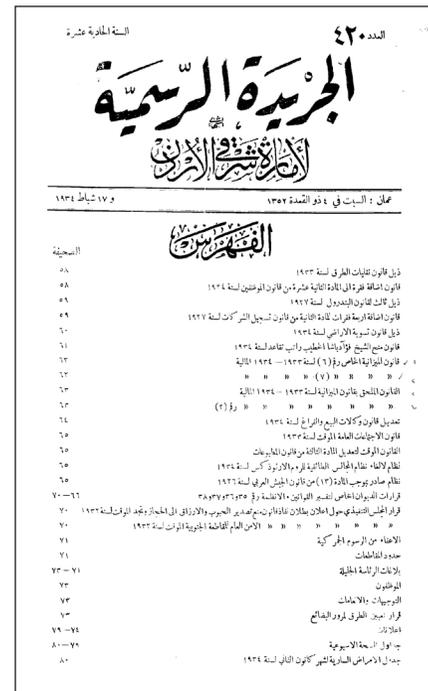
Despite the availability of natural resources like Dead Sea salts and phosphate, Britain did not encourage investment in Jordan. However, it opened the door for Zionist capital to invest in extracting potash ore and water resources, with these projects relying on Jewish labour from Palestine, from which the local population did not benefit.



17. Public Gatherings Law, 1933.



18. Charitable Societies Law, 1936.



19. Cover page of Public Gatherings Law, 1933.



20. First page of the Transjordan Defence Law of 1935.



21. Exile and Deportation Law, 1928.



22. Joint Penal Code, 1928.

Formation of the Work Force in Eastern Jordan without a Dedicated Legal and Political Framework

In the 1940s, the wage-labour began to emerge in Eastern Jordan, but there were no effective laws to protect their rights. The old Ottoman laws, such as the Ottoman Civic Code of 1907 and the Law of Associations of 1909, were the legal texts in force, but they were not respected and practically not implemented.

In 1928, a Legislative Council was established in Eastern Jordan, and some council members began advocating for laws to protect workers' rights. Mohammad Yusuf al-Saud and his colleagues presented a petition in 1937, and again in 1943, demanding the enactment of a law to guarantee workers' rights. However, the government rejected both these demands.

During one of the sessions of the Legislative Council, Issa al-Awad al-Amari called for the enactment of a law to protect workers, pointing out that advanced countries promote their workers' rights through cooperatives and trade union organisations. Minister Mohammad al-Ansi responded that there was no need for such a proposal since there were no factories or trade unions, and he considered that workers in Jordan lived in prosperity! The Legislative Council rejected the labour law proposal, and Eastern Jordan remained without labour legislation until 1953.

In addition, the laws and policies put in place to curb political opposition also restricted the political and social rights of workers, preventing them from organising themselves or demanding their rights.

In 1927, the Crime Prevention Law was adopted, granting authorities the power to monitor individuals suspected of posing a threat to security and restricting their movement. This was followed in 1928 by the Penal Code, which authorized the deployment of police and

security forces to control areas experiencing unrest, with the costs of these forces being borne by the local population. The same year, the Banishment and Deportation Law gave the government the right to expel individuals deemed a threat to public security, and to impose prison sentences or fines on those who returned to Eastern Jordan after having been expelled. In 1936, this law was used to expel Qassim Melhim and his companions who had attempted to establish a labour organisation.

In 1933, the Law on Public Meetings was approved, prohibiting meetings without prior government permission and requiring approval from the British army commander. In 1935, the Defense of Eastern Jordan Law was issued, applicable only in emergency situations, granting the Emir extensive powers, including censorship, arrest, and deportation.

With the increasing activity of political clubs, the government enacted the Law on Associations of 1936, which dissolved existing associations under the Ottoman Associations Law of 1325 AH and required their re-registration with the Executive Council. The law also stipulated that the associations' objectives should be in line with existing laws, not threaten public security, undermine the unity of the state, seek to change the existing form of government, or instigate a division between the people and the government. It granted the governor or public prosecutor the right to attend any meeting held by any association.

During the 1930s, these laws created a politically restrictive environment, and with the declaration of a state of emergency in 1939, the circumstances in the country did not allow for protests demanding more rights for workers or the emergence of labour organisations.



29

23. British soldiers and workers during their work on constructing the of Allenby Bridge (from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).



24. Workers building Allenby Bridge between the two banks of the Jordan River (from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).



25. A photo of Allenby Bridge during its construction on the Jordan River (from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).

Early Attempts of Labour Organisation in Eastern Jordan

The first attempts at establishing labour related organisations in Eastern Jordan date back to the late 1920s. British police reports from Palestine at the time mentions the successful establishment of “communist” cells comprising workers and citizens from Eastern Jordan, organised by Palestinian workers.

A report prepared by the general commissioner, A. S. Mavro Gordashu, titled “The Communist Movement in Palestine,” indicated that the Palestinian Communist Party was active in neighbouring Arab countries, including Eastern Jordan. The report was based on a document describing the activities of the “Anti-Imperialist League” between February and May 1927 and its attempts to establish local associations.

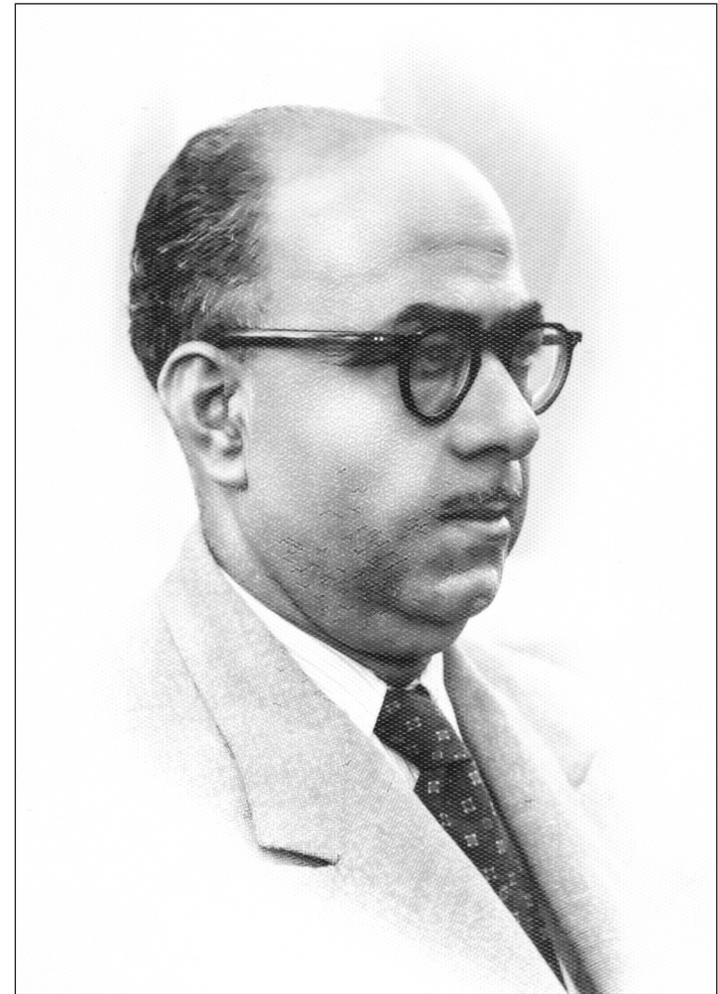
Also, the Jerusalem newspaper “Al-Jami’a Al-Arabiya” reported on September 16, 1931, that a group of Jordanians had applied to register a new political party called the “Jordanian Workers’ Party.” In their statutes, they stated that the party’s objectives included “protecting and defending the rights of workers and peasants.”

In the following years, attempts were made to organise unions in Eastern Jordan. According to Walter Lockyer, Dr. Subhi Abu Ghanimeh began establishing the “Jordanian Workers’ Union,” which had around 2,000 members, but it lasted only a few months before being dissolved by the authorities.

Historian A.D. Ali Mahafzah mentioned that the Palestinian press reported on the establishment of the “Jordan Workers’ Aid Association” led by Dr. Subhi Abu Ghanimeh, but with no information available on how long it lasted.

In 1936, the country witnessed multiple attempts to establish union organisations. According to Lockyer, Qassim Melhim tried to organise workers into a union with his Palestinian communist friends, but this attempt was suppressed by the authorities, who expelled those involved and prevented them from returning.

A. Konikoef mentioned in his book, “Transjordan: An Economic Survey,” another attempt in 1936 to establish a union or association for car drivers after they went on strike.



26. Dr. Subhi Abu Ghanima, who initiated the first attempts to establish a “Society for the Assistance of Workers in Jordan” (from Huda Abu Ghanima Collection).



27. Hussein Pasha Al-Tarawneh, President of the First National Jordanian Conference (1928), and a founding member of the first trade union in Jordan, 1932 (from the History of Jordan website).

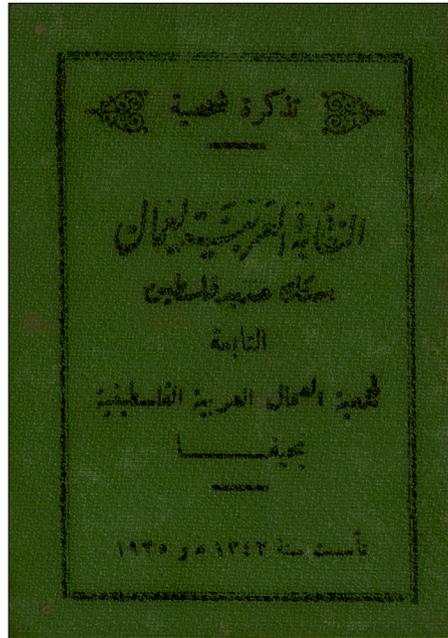
Labour Struggles and Attempts to Form Trade Unions Post-World War II

During World War II, economic activity thrived in Eastern Jordan, and the demand for workers increased. However, strict laws restricted freedoms, activists were pursued, and the formation of unions or effective labour movements was prevented.

After the war ended, the economic recovery turned into a severe recession, leading to a decline in wages and widespread unemployment. This situation sparked a wave of labour conflicts and industrial actions. One of the most notable protests was the strike by workers of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) in late 1946, in which workers at all the company's sites along the oil pipeline took part and which lasted for several days.

Although the authorities arrested Hanna Jumi'an, an employee in the accounting department of the Iraq Petroleum Company, and other strike leaders, the strike was highly successful, with workers managing to obtain most of their demands, such as increased wages and the formation of a trade union to represent them.

Hence, the strike by workers of the Iraq Petroleum Company is considered the first successful labour strike in Jordan, with thousands of workers from different sites between H4 station, Mafraq, and other stations along the pipeline participating. The strike achieved the formation of a union for the workers, and they even elected



28. Cover of the membership card of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society.

their leadership during the strike. This union continued to operate before collapsing in 1949 as its leadership had fallen into the hands of members loyal to the company's management.

Around the same time, in late 1946, a number of workers and employees of commercial establishments submitted a request to the governor of the capital to form a union "to unite and defend their interests." Employees of the Amman Railway also began organising themselves as a branch union affiliated with the Palestine Railway Union, based in Haifa. However, the Jordanian branch of this union lasted no more than six months before being dissolved.

In October 1947, Ghareeb al-Bakri, who described himself as the "Secretary of the Jordanian Workers' Party," wrote a letter to the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society in Haifa, requesting its assistance in establishing the party. Al-Bakri stated that the party's objective was to defend and guarantee workers' rights and asked the association to provide them with its statutes and programs to use as a model for their party, considering the political situation in Jordan.

Also, calls in the press associated with the political opposition intensified, demanding respect for workers' rights and an improvement in their living conditions, as well as enacting legislation to protect them from the employers' exploitation. This development constitutes what could be called a bloodless revolution in the Jordanian labour world.



29. The Rutenberg Project: Palestine Electric Corporation, 1932
(from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).



30. Panoramic photo of the first Potash Extraction Plant on the Eastern shore of the Dead Sea, 1937 (from Eric Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress).



31. A labour march marking Labour Day
(from Ahmed Al-Akhras Collection).





Chapter 3:

**Post-Nakba: Rebuilding Union Organisations
in the West Bank (1948/1952)**

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Post-Nakba: Rebuilding Union Organisations in the West Bank (1948/1952)

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the largest and most economically developed part of Palestine fell under Israeli occupation, while the central section, later known as the “West Bank,” was joined to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The Nakba of 1948 was a tragic turning point for the Palestinian people, leading to the destruction of the social and economic fabric of Palestinian society, the loss of unity and cohesion, and the displacement of a significant portion of the population, who became refugees, homeless and landless.

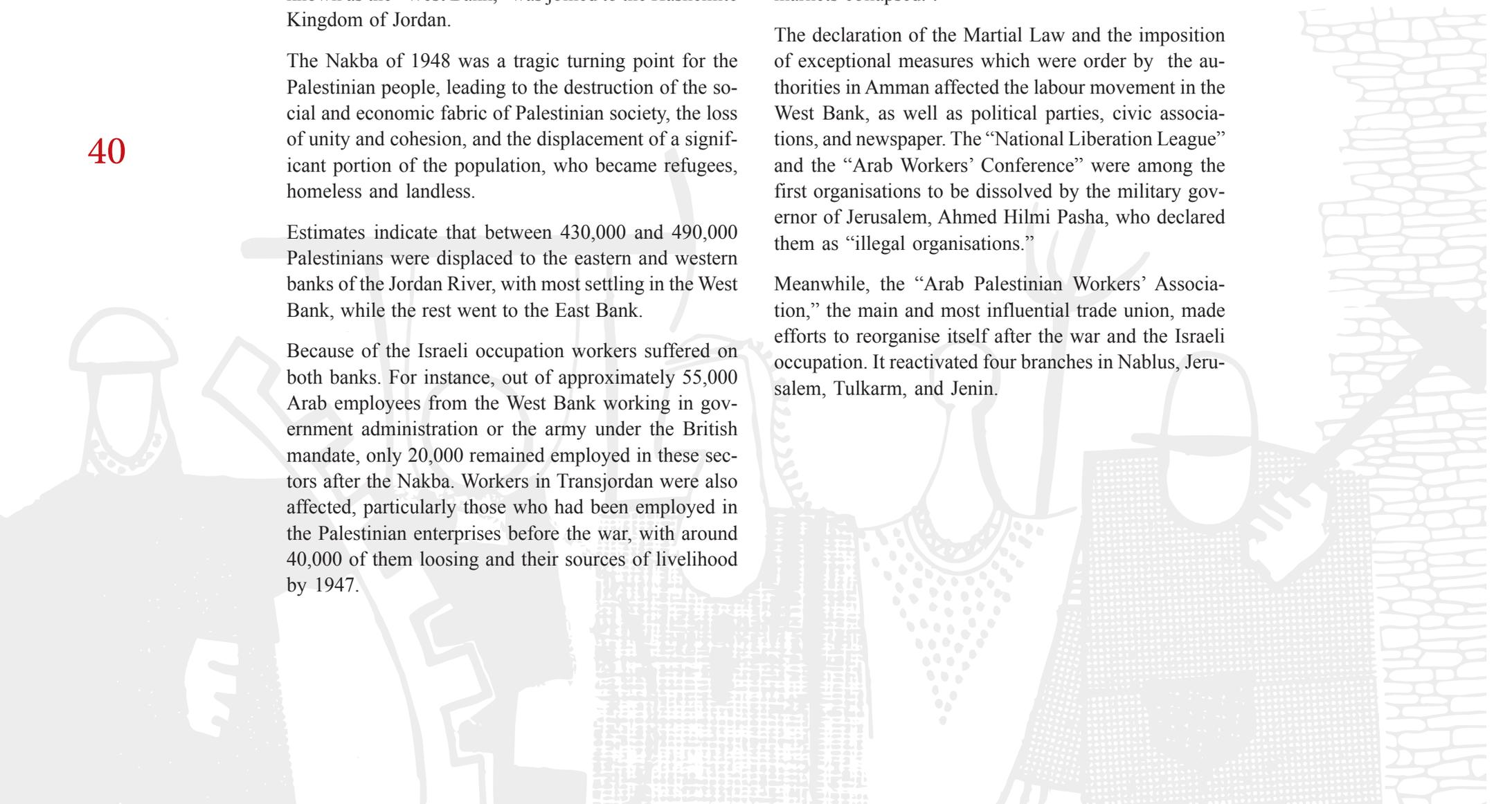
Estimates indicate that between 430,000 and 490,000 Palestinians were displaced to the eastern and western banks of the Jordan River, with most settling in the West Bank, while the rest went to the East Bank.

Because of the Israeli occupation workers suffered on both banks. For instance, out of approximately 55,000 Arab employees from the West Bank working in government administration or the army under the British mandate, only 20,000 remained employed in these sectors after the Nakba. Workers in Transjordan were also affected, particularly those who had been employed in the Palestinian enterprises before the war, with around 40,000 of them losing and their sources of livelihood by 1947.

With the Nakba came also unemployment on both banks of the Jordan. The access to Palestinian ports was now blocked for exports and exports of goods to overseas markets collapsed.

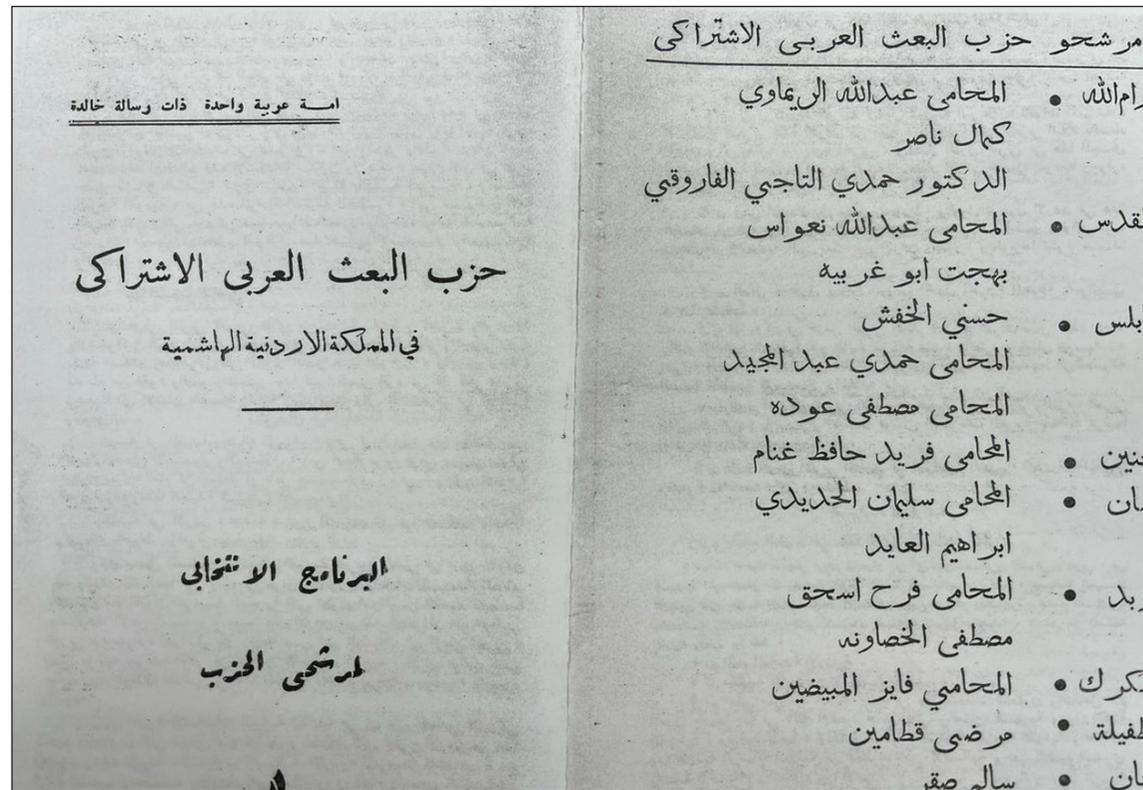
The declaration of the Martial Law and the imposition of exceptional measures which were order by the authorities in Amman affected the labour movement in the West Bank, as well as political parties, civic associations, and newspaper. The “National Liberation League” and the “Arab Workers’ Conference” were among the first organisations to be dissolved by the military governor of Jerusalem, Ahmed Hilmi Pasha, who declared them as “illegal organisations.”

Meanwhile, the “Arab Palestinian Workers’ Association,” the main and most influential trade union, made efforts to reorganise itself after the war and the Israeli occupation. It reactivated four branches in Nablus, Jerusalem, Tulkarm, and Jenin.





32. A photo of members of the Jordanian House of Representatives in the early 1950s, approached by the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society in order to cancel the decision to close its offices in the West Bank (from Ahmed Al-Akhras Collection).



33. "Husni Al- Khuffash" among the list of candidates of the Arab Socialist Baath Party running for the Jordanian House of Representatives elections in 1956. Al-Khuffash ran for the Nablus district (from Samir Na'im Abdul Hadi Collection).

Rebuilding the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society

The Centre of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society in Nablus, known as the "Nablus Workers' Unions Council," led by Husni Saleh al-Khufash, played a crucial role in reorganising the labour movement. In early 1949, the Council invited all trade unionists to attend a congress, serving as the "High Council of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society." Approximately 20 Palestinian unionists attended this meeting and took several important decisions:

1. Inviting all Palestinian unionists to participate in organising workers.
2. Making Nablus the major centre of the labour movement instead of Haifa.
3. Electing Husni Saleh al-Khufash as the acting Secretary-General of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society.
4. Organising workers in cities of the West Bank and the East Bank.

Following the conference, the labour movement leaders successfully opened branches of the Association in Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Beit Iba, and Mardah, and succeeded to reactivate former branches in Nablus, Jerusalem, Tulkarm, and Jenin.

However, the Jordanian authorities in the West Bank closed the offices of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society after deciding to dissolve the Ramallah Teachers' Society. The Jordanian newspaper "Al-Mithaq," close to the opposition party "National Front," criticized this decision, considering it unjustified, and called for the cancellation of the dissolution decision and demanded that both associations should be free to continue their activities.

The closure of the Society's headquarters was met with widespread opposition and sparked reactions in the Jordanian House of Representatives.

The Minister of Interior then declined responsibility for the decision, claiming that the Governor of Jerusalem was to blame, and promising to reconsider it "as required by the public interest."

The Palestinian Arab Workers' Society in the West Bank turned to members of the Jordanian House of Representatives to defend the workers' rights and exert pressure to unify the labour law of the West and East bank. These

parliamentarians included Abdullah Al-Rimawi, Abdullah Na'was, and Shafiq Irshiedat.

In early 1950, the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society decided to establish a branch in the East Bank in response to the sudden increase of the work force there as a consequence of the massive population displacement following the 1948 war. The Society's High Council held a meeting in Jericho on March 18, 1950, where this decision was taken by its representatives from Nablus, Jerusalem, Jenin, and Tulkarm. However, despite tremendous efforts, the decision could not be implemented because of the restrictive laws in force at that time enabling the authorities to oppose any such attempt.

On January 14, 1952, Mustafa Askalan, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, and Khalil Bitar tried to open an office of the Society in Amman, requesting the central administration in Nablus to inform the authorities of their wish to establish a branch. However, this attempt failed. From then on, the Society adopted a new name; calling itself the Arab Jordanian Workers' Association, and focused on seeking a law that would allow trade unions to be established throughout the Kingdom.

The Association's leaders began reaching out to leaders of political parties, members of the Jordan Bar Association, and members of the House of Representatives, including lawyer Suleiman Al-Hadidi, Representative Abdullah Al-Rimawi, Representative Abdullah Na'was, and Representative Shafiq Irshiedat, with the aim to draft and adopt a law giving the right to establish trade unions. They also met with the Secretary General of International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to request his support in pressuring the Jordanian government to meet their demands.

Nonetheless the government shut-down the Association's headquarters using red wax seal whilst claiming that there were no laws in the East Bank allowing trade unions to be formed. In addition, the authorities also closed the Association's branches in the West Bank.

And yet, it is to be seen as a result of these relentless efforts, that eventually the Trade Unions Law No. 35 of 1953 was adopted and published in the Official Gazette on April 16, 1953.

Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash

The Unionist Who Rebuilt the Labour Movement in the West Bank Post-Nakba



34. Husni saleh Al-Khuffash in his early years.

Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash was born in the village of “Mardah” in the Nablus district in 1917. He became active in the Palestinian Arab Workers’ Society in 1932 and was given the responsibility to head the Society’s Nablus branch in 1945.

During the unrests which followed the United Nations’ decision to partition Palestine in late 1947, National Committees were formed to manage local affairs in various parts of Palestine. Husni Al-Khuffash was elected as the secretary of the Nablus district’s National Committee and was responsible for civil protection and security in the city.

In 1950, Husni Al-Khuffash, as the president of the Nablus Workers’ Unions Council, called for a conference to bring together Palestinian unionists to resume the activities of the Palestinian Arab Workers’ Society and reactivate its branches in West Bank cities.

Around twenty unionists responded to his call and they decided to make Nablus the major centre for the labour movement instead of Haifa. They also agreed to organise workers on both banks of the Jordan River. Husni Al-Khuffash was then elected as the acting Secretary-General of the Society.

The Society succeeded in reopening its branches in the West Bank in addition to establishing new ones in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron. Al-Khuffash collaborated with Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin and Mustafa Askalan to establish a branch of the Society in Amman. The branch was indeed inaugurated on February 18, 1951, under the name the Arab Jordanian Workers’ Association, but the authorities later shut it down, claiming that the laws in force in East Jordan did not allow trade union organisations.

In December 1950, after organising a worker strike at the Khalifa Mechanical Company in Nablus, Husni Al-Khuffash was sentenced, without trial, to six

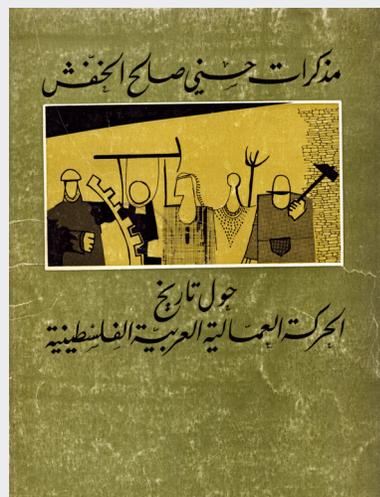
months of exile in the town of Shobak in southern East Jordan. The worker Abdul Rahim Rashid faced the same fate. After three months, King Abdullah issued a pardon for Al-Khuffash and Abdul Rahim Rasheed, and they returned to Nablus amidst a massive popular celebration.

After the shutting of the workers’ association branch, Husni Al-Khuffash and his unionist colleagues resorted to clandestine work in Nablus, meeting at the “Arab Club” and forming an advisory committee for the labour movement, which included lawyers, members of parliament, as well as prominent political and social figures, to demand from the government the enactment of a labour law. In Amman, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin rented a room as a temporary headquarters for a union of construction workers and to prepare for the establishment of more trade unions.

In the early 1950s, Husni Al-Khuffash joined the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party, which only obtained its government registration in 1955 after a long legal struggle. In the October 1956 elections, he ran as candidate of the party for the city of Nablus, but despite not winning the elections, he kept his union position and political status in Nablus and its district until he left Jordan. Indeed, after the dismissal of the Sulaiman Al-Nabulsi government in April 1957 and the imposition of martial law in Jordan he moved to Syria.

After leaving for Syria in 1957 and then for Egypt in 1962, Husni Al-Khuffash played a key role in reviving the Palestinian labour movement at the helm of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, which he chaired for two terms between 1965 and 1969. He also held leadership roles in the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions.

Source: Memoirs of Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash on the History of the Arab Palestinian Labour Movement, Research Center, Beirut, 1973, and other sources.

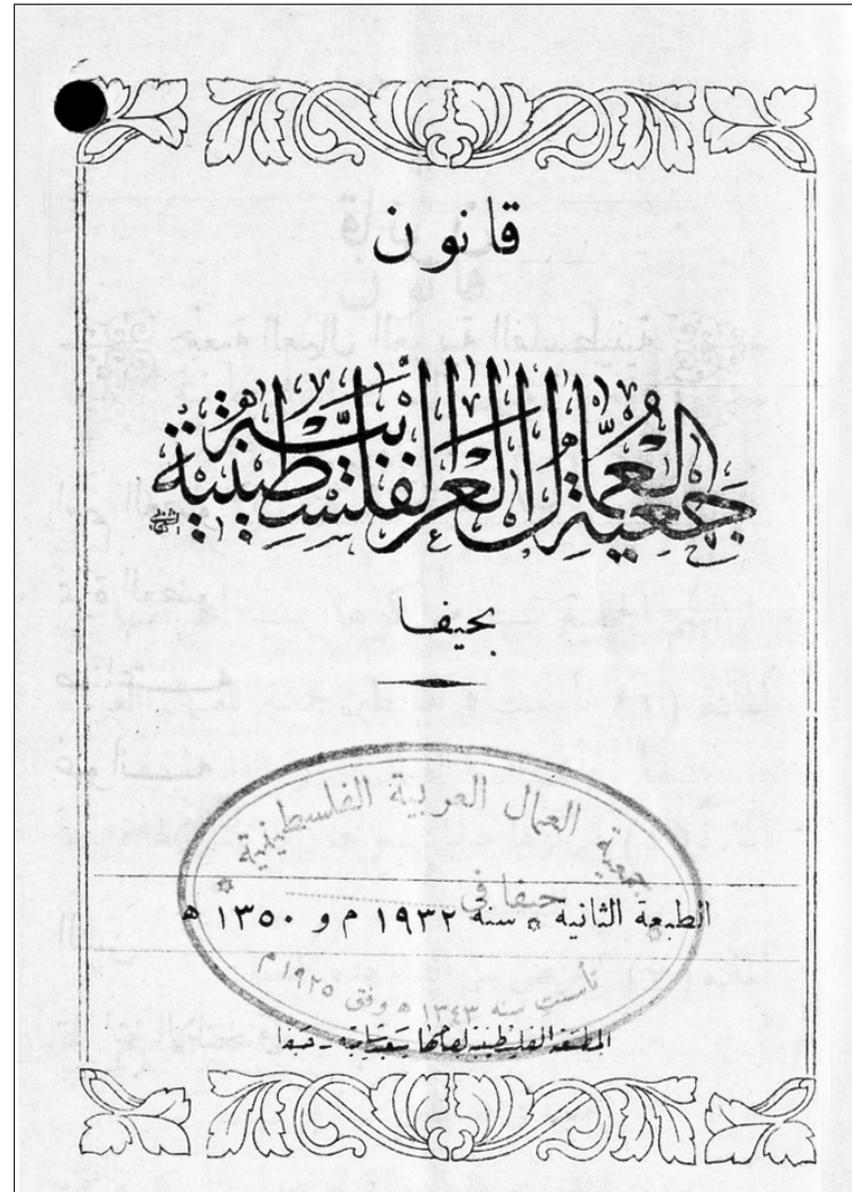


35. The cover page of the Memoirs of Husni saleh Al-Khuffash.

Source: Memoirs of Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash on the History of the Palestinian Arab Labour Movement, Research Center, Beirut, 1973, and other sources.



Lawyer Suleiman Al-Hadidi, one of the founders of the Jordan Bar Association in 1950. He played an important advisory role for a number of trade unionists in the early 1950s (from the website of Al Ra'i - Jordanian newspaper).



36. The Bylaws of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society, which was reactivated in the cities of the West Bank after the 1948 Nakba (from Ahmed Al-Akhras Collection).



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37. The trade union leader Husni Al-Khuffash, President of the Trade Union Council in Nablus, on the right. Next to him is his brother Na'im Al-Khuffash, who was also involved in the trade union activism in Palestine and Jordan. The three people in the front are Husni Al-Khuffash's brothers Samih, Wadi' and Badi' (from Husni Saleh Al-Khuffash's Facebook page).



احتشدت الجماهير في ساحة القصر الملكي بعمان ، تحمل أعلام النصر ، وتشق بحناجرها أجواز الفضاء
 - كما ترى إلى اليمين - هاتفة بحياة العامل الأردني الشاب ، الذي أنقذ الفيلق العربي من براثن
 عملاء الإنجليز ، وجعله جيشاً خالصاً للعروبة . وإلى أعلى ، يرى جلالة الملك حسين
 مطلاً على شعبه من شرفة القصر ، وقد ارتسمت على وجهه جلالته علائم الرضا والإيمان والتضحية

الضربة الملكية التي أنقذت الفيلق العربي!

كانت القنبلة التي فجرها الملك حسين في عمان ، بافالة الفريق جلوب ومعاونيه « باتريك »
 و « هاتون » ، حدث الأسبوع في الشرق العربي ، اهتزت له عواصم الدول الكبرى . وتشير التقارير
 الرسمية التي تلقتها العواصم العربية ، إلى براعة « التكتيك » الذي وضعه الملك حسين ،
 والذي أدى إلى التخلص من نفوذ جلوب في الجيش الأردني بصفة محكمة
 ولا تزال الجماهير في الأردن تتظاهر تأييداً للخطوة الملكية الحاسمة ، متبهة بالحدث العظيم ...
 اقرأ على الصفحات التالية قصة الفيلق العربي ، الذي خلصه الملك حسين من براثن الإنجليز
 وعميلهم « أبو حنيك »



38. King Hussein greets the crowds in front of Raghadan Palace, celebrating the Arabization of the Jordanian army command, Source: Egyptian magazine "Al-Musawwer", issue 1639, on March 9, 1956. pp. 12-13.



**Chapter 4:
Struggle on Both Banks of Jordan for
Trade Union Organisation (1952/1957)**



Chapter 4:

Struggle on Both Banks of Jordan for Trade Union Organisation (1952/1957)

When the East Bank (Eastern Jordan) and the West Bank were united in 1950, the Jordanian state faced the task to unify legislation and establish an advanced legal structure for the political system. This had to respond to the aspirations of the citizens in order to find their acceptance and gain their loyalty. The adoption of the new Jordanian Constitution at the beginning of 1952 was a significant turning point, as it provided for the civic and political freedoms and rights of citizens including the freedom of association and the right to establish professional associations and political organisations, as well as the freedom of expression, of the press and the right of assembly.

The new constitution laid the foundation for legislation to protect workers' rights. Article 23 stated that "Work is the right of every citizen, and the State shall provide opportunities for work to all citizens by directing the national economy and raising its standards." The second paragraph of the same article called for "The State

shall protect labour and enact legislation therefore based on the following principles: Every worker shall receive wages commensurate with the quantity and quality of his work. The number of hours of work per week shall be defined. Workers shall be given weekly and annual days of paid rest. " This Article also established the right to compensation and protection in cases of dismissal, illness, disability, and emergencies, as well as specific conditions for the work of women and minors, in addition to stipulating that "Free trade unions may be formed within the limits of the law."

A year after the constitution was adopted, another positive development occurred with the passing of the Trade Unions Law No. 35 of 1953, which responded to the demands of the labour movement, introducing the right to establish a trade union for any seven or more workers employed in the same profession or entity, and implying the unprecedented recognition of the right of workers to strike.

39. A massive demonstration in Nablus, demanding the overthrow of the Baghdad Pact government, 1955.

Source: From Ahmad Al-Akhras collection

The First Trade Unions

As soon as the Trade Union Law No. 35 was passed, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, a leading unionist in the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society, took the initiative to register a trade union for the construction workers on January 7, 1954. The governing body of the union included members such as Na'im Belibla, Hani Suleiman, Wajeeh Sidqi, Saadi Al-Hudhud, and Muhammad Ali Al-Araj. Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin had previously been secretly gathering workers after the authorities dissolved the branch of the Arab Jordanian Workers' Association in Amman.

A few days earlier, Wajih Muhammad Mangou registered the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union on December 27, 1953. Its governing body held its first meeting on January 19, 1954, which besides him included, Theeb Ghannam, Musa Al-Sanhouri, Umar Siyam, Sidqi Khalil, Ayesh Aliyan, and Salim Muhammad. At the second meeting of the governing body on February 28, 1954, a decision was taken to include Zidan Younis and Khader Awali as members. It was also decided that the trade union for construction workers' headquarters would be at

the headquarters of Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union.

The establishment of trade unions continued, with the registration of the Singer Corporation Workers' Union on March 27, 1954, followed by the Tailoring Workers' Union on April 4, 1954. On the same date, the Phosphate Company Workers' Union was registered, followed by the Shoes Industry Workers' Union on April 18, 1954, and then the Public Sector Workers' Union.

Thus, in the first half of 1954, the number of registered trade unions was ten. These were Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union, the trade union for construction workers, General Trade Union of Banks, the Workers and Employees Union of the Jerusalem District Electricity Company, the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, Singer Corporation Workers' Union in Jordan, Phosphate Mines Company Workers Union, Shoes Industry Workers' Union, Jerusalem Municipality Workers and Employees' Union, and Slaughterhouse Workers' Union.



40. Group of leaders of the Jordanian labour movement during their participation in an international conference. This photo shows Wajih Mango (second from the right) and Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin (first from the left) (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Unifying the Labour Movement

With the progress of setting-up trade unions in record time, the leaders of these unions realized the need for a general federation of trade unions as the membership of the individual unions was low and because this limited their capacity to effectively take-on the many tasks and challenges they faced. In particular, there were still large numbers of unorganised workers as well as unemployed lacking any form of legal protection.

Therefore, six unions met on May 1, 1954, at the invitation of the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union, and decided to establish a general federation of trade unions, electing a founding committee chaired by Zidan Younis. The committee applied to register the General Federation Jordanian of Trade Unions (GFJTU) with the Ministry of Social Affairs on May 26, 1954. After overcoming some administrative difficulties and delays the registration was granted on July 25, 1954.

The first executive committee of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions was then constituted with the following members: Zidan Younis as secretary-general, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin as deputy secretary-general, and Wajeeh Mangou, Mustafa Askalan, and Musa Qwaider. This committee agreed on a set of objectives for the Federation. Accordingly, its statutes stipulate that the Federation is to exercise oversight on the activities of affiliated unions, and striving to organise workers in more sectors. Also, they set the aim of defending the interests of workers through legislation which protects their rights, such as determining working hours, wages, and vacations. The objectives also included representing the union in front of governmental institutions and employers, as well as to establish workers' cooperatives.

Just three days after the registration of the Federation, the Phosphate Mines Company Workers Union was dissolved by the authorities and the number of affiliate unions in the Federation was reduced to five. Nevertheless, the Federation's leaders continued to campaign for workers to join trade unions, and as a result, the number of trade unions registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs rose to 15, of which 13 affiliate trade unions of the GFJTU and with two organizations independent from the Federation, namely the General Trade Union of Banks and the trade union for transport workers.



41. A photo of Jordanian labour leaders with a Chinese labour delegation visiting Jordan (March 24, 1957). At that time there were no diplomatic relations between Jordan and the People's Republic of China (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Facing Challenges

Subsequently, some trade unions faced government opposition when they attempted to establish branches in other parts of the country. The authorities shut-down one of the Federations branches in Jerusalem. They arrested several members of its executive committee, claiming that there was no provision in the Trade Unions Law No. 35 of 1953 that allowed establishing branches of the Federation.

The Federation addressed the Ministry of Social Affairs in an attempt to convince the authorities that its statutes allowed for the establishment of union branches, but the ministry did not react. The Federation continued to encourage its affiliate, the trade union for workers in cafes, restaurants, and hotels, to set-up its branch in Jerusalem. Furthermore, it also supported the establishment of branches of the Shoes Industry Workers' Union, and for the workers in electricity, as well as the transport workers in Irbid. The Federation advised that this should be done without informing the ministry, considering the establishment of branches to be an internal matter for the unions. However, the Legislation and Opinion Bureau of the government supported the trade unions' viewpoint, and allowed them to expand in establishing branches.



42. A group of leaders of the Jordanian labour movement, with Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin, Wajih Mango, and Sami Al-Kharouf in the middle, and from the right, Fathallah Al-Omrani (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



43. A group of Jordanian trade union leaders, with Zidan Younis, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin, and Wajih Mango in the middle, and Mustafa Askalan and Sami Al-Kharouf also in the photo (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Calling for Labour Legislation

The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions was also very active in pushing for more labour legislation. It submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Social Affairs demanding for the submission of the workers' compensation law to Parliament. Such a law was also to provide for the allocation of financial resources to trade unions and ease the registration of trade unions. When eventually, the Parliament of Jordan passed this law on March 18, 1955, it was considered a further achievement for the labour movement, even though some amendments to the original text restricted the intended scope rights it was to grant to workers.

The Federation and its members faced some challenges from management that tried to prevent trade union activities in their companies, such as the Jordan Cement Factories, which threatened union members with dismissal if they did not dissolve their trade union. However, the workers resisted the management's threats and they showed their determination to maintain their union.

After the attempt to dissolve the trade union at the company failed, management sifted the work contracts for drivers and guards from a monthly term to day labourer's status. The trade union then submitted a memorandum to the company's management to oppose the decision and demand to return to the previous status, but management ignored the request and also rejected a mediation by the Ministry of Social Affairs, affirming that such an intervention would be unlawful.

Escalation of Labour Disputes and Political Support for the Labour Movement

Disputes escalated in several factories. One of the tile factories fired four workers for attempting to set-up a trade union. A bus company withdrew from the agreement it had with the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union, after the trade union's representatives refused the company's demand for the trade union to withdraw from the Federation. On June 22, 1955, the Phosphate Mines Company fired fifty of its workers, whilst the secretary of the Phosphate Mines Company Workers Union was accused of inciting workers against the company. In response, the Federation called on phosphate workers to go on strike and put the unions' funds at their disposal to care for them.

The Federation's leadership faced government pressure to stop the strike, but they refused to comply and the company was forced to reinstate the dismissed workers. The attempts by some in government to transfer the authority to register trade unions from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Interior was foiled as some officials were supportive of the of the labour movement's actions.



44. Armed vehicles of the Jordanian Armed Forces patrolling the streets of Amman during public protests against the Baghdad Pact, late 1955
(from Ahmed Al-Akhras Collection).

Political Influence

The political climate in the mid-1950s played a positive role in the emergence of organisations in the Jordanian labour movement. After the Nakba in Palestine which meant the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948, and apart from the events that followed during the 1950s (see Box 2), the Jordanian society underwent significant transformations which were largely due to the influx of a large number of Palestinian refugees to both banks of the Jordan.

As part of these developments anti-colonial and anti-Zionist sentiments gained ground and demands for emancipation from British influence increased. These were expressed in the call to rejected the 1948 Jordanian-British treaty. The deep demographic changes in Jordan after the Nakba and the unification of the two banks also contributed to a revival of party-political life with the emergence of nationalist and leftist parties. Their political influence grew noticeably especially amongst the middle and the working classes.

The successes achieved in trade union organisation and the gains accomplished through the enactment of labour legislation, such as the Trade Unions Law No. 35 of 1953 and the workers' compensation law No. 17 of 1955, were not only the result of the struggle of the first union leaders. It was also the political and legal support provided by some progressive MPs and lawyers which played a decisive role in advancing the demands of the Jordanian labour movement. Such allies included MP and lawyer Shafiq Irshiedat, MP Abdul Halim Al-Nimer, West Bank MPs Abdullah Na'was (Jerusalem) and Abdullah Al-Rimawi (Ramallah), as well as lawyer Suleiman Al-Hadidi. These individuals formed a strong support basis for the labour movement in Jordan.

In short, the demand for workers' rights and their freedom to form trade unions became an integral part of the struggle for national liberation and political rights. The first Jordanian Constitution of 1952 illustrates this development by recognizing both the right to form political parties and as well as trade unions and by protecting workers' rights.



45. The streets of Amman closed with barbed wire during protests against attempts to drag Jordan into the Baghdad Pact, 1955 (from Ahmed Al-Akhras Collection).

Growth of Trade Unions and the Formation of a Coalition Government

In the 1950s, the Jordanian state institutions were not immune to the pressures resulting from political, social, and ideological conflicts, which explains the fluctuations in the government's positions towards the labour movement at the time, ranging from strictness to neutrality, and in some cases, understanding of trade unions' demands and then restraining to intervene or to use of violence against workers.

Many developments in Jordan have led to the October 1956 elections and the formation of the Sulaiman Al-Nabulsi coalition government. These include the decision of not joining the Baghdad Pact for mutual cooperation and protection, as well as non-intervention in each other's affairs amongst several middle Eastern countries and the UK on March 1 1956 in response to the domestic opposition in the country, and King Hussein's decision of Arabizing the army in January 14 1956.

These were favourable conditions under which more trade unions were registered, bringing their number under the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions to 25. In addition, 15 union branches were established in the cities of Irbid, Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, and Ma'an (see Table 1).

Also, the positive climate was felt in many factories and companies, as well as in some government institutions, where trade unions' activities were well received. The leadership of the GFJTU took advantage of this prevailing positive attitude towards workers' rights and conducted direct negotiation with employers on industrial relation matters which were not regulated by the labour laws. These negotiations aimed to improve working conditions, reduce arbitrary dismissals, decrease daily working hours (which reached 12 hours daily), overtime pay and paid leave for religious, weekly, and annual holidays.

The leadership of the GFJTU also obtained from the government authorities and some employers' associations the formal recognition that it was legitimate for the Federation to intervene in defence of workers' interests. And for the first time, trade unions received financial support through the budget of the Ministry of Social Affairs.



46. Suleiman Al-Nabulsi, the first Prime Minister of a parliamentary government in the history of Jordan (1956-57),

Source: Getty Images.

The GFJTU's Call for the Unification of Arab Trade Unions

In the 1950s, the leadership of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions undertook the remarkable initiative aimed at establishing a Federation for Arab workers' organisations. The GFJTU invited unions from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt to hold a preparatory meeting agree on a plan on how to unify Arab workers and to establish a Federation independent from international trade union organisations.

However, the preparatory meeting could not be held in Amman, as planned, due to circumstances prevailing in the country at the time, and so the meeting was held in Damascus with labour leaders from the four countries in attendance. A draft of the Federation for Arab workers' organisations statute was drawn up and preparations were made for its founding conference.

This initiative came amid the rise of nationalist and leftist ideologies among the leadership of the Jordanian labour movement, who were reluctant to engage with international trade union organisations and felt the need to take an independent stance. This is to be understood in the context of the escalation of the Cold War between on one side the United States with the NATO member states supporting the International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU), and on the other side the Soviet Union with the emerging socialist bloc.

Zidan Younis, the Secretary General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, explained the motives behind his call for the formation of the Federation for Arab workers' organisations by saying: "Our goal is to unite the efforts of Arab workers to serve the Arab nation and its dignity, and to work together in international labour conferences (...) in line with the interests of our nation and our countries. We believe that international workers' organisations operate according to certain international policies, and have indirectly supported the policies of repression that our brothers in North Africa have been subjected to as they struggle for their freedom and independence."

Zidan Younis and his colleagues successfully convened the founding conference of the International Confedera-

tion of Arab Trade Unions in Damascus from March 22 to 24, 1956. Eventually, representatives of trade unions from five Arab countries attended the conference as Libya had joined the initiative. Also, a delegation of workers from Tunisia took part on the last day of the conference.

At the conference Jordanian workers were represented by five members of the executive committee of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, these were Zidan Younis, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, Hassan Al-Wadhafi, Mustafa Askalan, and Wajeeh Mangou. Zidan Younis was invited to deliver the opening speech at the founding conference on behalf of the Arab delegations-This was in recognition of the GFJTU'S role in calling for the unification of Arab workers.

At the end of the conference, Fathi Kamel, the Secretary General of the Democratic Workers' Union of Egypt, was elected as the secretary of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, with Zidan Younis was elected the first assistant secretary.

After the Jordanian delegation returned to Amman, Zidan Younis addressed an official letter to the Jordanian government, demanding recognition of the the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions as a regional organisation, and calling on the Arab League to recognize it as well.

On January 14, 1957, the Jordanian government responded to Zidan Younis' request and informed him that after reviewing the statues of the International Confederation the Cabinet had decided to recognize it as an international organisation.

The membership of the GFJTU with about 11,000 members was limited relative to the overall membership of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions with about in total 1,630,000 workers. Despite these limited numbers and the turbulent political circumstances, the first Jordanian union leaders demonstrated remarkable political awareness, will and courage, and played leading and effective roles on both the domestic and Arab fronts.

Number of Trade Unions and Their Branches as of 1955

	Head Office	Branch
1 – The trade union for the construction workers	Amman	
2 - Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union	Amman	
3 - Shoes Industry Workers' Union	Amman	Hebron Jerusalem Nablus Irbid
4 - the Tailoring Workers' Union	Amman	Irbid
5 - Singer Corporation Workers' Union	Amman	
6 - Phosphate Mines Company Workers Union	Al-Ruseifa	
7 - the trade union for workers in carpentry	Amman	Irbid
8 - the trade union for workers in printing		
9 - the trade union for workers in municipalities, private companies, and retail	Amman	Nablus Irbid
10 - The trade union for workers in cafes, restaurants, and hotels	Amman	Jerusalem
11 - The trade union for transport workers	Amman	Irbid
12 - The trade union for workers in the Jordanian cement factories	Al-Fuhays	
13 - The trade union for workers in electricity and mechanics	Amman	Irbid
14 - The trade union for workers in the bakeries	Amman	Irbid
15 - The trade union for workers in the Hijazi Jordanian Railway Corporation	Amman	Ma'an
16 - The trade union for blacksmiths	Amman	Irbid
17 - Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing	Amman	
18 - The trade union for workers in education	Amman	
19 - The trade union for workers at the British Army Airports in Jordan	Al-Mafraq	
20 - The trade union for workers in the Public Works Department	Hebron	
21 - The trade union for workers in tiling and mosaic crafts	Amman	Nablus
22 - UNRWA Staff Union	Jericho	
23 - The trade union for workers in barber shops	Amman	
24 - The trade union for workers in slaughter houses and butcheries	Amman	
25 - Jerusalem Municipality Workers and Employees' Union	Jerusalem	

Source: Report of Zidan Younis, Secretary of the Jordanian Trade Unions Federation, dated September 30, 1955.

Zidan Younis: The Executive Secretary of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (1954/1957)



47. Zidan Mustafa Younis, the first secretary of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (1954-1957),

Source: The Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Centre.

Zidan Younis Mustafa Younis was born in the village of Arara, located in the Ara Valley south of Haifa, in 1921. He began early his career as a trade unionist by joining the Palestine Arab Workers Society in Haifa in 1942, where he became a full-time supervisor for the trade union of workers in “Sebna” factory in Haifa.

After the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and its consequences for Palestinians, Zidan sought refuge in Jordan, where he worked for the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory. Thanks to his extensive experience as a trade unionist, several trade union leaders, such as Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, Mustafa Askalan, and Naim Al-Khufash, asked him to lead the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions as they were trying to set-up at the time.

On February 28, 1954, the executive committee of the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers’ Union decided to increase the number of its members, making it possible for Zidan Younis to join the committee. On May 1, 1954, six trade unions met and decided to submit a demand to the government to register the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, which it did on May 26, 1954.

Zidan Younis was designated as the Executive Secretary of the Federation. He held this position until 1957.

Zidan Younis was a driving force behind the establishment of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, which was founded on March 24, 1957 and included trade unions from five Arab countries. He was elected as the First Assistant Secretary of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, in recognition of the prominent role played in setting-up the organisation.

Zidan Younis was visiting Damascus at the time the Sulaiman Al-Nabulsi government was dismissed in April 1957 and the state authorities imposed martial law. He decided not to return to Jordan. After a brief stay in Syria, he moved to work in Kuwait, where he passed away.

Zidan Younis commitment to workers’ struggle was an example for trade unionists and his life journey was filled with diligent work for the defence of workers’ rights in various Arab countries.

Source: Al-Qaimari, Muhammad Sulayman, **Jordanian Labour Unions**, Workers’ Library Series, Special Book, Amman, Jordan, 1998, p. 10/11.



48. Trade unionist Zidan Younis (in the middle) during an international labour meeting
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Workers' Compensation Law No. 17 of 1955

This was the pioneering law to address labour issues, which stated the following:

- **Severance Package:** In the event an employer terminates a worker's service, the worker is entitled to the severance package, which is equal to one month's salary for each year worked for the first three years of employment, and half a month's salary for each following year to a maximum of fifteen years.
- **Work Injuries Compensation:** in the event of total disability or death resulting from an injury sustained during work, the employer has to pay a compensation up to 500 Jordanian Dinars to workers or their dependence. In the case of permanent partial disability, compensation is granted at a rate equivalent to the percentage of disability, as determined by an accredited medical committee.

Source: Muhammad Jawhar, the **Labour Movement in Jordan (A Personal Experience)**, Working Paper Presented to the Second International Conference on the Social History of Jordan. July 3-5, 2000, Amman, Jordan.

49. A group photo of trade union leaders and activists, with Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin in the middle, and Zidan Younis to his left, and Wajih Mango in the middle of the back row
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).





**Chapter 5:
April 1957 Crisis and Its Impact on the
Retreat of the Labour Movement (1957 - 1967)**

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April 1957 Crisis and Its Impact on the Retreat of the Labour Movement (1957 - 1967)

The Jordanian labour movement suffered a severe blow in the wake of the major political crisis that Jordan suffered as a result of the conflict between the palace and the Sulaiman Al-Nabulsi government. It led to the dismissal of the government on April 12, 1957, and the suspension of Parliament. As attempts to form a new government failed before the crisis spilled over into popular protest.

The crisis erupted when on April 2, 1957 the Al-Nabulsi government took the decision to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. King Hussein refused to ratify the diplomatic treaty. He favoured an American offer made under the “Eisenhower Doctrine,” which had been announced by Washington in January 1957. According to this policy statement the USA would provide financial and military assistance to Middle Eastern countries which face a communist threat. Contrary to the King, the Al-Nabulsi government was against this option.

The labour movement denounced the political coup against the Al-Nabulsi government and participated with social and political organisations in the conferences and popular protest organised in reaction to the dismissal of

the government. Representatives of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions were prominent participants of the national conference in Nablus on April 22, 1957, demanding the resignation of the newly appointed Hussein Al-Khalidi government and calling for the formation of a new national government committed to more openness. The conference also called for the release of civilian and military prisoners, the return of the army to its barracks, the expulsion of “colonial agents” from the country, and respect for the constitution.

Trade union leaders and cadres faced persecution and arrests, especially those close to the opposition nationalist and leftist parties. This came after the declaration of martial law by the Ibrahim Hashem government, which also decided to dissolve political parties. As a result, many trade union leaders and activists were forced to leave the country to avoid arrest and persecution. Zidan Younis, the First Secretary of the GFJTU, who was participating in a trade union meeting in the Syrian capital, Damascus, as the crisis unfolded, decided not to return to Jordan, and his position remained vacant until the beginning of 1958 when his deputy, Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin took over the position.



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50. The second Congress of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, August 13-20, 1965. From right to left, the photo shows Mr. Rashed Marwan, The General Trade Union of Construction Workers - Amman; Mr. Adel Ghanem, The General Trade Union of Construction Workers - Nablus; Mr. Mahmoud Al-Kilani, printing press workers trade union - Amman; Mr. Salah Humaidan, Municipalities and Public Institutions Union - Amman; Mr. Mohammad Jawhar, Secretary General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions; Mr. Musa Qwaider, the Textile and Clothing Workers Trade Union - Amman; Mr. Waleed Al-Khayyat, General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity - Amman; Mr. Yousef Al-Ghoul, The General Trade Union of Construction Workers - Jerusalem; Mr. Mohammad Al-Qaimari, General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education - Amman; (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Suffering, Turmoil, and Persistent Will

From the second half of 1957 on and throughout the following years, the trade union activism in Jordan was confronted by numerous obstacles. Trade unionists were restricted in their freedom of movement in particular for trips outside of the country. Trade unions were placed under surveillance by state security agencies. Many unions were banned while others were pressured to dissolve.

Muhammad Jawhar, the Secretary General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions between 1964 and 1972, describes this period as being difficult. Trade unions were confronted with bans or suspensions for the simple reason that they were fulfilling their prescribed tasks and duties such as engaging in collective bargaining. Some faced the threat of being shut down. For instance, was in the case for the trade union for phosphate and cement workers, when they opposed employers shunning their obligations under existing collective bargaining agreements and arbitration committees were abolished. Also attempts of the trade union to establish new branches in other cities were blocked.

As a consequence of this backlash against the labour movement, the number of registered trade unions declined from 37 organisations in 1955/1956 to 29 in 1958/1959, then to 16 unions in 1960/1961. The number of workers members of trade unions dropped from 11,000 in 1956 to less than 9,000 in 1959/1960.

In spite of such obstacles, the labour movement achieved a noticeable recovery and with the adoption of original labour law (Law No. 21 of 1960) it was coming out of the crisis in the first half of the 1960s. This law strengthened the rights of trade unions to conclude collective bargaining agreements aimed at improving the working conditions of workers and improving their livelihoods. Consequently, the number of trade unions rose again, reaching 40 organisations in 1965/1966. The number of trade union members increased to 20,000, doubling trade union membership compared to what it had been at the end of the 1950s.

In 1960, the original labour law, Law No. 21, was adopted. It gave the struggle for workers' rights a new impetus, putting trade unions in a stronger position to defend workers' interests. However, this original law was later reviewed and many of the dispositions favourable to trade unions were struck-out when it was submitted to the House of Representatives and the Senate. Also, it eventually had little positive impact in practice, as a large part of it was effectively ignored by many employers. A major weakness in the law was identified by Muhammad Jawhar, when he filed a complaint and addressed a memorandum to the Minister of Social Affairs on October 27, 1963, because of the small number of labour inspectors in the Labour Department at the ministry responsible for implementing and monitoring the law, and the lack of transportation means for the inspectors.

Arbitration Committees

Arbitration committees were formed to resolve labour disputes between employers and workers. These were tripartite committees composed of representatives from government, employers, and workers to resolve labour disputes. The rulings of these committees were final, and were referred to the implementation departments after the approval of the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour. These committees were a smart step and a good start to organizing industrial relations, but faced strong resistance by employers.

Source: Jawhar, Mohammad, **Labour Movement in Jordan**, Cairo, Ahram Est. Press, pp. 32/33.



51. A group of representatives of Arab trade unions who participated in the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions Congress (ICATU), when they met with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Presidential Headquarters in Cairo. Zidan Younis is right behind President Abdel Nasser, and Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin is to his right, Mustafa Askalan is to his left (from Trade Unionist Mustafa Askalan Collection).

Government Interference, Retreat, and a Triumphant Victory

Confronted with far reaching government interference in the affairs of trade unions, the Secretary General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, Muhammad Jawhar, decided to address a letter to King Hussein on February 1, 1964, pleading with him to take the necessary steps to stop such interference, insisting that the freedom of association and the right to form and join trade unions is an essential part of the democratic order enshrined in the Jordanian Constitution and the rights protected by Charter of Human Rights.

In his memorandum to the King, Jawhar pointed out the direct government interference in the Tailoring Workers' Union, to which the governor of the capital had issued an instruction on January 8, 1964, imposing the dismissal of Sami Al-Kharouf, the General Secretary of the union, and two members of the executive, Musa Qwaidar and Victor Lalas and this despite the fact that they had been founding members of the union and had held their positions for more than ten years.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour imposed serious restrictions on trade unions with the Minister issuing a directive forbidden Jordanian trade unionists to participate in any trade union activities outside the country unless they had received the Ministry's explicit approval. Government interference reached its peak when the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour submitted to the Ministry of Interior lists with the names of all trade union leaders with the purpose to restrict their domestic travel. These restrictions came without prior notice and targeted the General Secretary of the Federation, Muhammad Jawhar, as well as most other prominent trade unionists

Under the circumstances prevailing between 1957 and 1967 when political and civil rights were restricted, many companies used the opportunity to break collective bargaining agreements. Also, the activities of arbitration committees which contributed to the rapid and smooth resolution of labour disputes was suspended. Memoranda of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions document many complaints regarding arbitrary dismissal of large number of workers in major companies, such as Phosphate Mines Company, Jordan Cement Factories, and the Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural Company (Intaj).

Responding to numerous calls for the review of the labour legislation, the government invited an expert from the International Labour Organisation to participate in the work of a tripartite 6 member advisory committee it had set up for the review process. After a year of work, a draft to amend labour law was presented in 1965. Although, according to its text the law granted workers more rights, its actual implementation remained limited.

Despite these difficult circumstances, in 1962 and 1963 trade unions achieved to conclude 13 collective bargaining agreements with employers. These covered the determination of working hours, fixing of a minimum wage, and regulating annual leave. Then, in 1965 and 1966, the labour movement concluded 10 collective bargaining agreements and five collective dispute settlements. As we mentioned earlier, the number of registered unions increased to more than forty, and the number of members increased to 20,000, double the number at the end of the 1950s.



52. Zidan Younis and Sami Al-Kharouf on the left, in 1950s
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



53. Mohammad Jawhar, Secretary-General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade
Unions, receives the head of an Arab labour delegation
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



54. A number of labour leaders with the late King Hussein bin Talal in the mid-1960s during a meeting with trade union leaders
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin: The “Founding Father” of the Jordanian Trade Unions



55. Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin, founder of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers and the second Secretary of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions,

Source: Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Centre.

Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin was born in Nablus in 1910, and began his activity as a trade unionist in 1942 with the Palestine Arab Workers Society. After the Nakba of 1948, he contributed to rebuilding the Society’s branches in the West Bank. The Nablus Workers’ Unions Council was chosen as the headquarters of the Society.

When the Society decided to transform into the “Jordanian Workers’ Association,” Zaki moved to Amman, and from his simple home in Muhajireen Street, he began inviting workers to join unions. At the beginning of 1952, he met with Husni Al-Khufash and Mustafa Ali Askalan in Amman, where they collected donations and rented an office for the Society, but the authorities soon shut it down it, as well as the Society’s branches in the West Bank.

Despite this, Zaki did not stop calling on construction workers to establish their union. After the adoption of the Trade Unions Law of 1953, he applied to register the trade union for construction workers, which was granted on January 7, 1954. The first Executive of the union was then formed, chaired by Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, and including Naim Belibla, Hani Suleiman, Wajeeh Sidqi, Saadi Al-Hud-

hud, and Muhammad Ali Al-Araj.g

When the discussion of forming a General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions began, Zaki led the efforts to contact Zidan Younis to convince him to be the president of the Federation. Zidan agreed to the offer, and after the Federations’ registration was granted in July 1954, Zaki became the Vice President of the Executive of the Federation, whilst remaining at the helm of the trade union for construction workers.

Zaki led the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions from March 28, 1958, to April 14, 1960, thus becoming the second secretary-general of the Federation. He took over the position from Zidan Younis who had to leave the country during the major political crisis caused by the dismissal of the Sulaiman Al-Nabulsi government and the imposition of martial law.

Source : Al-Qaimari, Muhammad Sulayman, *Jordanian Labour Unions*, Amman, Jordan, 1998, pp. 30/35.

Source: Al-Qaimari, Muhammad Suleiman, *Jordanian Labour Unions*, Amman, Jordan, 1998, pp

Wajeeh Muhammad Mango: Founder of the First Trade Union in Jordan



56. Wajih Mango, founder of the first trade union in Jordan and the third secretary of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions,

Source: Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center.

Wajeeh Mango was born in Salt in 1910, and began his working at an early age, following in the newspapers the events around the Palestine Arab Workers' Society. After the Nakba, he met the leaders of the Society who moved to Amman, such as Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, Husni Al-Khufash, Mustafa Askalan, and Zidan Younis. These leaders attempted to resume their union activities after "West Bank," was joined to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. However, in absence of any proper labour legislation and given a political culture opposed to trade unions they faced many obstacles that.

After the adoption of the Trade Unions Law No. 35 in 1953, Wajeeh Mango took the initiative with his colleagues working at the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory to apply to register a trade union for the company's workers, which was granted on December 27, 1953. The Executive of the union held its first meeting on January 19, 1954, chaired by Wajeeh, and including Theeb Ghannam, Musa Al-Sanhouri, Umar Siyam, Salim Muhammad, Sidqi Khalil, and Ayesh Aliyan.

In a subsequent meeting, the Executive elected Zidan Younis and Khidr Awali as new members and thus paved the way for Zidan to become the first secretary-general of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions. Under Wajeeh's leadership, the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union called on other trade unions to establish a general federation. On May 1, 1954, six trade unions responded to this call and decided on May 26, 1954, to apply to register the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, electing Zidan Younis as the president of the founding executive of the Federation.

Wajeeh Mango was known for his modesty and close ties with union pioneers, such as Zaki Al-Sheikh Yasin, Mustafa Askalan, Musa Qwaider, and Zidan Younis. Wajeeh led the Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Factory Workers' Union until 1964, and served as the General Secretary of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) for two consecutive terms, from July 12, 1960, to August 27, 1964. Wajeeh Mango passed away in March 1982.



57. Wajih Mango delivering a speech before the late King Hussein bin Talal
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



58. A number of trade unionists with the Chinese delegation that visited Jordan in 1957
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Labour Law No. 21 of 1960

This was the first law to regulate work in a nearly comprehensive manner. The law provided the following:

1. The number of workers required to form a union was raised to twenty.
2. Working hours for workers were set at eight hours per day.
3. Each worker was granted an annual leave of twenty-one days, from which religious and national holidays were deducted.
4. The law established the foundations for collective bargaining between workers and employers.
5. Workers were granted the right to strike, provided that a prior notice was given at least twenty-eight days in advance for public facilities, and fourteen days for private facilities.

However, the implementation of this law faced many obstacles and difficulties which hindered its actual enforcement, including:

1. Referring labour cases to civil courts.
2. Insufficient financial penalties specified to reduce contraventions.

Law No. 2 of 1965

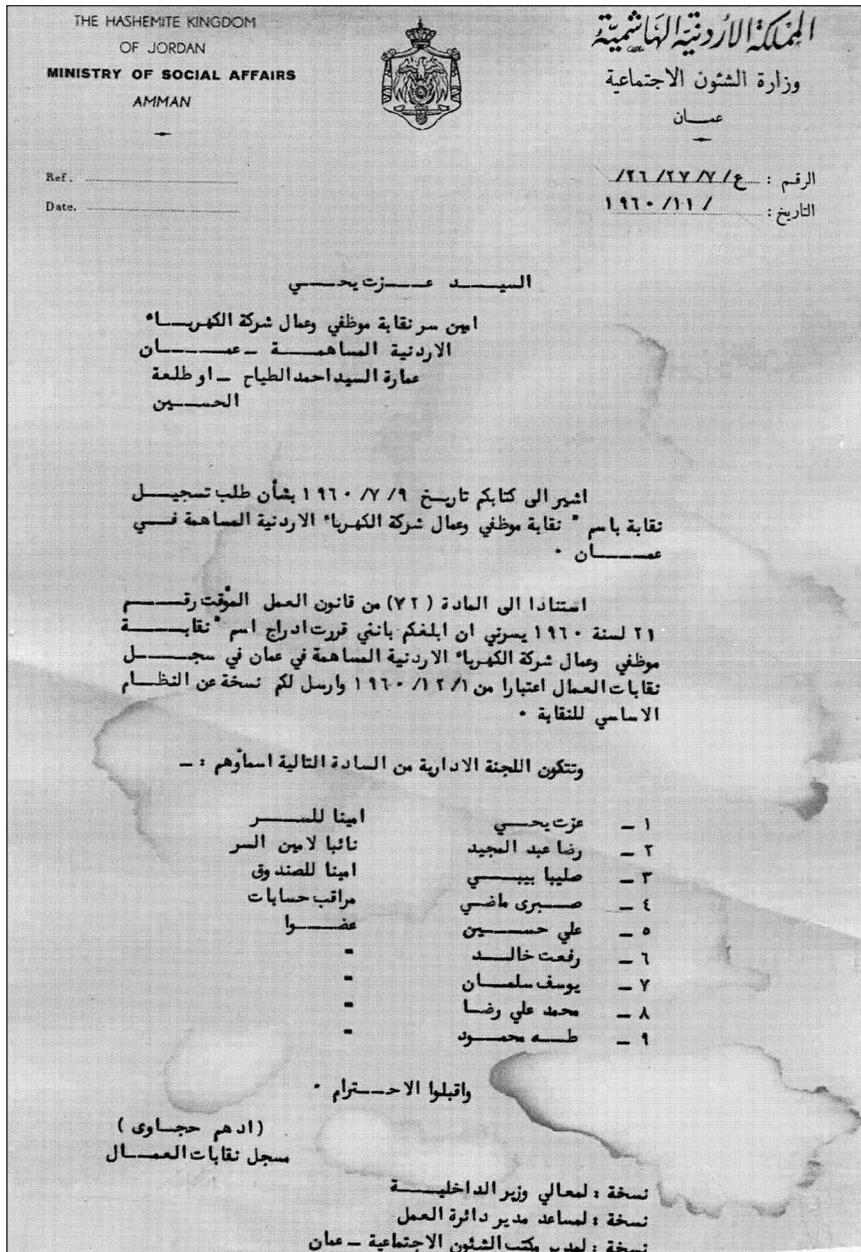
Amending Labour Law No. 21 of 1960

Considering the loopholes that hindered the implementation of Labour Law No. 21 of 1960, the government requested the assistance of an expert from the International Labour Organisation to improve the law. The expert spent some time in Jordan to study the law, visiting some work sites and meeting with representatives of the government, employers, and workers. Based on the insights gained, he prepared a draft to amend the law and participated in discussing it with the concerned parties through a tripartite labour advisory committee consisting of 2 people from each party.

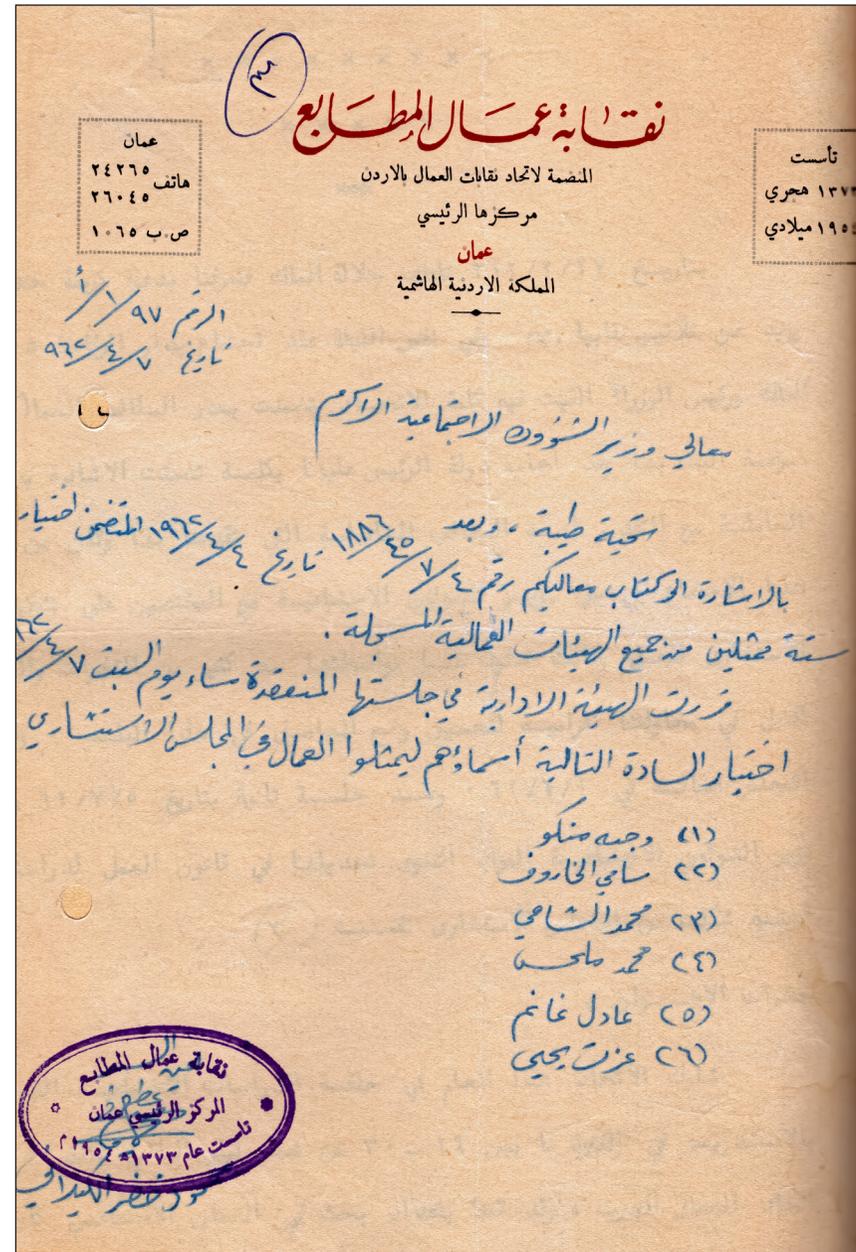
The most important amendments made to the law included:

1. Granting workers, a paid weekly day of rest, in the case where the number of workers in the institution was five or more.
2. Granting workers paid leave during all religious and national holidays.
3. Including workers operating mechanical machinery in agriculture under the provisions of the law.
4. Granting female workers maternity leave, the right to resign, and the right to receive an end-of-service indemnity in the case of marriage.
5. Granting workers, the right to resign after fifteen years of service and receive an end-of-service compensation.
6. Amending the end-of-service indemnity ratio to become: half a month for the first four years, and one month for each subsequent year.

Despite these additional achievements, labour cases continued to be heard in civil courts, which limited the effective application of the law as procedures of civil courts are slow and court decision are often delayed.



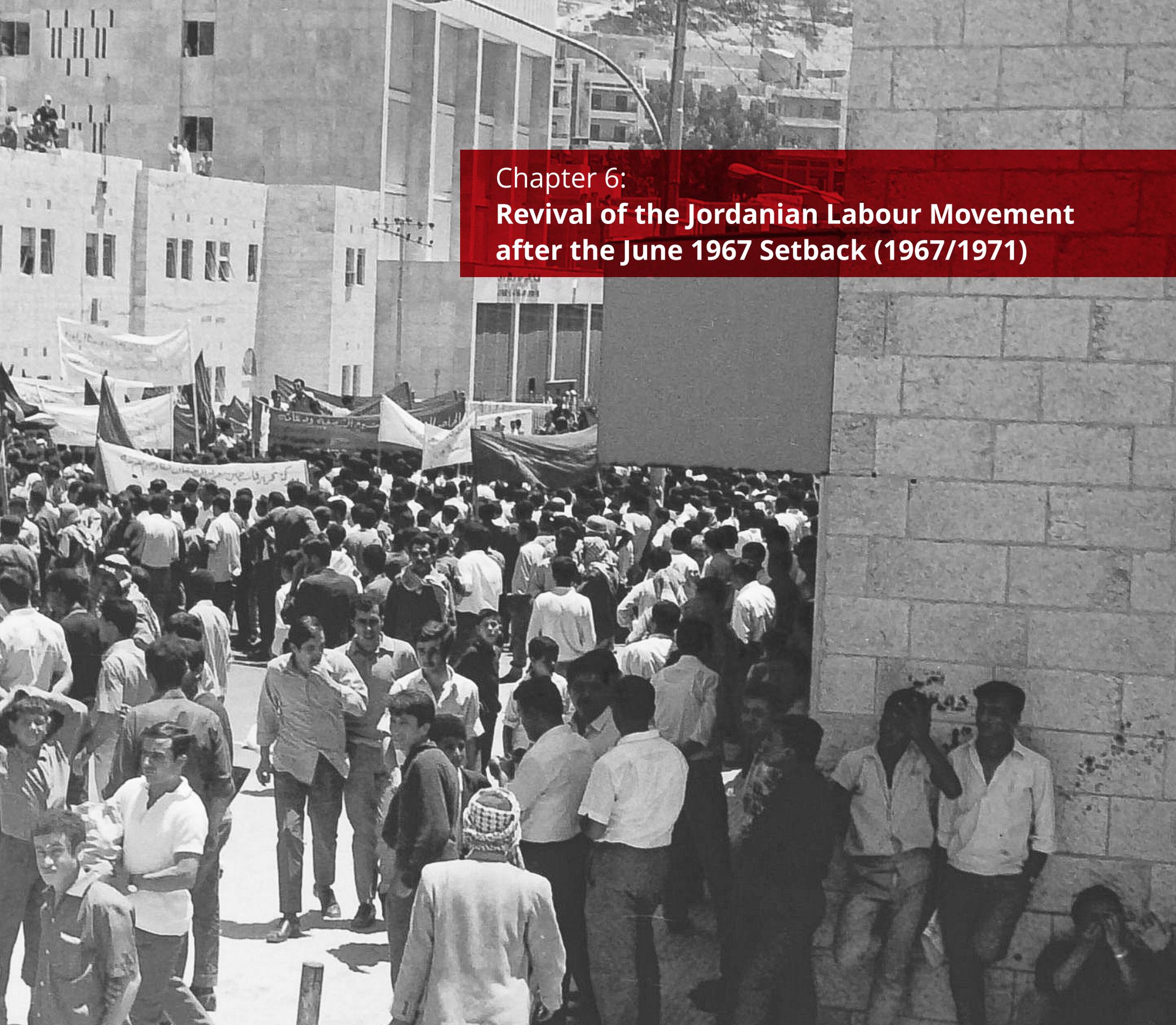
59. A letter approving the formation of the first General Trade Union of Electricity Workers, 1960
(from the Labour Archive of Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center).



60. Text of a letter from the Printing Press Workers Trade Union requesting the inclusion of a number of trade unionists in the Consultative Council of the Ministry of Social Affairs
(from the Labour Archive of Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center).



61. A massive demonstration in Amman in protest against the Rogers Plan, June 1970 (from Nour El-Din Al-Shatti Collection).



**Chapter 6:
Revival of the Jordanian Labour Movement
after the June 1967 Setback (1967/1971)**

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Revival of the Jordanian Labour Movement after the June 1967 Setback (1967/1971)

In addition to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the June 1967 war dealt a severe blow to the Jordanian economy. The occupation severed the economic connection between the two banks of the Jordan River and disrupted development projects that were part of the seven-year plan between 1964 and 1970. The state's resources were redirected towards military efforts, rebuilding the Jordanian army, and rearming it.

As a result, Jordan witnessed a noticeable decline in the rate economic growth, with growth becoming negative during the five years following the war. Jordan lost most of its tourism income, which heavily relied on visitors to the holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and most financial transfers from workers abroad decreased. With the uptake of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the West Bank to the East Bank, unemployment rates rose and wages decreased. Also, shipping costs increased due to the closure of the Suez Canal.

After the 1967 war, the government became more dependent on foreign aid, which constituted more than half of the public revenues in the 1971 budget. The reliance on imports also increased, leading to a permanent trade deficit and a large deficit in the Jordanian balance of payments between 1969 and 1972.

Industrial establishments experienced a decline in their production, which consequently led to the dismissal of many workers, increased unemployment, and decreased wages. According to work force data, the unemployment rate reached an alarming figure of 55.6% of the labour force by mid-1969.

62. A massive demonstration in downtown Amman organized by Palestinian resistance factions, 1970 (from Nour El-Din Al-Shatti Collection).







63. Mohammad Jawhar, with Musa Qwaider next to him, shaking hands with the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



64. Trade unionist Mohammad Al-Qaimari, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education, at a meeting of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

Rise of the Collective Labour Disputes and Industrial Action

After two years of confusion, from mid-1967 to mid-1969, the labour movement abandoned its passive attitude to eventually start defending workers' and union rights. In the last quarter of 1969 (from September to December), the country witnessed 17 major industrial actions, and in 1970, dozens of collective dispute settlements were signed in various sectors, such as the manufacturing and the construction sector, including the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, The Jordan Worsteds Mills Co (JOWM), Jordan Brewery Co. Ltd, as well as companies in phosphate, cement, tanning, aluminium, Arab East Tobacco and Cigarette Company, Industrial Development Corporation, and printing houses. Collective labour disputes also arose for UNRWA teachers, the land contractors and movie theatres employees.

During the industrial action in the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company and cement factories, workers resorted to strike actions, but the companies' managements called-in the police and army to repress the workers and break the strike.

1970 became the most prominent year in labour uprising. Trade unions in the country obtained gains for workers' rights and in their general living conditions as well as political and civic rights. At least 30 industrial actions took place in the manufacturing sector, nine in the construction sector, seven in hospitals and medical institutions, four in the transportation and communications sector, in addition to other movements in the private education, restaurants, retail sector, hotels, farms, UNRWA, and other service sectors, bringing the total number of industrial actions in 1970 to about 70.

65. From a labour demonstration in Amman, 1969
(from Nour El-Din Al-Shatti Collection).







66. A meeting of the International Arab Federation of Textile, Spinning and Garment Industry Workers in Cairo, 1969. Musa Qwaider and Sami Al-Kharouf, representatives of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing in Jordan, are in the photo (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).



67. Mohammad Jawhar, Musa Qwaider, and a number of Arab labour leaders, in front of the headquarters of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions - Damascus (from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).

Distribution of Labour Disputes by Economic Activity (for the first nine months of 1970)

Activity	Number of Labour Disputes
Industry and Mining	29
Building, Construction and Quarries	9
Transportation and Communications	4
Public Institutions and Municipalities	7
Health Services and Hospitals	5
Other Commercial and Service Companies	10
Poultry Farms and Nurseries	2
(UNRWA (Teachers, Workers, and Employees	2
Total	68

Source: Hani Hourani, *The Jordanian Labour Movement (1948/1988) Its Stages of Development and Current Issues*, New Jordan Magazine, Nicosia, Cyprus, September 1989. p. 29.

68. The headquarters of the trade union of workers in agriculture in the Jordan Valley (from Nour El-Din Al-Shatti Collection).



يا جماهيرنا انتم ماليه
في اتحادكم قوة لكم
انظروا في صفوف اتحاد العمال الزراعيين

مستأجر
العمل في الزراعة
والتي هي
التي هي
التي هي
التي هي
التي هي

اتحاد العمال الزراعيين
فرع الشوبه



Collective Bargaining Agreements and Unprecedented Gains for the Labour Movement

The industrial actions and workers' strikes achieved the conclusion of dozens of collective bargaining agreements, which met a set of key demands:

1. Cost of living increment
2. Annual Wage Increase
3. Health Insurance
4. Paid Sick Leave
5. Paid Annual Leave

In many sectors, important additional benefits could be obtained, such as transportation allowance, work clothes, increased overtime pay by 150% to 200%, the establishment of a savings fund with contributions from workers and employers, the exclusion of arbitrary dismissal, the determination of a minimum wage, the minimum annual wage increase, a war allowance for workers in the Jordan Valley, the thirteenth and fourteenth month salaries, coverage of surgical expenses, and the recognition of the freedom of association and the right to join a trade union in several sectors that were practically or officially deprived of it, such as agricultural workers, teachers, and workers in government institutions and cement factories.

Thanks to the increasing pressure from the labour movement, the Labour Law was amended to include the establishment of independent industrial courts separate from regular courts. The aim of this amendment was to accelerate the settlement of labour related cases in the courts. The the freedom of association and the right to join a trade union for agricultural workers operating agricultural machinery or in regular irrigation was also recognised as they were equated with other workers in terms of their rights.

During this period, the working class achieved important gains, such as the recognition of the freedom of association and the right to join a trade union for categories that were deprived of it, such as: agricultural workers, teachers in private and government schools, employees of the in-

ternational UNRWA agency, and workers in several public institutions, such as the Natural Resources Authority, Civil Aviation, and municipalities.

The working classes benefited greatly from the new political balance of power, which enabled them to successfully resort to the strike as a means to advance workers' rights, as it was no longer confronted by police repression.

One of the most important achievements of the labour movement was exclude the the right to arbitrary dismissal for employers, as most of the collective bargaining agreements signed during this period stipulated the exclusion of arbitrary dismissal, the reinstatement of dismissed workers, or the formation of joint committees to settle matters of arbitrary dismissal.

Other achievements obtained during this period included improving working conditions, specifically increasing wages, determining annual increases, linking wages to the rise in the cost of living, granting cost of living increment to families, setting a minimum wage, raising overtime pay, thirteenth- and fourteenth-month salaries, paid weekly off-days and official holidays, setting or increasing the duration of annual leave, and increasing the days of sick leave.

Other gains were also achieved, such as an obligation to health insurance, the establishment of savings funds with joint contributions, providing transportation for workers, providing meals and work clothes, improving labour safety conditions in work places, setting-up of life insurance schemes, granting occupational hazard allowances, and the war allowance for some sectors.

The number of registered unions under the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) increased from 20 unions in 1967 to 40 unions in 1969. At the same time, the number of workers members of trade unions gradually increased from 26,000 workers in 1967 to 26,400 workers in 1968, then rose to 27,400 in 1969, and reached a record number of around 40,000 in 1970.

Mohammad Jawhar



69. Mohammad Jawhar, Secretary General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions 1964-1971,

Source: General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity.

Studied at Al Nahda College in Jerusalem, and worked as a teacher in the village of Jabel Mukaber for five years. After that, he moved to work at the Production Company in Russeifa during the 1960s. Then, he worked at the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) when Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin was the President of the GFJTU, and during the presidency of Wajih Mango (1964-1965). Mohammad Jawhar was known for his great administrative abilities, so he joined the trade union for workers in public institutions, and became its president. In 1964, he was elected Secretary-General of the GFJTU, and was re-elected four times in a row until 1972.

In a manuscript kept by Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center, Mohammad Jawhar tells the story of how he got involved in trade unions: “In 1958, the Arab Baath Party asked me, as a member, to move to Amman for an organizing mission. They found me a clerical job at the GFJTU, which served as a cover for political action. I continued in this role until I was arrested in 1960, and I was imprisoned for seven months and a few days. Then, I was released and resumed my work at the GFJTU in a normal manner.”

Mohammad Jawhar talked about the split in the Baath Party in 1959 due to the dispute over the Syrian-Egyptian union. Abdullah Al-Rimawi, Bahjat Abu Ghraibah and others defected. The

Baathist Workers’ Organization sided with the defected wing. Despite this, the Baathist Workers’ Organization remained united as a nationalist wing “independent of any political organization.”

Jawhar says: “I assumed leadership of the GFJTU indirectly between 1960 and 1962, and then directly from 1962 to 1971. During that period, I was elected Deputy Secretary-General of the GFJTU for the 1962-1964 term, and then Secretary-General for four consecutive terms between 1964 and 1972. I quit trade union work at the end of 1971, before the end of my last term.”

Mohammed Jawhar is considered a controversial figure in the history of the Jordanian labour movement. Unlike others, he did not start union work from the bottom up, but rather entered the arena through an administrative position at the GFJTU. During this period, he gained extensive experience in trade union work, especially under the leadership of Wajih Mango, which qualified him to become Secretary-General of the GFJTU for a period of nearly eight years.

If his account of his political party background is correct, it is surprising that his positions were characterized by clear hostility towards trade union leaders with political party background, especially those affiliated with the Communist Party, which made him classified as one of the “right-wing trade unionists”.

Source: Al-Qaimari, Mohammad Suleiman, **Labour Union Movement in Jordan 1950-1970**, Amman, Jordan, 1982, pp. 159-160.

Also: Jawhar, Muhammad, **The Jordanian Labour Movement (1954-1972)**, by Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center.

Struggle for Political Influence over the Trade Unions between the State and Resistance Organisations

Between 1967 and 1971 the Jordanian labour movement was the arena of a contest for influence between various political forces, including some opposition political parties, Palestinian resistance factions, and the Jordanian state authorities. The latter did not hesitate to suppress some workers' strikes, such as those that occurred in the cement factories in Al-Fuhays and the phosphate mines in Al-Ruseifa.

Some leftist and nationalist organisations affiliated with the Palestinian resistance took on the struggle for better living conditions as well as civic and political rights thereby threatening to affect the role that trade union had played in pushing such demands. These organisations affiliated with the resistance movement relied on their armed wings and interfered in trade unions' negotiations with employers and factory managements to forcefully obtain satisfaction for workers' demands.

The state's intervention to support major manufacturing companies against workers' demands instead of acting as a fair mediator was a sufficient justification for some Palestinian resistance factions to step-in and support the workers.

However, any gains achieved in this manner did not last long, as they began to fade between 1971 and 1976, with the departure of resistance forces from Jordan and the state authorities recovering complete control over the political and social situation in the country.

Even though these interferences in the affairs of the Jordanian labour movement cast doubt on the legitimacy and sustainability of the gains obtained, the importance of such progress at that time for the working class cannot be underestimated.

70. A labour demonstration marking the 1st of May, organized by the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in downtown Amman, 1970 (from the collection of Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center).



71. Part of a demonstration in Amman marking the Labour Day, May 1, 1970 (Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center).



72. The moment when the workers celebrating May 1, 1976 met with trade union leader Musa Qwaider in Dibbeen Forest, after his release from prison (from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).





Chapter 7:
**The State Restructures the Jordanian Trade
Unions (1971/1976)**

Chapter 7:

The State Restructures the Jordanian Trade Unions (1971/1976)

After the events of September 1970 and July 1971, which ended with the departure of the Palestinian resistance from Jordan, the government took advantage of the changes in the domestic balance of political power to increase its control over the organisations of the labour movement and other social and civic organisations which had emerged between 1967 and 1971.

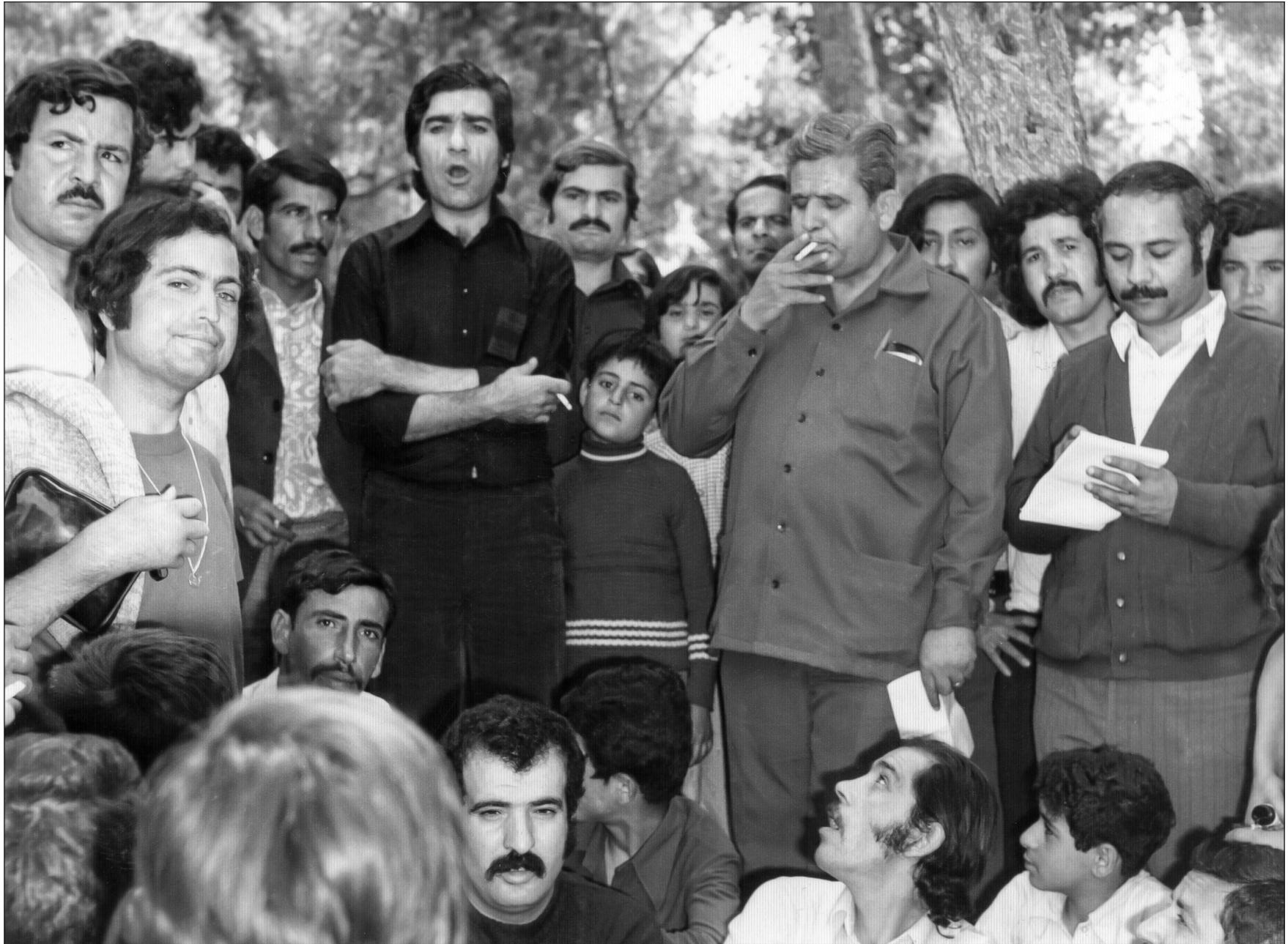
The authorities took a number of radical measures to change the composition and organisation of trade unions, going as far as to appoint leaders loyal to the government in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions and its affiliates. The 1970/1971 elections for the executive committee of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), brought into office a leadership headed by Muhammad Jawhar with both supporters of the Fatahas well as moderate unionist elements. Muhammad Jawhar served as the Secretary General of the Federation for eight years (1964-1972).

After the events of September 1970, three members of the Executive Committee went into exile and left for Damascus and claimed to be “legitimate leadership” of the GFJTU. This situation lasted until they returned from exile to Jordan in 1990.

On September 12, 1971, other five members of the Executive Committee were made to resign under pressure from the then- Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Mustafa Dudeen, and the Director of the Labour Department, Naji Abdul Aziz. This was followed by the appointment of a “Temporary Executive Committee” led by officials from the Labour Department of the Ministry. Additionally, Kamel Hishlamon, the Assistant Director of Labour was selected to assume the position of Vice President of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions.

In December 1971, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment issued Directive No. 14, which instructed trade unions to hold elections for their governing bodies. The Directive orders the powers for conducting the trade union elections to be transferred to the Minister, including the determination of the candidates for these elections.

The Minister’s decisions were based on the Interim Labour Law No. 67 of 1971, which granted him extensive powers, including directly interfering in internal operations of the trade unions. It also gave the Minister the authority to dissolve trade unions if they were to engage in political activities or promote “subversive” ideas.



73. May Day celebrations in Dibbeen Forest. Musa Qwaider, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, and Yousef Hourani, Vice President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, in the middle of the photo (from Trade Unionist Yousef Hourani Collection).

The First Mergers of Trade Unions

In 1971, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment enforced the merger of a number of trade unions aiming to reduce the influence political forces in opposition to the government had on their leadership. As a consequence, the 1972 trade union elections resulted in a reduction of the influence held by labour leaders independent from the government with about only one-third of the trade of unions having a leadership not dependant on the state authorities.

In a memorandum published by the Musa Qwaider after his resignation from the Temporary Executive Committee of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, he explained the reasons for this resignation and revealed details of the government's interference in trade unions running-up to 1972 elections. These included striking-off candidacies from trade unions electoral lists, in particular targeting the trade unions for workers in light industries, mines, health services, and transport. He also revealed that the government had moved to dissolve the governing body of the trade union for workers in Natural Resources Authority and instructed government employees to run in the elections of the trade union of workers in railways, as well as imposing pro-government candidates in the elections of the General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, even though they did not meet the qualifications required.

As a result of these interferences, trade unions led by unionist independent from government boycotted the elections of the general council and the Executive Committee of the GFJTU. Government interference was not limited to meddling in the composition of trade union's leadership. The authorities also directedly interfered in employment decision obliging public institutions and private companies to obtain clearance from the state security agencies through a certificate of good conduct before signing employment contracts. Also, the authorities made it mandatory for employers to provide lists of their employees upon which hundreds of workers were summoned for interrogation, and many were subsequently dismissed for "security" reasons.

Employers Reneged on Collective Bargaining Agreements

In terms of labour relations, many establishments in the private sector, and even some governmental bodies and independent public institutions, reneged on the obligations they were under in terms of collective bargaining agreements. These agreements guaranteed workers some rights, such as: cost-of-living adjustment, health insurance, and weekly or annual paid leave as well as sick leave. Representatives for manufacturing and trading companies went as far as demanding a reduction in annual leave to less than 25 days a year.

Private companies also began to violate the limitation of 8 regular working hours a day, and forced their workers to work for up to 11 consecutive hours without paying overtime. Cases of arbitrary individual and collective dismissal also increased, with the tacit approval of the Labour Department. The right to strike was practically abolished, as companies relied on security forces to repress strikes and on the authorities to prosecute the unionist and activists involved in them.

After the September 1970 events (Black September) which involved a conflict between the Jordanian army, and the Palestine Liberation Organization, political isolation as well as economic sanctions, including the closure of export routes were imposed on Jordan by some Arab countries. As a result, the Jordanian economy suffered a severe recession. The manufacturing sector was particularly affected with the reduction in production, the closure of dozens of factories and in some cases even the declaration of bankruptcy. The construction sector was also affected. All in all there was a wave of mass dismissal of workers in both sectors.



74. Photos of a number of trade unionists and their family members on a bus transporting them to the May Day celebration site in Dibbeen Forest (from Trade Unionist Yousef Hourani Collection).



75. A group of trade unionists on their way to the May Day celebrations in Dibbeen Forest. Haidar Rashid, President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, and Ahed Qantar, Secretary-General of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions are in the middle of the photo (from Trade Unionist Ahed Qantar Collection).

Regional and International Isolation of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions

During the 1970s, the Jordanian labour movement faced great challenges due to government interference, which tarnished its reputation and acceptance both at the World federation of trade unions (WFTU) and the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions. The latter cancelled the membership of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions at a conference held in Cairo on May 25, 1972.

After a delegation from the International Labour Organisation visited Jordan between April 29 and May 5, 1974, to investigate the situation the Committee on Freedom of Association, condemned government interference in and restriction of trade union activities. The official report submitted by the delegation confirmed the occurrence of government meddling in internal trade union affairs and obvious violations of freedom of association and the right to join a trade union.

The Three-Year Development Plan (1973-1975)

In order to address the impact of the occupation of the West Bank on the Jordanian economy, the Jordanian government devised a short-term development plan for 1973 to 1975. The plan included five main objectives, including job creation, skills development and vocational training, incentives for GDP growth, and reducing the deficit in the trade balance. The plan also focused on increasing reliance on domestic resources and ensuring a socially and regionally more even distribution of economic development in the country.

Despite the plan's success in stimulating economic growth, it did not address the most prominent structural problems. The deficit in the trade balance increased to 47% of the gross domestic product, compared to 30% in previous years. The public service sector continued to dominate, with 64% of the GDP and 63% of employment rate, compared to 18% in agriculture and 19% of employment in manufacturing, construction, and energy.

The Effects of Recession and Emigration

The three-year development plan also spurred a sharp rise in prices and a high levels of inflation, which affected negatively the rate of real economic growth and the further skewed income distribution. Despite an increase in investments, the unemployment remained high and large numbers of skilled workers and professionals migrated to the Arab Gulf countries.

The migration of qualified Jordanian workers with high professional and technical skills from Jordan to the Arab Gulf countries became a prominent feature after the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank. The emigration of Jordanian workers increased constantly and in 1973, it reached 10% annually. This in particular affected the public sector, where in 1974, 21% of engineers and 26% of government's technical staff left the country.

According to government reports the causes for Jordanian labour emigration were due to the high cost of living and the lack of wage increases to compensate for the rise in prices. Official reports also pointed out that the non-compliance by enterprises with minimum standards and basic working conditions, such as health and safety requirements or rest periods as well the lack of company policies for wage increases and promotions, were the main factors that decided the workers to emigrate.



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76. A number of trade union leaders in one of the elections. In the middle of the photo, Abdul Rahman Al-Majali, President of the Trade Union of Workers in the Natural Resources Authority, and Haidar Rashid, President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, to his left. Trade unionist Fahmi Al-Katout is in the back row (from Trade Unionist Fahmi Al-Katout Collection).

Strengthening the Bargaining Power of the Working Class

After the October 1973 war and the rise in oil prices worldwide, the Arab oil-producing countries pursued economic development strategies, requiring foreign workforce with Jordanian skilled labour being high in demand in the most of the Arab countries oil-producing. This in turn contributed to strengthening the bargaining power of the Jordanian working class and its trade unions.

The unions took advantage of this, and began to pressure for the abolition of the legal restrictions imposed on them in 1971, which had given the government the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions and its affiliates. In the early 1970s, new regulations were adopted, removing many government restrictions on trade unions.

As a consequence, trade union elections from February to May 1974, led to a change in the composition of the organisations' leadership with unionist independent from state authorities and aligned to the political groups of the democratic opposition taking over in most unions. Out of 21 unions belonging to the GFJTU, they won power in 14 affiliates of the Federation, with only seven affiliates remaining controlled by officials subservient to state authorities, being appointed without any real electoral process.

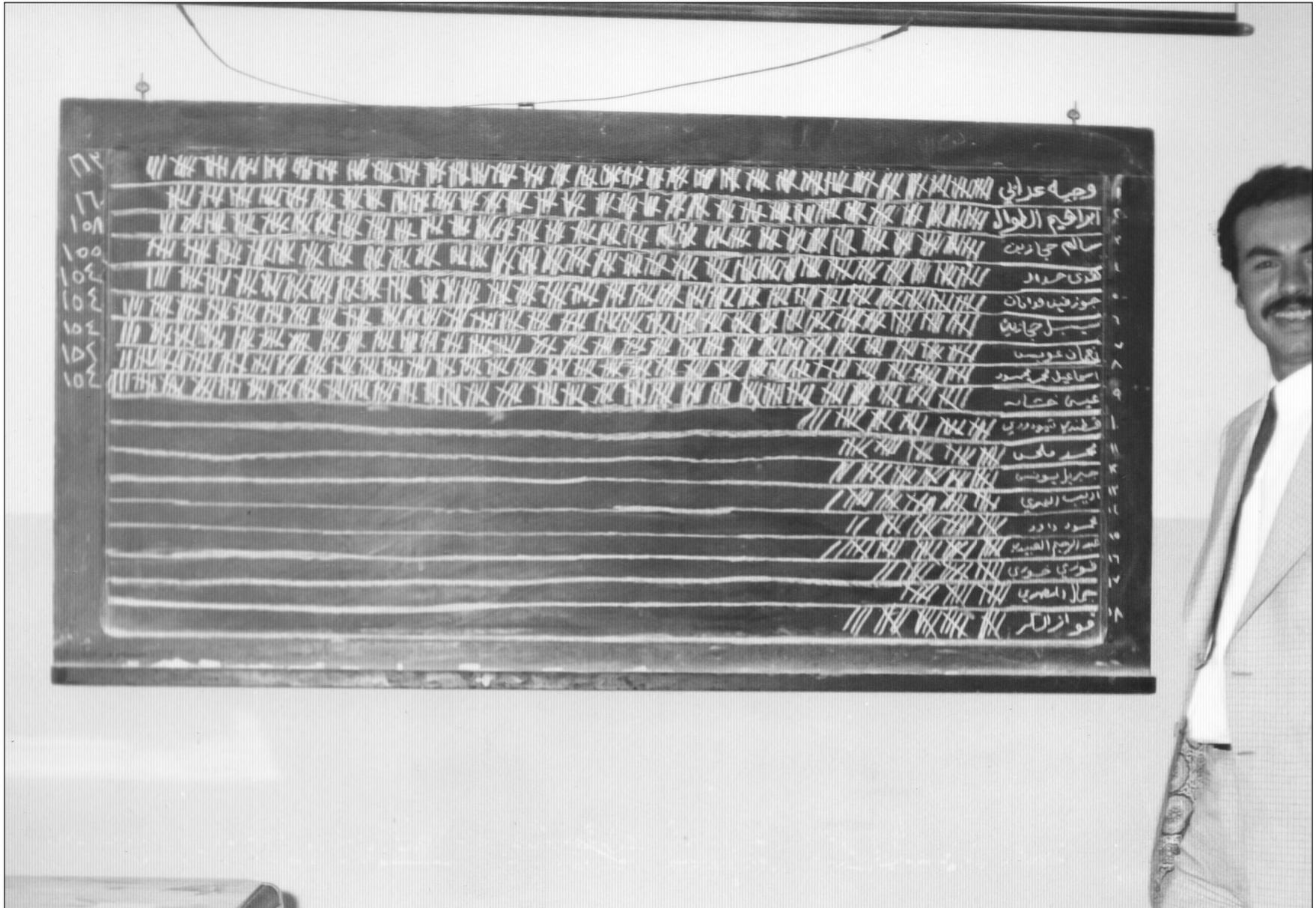
Indeed, the government interfered in these trade union elections by barring candidates from standing for office in some unions, such as the Banks Employees' Union, the Blacksmiths and Carpenters' Union, and the Textile Workers' Union. The authorities also prevented the UNRWA Workers' Union from holding its elections. On the other hand, the authorities ignored the mock elections in the Land Transport Union, the Customs Clearance Workers' Union, and the Private Education Union.

A Changing Balance of Power and the Ongoing Struggle

This shift in the balance of power amongst the Federation's affiliates encouraged union leaders who had opposed government interference to stand for election of the Federation's general council and the Executive Committee. Eventually, the outcome of this election produced some balance between the contending forces within the Federation. However, the government launched a political campaign against the unionist independent from state authorities, describing their activities as "destructive" and aimed at diverting the course of unions to serve political purposes.

Despite such attempts by the government, unionist independent from state authorities and aligned with political groups of the democratic opposition maintained their influence in the general counsel of the GFJTU. Trade unions began to take on the demands of the working class, increasing industrial action and collective labour disputes in major manufacturing companies. The trade unions also campaigned against employers who resisted labour court orders and reneged on their obligations under collective bargaining agreements. Also, labour leaders called for measures to end inflation and for the introduction of a wage system compensating for the prices increases.

In a memorandum submitted to Prince Hassan bin Talal on December 25, 1974, trade union leaders demanded to stop interferences by state security agencies in trade union activities and protect their independence. They also demanded the reform of the Labour Law as well as the creation of a law social security system.



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77. Trade unionist Fahmi Al-Katout next to the elections board of the General Trade Union of Workers in Health Services
(from Trade Unionist Fahmi Al-Katout Collection).

Amendment of Article 84: Countering Industrial Action and Collective Labour Disputes, Reorganising Trade Unions

In an attempt to counter escalating industrial action and collective labour disputes and reduce the influence of democratic forces in the labour movement, the President of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Union, Sami Hasan Mansour, announced at a council meeting in November 1975 that he had sent a letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, requesting a review of the Federation's structure and a reduction in the number of registered affiliates.

The government of Zaid al-Rifa'i did not hesitate to devise a plan to reorganise trade unions, forcefully merge them as to reduce their numbers. The government held a series of meetings at the end of 1975 and the beginning of 1976 to discuss the steps necessary to implement this plan. Before the trade union elections of 1976/1977, the government also amended some articles of the Labour Law to ease the process of forced mergers.

On January 19, 1976, Article 84 of the Labour Law was amended to give the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment the authority to take decisions to reclassify professions, crafts, and industries and determine which category of workers are allowed to form unions as well as to determine the categories of workers that can affiliate to the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions. According to this amendment, the Minister's decisions apply to all existing unions thirty days after their announcement.

However, this amendment soon faced strong opposition from trade unions. Representatives of 16 trade unions submitted a memorandum of protest to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, expressing

their shock at the amendment of Article 84, affirming that the formation and development of trade unions was their own right and duty, stressing that any changes must emanate from within the trade unions themselves, based on their choices and its needs only.

In February 1976, the government of Zaid al-Rifa'i was formed, with for the first time the creation of a separate Ministry of Labour from the Ministry of Social Affairs. This was an acknowledgment of the increasing importance of labour relations issues and the need to set-up a dedicated high-level government authority to address the amendments of Article 84. Essam Al-Ajlouni, the first Minister of Labour, pledged to draft a new Labour Law, in addition to a Social Security law.

The democratic forces in the GFJTU succeeded having their opposition to the amendment of Article 84 adopted as official position of the GFJTU, when the Executive Committee of the Federation issued a statement calling for a review of the article.

The Minister of Labour tried to overcome the opposition from the trade unions by agreeing to form a joint registration committee and setting March 10, 1976 as the final deadline for submitting trade union registration applications. Also, April 20 was set as the deadline for the elections for the general council and the Executive Committee of the Federation.

With this arrangement in place, the merger of trade unions was undertaken, reducing their number from 21 to 17 affiliates in the Federation, instead of 13 as previously intended.



78. A panel organized by the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance on amending Article 84 of the Labour Law, 1986
(from Trade Unionist Yousef Hourani Collection).

The Rise of Collective Labour Disputes between 1974 and 1976

With deteriorating living conditions of the working class and the lower middle class, collective labour disputes increased significantly, even despite the authorities' control over the GFJTU and many of its affiliates. In 1974, 24 collective labour disputes were reported, according to official documents and newspapers from that time. In these disputes, settlements or collective bargaining agreements were reached in nine cases, which included some companies such as the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, the Industrial Development Company, the Mining Exploration Company, the Petra Plastic Company, in addition to three commercial banks and two hospitals.

Some of these agreements came only after workers had gone on strikes or threatened to do so. Some industrial action came in response to employers' attempts to prevent workers from exercising their right to join trade unions, or even trying to dissolve existing trade union committees in companies, as happened in the Jordan Worsted Mill Co (JOWM).

In 1975, more than twenty industrial actions and collective labour disputes, including threats of or effective strike actions. At the end of 1975 and the beginning of 1976, the clashes between workers and employers escalated significantly. Among the most prominent of these industrial actions were the strikes of workers in the Jordan Worsted Mills Co (JOWM), the tanning factories, and the Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural Company (Intaj), as well as workers striking at the Balian factory, which included 70 female and 15 male workers.

Results of the 1976 Trade Union Elections and the Authorities' Response to Collective Labour Disputes

After the reorganisation of the trade unions, the 1976 elections showed evidence of only limited successes in the authorities' attempts to control the organisations of the labour movement. They were successful in abolishing the trade union of workers at the Natural Resources Authority and the UNRWA Staff Union. However, some of the leadership independent of government authorities were able to hold on to their previous positions. Nevertheless, the reorganisation of the Federation reduced the representation in the general council of trade unions with leadership independent of government authorities to around 30 members, compared to 34 members being trade unionists loyal to the government authorities.

The authorities responded to industrial actions and strikes, especially those related to large companies, by intensifying the repression against trade union leaders and labour activists. In February 1976, the authorities arrested the prominent trade unionists Musa Qwaider and Fathallah Al-Emrani, leaders of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing and summoned dozens of workers for interrogation, after the strike of workers in the Jordan Worsted Mills Co (JOWM).

Abdul Rahman al-Majali, the president of the trade union of workers at the Natural Resources Authority and a member of the Executive Committee of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, was also dismissed in January 1976 because of his support for the strike in the Jordan Worsted Mills Co (JOWM). Arrests were not limited to trade unionist independent from the government authorities alone, but also included other unionists, such as Ahed Qintar, the President of The General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism, and Jamal Al-Najdawi, the President of the General Trade Union for Workers in Petrochemicals, in September 1976.



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79. A seminar organized by the Jordanian Labour Department in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 1975 in Amman (from Trade Unionist Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

May 1st Celebrations in Dibbeen Woods

Fahmi Al-Katout*

The Jordanian labour movement waged a continuous struggle to preserve its right to freedom of association and the establishment of trade unions, defend its legitimacy and confront arbitrary dismissal as well as government interference in its internal affairs. Trade union leaders independent from government authorities made the experience that the government was not neutral in collective labour disputes, but rather supported employers and sought to weaken trade unions. This limited their ability to obtain satisfaction for workers' demands. Therefore, the labour movement had only itself to rely on in the struggle to enhance its strength and negotiating capacity and to reach collective bargaining agreements and secure workers' rights.

The Jordanian labour movement, especially trade union leaders independent from government authorities, succeeded in linking demands on working and living conditions, such as increasing wages and achieving social and health insurance, with promoting social consciousness and labour solidarity at in the Jordanian society, as well as trade union cooperation in the Arab world and at international level. The International Workers' Day, celebrated on May 1st, provided an opportunity to propagate this consciousness among workers.

In 1973, Musa Qwaider, the president of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, proposed celebrating May Day and using it to revive the memory of the martyrs of the global working class and the Palestinian resistance movement, through organising a trip for workers and their families to the Dibbeen Woods.

This idea was well received and other unions, such as the Health Services Union, the Banks Union, and the Leather Industries Union, joined-in. Over time, this outing became an annual tradition, in which thousands of workers participated and participation reaching around 10,000 people in some years.

During the celebration of Workers' Day began in the afternoon, workers and their families had lunch and enjoyed their family gatherings. Musa Qwaider delivered a speech at the beginning of the celebration, followed by the signing of the national anthem and labour songs. This annual ritual continued until May 1, 1976, when Musa Qwaider was unable to lead the celebration as he had been arrested earlier in the year along with several other trade unionists.

In the following year, 1977, the celebration had a special and different character. Workers gathered in Dibbeen in the morning of May 1st, and listened to a speech by the Muhammad Abu Sham'a, a trade unionist who delivered the speech on behalf of the imprisoned leader Musa Qwaider, who still in prison.

During the speech, Abu Sham'a spoke about the necessity of reviving the memory of the martyrs of the working class of the Palestinian and Jordanian people, as well as to recall the right of the Palestinian resistance to exist. He also spoke about the suffering of the working class, caused by inflation, economic crises, and the restriction of rights and freedoms. He ended his speech by calling for the release of imprisoned trade unionists.

Around 4:30 p.m., as workers were preparing to return home, they heard rumours the imminent arrival of Musa Qwaider to Dibbeen who was said to have been released from prison in the morning. As he eventually arrived, within minutes, hundreds gathered around him, welcoming and embracing him with great joy and enthusiasm. They carried him on their shoulders, amid chants of “Welcome Abu Yusuf.” In an atmosphere filled with enthusiasm and emotions, “Abu Yusuf” delivered an inspiring speech, saying: “I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the sincere feelings you have shown, and I promise you that I will continue to defend your rights with all my effort until the last moment of my life.”

Abu Yusuf’s presence in Dibbeen at the annual Workers’ Day celebration immediately after his release from prison was a huge surprise. It made Qwaider appear as a towering trade union leader, incarnating the resilience of the working class and testifying of his deep attachment to the cause of workers’ rights. The workers’ reception of him in this manner demonstrated their great respect and appreciation for his sacrifices, as well as their attachment to the values of freedom he strives for, which gave the celebration a special character.

After that, Musa Qwaider continued to lead the May 1st celebrations in Dabbin every year. This day became an annual tradition to cultivate and grow social consciousness among workers, showcase their suffering from economic hardship and inflation, and provide an opportunity to denounce the greed of entrepreneurs and employers. It was also an opportunity to call for state intervention to protect the workers from unlimited control by employers, and de-

mand protection for the independence of the trade unions.

In 1979, the authorities prevented workers from celebrating their holiday in Dibbeen, as they could no longer bear the continuation of this labour activity. They issued instructions to transportation companies not to rent their buses to unions, and the police stopped other means of transportation heading to Dibbeen, forcing those who managed to arrive to leave. In addition, the authorities opposed the invitation of labour unions to participate in the official celebration in Al Hussein Youth City (The Sports City), thus depriving workers of their usual celebration.

Despite the official ban imposed by the authorities, workers continued to head to Dibbeen during the years 1980 and 1981, where hundreds of workers and their families gathered to celebrate their holiday.

In 1990, the Dibbeen Woods witnessed a large labour demonstration in which about ten thousand people participated. During the demonstration, the trade unionist Haider Rasheed, the President of the General Union of Workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting, delivered a speech in which he spoke about the past achievements and current demands of the Jordanian labour movement. The “Baladna” artistic troupe also presented a distinctive performance that included some national songs.

Over the years, the May 1st celebrations in Dibbeen remained an important symbol to inspire the Jordanian workers, and an expression of the labour movement’s commitment to its independence, freedom, and the ongoing struggle of trade unions.

Fahmi Al-Katout, former trade unionist, member of the Politburo of the Communist Party, author of several books on the Jordanian economy.



80. Trade Union leader Musa Qwaider giving a speech to workers' audience on May Day
(from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).

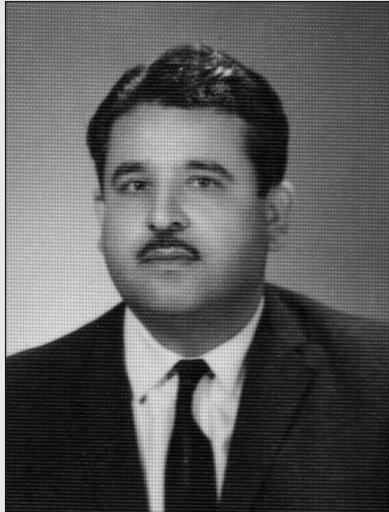


81. Part of the May Day celebrations in Dibbeen Forest
(from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).



82. A workers' gathering on the Labour Day on May 1, 1975, in Dibbeen Forest. Haidar Rashid, President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance is on the right (from Trade Unionist Samara Al-Khatib collection).

Musa Yousef Qwaider: Icon of the Jordanian Labour Movement (1924-1997)



83. Musa Yousef Qwaider, one of the Founders of the Jordanian labour movement (from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).

Musa Qwaider was born in the city of Jaffa in Palestine in 1924. Qwaider and his colleagues founded a trade union for textile workers in Jaffa in 1942, and in the same year, he joined the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society. He also joined the Palestinian Communist Party, then the National Liberation League in Palestine, which split from the Communist Party in 1947. Due to his affiliation with the communist movement, he participated in the founding of the "Arab Workers' Congress (AWC)," which in turn split from the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society.

After the Nakba in 1948, Musa Qwaider was among the labour activists who moved to Amman. In Jordan, he was one of the founders of the Jordanian Communist Party, which was founded in 1951. He was arrested for the first time between 1952 and 1953, and he was held in detention for a year and a half.

In 1954, Musa Qwaider was one of the founders of the Textile and Clothing Workers Trade Union, along with figures such as Wassef Al-Johari, Sami Al-Kharouf, Victor Elias, Michel Swaileh, Mohammad Al-Adwani, Muhammad Zuwaid, Mustafa Al-Shamroukh, Lutfi Al-Bukhari, Hamdi Al-Kayali, and Fathallah Amasha.

Through the Textile and Clothing Workers Trade Union, Qwaider contributed to the establishment of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions in May 1955, which included six trade unions at the time. He also played a role in establishing the Textile Workers Cooperative Society on November 15, 1956.

Qwaider assumed the leadership of the Textile and Clothing Workers Trade Union after Wassef Al-Johari and Sami Al-Kharouf. The name of the trade

union changed several times; it was called the Textile and Clothing Workers Trade Union, then the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.

After the incidents of September 1970 (the fighting between the Jordanian army and Palestinian commandos in Amman), Musa Qwaider took over the secretariat of the "Interim Executive Committee", which managed the work of the GFJTU, after the elected Executive Committee was dissolved on July 7, 1970. However, he soon resigned from this committee, which was formed on October 5, 1970 by a government decision, as he publicly criticized it, and led the labour opposition against the committee which was biased to government authorities and was in charge of the leadership of the GFJTU and the presidency of the Central Council.

In 1976, Musa Qwaider was arrested for the second time while he was leading the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, and the secretary general Fathallah Al-Omrani was arrested with him. He was released on May 1, 1977, when he was warmly received by crowds of workers at the Labour Day celebrations held in the Dibbin Forest.

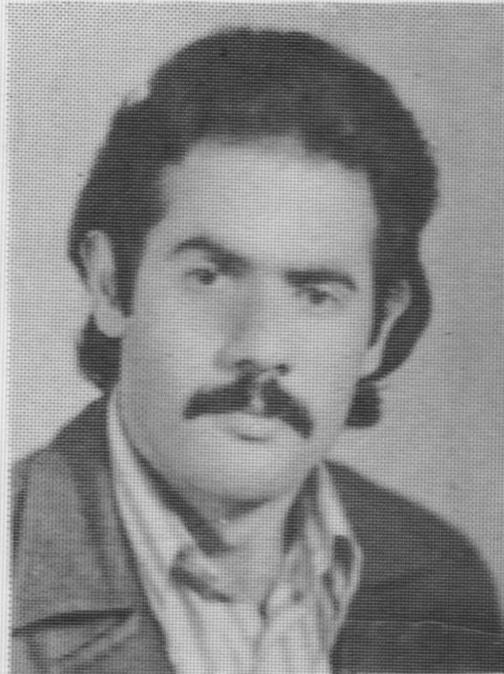
After Jordan began its political liberalization in 1989, Musa Qwaider decided to run for parliamentary elections in the first district of Amman during the November 1989 elections, but he did not win.

After 1984, the trade unionist Fathallah Al-Omrani took over the leadership of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, but Musa Qwaider continued to provide guidance and advice to the trade union movement until he passed away in August 1997.

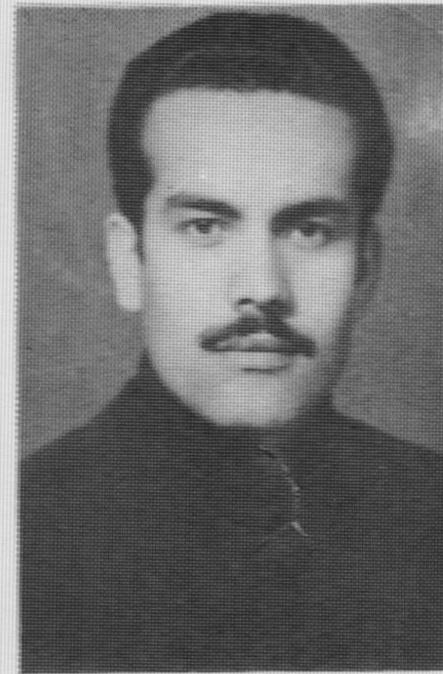
HANDS OFF...



MUSA QUADER
President, Textile Trade
Union of Jordan
Arrested Feb. 15, 1976



AHMED DJRADAT
Teacher, Member of the Prepa-
ratory Committee for the Union
of Teachers of Jordan
Arrested Feb. 1, 1976



FATHALLA EL UMRANI
Secretary General, Textile Trade
Union of Jordan
Arrested Feb. 17, 1976

84. A photo of a solidarity poster dating back to 1976, calling for the release of detained trade unionists: Musa Qwaider, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, and Fathallah Al-Omrani, Secretary of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing in Jordan. In the middle is Ahmed Jaradat, member of the Preparatory Committee of the Teachers Union
(from Trade Unionist Musa Qwaider Collection).

85. Male and female members of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, during one of the Trade Union's electoral cycles (from Trade Unionist Fathallah Al-Omrani Collection).





**Chapter 8:
Restricting the Independence of Trade
Unions (1976/1989)**

Chapter 8:

Restricting the Independence of Trade Unions (1976/1989)

The three-year economic development plan between 1973 and 1975, and the first five-year plan between 1976 and 1980, contributed to alleviating the effects of the loss of the West Bank in the 1967 war. These plans led to the revival of the economy and achieved high real growth rates of up to 8.5% during the second half of the 1970s.

However, this period between 1973 and 1980 was also marked by a significant increase in inflation with rising prices, inducing a decline in the real value of nominal wages. This situation prompted many skilled workers to emigrate for work in the Gulf states, where high investment rates pushed up the demand for labour. As a result, in Jordan the unemployment rate decreased for the first time in the recent history of the country, and an exceptional situation of “full employment” occurred, along with an increased reliance on low-wage migrant workers and foreign labourers.

At the same time, economic and social challenges increased, such as migration from rural areas to the cities inducing urban expansion at the expense of agricultural land as well as widening of the social inequality. Disparities in development between different regions and governorates of the country grew and new pockets of poverty emerged in Jordan.

Based on the results of the three-year and five-year plans for the period 1973-1980, which enhanced optimism about the continuation of the economic recovery, the Jordanian state developed another five-year plan for the period 1981-1985. This plan aimed to raise the an-

nual growth rates of the GDP to 11%, and set investment targets at 3.3 billion Jordanian Dinars, which was an ambitious goal that depended on the continued flow of foreign aid and loans.

From Economic Boom to the “Double Crisis”

But already at the beginning of the plan’s implementation in the early 1980s, signs of an economic slowdown began to appear, due to the decline in oil prices and the economic growth slowdown in the Gulf states, which negatively affected the level of financial transfers to Jordan and Jordanian export markets there. This coincided with the outbreak of the eight-year Iraq-Iran war, which continued until 1988, and which diverted a large portion of the funds originally planned for investments in Jordan.

By the end of 1982, signs even of a recession in the Jordanian economy appeared, and continued until the eruption of the major double economic and financial in 1988 and 1989. During the period from 1983 to 1988, the economic performance was marked by a significant decline in growth and investment. Also, foreign financial aid decreased by 26%, and preferential loans and economic assistance only reached 36% of the original set targeted figures. As a result, the government was forced to rely more on commercial loans from international and local sources to finance government spending, which contributed to worsening the budget deficit and the balance of payments deficit in the national accounts.



86. A symposium on the occasion of the Social Work Day, April 10, 1979, with Issam Al-Ajlouni, former Minister of Labour, in the middle of the photo (from the collection of National Library, Jordan News Agency - Petra).

Decline in Job Growth Rates and Worsening Unemployment

The employment offices of the Ministry of Labour witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of job seekers, with the number rising from less than 300 in 1980 to more than 17,000 in 1984, and then exceeding 30,000 in 1985. However, these figures only reflect a small part of the actual level of unemployment, as administrative complexities prevented many unemployed people from registering with the government recruitment offices.

At the same time, the Civil Service Commission reported a significant increase in the number of employment applications, where the number rose from 7,175 in 1981 to 23,800 in 1985, and then reached between 30,000 and 35,000 by the end of 1986. These figures indicate an increase in unemployment among the most educated segments of the work force, including holders of intermediate and university degrees.

The decline in the external demand for Jordanian labour was one of the reasons for the worsening of the unemployment problem, in addition to the emergence of a reverse migration wave of Jordanian labour expatriates in the Gulf countries. According to official sources, the unemployment rate during the years 1983/1985 was estimated between 7% and 9% of the total work force, while unofficial estimates indicate that the unemployment rate may have reached double these figures.

In addition to the high unemployment rate, the economic recession led to a radical redistribution of the national income in favor of the upper social categories, i.e., those who hold the largest share of ownership and capital returns, at the expense of wage income. As a result, the share of wages and salaries from the gross domestic product declined during the period 1981/1985. The government also adopted

a policy to freeze the salaries of state employees, and even reduce the salaries for new employees. In addition authorities pushed for a decline in the level of wages for workers in the private sector.

Wages of private sector workers increased during the 1970s. However, by the end of the 1980s, the wages no longer provided for the same purchasing power as previously. This was reflected in the decline of the number of collective bargaining agreements concluded annually, to the point where they did not exceed the number of fingers of one hand at the end of the 1980s.

Furthermore, many private sector companies refused to extend existing collective bargaining agreements and even reneged on benefits and rights previously acquired by workers. Mass dismissal of workers occurred with the aim of employers to eliminate previously established employment standards, and replace the dismissed workers with new employees at much lower wages and with less benefits.

Amid this economic decline, the government authorities did not refrain from using unemployment and foreign labour as tools to pressure the local work force, in order to maintain a low level of wages and enable large capital to achieve additional profits.

Living costs were continuously rising during the 1980s. Particularly noticeable were increases in the prices of basic commodities consumed by poor families with limited income, such as food, clothing and shoe prices, housing rents, and transportation and communication costs. The impact of inflation was exacerbated as it coincided with a drop of wage levels and fixed incomes, the rise in unemployment rates, and the decline in secondary employment opportunities.



87. From a union trip including Kawthar Abdul Aziz, Khozama, Fahmi Al-Katout, and Fathallah Al-Omrani in the late 1970s
(from Trade Unionist Fathallah Al-Omrani Collection).

The Jordanian government perceived the economic and financial crisis in the second half of the 1980s as a temporary problem that did not require major changes in economic and financial policies. Instead of adapting to the decline in Arab and international financial aid, the government turned to borrowing more from international and local commercial sources, and continued to expand current spending, assuming that Arab aid would return soon.

As the crisis went on, the size of the public external debt increased significantly and its composition changed, with the proportion of debt from commercial loans increased, along with the burden of repaying this debt instalments and the interest thereof. The domestic public debt also increased, with the share from commercial banks dominating. As a result, the policy of expanding government spending implied a continuous deficit in the balance of payments, as the traditional financial resources, such as Arab aid monies, remittances from Jordanian workers abroad, and the decline in the value of exports dwindled.

By the end of 1988, the government of Zaid al-Rifa'i declared Jordan's inability to repay its external debts. This led to the collapse of the Jordanian dinar's exchange rate with its value dropping to less than half of what it had been in the previous months. Under these circumstances, the government requested assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to reschedule Jordan's external debts.

This resulted in the imposition of a strict austerity program, which included cutting government subsidies on fuel, livestock feed, and some other consumer goods. This ignited a large popular protest movement in southern Jordan in April 1989, soon turning into a country-wide wave of political demonstrations calling for the abolition of martial law and exceptional powers, the arrest and trial of those responsible for corruption and the economic crisis, the conduct of free parliamentary elections, and the restoration of political and civil rights and freedoms.

The Labour Movement between the “Anvil” of Living Pressures and the “Hammer” of Government Interference

Returning to the labour movement, the trade union leaders who kept their independent from the influence of government authorities met in 1976 to discuss the deterioration in living conditions of the working class and the rise in interference by state security agencies in trade union affairs. After exchanging views and discussing the difficult circumstances faced by the working class and the persecution, dismissal, and arrest of trade unionists, they decided to form the “Trade Union Alliance for the Defense of Workers’ Rights,” and published a statement signed by 39 trade union leaders containing six demands on how to improve workers’ working and living conditions.

(See the text of the statement in Box 9).

Between October 23 and 26, 1978, the third labour conference of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) was held, coming 12 years after the second conference of 1966. This conference was attended by 170 members of the executives of the 17 unions registered with the Federation. The conference constituted an important event in the history of the Jordanian labour movement, as it was preceded by extensive preparations that included the preparation of working papers on the overall situation in the country, the Labour Law, the internal organisation of the Federation, in addition to issues of wages, industrial relations, and migration.

The conference came out with a set of advanced recommendations, the most prominent of which was guaranteeing for all workers the freedom of association and the right to join a trade union, including agricultural workers and day labourers in state entities, and abolishing the differences between public and private sector employment. The conference also called for the abolition of the restrictions imposed on the freedom of association and the right to join a trade union which gave the authorities the means to prevent trade unionists from performing their tasks in defence of workers or running for elections, gave the authorities the right to interfere in the organisation of trade unions, dissolve them or prevent their establishment. The conference’s recommendations included a demand for equal rights and equal pay of women, as well as the prohibition of their dismissal in case of marriage. In addition, the

recommendations demanded an increase in the length of annual leave, linking its duration to years of service.

The conference’s recommendations also included demands for wage increases to be linked inflation, for the state’s impartiality in collective labour disputes, and for lifting restrictions on workers’ strikes. The conference further called for preventing the replacement of Jordanian workers with foreign workers, for expanding the scope of social security, to include health insurance and unemployment insurance.

On the internal level, the conference recommended amending the internal system of the Federation to avoid the paralysis of its bodies, especially the General Council, and determining the number of representatives in the Council at six for each union.

The leaders of the trade unions loyal to the state authorities did not publicly oppose these demands, but their representatives obstructed the elaboration of recommendations for the enactment of these demands by not attending the meetings of the committee that had been set-up for this purpose.

On the other hand, this period is marked by a major achievement for the Jordanian labour movement, namely the adoption of the Social Security Law, number 30 of 1978. It provided for old-age, disability, work injury and death insurance.

On May 1, 1980, the first stage of the implementation of the Social Security Law began in large enterprises, followed by medium sized enterprises that employ 50 workers or more. At the end of 1981, the social security insurances was extended to public institutions and government departments not covered by the civil service retirement scheme. By the end of the same year, the social security insurances also included workers in city, town and village councils. At the beginning of January 1982, the Social Security Law was extended to non-military personnel in the armed forces and security agencies. At the beginning of June 1987, the law covered workers in small enterprises which employ five workers or more.

However, the law did not include the most important types of social insurance, namely health insurance for workers and their families, and unemployment insurance.



88. From right: Zakaria Hamdan, Secretary General of the Nablus Federation; Ahed Qantar, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism; Abdul Rahman Al-Majali, President of the Natural Resources Authority; Musa Qwaider, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing; Khalil Abukharmah, President of the General Trade Union of Public Services; and Sami Hassan Mansour, President of the General Trade Union of Land Transport Employees and Mechanics (from Trade Unionist Khalil Abukharmah Collection).

General Unions' Elections 1988/1989

The trade union elections cycle for the years 1988/1989 were marred by direct state security interference, which constituted far reaching violations of trade union rights. In this cycle, the democratic electoral process significantly declined, as it was limited to a small number of trade unions. Out of the 17 unions affiliated with the Federation, only five unions conducted elections to choose their executives, while other unions refrained from conducting elections, and some of them organised elections only partially. As a result, about half of the unions did not conduct any elections, and the existing executives of those unions announced their victory by acclamation without holding any elections.

It is under these difficult circumstances that the Jordanian labour movement from the mid-1980s onward was confronted with one of the most severe economic crises in the country's history. Later on in April 1989 this crisis provoked a large and spontaneous popular uprising led by land transport drivers and starting from the city of Maan in southern Jordan. It spread rapidly first amongst the southern cities before extending to the central and northern parts of Jordan.

As different groups in society involved themselves with this uprising, strong demands for change emerged, such as the restoration of political and civil rights and freedoms, lifting the ban on political parties and resuming parliamentary life by conducting free and fair elections. Additionally, there were strong demands for accountability of officials responsible for corruption as well as those who were behind decisions that led to the economic crisis and to the collapse of the Jordanian dinar's exchange rate. Eventually, the demonstrations succeeded to propel democratic change and lead the way to elections in November 1989. However, the leadership of the GFJTU and many other trade union leaders did not join the uprising.



89. Elections of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions on April 3, 1978
(from the collection of the Department of the National Library, Jordan News Agency - Petra).



90. Jordanian delegation participating in the ILO meeting. In the photo from left is Ahed Qantar, President of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (1974-76). Representatives of the Jordanian government and labour organizations also appear in the photo (from Trade Unionist Ahed Qantar collection).



91. The second training course on labour force and employment information, 1983
(from the collection of National Library).



92. A commemorative photo of a group of trade union leaders taken in the mid-1970s
(from the collection of trade unionist Ahed Qantar).



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93. A Jordanian labour delegation on an official visit to the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) after the restoration of trade union relations between Jordan and Egypt in 1984.
From right: Khalil Abukharmah, Fawzi Doso, Mohammad Samih, Abdul Halim Khaddam, Abdul Razzaq Mohammad Saeed, Mahmoud Herzallah, and Khalaf Atallah
(from Trade Unionist Khalil Abukharmah Collection).

The Formation of a Trade Union Alliance to defend the Workers' Rights

In mid-1976, a number of trade union leaders and activists met to discuss the conditions of Jordanian workers and the challenges they face, and to find the best way to improve their plight. Fahmi Al-Katout speaks about what was discussed in this meeting, saying:

“Participants discussed the harsh reality of the working class, including rising in inflation, the emigration of skilled workers leaving the country because of the inadequacy between wages and the cost of living, and the overdue reform of the Labour Law to match with the developments in industrial relations and suit the increasing diversity work and employment types. They also addressed the interference by security agencies in trade union internal affairs and the arbitrary dismissal of activists. To address these issues, the participants developed a program of action to achieve a number of objectives. Out of a sense of responsibility, a genuine commitment emerged among the activists and leaders of the labour movement to make real progress.”

The most urgent objectives they agreed upon were:

1. Improving the living conditions of workers: through increasing wages, raising the proportion of end-of-service compensation and benefits in cases of injury or death, and establishing a savings fund for workers, with the demand to set a minimum wage linked to the rise in prices and housing rents.
2. Establishing a comprehensive health insurance to benefit both workers and their families.
3. Establishing a social security fund with participation of workers in determining and managing its operations.
4. Adopting a modern Labour Law by Parliament to regulate the relationship between workers and employers.
5. Solving the housing problem by providing workers' housing, and securing transportation to and from work sites.
6. Enhancing occupational safety by providing sufficient health and safety devices in factories, and maintaining a clean and safe work environment.

The document also addressed other aspects related to trade union, cultural, and social work, including vitalising trade union work, organising all workers in trade unions, supporting workers right and interests, and providing full support for the Palestinian cause and all forms of struggle aimed at realising the Palestinian people's right to self-determination on their land. The document was signed by 39 trade unionists. However, it should be noted that some prominent trade union leaders were absent from the meeting due to their detention. Amongst the signatories were:

- Ahed Qintar, the president then of the trade union of workers in air transport.
- Muhammad Sami, the president then of the trade union of workers in Food Industry.
- Salim Hijazeen, the president then of the trade union of workers in of Health Services.
- Jamal Al-Najdawi, the president then of the trade union of workers in Petrochemicals.
- Abdul Qadir Al-Bakri, the president then of the trade union of workers in printing.
- Haider Rasheed, the president then of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Abdul Rahman Al-Majali, the president then of the trade union of workers in the Natural Resources Authority.
- Muhammad Abu Zaina, the president then of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.
- Wajeeh Araba, secretary of the trade union of workers in of Health Services.
- Muhammad Al-Qaimari, the president then of the Union of Workers in private education.
- Khazima Kayali, secretary of the union committee in the tailoring branch.
- Muqbel Al-Mumani, secretary of the union committee in one of the production companies.
- Shawqi Saleem, secretary of the union committee in the tanning branch.
- Muhammad Rasheed Obaid, secretary of the union committee for workers in commercial establishments.
- Jawdat Uthman, member of the administrative body of the trade union of workers in Food Industry.
- Muhammad Abu Sham'a, former president of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Ahmad Aal-Nimri, secretary of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Yousef Al-Hourani, vice president of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Musa Al-Shakhshir, member of the administrative body of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Fahmi Al-Katout, member of the administrative body of the Commercial Establishments Workers' Union.
- Akram Al-Nimri, former secretary of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.



94. President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, Haidar Rashid, giving a speech at a ceremony to support and endorse candidate Yaqoub Ziyadin, in 1989, in the House of Representatives elections (from Trade Unionist Haidar Rashid Collection).

- Ziyad Al-Saqa, member of the administrative body of the trade union of workers in Banks, Insurance, and Accounting.
- Nimer Abu Atiyah, former president of the trade union of workers in leather industries.
- Issa Khashan, member of the administrative body of the trade union of workers in Health Services.
- Eugenie Haddad, member of the Private Education Committee.
- Hassan Awwad, member of the administrative body of the Food Industry Workers' Union.
- Muhammad Hamdan, vice president of the UNRWA Staff Union.
- Musa Al-Omari, member of the administrative body of the General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals.
- Muhammad Abdul Hafiz, member of the administrative body of the Commercial Establishments Workers' Union.
- Asata Al-Omari, member of the administrative body of the Production Branch.
- Muhammad Abdul Aziz, secretary of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.
- Ali Rida, member of the administrative body of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.
- Ali Qasim, member of the administrative body of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.
- Nasser Hamdi, member of the administrative body of the trade union for workers in printing.
- Adeeb al-Qabali, member of the administrative body of the Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.
- Nimer Musleh, secretary of the Phosphate Mines Company Workers Union.
- Yousef al-Atti, president of the committee of workers at the Anton Dababneh Foundation in the phosphate sector.

The Economic Crisis and its Impact on the Working Class

After a decade of rapid economic growth between 1973 and 1982, Jordan witnessed a gradual decline. By the end of the 1980s, this downward trend turned into a major economic crisis that involved financial and monetary aspects. The most prominent manifestation of the crisis was the deterioration in the exchange rate of the Jordanian Dinar against the US dollar, as the Dinar lost more than half of its value. There was also a surge in inflation, which undermined the purchasing power of the Dinar and greatly affected the lives of citizens. At the same time, the state stopped paying its foreign debts, which prompted the government to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reschedule the debts and adopt long-term economic adjustment programs, this involved privatizing state-owned enterprises and the government withdrawing from its leading role in social and economic policies.

The low-income groups, especially the working class, were the hardest hit by this crisis. The average per capita income fell from \$1,800 in the early 1980s to less than \$1,200 in 1988, and then fell to less than \$750 in 1989 due to the collapse in purchasing power of the Jordanian Dinar.

During the last years of the 1980s, the gap between social classes increased significantly. The top 5% of the population controlled 30% of the national income, while 15% of the population received only 12% of the national income, and 40% of the population's share of the national income was only 15%. This disparity forced the vast majority of citizens to live in poverty or barely meet their basic needs.

The economic crisis which Jordan went through during that period had a major social impact on the lower and middle classes. The downturn resulted in the redistribution of national income to the detriment of wage earners. While the labour share of GDP had grown well by 71% between 1971 and 1975, and by an astonishing 141.5% between 1976 and 1980, this share dropped significantly between 1981 and 1985, where it did not exceed 44.5% despite the increase in the number of workers. At the same time, the government adopted a policy of freezing public servants' salaries by 20% to 30%, while the cost of living rose by 30% between 1980 and 1985.

Private sector workers also lost many of the benefits they had enjoyed during the 1970s and early 1980s. With this decline, and as a result of the redistribution of national income at the expense of the lower and middle classes, the scope of absolute and relative poverty expanded in the Jordanian society. In the mid-1980s, a government study showed that 20.5% of the population lived on an income of less than JoD100 a month.

95. From a labour trip to the Dead Sea in the late 1970s (from Fathallah Al-Omrani Collection).





96. A labour demonstration in front of Petra Bank building, In 1990, on the occasion of workers' strike at the Bank, after it had financial difficulties and entered into the liquidation phase (from Trade Unionist Samara Al-Khatib collection).





Chapter 9:
**The Jordanian Labour Movement in the Era
of Political Liberalisation (1989/1999)**

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The Jordanian Labour Movement in the Era of Political Liberalisation (1989/1999)

In the 1990s, Jordan faced major challenges that deeply affected the working class and the labour movement. The first of these challenges was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, paved the way for the unification of Germany the following year, and the end of the Cold War. This was followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in late 1991, and the independence of 15 republics that had been part of it.

This major transformation led to a wave of ideological reviews among the ranks of the communist movement and leftist parties in Jordan. As a result, many leftist organisations split and the influence of the left-wing politics in the labour movement declined, as well as a decline in the influence their members had in the trade unions for many years.

On the other hand, there was no longer an international trade union block competing with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to which most Arab trade unions were affiliated, including the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), after decades of being a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions.

The second event that severely affected Jordan economically and socially was Iraq's occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and then the outbreak of the Second Gulf War, where the United States led an international alliance to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Jordan did not participate in this alliance, but it was affected by it, as more than 300,000 Jordanian expatriates from the Gulf were displaced, and this displacement was considered the third largest forced immigration witnessed by Jordan after the wars of 1948 and 1967.

The return of expatriates had a significant impact on the Jordanian economy, as Jordan lost the financial remittances that represented the second source of hard currency after export revenues. The Gulf states were also closed to Jordanian exports, and annual financial aid from the Gulf countries stopped, which increased the deficit in the general budget and the balance of payments. According to the Inter-Arab Investment Guarantees Corporation, Jordan's losses due to the Second Gulf War were estimated at more than two billion US dollars in 1990.

However, the savings of returning expatriates contributed to the revival of the Jordanian economy in the following years, and succeeded in partly compensating for the shortfall in financial aid from the Gulf states.

With respect to the labour movement, the beginning of the 1990s brought about a reconciliation between the leadership of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions and the trade union leaders who had left for Damascus in the 1970's claiming to constitute the "legitimate leadership" of the GFJTU.

Under the mediation of International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, the two-decade long isolation of the Jordanian labour movement ended.

That period also saw the birth of the "Democratic Labour Union Bloc," which included four unions led by the Communist Party, in an effort to rebalance the structure of the GFJTU. However, negotiations between the two arms of the labour movement failed to achieve practical results as the state authorities interfered in some unions, which led to the dismantling of the Democratic Labour Union Bloc and the reduction in the number of unions independent from the government.



97. Workers' strike at Petra Bank in 1990
(from Trade Unionist Samara Al-Khatib collection).



98. Workers' strike at Petra Bank in 1990, demanding the protection of workers' rights following the decision to liquidate the bank
(from Trade Unionist Samara Al-Khatib collection).

The Fourth Conference of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions 1994

At the end of the 1980s, with the beginning of democratic liberalisation in Jordan and the 1989 parliamentary elections, it was hoped that the labour movement would benefit from this development, and effectively address the sufferings of the working class particularly affected by the economic crisis, rising prices, and the decline in the value of the dinar. However, the GFJTU did not act to improve the living and working conditions of workers or raise demands for compensating workers for the losses they incurred during the 1980s. On the contrary, the Federation supported the introduction of a value added tax in general commercial transactions, which is one of the most harmful taxes to consumers with low incomes as is the case for most workers.

The deterioration of the GFJTU reached its ultimate stage during the 1990s with the fourth conference of the Federation, which was held from October 11 to 13, 1994. This was the first conference to be held since the third conference in 1978. Indeed, despite the fact that a conference was supposed to be organised every four years it had been 16 years since the last conference

During the fourth conference, a new statute for the GFJTU was adopted which gave the executive of the Federation almost complete control over the General Council and the its affiliates. The General Council's role became purely advisory, while the term of office of the administrative bodies of the unions and the Federation were extended from two to

four years. The Executive Body also obtained extensive powers that allowed it to intervene in the internal affairs of the affiliates, including the establishment of investigation committees and imposing penalties including the power to suspend the administrative bodies of the affiliates.

Furthermore, the conference imposed a unified administrative organisation on all member affiliates, which restricted their ability to manage their own affairs. This included obliging affiliates to receive the Federation's approval for candidates standing for their elections. Also, the Federation took over the supervision of and the counting votes in affiliates' elections. According to the unified administrative organisation, the Federation had the powers related to the member unions, including supervising the elections of the branches by appointing an electoral committee overseeing the counting and announcing the results of elections. Also, the Federation was to receive complaints on the elections and rule on objections from losing candidates.

In the end, the adoption of the Statute of the GFJTU and the Standard Internal System of Unions" strengthened the trade union leadership aligned to government authorities and increased their control over the Federation and its affiliates. This situation, of course, sparked protests and criticisms within the labour movement, considering these changes an attempt to limit the autonomy of trade unions and to restrict their ability to defend workers' interests.



99. A group of members at the General Assembly of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity surrounding Waleed Al-Khayyat, President of the Trade Union (from Trade Unionist Ali Al-Hadid Collection).

100. The platform of the Fourth Congress of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), 1994. From right to left: Khaled Shraim, Secretary General of the GFJTU, Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Majali, Prime Minister, and Abdul Halim Khaddam, Deputy Secretary General of GFJTU (from Trade Unionist Khaled Shraim Collection).



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101. General Assembly meeting of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, 1996 (from Trade Unionist Ali Al-Hadid Collection).



Lawyers for Labour Justice

During the 1950s and the 1960s, the Jordanian labour movement was supported by many lawyers and legal experts who stood by the working class in its struggle for its rights to organize and improve the standard of living. Although it is challenging to list all the names, some prominent figures who supported workers and contributed to building trade unions cannot be overlooked.

Suleiman Al-Hadidi

One of the most prominent figures is lawyer Suleiman Al-Hadidi, who was one of the founders of the Jordan Bar Association in 1950 and held the position of President of the Jordan Bar Association for about 12 years between 1967 and 1985. Al-Hadidi played an important advisory role for a number of trade unionists in the early 1950s to obtain the right to organize, and contributed to drafting the by-laws of the emerging unions. Zaki Al-Sheikh Yassin, founder of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers, recalled in one of his press interviews with the late Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari, the role played by Al-Hadidi in this regard.

He was born in As-Salt in 1926 and passed away in 1993. He was also the publisher of “Al-Yaqzah” weekly newspaper. He ran for parliament twice, in 1954 and 1956, but he did not win. He left Jordan in 1957 after the dismissal of Suleiman Al-Nabulsi’s government. In 1971, he served as Minister of Interior in Abdul Munim Rifai’s government, which was formed to restore stability in the country after the clashes that took place between the Jordanian army and the *fedayeen* organizations in 1970.

Shafiq Irshidat

Shafiq Irshidat was one of the first human rights activists and members of the Jordanian parliament who stood by the workers and supported their struggle, especially in their quest to obtain the right to organize. Irshidat, who founded “Al-Mithaq” newspaper in 1949, played a prominent role in defending workers’ rights. His newspaper did not hesitate to criticize and condemn the measures that aimed to dissolve the branches of the Palestinian Arab Workers’ Society in the West Bank in the early 1950s. The newspaper also supported the establishment of a drivers’ trade union in Irbid Governorate in the late 1940s.

Irshidat was born in 1918 and passed away in 1978. He was elected to the first House of Representatives in 1947, and was re-elected as a representative of Irbid in 1950 and 1956. In 1952, he became the president of the Jordan Bar Association, succeeding the founding president, Abdul Latif Salah. He then served as Minister of Justice and Transportation in Fawzi Al-Mulki’s government between 1953 and 1954. In 1954, he was among the founders of the National Socialist Party with Suleiman Al-Nabulsi and others, and was a member of the party’s Central Committee. In addition to his human rights, parliamentary and political activities, Irshidat was one of the founders of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) in 1954, and was elected its supervisor.

Abdullah Al-Rimawi

Abdullah Al-Rimawi, born in Jerusalem in 1920 and passed away in 1980, was a prominent politician, legal expert and a representative for Jerusalem in the Jordanian Parliament twice during the first half of the 1950s. He played an important role in supporting workers’ rights, providing advice and political support to the Trade Union Council in Nablus, an affiliate of

the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society to counter attempts to dissolve the Society. Al-Rimawi continued his efforts in the Jordanian parliament to defend the right of workers to establish their own trade union organizations, and to pass the first Trade Union Law in Jordan.

Al-Rimawi graduated with a BSc in natural science from the American University of Beirut in 1940. Then, he studied law at the University of London, and graduated in 1944. He was one of the founders of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, Jordan branch, and served as the party's secretary. He served as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the government of Suleiman Al-Nabulsi (1956-1957). After the government was dismissed, he moved to Damascus. Following Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic in 1961, Al-Rimawi broke away from the Baath Party and founded the Nasserist-oriented "United Arab Movement". He returned to Jordan in 1970 to continue his work as a lawyer, and in 1978, he was elected a member of the first Jordanian Consultative Council (JCC).

Mohammed Ayyash Milhem

Lawyer Mohammed Ayyash Milhem was born in Halhul, Hebron Governorate, in 1927 and passed away in Amman in 2015. He received his Bachelor's degree in Law from the University of Leeds in London in 1949, and completed his Master's degree from the same university in 1950. Milhem was a prominent lawyer and human rights activist, interested in social, trade union and national work. He founded many civil society organizations.

Mulhim wrote several books, including "*Construction Contracts*", "*In the Midst of Life*" (an autobiography), "*Explanation of the Supreme Court's Advisory Opinion on the Apartheid Wall*", "*The Apartheid Wall in Palestine*", and "*In Life and*

Politics 1990-2014".

One of his most notable achievements was in 1961, when he successfully defended the right of bank employees to establish a union. This legal ruling was a victory for the labour movement. The Supreme Court supported the employees' demand, which revived the trade union action, despite the martial law at the time.

In addition, Milhem contributed to the establishment of several trade unions and municipal councils in Jordan. In Palestine, he contributed to the establishment of Palestine Lawyers Union and the Anti-Apartheid Wall Committee in Palestine.

Odai Madanat

Lawyer and short story writer Odai Madanat was born in 1938 and passed away in Amman in 2016. He studied law at the University of Damascus, and from the beginning of his career, he chose to defend workers' rights and gains. He was a legal advisor to many trade unions, and played an important role in supporting workers before the Labour Court and other courts in general. He was known for providing *pro bono* legal services in many occasions, and he published legal studies on the Labour Law, Social Security Law and everything related to labour rights.

Alongside his legal career, Madanat was a short story writer and novelist. His literary career started in 1983. Over the next three decades, he published several short story collections and novels, including "*The Twelfth Eccentric Patient*," "*Good Morning, Neighbor*," "*The Intruder*," "*A Stormy Night*," "*Streets of the Soul*," "*Those Roads*," and "*Miss Izdihar and I*," in addition to literary criticism.

The Struggle for the Adoption of the Labour and Social Security Laws

In 1996, the new Labour Law No. 8 was adopted to replace the old Labour Law No. 21 of 1960. However, this new law faced opposition from the labour movement. The leadership of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions expressed reservations about twenty out of 142 articles included in the law. The concerns expressed focused on several key points:

- Article 31 granted the employer the right to terminate or suspend permanent employees, either partially or completely, if economic or technical circumstances, such as reducing the size of the work force or changing the production system required it. Despite the provision that the disposition of this article was subject to a tripartite committee verifying the validity of the procedures, it was used as a pretext to arbitrarily dismiss workers without any justifiable reasons. Article 23 also gave the employer the right to dismiss the worker without the obligation to provide any reasons.
- The law did not explicitly state the equality of wages between men and women, despite Jordan's ratification of numerous international conventions to this effect or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Trade unionists and human rights activists also emphasized the need for instructions and procedures to ensure the proper application of the law, especially regarding work place inspection at companies to ensure compliance with safety and health conditions, and monitoring the work of women, children, and foreign workers. They also emphasized the need to comply with the conditions of employing foreign labour, including obtaining work permits, and ensuring that workers are engaged in authorized professions.

The unions also demanded the amendment of the Social Security Law adopted in 1978, which began to be implemented in 1980. They pointed out that the two most important types of insurance stipulated by the law were not enacted, namely health insurance for the worker and his family, and unemployment insurance. Social security was limited to old-age, disability, and death insurance only, while some major companies provided health insurance for their workers at an additional cost.

In the 1990s, clear problems emerged in the application of the Social Security Law, as not all companies did register their employees in the Social Security Fund, and some employers did not transfer the contributions deducted from the workers' wages to the Fund. Also, some employers did not declare the actual salary of the workers, in an attempt to reduce the percentage due by them to the worker's wage. One of the main objections of the trade unions to the Social Security Law was the way the retirement pay was calculated, which according to Article 42, paragraph (b), the retirement pay is calculated based on 1/50 of the worker's average monthly wage during the last two years of his/her work, while the unions demanded that the calculation should be based on 1/36 of the worker's average monthly wage during the last two years of his/her work.

In December 2000, the government submitted a draft amendment to the Social Security Law to the House of Representatives, in response to the demands of the labour movement. The amendments included expanding the coverage of social security to include self-employed workers as well as the family members of small business owner, and to allow Jordanians working abroad to join the Social Security Fund. Also, the amendment added the right for heirs of someone who died as a result of a work accident to receive 60% of his salary paid by social security. In addition, the amendment reducing the qualification for the entitlement to a retirement pay to from 120 months to 60 months of work.

The draft amendment responded to some of the trade unions' demands, as the retirement calculation became based on 1/40 instead of 1/50 of the salary, and with a passage being added setting early retirement at the age of 45. However, the subscription period was raised from 15 years to 18 years. In addition, the amendment stipulated the establishment of an independent investment body to manage the funds of the Social Security Corporation. However, the amendments did not provide for an expansion in the risks covered by the insurance to include health and unemployment insurance.

During the second half of the 1990s, Jordan experienced a decline in economic growth and a resurgence of the political crisis which was ignited by the amendment of the Law on the



102. A team of trade unionists participating in a workshop on the Social Security Law, with Salem Hijazin, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Health Services, in the middle of the front row (from Trade Unionist Salem Hijazin Collection).

Press and Publications which constituted a limitation of civil and political rights in Jordan. These restrictions of public freedoms pushed opposition parties and leaders of the professional associations to boycott the 1997 general elections for the 13th House of Representatives.

At the same time, new crises emerged regarding government performance, the most prominent of which was caused by the pollution of drinking water. This prompted the King Hussein to publish a letter to then Prime Minister Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Majali whilst he was receiving treatment in the United States. In this message the King pointed at the severe manifestations of deterioration in the government. After that, a new government

was formed under the leadership of Dr. Fayez Al-Tarawneh in an attempt to calm the situation.

After the death of King Hussein and the accession of King Abdullah II to the throne in 1999, the growth rate of the gross domestic product at constant prices was around 1.6%, indicating the continued decline in per capita income and the deterioration of the standard of living. In the same year, the unemployment rate among Jordanians over the age of 15 reached 15.6%, where the unemployment rate among males was 12.9% and among females was 30.9%. However, other studies indicated that the actual unemployment rate in Jordan was much higher.

Memorandum of the Labour Movement to King Hussein On the occasion of the April 1989 protests

On June 18, 1989, the late King Hussein bin Talal received a delegation representing the Jordanian labour movement, as part of his meetings with civil society organizations, following the popular protests that took place in April 1989. During the meeting, the delegation presented the King with a written memorandum explaining the problems facing the working class and listing its demands. The memorandum stated:

“Opening channels of dialogue with various sectors of the people, including the labour movement, which represents the largest segment of Jordanian society and bears the greatest burden in confronting the economic crisis that our country is going through, is a very important step. This dialogue has always been a basic demand of the trade union movement.”

The trade union and labour movement in Jordan faces many challenges and problems, which can be summarized in the following main points:

Labour Law: The current law was enacted in 1960 and is no longer relevant to the current circumstances. In 1978, Your Majesty ordered the introduction of a new and advanced labour law on the occasion of Labour Day, but it has not been implemented yet.

Migrant labour: Migrant labour has become a major competitor to Jordanian workers, which makes it necessary to engage trade unions in organizing the employment process. This would ensure the priority of work and a decent living for Jordanian workers.

Unemployment: Unemployment is on the rise and spans

across all sectors without exception. This requires appropriate solutions with the participation of the trade union movement. The problems of high cost of living, and rising prices and taxes are also worsening, in addition to mass layoffs, arbitrary dismissal and reduction of workers' wages.

Freedom of Association: The trade union movement faces major challenges due to the interference of the security services in its internal affairs. This interference manifested in preventing many trade unionists from running for trade union positions, as well as preventing them from traveling, confiscating their passports, depriving them of the right to work, and persecuting them at their workplaces. Many of our fellow trade unionists are still under arrest, despite Your Majesty's directives to release all those who were detained in the recent events. The latest example of this interference occurred just before our meeting with Your Majesty today. The President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Health Services was prevented from attending this meeting with Your Majesty, while presidents of other trade unions are present.

With regard to the parliamentary elections, and after Your Majesty's speech about amending the electoral law to ensure representation of all segments of society, the working class hopes to have its representatives in the House of Representatives. This has been the case in many Arab and other countries. We hope that these issues will receive Your Majesty's attention and consideration. Peace be upon you.

Amman, June 18, 1989

Source: Al Urdun Al Jadid Magazine, Issue 14, Year 6, summer 1989, pp. 86/87



103. Jordan Electric Power Company (JEPCO) workers congratulate the late King Hussein on his safe return after his medical trip (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity).

104. Jordan Electric Power Company (JEPCO) workers protesting in 2014
in front of the Company's building
(from the Collection of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party "Hashd").



**Chapter 10:
The Labour Movement in the Context of
Jordan's Integration into the Global Economy
(1999/2007)**



Chapter 10:

The Labour Movement in the Context of Jordan's Integration into the Global Economy (1999/2007)

When King Abdullah II ascended the throne in June 1999, the Jordanian state focused primarily on economic reform and liberalisation, while political reforms were postponed. This approach was motivated by the decline in economic growth rates during the second half of the 1990s, and even the occurrence of recession in some years.

In response to the immense wave of Arab and international expressions of sympathy following the death of King Hussein, King Abdullah II embarked on a world tour in which he called on creditor countries to alleviate the debt burden of Jordan, either by cancelling debts or converting them into equity.

As part of the countries steps to integrate into the global economy, Jordan signed the protocol of accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 1999, followed by the signing of a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States in 2001. The partnership agreement with the European Union entered into force on May 1, 2002. Jordan also signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on March 17, 1999, to extend an economic support program for further three years, which focused on structural adjustment, privatization, and trade liberalisation.

On the domestic front, the King met with 180 managers and representatives from the public and private sectors on November 26, 1999, to discuss economic growth initiatives. This meeting resulted in 40 recommendations that focused on policies of liberalisation, financial and administrative reform as well as strengthening of higher education. The meeting also led to the formation of an “Economic Adviso-

ry Council” under the direct supervision of the King, which included 20 members, 17 of whom represented the private sector and 3 the public sector.

In 2000, the “Privatization Law” was adopted as legal basis for the privatization of about thirty entities and companies, including the cement, phosphate, and Arab potash companies, the Royal Jordanian Airline, the Jordanian Telecommunications Company, and electricity generation and distribution companies. The majority of the proceeds from privatization were used to repay or restructure government debts. Less than 12% were allocated to finance some development projects, including the “Economic and Social Transformation Program”. This sparked a lot of controversy. Indeed, a subsequent audit revealed irregularities in the implementation of the privatization of some major companies, such as the electricity generation company, the cement company, and the phosphate mines company. In these cases the privatization procedure had been flawed.

With unemployment becoming an increasing problem, the Jordanian government began efforts in 1999 to regulate the labour market and control the employment of foreign labour in such a way that it would only be allowed in cases where no national could be employed. As a consequence, non-Jordanian workers were excluded from 15 professional categories. Also, the government took the decision to set a minimum wage of 80 Jordanian dinars. However, economic growth rates remained low and the set of policy reforms reform policies, which were expected to increase the demand for labour by forty thousand jobs annually in the years from 1999 to 2003 remained without significant effect.



105. General Assembly meeting of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, 2007
(from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity).



106. The Sixth Congress of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, 2006.
The photo shows trade unionists Haider Rashid and Samara Al-Khatib 3rd and the 5th from the left
(from Trade Unionist Samara Al-Khatib Collection).

During the first decade of the new millennium, the weakness of the Jordanian economy persisted and it only grew at low rates. With the work force growing at the same time this led to an increase in unemployment and poverty rates. Poverty rates ranged between 14.2% in 2002 and 13.9% in 2008. Despite the efforts made to reduce poverty, 14 localities were newly classified as poverty areas in 2008, while only 4 localities were taken of the list of poverty areas. The poverty rate in these localities reached up to 31.7% of the total population.

The accession of King Abdullah II to the throne coincided with regional developments that had a negative impact on economic and political conditions especially affecting fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. First of these developments was the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000, followed by the attack by “Al-Qaeda” against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. After that came the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003. The United States also declared the war on terrorism as a top priority, launching a war against the Taliban and occupying Afghanistan for twenty years (2001-2021) before the Taliban eventually regained control of the country.

The Jordanian government argued that because of these regional and international developments it was forced to postpone the elections of the 14th House of Representatives, which had been scheduled for 2001. The following year, 2002, saw the amendment of the Public Assemblies Act, which restricted the rights to organise gatherings and

demonstrations by making it mandatory to obtain prior approval from the Governor. The registration of private associations and civil society organisations was also rendered more difficult.

Under the banner of combating terrorism, other measures were introduced that led to the arrest of dozens of activists who were labelled fundamentalists. The tension between opposition forces and the political establishment rose significantly after the US invasion and occupation of Iraq as there was mounting criticism of the Jordanian’s government position on the US war in Iraq.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003 had severe consequences for the Jordanian economy. It implied the end of preferential treatment for Jordanian exports in Iraq as well as the loss of the Iraqi market which had been the largest market for Jordanian industrial and agricultural exports. Also, it ended the low-priced oil imports from Iraq. At the same time, the number of Iraqis fleeing their country and seeking refuge in Jordan doubled. This put great pressure on the country’s infrastructure, water resources, health and educational services.

In general, these developments were detrimental to the general situation in Jordan and had negative effects on the labour market. Working conditions deteriorated, job stability declined, cases of arbitrary dismissal increased, and unemployment rates rose, especially with the increasing number of migrant workers. All this led to a significant increase in industrial actions and collective labour disputes.



107. Part of the General Assembly meeting of the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism, 2000
(from the website of the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism).



108. Part of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity elections, 2002
(from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity).

The Escalation of Industrial Actions and Collective Labour Disputes

During the first decade of 2000's, economic and social tension increased significantly as indicated by the steep rise in the number of industrial actions and collective labour disputes. In 2004 and 2005, the daily press recorded 37 and 38 incidences of industrial actions and collective labour disputes, respectively. This upward trend continued in the following two years (2006 and 2007), when the number of industrial actions and collective labour disputes reached 65 in 2006, and the industrial actions and collective labour disputes in the first nine months of 2007 exceeded the total recorded of the previous year, reaching 77 incidences of industrial actions and collective labour disputes.

One of the most prominent features of the industrial actions and collective labour disputes in this period was the increase in threats of taking strike actions or effective strikes taking place. In addition, workers resorted to demonstrations at work sites and at the Amman head offices of major companies. In 2004, nine strikes and demonstrations took place. In 2005 the number decreased to three, then increased in 2006 to an unprecedented number of strikes and demonstrations, with eight incidences of threats of strikes and 24 strikes and demonstrations which actually took place. This trend continued in the first nine months of 2007, with 32 actual strikes and demonstration and eight more incidences of threats of strikes.

Although most of these actions were peaceful, the rapid increase in the number of collective labour disputes, strikes, and demonstrations clearly indicated the sharp deterioration in labour relations during that period.

The Ministry of Labour also reported an increase in the number of collective agreements concluded during these

years, which is an additional indication for the increase in industrial actions and collective labour disputes during this period. It is noteworthy that a large part of these agreements was for workers in the so called qualified industrial zones where many workers had threatened to strikes or did actually strikes and demonstrate.

It is also noticeable that the number of collective labour disputes increased in sectors not organised by trade unions, such as government employees and contract workers in ministries and government institutions. The higher professional grade of state employees began to adopt unusual protest methods that were previously limited to workers, such as strikes and sit-ins demonstrations.

In addition, there were demands from trade unions for the government to develop labour legislation, allow non-Jordanian workers to join unions, improve the conditions of female workers in the qualified industrial zones, and develop laws related to Jordanian female workers. For the first time, there were demands to end the restrictions on the freedom of association and allow for the establishment of new trade unions.

In 2006, the Jordanian newspaper "Al-Dustour" published outcome of an opinion poll on the reasons for the increase in collective labour disputes and strikes. The poll showed that 40.9% of workers blamed the government for its failure to respond to workers' demands, while 33.6% of them saw the reason as the weakness of labour legislation. Also, 20.2% blamed the unions themselves for their weakness in defending workers' rights, while 5.3% attributed the rise in industrial unrest to other diverse factors.



109. A protest by Al- Intaj Company workers, 2004, demanding the restoration of their rights (photo by Saher Qaddarah).



110. A demonstration organized by several of trade unions in 2012, demanding several labour rights. The photo shows several of trade union leaders: Mahmoud Al-Hyari, President of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers, Khaled Al Zyoud, President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, and Ali Al-hadid , President of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers).

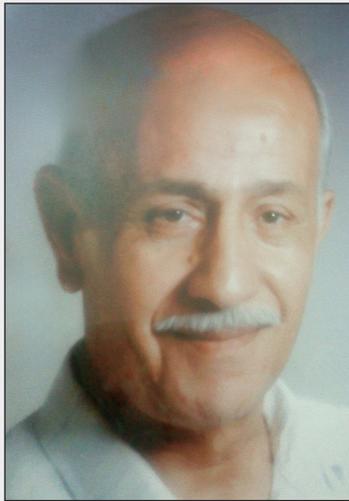


111. A demonstration by the workers of the Al- Intaj Company that ceased its operations demanding their rights, 2004 (photo by Saher Qaddarah).



112. Labour protests, 2004, demanding outstanding labour rights (photo by Saher Qaddarah).

Mohammad Suleiman Al-Qaimari: Historian of the Jordanian Trade Unionism



114. Mohammad Al-Qaimari
(from Trade Unionist Mohammad
Suleiman Al-Qaimari Collection).

The demand-driven labour movement of the day labourers is considered one of the oldest and longstanding labour movements in Jordan. This movement began in 2006 by workers at the Ministry of Agriculture. Since then, these workers have organized dozens of protests to demand jobs with fixed contracts, better working conditions, and increased wages. They established an organizational framework called the “Day Labourers’ Committee,” and

their movement continued for years until most of their demands were met.

The struggle of day labourers was not limited to the agricultural sector only, but extended to include many governmental and municipal sectors such as the Ministry of Public Works, Customs, Municipalities, Courts, and Railways. One of their most prominent protests was the major strike carried out by the workers of the Aqaba Port in the summer of 2008, to advocate for better working conditions and higher wages, which lasted for several days. They were able to form an independent trade union committee called “Aqaba Ports Corporation Workers’ Committee”, which worked independently of the General Union of Workers in Seaports and Clearance.

Day labourers’ movement:



113. Mohammed Al-Sunaid, Head of the Committee of Day Labourers, in a sit-in
(from the website jo24).

Mohammad Al-Qaimari (1936/2005) was a prominent figure in the Jordanian labour and trade union movement, and left an unforgettable mark during his career. He began his trade union career by establishing the Ministry of Public Works Workers and Employees Union in 1956/1957, then moved to the field of education in 1964 where he participated in several attempts to establish a General Teachers’ Union. In 1969, after a long legal struggle with the Trade Union Registrar at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, he and his colleagues were able to establish the General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education.

Al-Qaimari was elected Secretary of the General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education in the first elections in October 1969, and in the same year, he was chosen as the trade union’s representative in the GFJTU Council. He continued to play a leading role in the General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education until 1984.

In addition to his trade union role, Al-Qaimari was a historian of the trade union movement. He authored five important books: “Labour Union Movement in Jordan 1950-1970,” “General Federation of Trade Unions - Objectives and Achievements 1954-1997,” “Lights on the Palestinian Labour Movement,” “Jordanian Trade Unions,” and “The General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education.” He also supervised the editing of labour-related pages in Jordanian newspapers such as “Addustour” and “Sawt Al Shaab” for years.



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115. The annual general assembly meeting of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, 1999, at the University of Jordan auditorium (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity).

116. A public march in downtown Amman against price increases, 2012 (photo by Hassan Al Tamimi).



Chapter 11:

Economic Decline Exacerbates Suffering of Working Class and Ignites Industrial Action (2008/2013)

Due to the successive international and regional tensions, Jordan suffered several economic shocks starting 2007, when oil prices declined from around \$150 per barrel to less than half, to about \$70, as a consequence of which investments in the Gulf states' economies declined, inducing particularly a recession in the construction and real estate sector there. These troubles swept over into the Jordanian economy, with the decline in aid and investments, and the decrease in remittances from Jordanians working in the Gulf.

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In 2008, the real estate and housing market crisis in the United States hit many banks and major financial institutions, its repercussions reaching Europe the following year. With the recession in the Gulf states' real estate market, many large real estate investment projects in Jordan collapsed, developers' debts accumulated and banks were forced to take measures of precaution against insecure debtors.

At the beginning of 2011, the political crisis in Syria erupted and soon turned into a civil war, forcing millions of Syrians to flee their country, and hundreds of thousands of them found refuge in Jordan. Eventually, their number would reach one million and four hundred thousand Syrian.

These crises heightened the structural imbalances in the Jordanian economy. The decline in aid, investments, and remittances from workers abroad exacerbated the deficit of the government budget, and increased the reliance on internal loans to cover the deficit. This led to a rapid rise in public debt, reaching \$13.4 billion in 2011, and \$15.7 billion at the end of 2012. This was equivalent to 72% of the gross domestic product.

At the same time, the trade balance deficit grew, exceeding the \$7 billion in 2012 as a consequence of the heavy reliance on imports of energy and food.

These clear structural imbalances of the Jordanian economy also exacerbated the problem of unemployment. The increasing reliance on foreign workers with their number standing at about 800,000, contrasted with about 200,000 Jordanians being unemployed. At the end of 2012, the unemployment rate was estimated at 12.5%. Unemployment among the youth was even double this rate.

Of course, in this situation a noticeable increase in poverty rates occurred, especially in areas outside the capital Amman, and in more remote governorates. On the other hand, wealth and income were concentrated more in the hands of certain groups only, which contributed to widening the gap between the poor and the rich, and effectively reducing the middle class.

With the retreat of the state from its commitment to social welfare and the imposition of more tax burdens on citizens, popular discontent escalated and hitherto unknown social tensions emerged. They came in form of violence in universities, assault on workers in public institutions, especially in the education and health sectors. Attacks against government buildings and security facilities were also reported.

Popular discontent also rose in response to the lack of transparency, accountability and absence of parliamentary oversight in the privatisation of major public companies. In particular, widespread public opposition was voiced against plans to sell valuable and vital public assets such as the King Hussein Medical Center.



117. A sit-in by cement factory workers to improve their working conditions, 2011 (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers).



118. A sit-in by workers at the Miyahuna Water Company, 2012, to demand the reinstatement of those dismissed from their jobs and their permanent recruitment (from the Collection of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party "Hashd").



119. The General Trade Union of Construction Workers in a workers' protest, 2011. Mahmoud Al-Hyari, President of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers, (left), is leading the demonstration, (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers).

At the beginning of the 2010's, the labour movement led the popular protests. In 2010, just before the events of the "Arab Spring," the number of industrial actions and collective labour disputes reached up to 140, with a quarter of these actions in the public sector, and this despite the ban for state employees from membership in trade unions. By the end of 2011, workers' protests reached unprecedented numbers, with 829 incidents of industrial actions and collective labour disputes being recorded.

The outstanding fact is that most of the industrial actions and collective labour disputes which occurred in 2011 took place in the public sector, with a total of 485 incidents recorded, equivalent to 58.6% of the total, while the private sector saw 309 actions or 37.3% of industrial actions and collective labour disputes. Also, the unemployed undertook 136 labour related protests, coming to 4.2% of all industrial actions that year.

This most important reason for this development in industrial actions and collective labour disputes in Jordan can be attributed to the public sector joining the ranks of demonstrating and striking workers. This shift came as a result of the deterioration of the conditions of day labourers in government institutions and municipalities. Also, the deterioration of the living conditions of professionals in the public sector, such as teachers, engineers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists contributed to swelling the ranks of the protests and join industrial actions or collective labour disputes. But the most salient aspect is that 98% of these actions were initiated and carried out by labour organisations and workers' associations not affiliated to the long-established trade unions under the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU). This reflects the alienation between the Federation and the actual working class' based labour movement.

At a time when the leadership of the GFJTU appeared unable to deal with the escalation of protests, a group of independent workers' organisations emerged calling for a radical reform in the GFJTU. In April 2009, these organisations

convened the "Trade Union Workers' Forum," at the invitation of the so called "National Campaign for the Defence of Bread and Democracy". The demands they raised were not limited to the improvement of living conditions only. They also called for reform of the organisational structure and procedural operation of the GFJTU. They were striving towards trade union pluralism and the establishment of new trade unions in order to better represent the diversity of the working class in Jordan.

Among these initiatives: the "Labour Movement for Change and Trade Union Reform," the "Democratic Trade Union Gathering," the "Professional Trade Union Gathering," the "Workers' Unity Bloc," the "Unemployed Gathering," the "Jordanian Workers' Gathering," the "Daily Workers' Committee," the "Group of Twenty," the "Committee of Workers in the Communications and Information Technology Sector," the "Social Security Retirees' Association," the "Labour Watch," the "Committee of Workers in the Shoe Industry," "Artists for Change," in addition to the "Alternative Culture Association."

On May 1, 2011, these organisations announced the formation of the "National Campaign for the Defence of Jordanian Workers," and organised a sit-in in front of the Ministry of Labour, and workers marched from the Professional Associations Complex to the building of the GFJTU in the Shumaysani suburb of Amman.

In 2006, Jordan ratified the "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," which guarantees the right for all workers to establish or join a trade union without restriction. However, the Jordanian government maintained the legal a ban on the establishment of trade unions, outside the 17 trade unions affiliated to GFJTU as imposed with the enforced legislative reorganisation of trade unions in 1976. This legal disposition is considered to stand in contravention of Article 16 of the Jordanian Constitution that stipulates the right of Jordanians to form or join associations, unions, and political parties, provided that their objectives are legal and their means are peaceful.



120. A strike by the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity in 2012
(photo by Saher Qaddarah).

Despite such legislative instruments, the government was unable to prevent workers who were excluded from trade union representation to eventually establish their own organisations and form trade unions. Their initiatives benefited from the impetus of the “Arab Spring” and the emergence of a multitude of popular and social movements in Jordan during the years 2011 and 2012. The day labourers in the Ministry of Agriculture were at the forefront of this struggle, as they raised again demands for job security and for fixed benefits. These were grievances they already had raised in strikes and demonstrations in 2006, and throughout 2007 and 2008.

The movement of day labourers extended to other government institutions, such as the Ministry of Public Works and

Housing, the Ministry of Local Administration, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Industry and Trade and Supply, the Ministry of Finance, in addition to the Water Authority of Jordan and the Jordan Valley Authority. These institutions hold the largest number of workers outside the regular staff. They receive low wages, ranging between 110 and 130 dinars, and some do not even exceed 90 dinars per month, which is less than the minimum wage, which at the time was 190 dinars.

To overcome these challenges, the day labourers turned to the Parliament for support, which later led the government to develop a plan to address their conditions. This started at the beginning of 2007, and ended at the end of 2009.

Rise of Independent Trade Unions

According to a report published by the “Independent Trade Unions Federation of Jordan,” demands to establish trade unions independent from the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions first appeared during the general strike carried out by the workers in Jordan Phosphate Mines Company in 2001. At that time, the company did not respond to any of the workers’ demands and even the leadership of the General Union of Mining and Metal Workers did not support the striking workers’ demands. Thus, the striking workers took the initiative to establish an independent trade union to represent their interests. Their efforts constitute the starting point of a wave in the labour movement with workers aspiring to establish more independent unions.

The Phosphate workers were followed by the workers of the Jordanian Electricity Company, when a large number of its employees organised a strike and a demonstration in front of the Prime Ministry. However, the General Union of Electricity Workers denounced this strike, claiming that the workers of the company had already obtained satisfaction on all of their demands. Following this, the spokesman for the protesting electricity workers announced their intention to form an independent trade union. This encouraged workers in different sectors such as railways, pharmaceutical industries, municipalities, printing presses, taxi drivers to follow their example.

In late July 2011, a number of leaders of emerging independent labour movement agreed to hold a preparatory meeting to lay the

foundation for a new trade union federation, considering that the established Federation and its affiliates had in their view lost the legitimacy to represent workers and defend their interests. Soon, these independent trade union organisations met in a much larger meeting at the Professional Syndicates Complex in Amman on August 13, 2011, which concluded with the proclamation of a preparatory committee for the establishment of the Independent Trade Unions Federation. The labour activist Muhammad Sanid was designated as the official spokesman for the organisation.

During the following months, the founding conferences of what became known as the independent union of workers in the phosphate sector on November 12, 2011, and the General Union of Workers of the Jordanian Electricity Company on February 15, 2012, were held. Also, workers in printing industries, municipalities, pharmaceutical industries, railways, at Aqaba Port, in aircraft maintenance and air transport formed preparatory committees to establish their own trade unions independent of the GFJTU.

Following these developments, a preparatory committee for the Independent Trade Unions Federation, representing six unions, was formed. The committee included newly formed workers’ organisations in phosphate mining, Electricity Company, printing industries, municipalities, pharmaceutical industries agricultural sector and day labourers. Eng. Azzam Al-Samadi was chosen as the president of the committee, and Muhammad Sanid as its official spokesman.



121. A photo of the leaders of the “National Campaign to Defend Workers in Jordan”, which was launched in 2011. This campaign is a labour movement independent of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (photo by Saher Qaddarah).

Government's Position on Independent Unions

The government, represented by Minister of Labour, the late Maher Al-Waked, refused to recognize the independent trade unions. On November 24, 2011, the Minister announced that the Labour Law does not allow for the establishment of independent unions where there is a legally registered trade union, adding that dissatisfied members can change their trade union's leadership through elections.

The government maintained its position with Minister of Labour Atef Adibaat renewing the official rejection of registering independent unions. This led a preparatory committee to organise a demonstration in front of the House of Representatives on December 1, 2011, demanding from Parliament a vote of no-confidence on the Minister of Labour, the rejection of the temporary Labour Law, and the adoption of a new law consistent with the Jordanian Constitution and international obligations of Jordan. However, when the newly formed trade unions again submitted applications for registration at the beginning of October 2012, the ministry rejected them once more.

Despite this, the Independent Trade Unions Federation was able to move ahead, and held its founding conference at the Professional Associations Complex on April 23, 2013, with the participation of about 300 delegates from ten newly formed trade unions, including the workers in phosphate mines, the Electricity Company, printing industries, municipalities, pharmaceutical industries, railways, public car drivers, the Department of Statistics, agricultural workers, and day labourers in other sectors, in addition to workers in engineering.

The conference was also attended by representatives from the preparatory committees for the establishment of new trade unions from eight other economic sectors, who had been invited as observers. In addition, other participants were political leaders, MPs, representatives from Arab and international workers' organisations and from civil society organisations. The conference discussed two main documents which dealt with the future of the political, economic, and social orientations of the Independent Trade Unions Federation, and the bylaw of the new federation.



122. A strike by workers in a Jordanian bank, in 2011, demanding better working conditions. The photo shows Samara Alkhatib, President of the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, (photo by Saher Qaddarah).

Background of the Corruption Case in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions

The “corruption cases” and “financial and administrative irregularities” in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions became the basis for challenging the legitimacy of the leadership of the Federation at that time. In the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 calls had been raised for the dismissal and investigation of the GFJTU leaders. These calls were reiterated in 2007 based on the revelations from the report of the Audit Bureau scrutinising the GFJTU leadership activities for the years 2005 and 2006.

According to a report by the newspaper “Al-Arab Al-Yawm,” a committee formed after the Ministry of Labour had received a complaint about financial and administrative irregularities at the Federation, found many violations and discovered that end-of-service compensations were paid in the 2001 budget, despite the fact that the service of any employee was not terminated. The report also alleged that the President of the Federation at the time had been paid a large financial advance that was not recorded in the accounts of the organisation.

Furthermore, the report exposed that financial support provided by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions – LO Norway, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the International Labour Organisation to the GFJTU in 2001 were not recorded in the budget of the Federation. The report documented the existence of “fictitious expenses” coined as “electoral expenses,” “end-of-service compensations,” “advances,” “assistance,” and “gratuities.” Finally, the report pointed to similar breaches in the 2002 budget of the Federation.

Due to the extent of accusations against the President of the Federation, the Minister of Labour Amjad Al-Majali stopped the allocations paid to the GFJTU from the Social Security Corporation, which amounted to a quarter of a million dinars. Exception was made for the salaries of the workers in the Federation for which payments continued. Later, the Minister of Labour Bassam Al-Salem resumed the payment of all allocations, yet it was stopped several times over again, because of the persisting problems in the relationships between the Social Security Corporation and the Ministry of Labour on the one hand, and the GFJTU on the other.

Despite the criticism by some former government officials and from some trade unions questioning the handling of the payments made to the GFJTU by the Social Security Corporation the funds continued to flow. They ranged between 200.000 dinars in 2009 and 250.000 dinars during the years 2011 and 2012. In addition, the Social Security Corporation provided funds to support workers’ children, which amounted to 700.000 dinars in 2010, and rose in the following year (2011) to 836.000 dinars, with represents a significant increase of 19.5%.

Abdul Rahman Al-Majali, one of the former officials in the Ministry of Labour, voiced strong criticism challenging the legitimacy of the membership of the former President of the Federation and some of former members of the GFJTU executive on the Board of Directors of the Social Security Corporation. Indeed, after retirement from the Federation they were no longer representing the GFJTU or workers’ interests.



123. A strike by workers to demand labour fairness, 2012. The photo shows presidents of a number of trade unions (from the Collection of the General Trade Union of Construction Workers).



124. Day labourers in the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), in the early days of what is known as the Arab Spring, 2011, carrying out a mass sit-in in front of the GAM building in Ras Al Ain to demand their rights (photo by Saher Qaddarah).

Internal Disputes at the GFJTU

The tension within the Jordanian labour movement were primarily caused by growing opposition to the leadership of the GFJTU and the emergence of new trade unions outside the Federation. These were motivated by the perceived shortcomings of the GFJTU leadership. In turn, these tensions triggered internal conflicts amongst trade union leaders within the Federation itself, highly published in the media as they ended-up in court.

One of the most prominent of these conflicts occurred when the then President of the Federation, Mazen Al-Maayta, whilst participating in a meeting of the International Labour Organisation, suspended the membership of Khalil HIyasat, then President of the General Union of Workers in Air Transport and Tourism. This decision came as a result of an internal dispute in the Air Transport Workers' Union.

Al-Hiyasat resorted to the courts to challenge the decision as arbitrary and illegal noting that the decision to suspend must be taken by the general council of the union, not the executive committee. Based on this argument, the courts ruled in favour of Al-Hiyasat, reversed the suspension and ordered he be reinstated and awarded him a compensation payment of 12.700 dinars.

In another dispute, Muhammad Ali Al-Hajaya, a former member of the executive committee of the Federation, submitted a complaint to the High Court of Justice to challenge the results of the elections of the General Union of Mining Workers, indicating that irregularities occurred during the election process.

Industrial actions of 2013

In 2013, labour unrest remained at a high level. The number of industrial actions and collective labour disputes reached 890, which is only marginally lower compared with 2012 when 901 instances were recorded. As in previous years, these actions took place outside the influence of government registered trade unions. Actually, the latter did not play any significant role in demands to improve working conditions. This is how many workers were forced to rely on themselves to organise and act.

It is worth noting that strikes were the most common form of action in 2013, reaching 480, representing over 50% of the total number of industrial actions and collective labour disputes. Also, 106 cases of strikes threats were recorded, representing about 11%. As for demonstration, their number reached 280; representing about 30% of actions undertaken.

The motivation for these actions in 2013 were mostly economic in nature. Indeed, up to 49.7% were organised to demand an increase in wages, whilst 21.4% protested against labour laws and regulations, 9.8% against unfair dismissal, 9.3% demanded a more rights, 5.2% called for the creation of jobs, 3% sought the confirmation of employment, and finally 0.9% demanded the establishment and official recognition of new trade unions.

As was the case in the years from 2010 to 2013, 89% of these actions were undertaken outside of the long-established trade unions.



125. Sit-in of land transport drivers, 2011 (photo by Saher Qaddarah).



126. Pensioners from the Phosphate Company during a sit-in in front of the company's building, 2012, demanding the preservation of their benefits (photo by Saher Qaddarah).

127. A sit-in by farmers, 2019, protesting against low prices of crops and rejecting the commercial mediator between the farmers and the market (photo by Saher Qaddarah).



Chapter 12:
Impacts of the 2008 Crisis on the Economy and
Living Conditions of the Working Class (2013-2023)



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The Jordanian economy faced major challenges during the period from 2013 to 2023, where the growth rates of the gross domestic product declined significantly, dropping from 8.1% during the years 2006/2007 to an average of 2.6% annually in the period from 2010 to 2016.

At the same time, the public debt increased significantly over the period of 13 years from 7.43 billion dinars in 2004 to 27.4 billion dinars in 2017. This rapid increase of almost 300% led to the public debt ratio reaching around 96% of the gross domestic product in 2018.

The main problem lay in the government's inability to control the fiscal deficit. In 2018, the government of Hani Al-Mulqi approved a set of tax laws and policies based on the requests of the International Monetary Fund, which aimed to reduce the fiscal deficit through increasing tax revenues. However, these measures led to the outbreak of one of the largest waves of popular protests since April 1989.

One of the most prominent reasons for the popular anger was the draft Income Tax Law that the government forced through the two chambers of the Parliament of Jordan for its approval in an emergency session. This draft faced widespread popular rejection, as it reduced income tax exemptions for families from 24,000 dinars to 16,000 dinars, and for individuals from 12,000 dinars to 8,000 dinars, significantly affecting the low-income households. The draft law also annulled tax exemptions on education and medical bills, and it raised the opposition of the business community across all sectors as it foresaw the imposition of additional taxes on capital gains and rents.

After the Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulqi refused to withdraw the draft of the new Income Tax Law, the council of Jordanian Professional Associations announced a general strike on May

30, 2018, with dozens of civil society organisations and business companies joining the call. In the afternoon of that day, citizens gathered at the 4th Circle in Amman close to the office of the Prime Minister staying until dawn. During that demonstration, protesters chanted the national anthem and shouted slogans denouncing the policies of the Al-Mulqi government, demanding his resignation as well as the withdrawal of the draft tax law.

This coincided with the government's announcement of a rise in fuel and electricity prices thereby only augmenting the anger of the citizens. A number of activists blocked the road to Amman International Airport using burning tires to stop traffic. Similar incidences occurred in most cities around the country. This prompted King Abdullah II to intervene by ordering the annulment of the increases in fuel and electricity prices.

Three months earlier, the Al-Mulqi government had raised the prices of 162 basic commodities, including bread, more than doubling its price from 16 piasters per kilo to 40 piasters. The government also imposed a sales tax on books, school supplies, and medicines. However, the Pharmacists' Association with the support of other the professional associations forced the government at least to retract the imposition of taxes on medicines.

Under the pressure of an unprecedented popular protests movement of strikes and demonstrations which had started in Amman on May 30 and spread to other cities going on for a week, Hani Al-Mulqi resigned on June 4, 2018. The protests did not stop until June 7, 2018 and only after the leaders of the professional associations received assurances from the Prime Minister-designate Dr. Omar Al-Razzaz that he would withdraw the draft of the new income tax law and start a dialogue on tax reform.



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128. Electricity workers setting up tents in front of the Jordan Electric Power Company (JEPCO) headquarters, during their sit-in and strike, 2014 (from Trade Unionist Ali Al-Hadid Collection).

Social Effects of Economic Policies

With the economic crisis that hit Jordan between 2008/2011, per capita income declined, recording a negative growth of -1.8% in 2011. This decline continued to reach -6.4% in 2013 and -6.2% in 2015.

Some external factors contributed to this deterioration, such as the rise in energy prices worldwide and the closure of borders with Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, domestic economic policies were the main reason for the decline in per capita income, they were also the principle cause for the increase in unemployment rates, from 11.9% in 2014 to 13.1% in 2015, and reaching 18.2% in 2017.

With wages depreciating, the living and working conditions of the working class deteriorate over the past ten years (2013-2023). The worst phase was reached during the outbreak of the Corona pandemic (2020/2021). Despite the relative recovery of the Jordanian economy after the pandemic, the growth rates remained low, comparable to the modest rates for the period of 2013 to 2022 of no more than 2.2%.

Due to this weak growth, the capacity of the Jordanian economy to generate job creation did not improve. For example, the number of newly created jobs decreased from 70,000 jobs in 2007, before the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008, to 38,000 jobs in 2018, and it further declined in the years of 2020 and 2021 under the impact of the Corona pandemic.

The workforce participation rate continued to decline, dropping from 39.7% in 2017 to 33% in the second quarter of 2023. The participation of women in the workforce was more adversely affected than that of men, as it dropped to 13.6% by mid-2023. As the employment rate declined from 31.2% before the Corona pandemic to 25.6% in mid-2023, the unemployment rate rose to 22.3%. This is even higher than the average unemployment rate during the years of the pandemic, when it reached 19.2%. The unemployment rate

among young people aged 15 to 24 years reached 46.1%, with 42.1% for males and 64.1% for females.

As for employment policies, they were also affected by the decline in economic growth, which led to an increase in the reliance on what is known as “flexible work” policies, which assume that low wages and less stringent working conditions will encourage investment and generate new job opportunities. With these policies, the minimum wage in the private sector remained fixed at 260 dinars, and the government reneged on its commitment at The Tripartite Committee for Labour Affairs to raise the minimum wage based on inflation rates starting from 2023 and for a duration of three years at first.

As a result of the devaluation of wages and the rise in unemployment, the number of people living below the poverty line increased. According to the figures of the Social Security Corporation for 2021, 55% of registered workers receive monthly wages of up to 500 dinars or less, while the poverty line for the standard family in Jordan was around 480 dinars per month based on 2017 statistics. It is fair to assume that after seven years since 2017 with continuous inflation it would be even higher today and that therefore poverty is more widespread.

The situation has been much worse for the 59% of the work force not covered by social security. Despite these harsh conditions, the General Federation Jordanian of Trade Unions (GFJTU) did not undertake any action to defend wage levels or the gains achieved through collective bargaining agreements.

Over the last ten years, from 2013 to 2023, the ability of the working class to defend its economic and social rights significantly declined. This is evidenced by the number of labour protests recorded during the period from 2010 to 2023, as shown in the following table:



Manifestations of the Decline in Industrial Action and Collective Labour Disputes (2010 - 2023)

Year	Number of Protests
2010	139
2011	829
2012	901
2013	890
2014	474
2015	236
2016	288
2017	229
2018	203
2019	266
2020	145
2021	225
2022	62
2023	89

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Source: Jordanian Labour Observatory, Al-Phenix Centre for Studies, **Report on Labour Protests in Jordan in 2023.**

129. A female migrant worker votes during the elections of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing (from the website of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing).



130. Activists from “independent trade unions” during a labour march requesting union freedom (from the Collection of the Jordanian Democratic People’s Party “Hashd”).

The ability of the working class to defend its economic and social rights significantly declined due to weakness of the organised labour movement. It suffered from division after the establishment of the Federation of Jordanian Independent Trade Unions in 2011, and the increasing marginalisation of the GFJTU in civil society and public life.

After this first conference of the Federation of Jordanian Independent Trade Unions and in light of the International Labour Organisation expectations with respect to freedom of associations in Jordan, Mazen Al-Maayta signed a “joint initiative” with the engineer Azzam Al-Samadi, the president of the Federation of Jordanian Independent Trade Unions, on May 13, as an attempt to prevent a further decline in the relevance of the GFJTU. Related to this joint initiative a statement made public after their meeting focused on the importance of unity in the labour movement and the freedom of workers to join or establish a trade union both in the public and the private sector. The statement called for enhancing transparency and democratic standards in the trade unions and expanding their membership to include all workers in the country. More specifically, the two parties agreed to

1. Form a Technical Committee for a National Labour Conference and therefore requested the Minister of Labour to convene the Tripartite Committee for Labour Affairs to establish an expanded technical committee to review the occupational delimitation of trade unions and reorganise the trade union’s organisational scope. This technical committee was to include

local and international experts. It was also to draft a legislative proposal regulating trade union organisation. This was to be debated at a national conference bringing together social partners and international organisations including the International Labour Organisation, the International Trade Union Confederation and civil society organisations. The aim of this conference was to come up with recommendations to reform the legal system regulating trade unions.

2. Improve Cooperation and Coordination to overcome the challenges facing the Jordanian labour movement, especially those related to the demands of workers in the private and public sectors. The aim of this cooperation was to remove the prevailing tensions in the labour market, and to direct efforts towards comprehensive development of the national economy, as well as to contribute to enhancing stability and security.

However, this agreement fell apart, as Mazen Al-Maayta, the then President of the GFJTU, reneged on his commitments, pressured by state security and government authorities. The divide in the labour movement persisted.

During the past decade, leaders and activists of trade unions not affiliated to the GFJTU faced repression from state security as well as employers in major companies, often being hit with arbitrary dismissal. These attacks eventually weakened the newly formed trade unions, leading them being divided. Eventually, their demands decreased even though social pressures supporting their rise in the beginning of 2010’s was still strong.

131. Waleed Al-Khayyat, former president of the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity during his illness (2014), and Ali Al-Hadid, who is also a former president of the union, is next to him (from Trade Unionist Ali Al-Hadid Collection).



132. A banner calling for workers' rights raised by the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity (from the Collection of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party "Hashd").



The Re-emergence of Cases of Corruption

In June 2020, cases of corruption in the GFJTU resurfaced after the Administrative Committee in the House of Representatives, headed by Dr. Ali Al-Tarawneh, had taken the initiative to investigate the GFJTU leadership practices. Since these problems have not been settled neither 2002 nor in 2011, the Federation head continued its work without being held accountable. This committee in particular investigated the case of monthly deductions of union membership fees for the benefit of the Amman branch of Trade Union of Workers in Municipalities. The committee investigated based on the complaints regarding this deduction being made over years, and in some cases even despite the fact that workers had been dismissed from work several years before.

Also, the Administrative Committee investigated the internal procedures at the GFJTU. It requested the Ministry of Labour to provide the minutes of the elections of the GFJTU for the last four electoral cycles as well as their final results. In addition, it also requested the minutes of the meetings of the general assembly. Furthermore, the committee requested the Audit Bureau to submit the last four financial reports of the general assembly, the names of the beneficiaries of the university scholarship grants provided by the union. Finally, they also requested to provide them with the names of the president and members of the administrative council who were in office during the last four cycles. In addition, the committee followed up these issues with the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission.



133. Khaled Zaher Al-Fanatseh, President of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, honoring Nadia Al Rawabdeh, former Minister of Labour (from the website of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions).

During the ongoing investigations at the time, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Labour, Farouq Al-Hadidi, stated that the case of the trade union for workers in municipalities, headed by Hammam Al-Maayta, was under investigation by the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, based on the reports of the Audit Bureau (Hammam Al-Maayta is the youngest son of Mazen Al-Maayta, the then president of the GFJTU). It is worth noting that the Greater Amman Municipality imposed compulsory membership on its workers and deducted monthly subscriptions from their salaries. In a statement to the Jordan News Agency, the director of the legal department in the Greater Amman Municipality, Hazzaa Al-Majali, indicated that the agreement signed between the Greater Amman Municipality and the trade union for workers in municipalities stipulates that these deductions may not be discontinued.

Despite the emergence of more corruption cases involving the top leadership of the GFJTU, and investigations by the Parliamentary committees of the House of Representatives as well as the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, at the 9th conference of the GFJTU in 2022 Mazen Al-Maayta did not hesitate to stand for re-election as President of the Federation for another the five years. Eventually, the conference “re-elected” Mazen Al-Maayta as President of the Federation, with Khalid Al-Fanatseh as his deputy.



134. Khaled Zaher Al-Fanatseh, at the most recent Congress of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, pledging to implement comprehensive reforms (from the website of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions).

Suspending Mazen Al-Maayta's from Leading the GFJTU

After less than two years into his new term of office as President of the GFJTU, the public prosecutor of the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission gave the order to suspend Mazen Al-Maayta's from the presidency of the Federation and from the presidency of the trade union of workers in private education. His movable and immovable assets were seized, and he was banned from traveling until he appeared before the court. However, due to poor health condition, Mazen Al-Maayta was not detained, but his youngest son, Hammam Al-Maayta, was detained. Hammam Al-Maayta was suspended from his position at the trade union for workers in municipalities and the trade union of workers in the Greater Amman Municipality.

The public prosecutor's order was based on audits conducted by the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, which found "financial irregularities" amounting to 4,28 million dinars, and revealed further administrative and legal anomalies. Based on this, the case had been referred to the public prose-

cutor, who brought charges against Mazen Al-Maayta, his son and a number of other defendants for the crimes of abusing their offices, embezzlement, and forgery, as well as rigging elections of the governing body of the trade union for workers in municipalities and falsifying meeting records.

Despite the shock caused by the public prosecutor's decision to prosecute Mazen Al-Maayta and his son with criminal charges related to abuse of office, embezzlement, and forgery, given the immense influence exercised by Al-Maayta for more than three decades, trade union leaders did not comment publicly these developments. However, the revelation of corruption in the top leadership of the GFJTU made clear the urgent need for reform within the Federation. It also signalled to the need for renewal in the Jordanian labour movement in general, which has long suffered from organisational stagnation and bureaucratic paralysis, reinforced by the absence of democratic and competitive elections in most affiliates of Federation, as well as at the Executive Committee of the GFJTU itself.



135. A protest by agricultural workers demanding to organize the sector and a trade union of their own (from the website of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions).

Women Leaders in the Labour Movement

Suad Mohammad Bakir

Suad Bakir was born in Amman. She joined the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism in the 1980s. She became the first female president of a trade union in Jordan when she won the election for the presidency of the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism in 1992. Bakir is still active in the trade union and participates in the administrative body for the 2021-2027 term. In addition to her trade union work, she is a member of the Jordan Labour Party and a social and political activist. She ran for the Greater Amman Municipality Council for Marka district. She has also been involved in many feminist and social organizations.

Basima Mohammad Al-Orani

Basima Al-Orani was born in Amman in 1965 and began her union activity in 1984. She won an election for a position in the General Trade Union of Public Services and Free Vocations in 1987, and became the trade union's president in 1994. After years of trade union and political work, she left the trade union and left the country.

Bushra Al-Salman

Bushra Al-Salman was born in Amman in 1971. She won an election for a position on the Administrative Body of the General Trade Union of Workers in Food Industries in 2005. In the 2021 trade union term, she became the first female president of the trade union and the first woman to become a member in the Executive Office of the GFJTU. Al-Salman is a trainer and social activist at the Issam Al-Ajlouni Centre and holds the position of Assistant Secretary-General of the Arab Federation for Food Industries. She is also a member

of the Economic and Social Council of Jordan and Head of the Labour Policy Committee. She ran for the 2024 parliamentary elections on the Azm Party list.

Leading Female Trade Unionists

The history of the trade union movement in Jordan is full of prominent female participation in the trade union administrative bodies. The most prominent female trade unionists are:

General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing: Two-thirds of the administrative body seats were occupied by women in the 2021 elections. The most prominent amongst them are: Hilda Ghattas, Iman Nasrallah, Ahlam Al-Tirawi, Maysoun Hdaib, Nayfa Al-Rifa'i, Sanaa Abu Namous, Mervat Al-Jamhawi, Jamila Lafi, Rabi'a Obeidat, and Nayfa Al-Azazmeh.

General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity: Asmaa Matar.

General Union of Workers in Seaports and Clearance: Hanaa Al-Sultani.

Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance: Noura Al-Issawi and Nadia Al-Bishawis

General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education: Myassar Salah, Muna Mahmoud, Afaf Al-Shawwa, Tharwat Al-Qazaq, Samira Harb, Dalal Farraj, and Hanan Al-Qawasmi.

General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism: Najlaa Hawatmeh, Rita Al-Kharsha, and Basma Hattar, who was the vice president of the trade union in the 1984-1986 term.



136. Female migrant workers vote in the most recent elections of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing, 2024 (from the website of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing).

Appendix (1)

Samples of logos and Stamps
of Jordanian trade unions in
the 1950s and 1960s

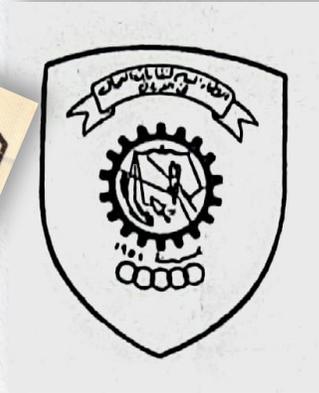


137. An excerpt from the labour archive of
Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Centre.



نقابة عمال المطابع
المنظمة لاتحاد نقابات العمال بالاردن
مركزها الرئيسي
عمان
المملكة الاردنية الهاشمية

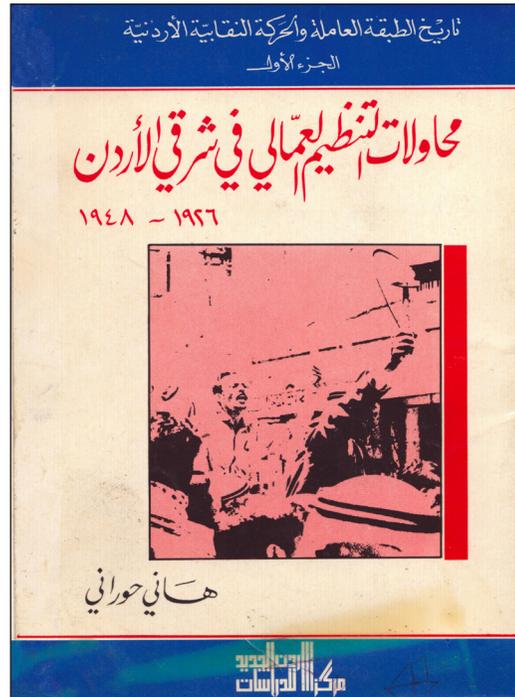
نقابة عمال المطابع
المركز الرئيسي عمان
تأسست عام ١٩٧٣
٢٠١٥



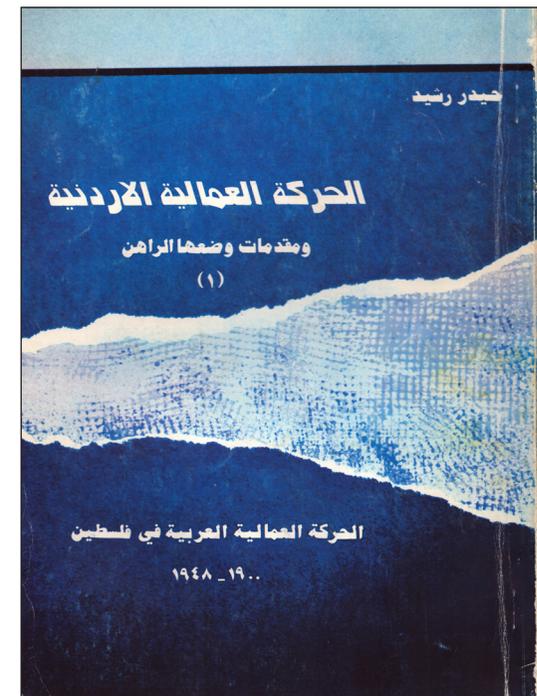
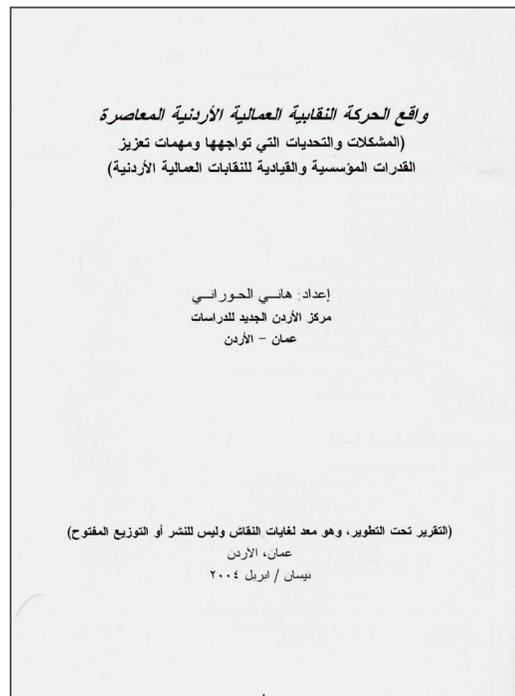
Appendix (2)

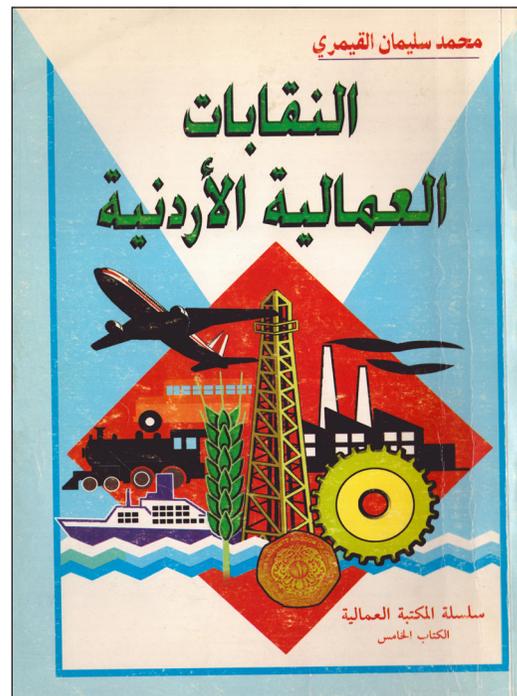
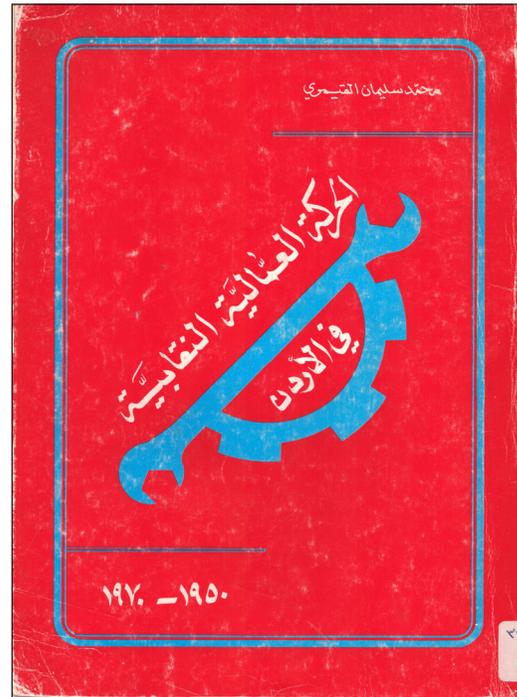
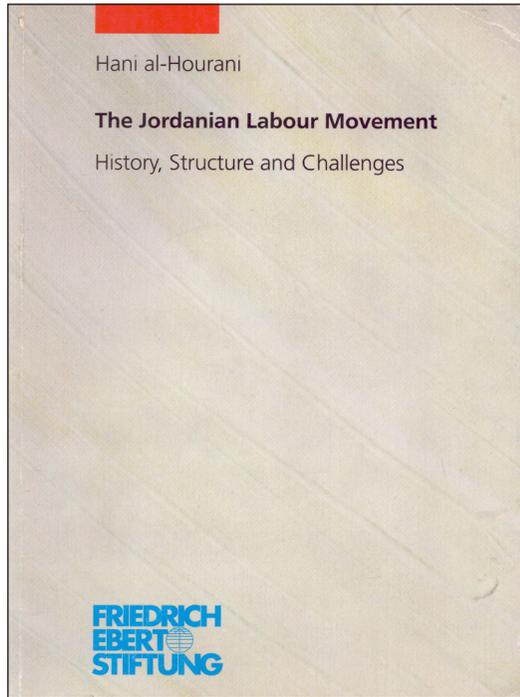
Covers of books and publications about the Jordanian labour movement

138. From the archives of
Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Centre.



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صوت عمال الأردن

حريّة دورية عمالية جامعة مستقلة - جمادى الأولى ١٤٢٤هـ - أيار ٢٠٢٤م

يصدرها الاتحاد العام لنقابات العمال في الأردن - العدد الثالث عشر - السنة السادسة ٢٠٢٤م

حكمة العدد
(من أمسي كلاً من تعب بعينه أمسي مفقوراً له)
رحيلته فريضة

الملكة الهاشمية لحتت بالرفيق الأعلى مع الشهداء الأبرار من بني هاشم

الأسرة الأردنية ودعت صانعة الرجال وسط مشاعر جياشة من الحزن

كلمة العدد
الملكة الجليلة في قلوب العمال

بطلة الأمن العام
خليل خوري

الأول من أيار، مناسبة لغاية على قلوب العمال، فيها يتم تكريم الهمميين لقاء عطاهم وجههم التميز لخدمة الوطن، وقد مسرة الفخر والاعتزاز.

وعندما نودي بجلالة الله الحسين ملكاً على البلاد، وفدت إلى جنب أيتها أميرتكم من رزة في أول سنوات حكمه وهو ما مال شيئاً بالأمر وكان لتوجهاتها الكريمة أن تحمت تلك الأقدار على مطرقة الأحداث حتى البقية من ٢

تسليماً للضام لله وقدره يعقلون بمعصمها الأسي والحزن، وعت الأبرة الأردنية الروادة يوم الإبرامه اللقي، طوية الوطن الكريمة، الفخر لها جلافة كتلة زين الشرق، حيث التفتت إلى جوار رها وأخت بالمشاهير من بني هاشم راضية مرضية، مشقة بعد حياة حافلة بالخير والطمأنينة.

وكتبت القصة المسماة النبوة الأردنية، والواقعة الأولى للهممة الأردن الشكافية، ورمزاً للأهمية الصادقة للبرية بالسبح والحمد.

وقد بدأت زعموها الله حرايتها مساهمة متاشقة منذ الألف العراة الأولى لشيرة العويبة كثرى وهي صعبة بعد وعاشت في البيت الهامسي العريق تعمل مع العراة من أبناء هذا البلد في تأسيس الأردن الأزرق، وواجهت الصواب والأفعال

العمال الأردني

نشرة داخلية غير دورية تصدرها النقابة العامة للتقل الجوي والسياحة

تشرين ثاني - كانون أول ١٩٨٢ • ٤٢٠٣١ • ٦١٥١

النقابة قوية بأعضائها

مجلة الاتحاد العام لنقابات عمال الأردن

العدد الأول - 1

الضمان، مليون و 555 ألف، المشاركة مقال بمطلة الحماية الاجتماعية

الاندحادات العربية ينتخب المناطسة بالأسا لرئيس "مركز العمال"

ارفع الحد الأدنى للحدور في الأردن

الاتحاد العام لنقابات العمال: نستمد الإرادة من معاني الاستقلال

١٤٢٤ / ١ / ٦

البناتسة:
البطلة المرتفعة وتدني اناجية العمل بكسان ضعف الحكومة وغياب فنوات التواصل

الحوار الاجتماعي يلعب دوراً محورياً بتحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة

اتحاد العمال
يبحث آليات تعزيز التعاون مع صندوق استثمار أموال الضمان

حكمة العدد
لا تتكلم وأنت غاضب، حتى لا تقول حديث تندم عليه طوال حياتك..

النقابة

نشرة داخلية تصدرها النقابة العامة للعمال في صناعة الخزل والتسبع والاياسة في الأردن / العدد (٩٥) آذار ٢٠٢٣

عضو الاتحاد العام لعمال الأردن / عضو الاتحاد العربي للتسبع / القاهرة / عضو الاتحاد العربي / جنيف

الضمان الاجتماعي مسلاذ العمال وحمائته واجبة

في اليوم العالمي للمرأة .. النقابة تطالب بتعديل القوانين لتحقيق المساواة

رفعة جناح

تعايات العمال في الأردن ، والتي تعمل برعاية الاتحاد العام لعمال الأردن والذي هو عضو اتحاد العمال العرب ، هي تعايات تحمير ميلها عملا وطنيا رائداً يهدف إلى خجبة الفرد والمجتمع على السواء ، وواجبا قوميا يلتقي على مانتها ، لذلك ، ومن هذا الجلاء ، كالم ، لبي

العدد الثاني عشر • ٤٢٠٣١ • ٦١٥١ • آب ١٩٧٨

الجناح الطائر
طائرة الغند

نشرة داخلية غير دورية تصدرها النقابة العامة للعمال في الأردن

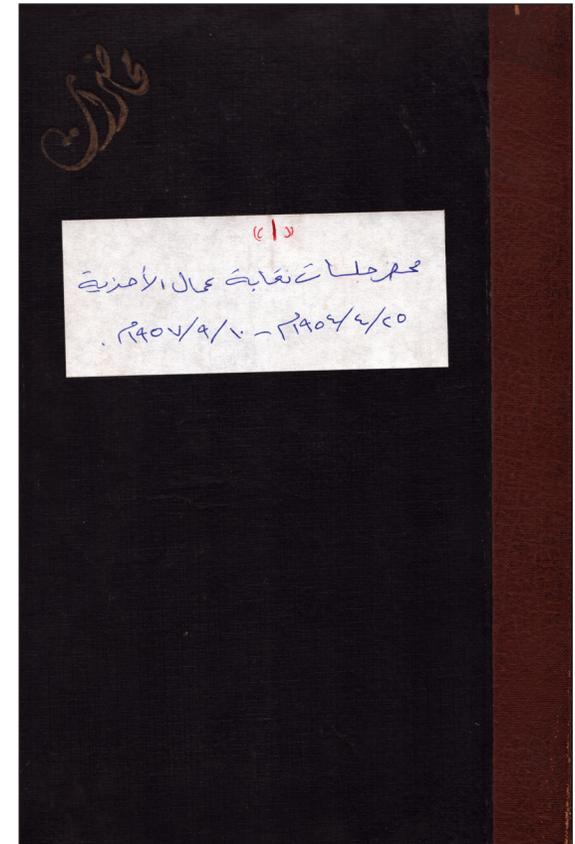
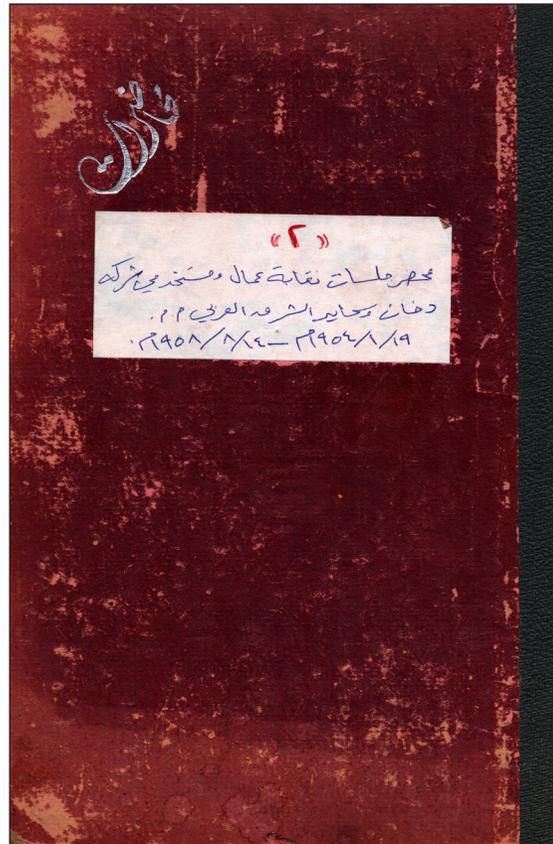
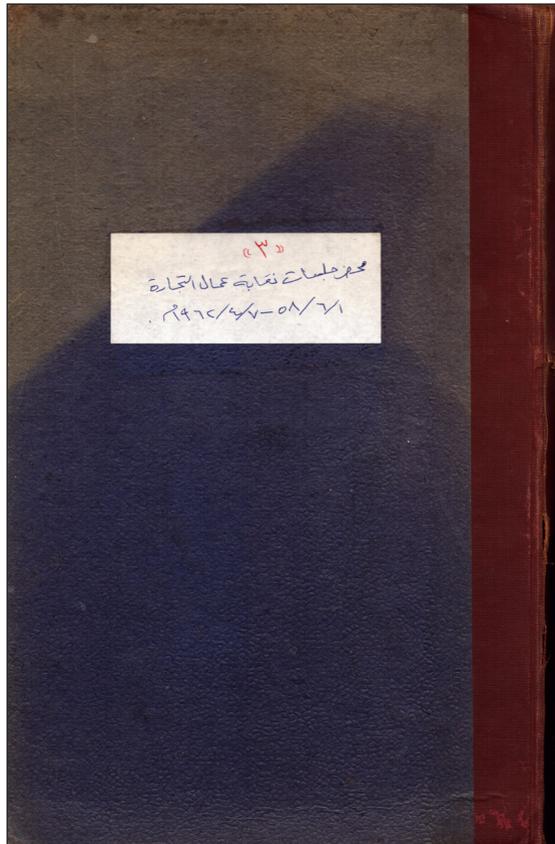
تعايات تحمير ميلها عملا وطنيا رائداً يهدف إلى خجبة الفرد والمجتمع على السواء ، وواجبا قوميا يلتقي على مانتها ، لذلك ، ومن هذا الجلاء ، كالم ، لبي

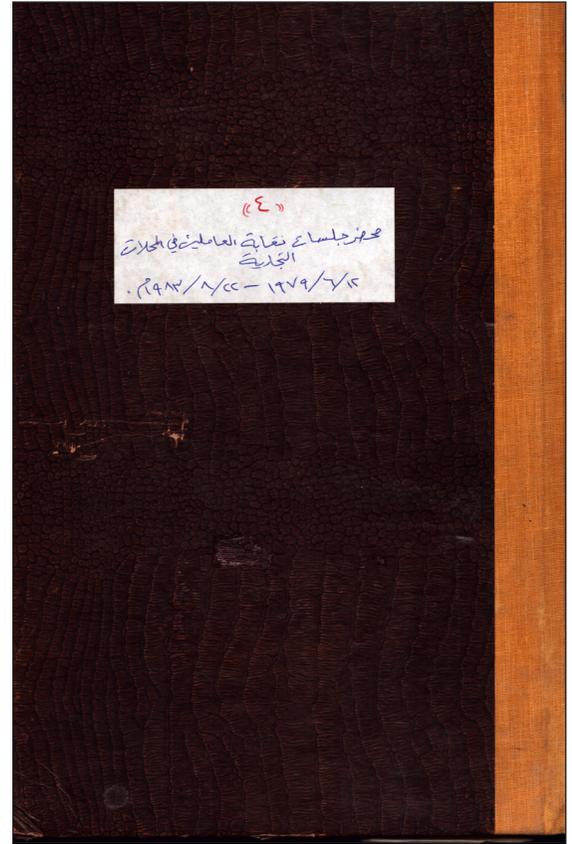
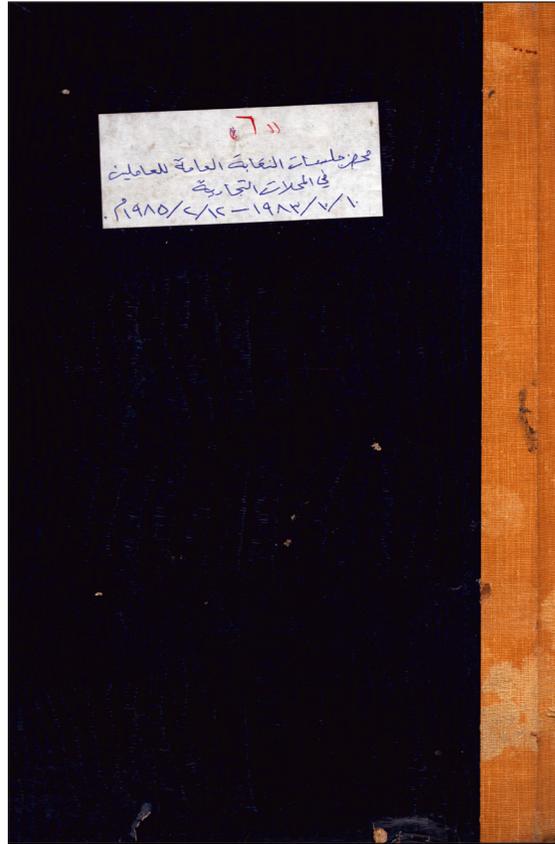
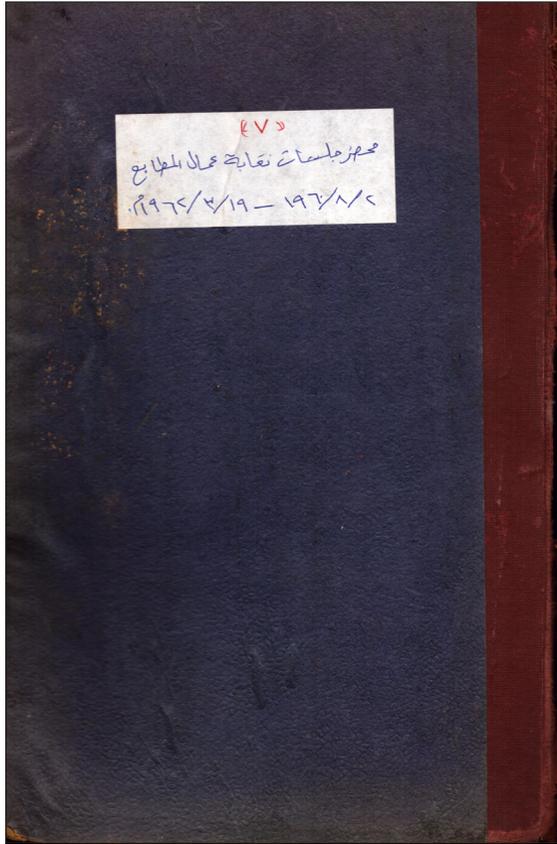
١٩٧٩ / ١ / ٦

العدد الرابع

Appendix (4)

Covers of minutes of meetings for the first Jordanian trade union





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Collection of unionist Fathallah Al-Omrani, president of the General Union of Textile Workers.

Collection of the family of the late unionist Mohammad Al-Qaimari, former president of the General Union of Private Education Workers.

Collection of unionist Fahmi al-Katout.

Collection of the family of the late unionist Mustafa Askalan

Collection of unionist Khaled Shraim, former president of the General Federation of Trade Unions, and former president of the General Union of Mines and Mining Workers.

Collection of the late unionist Muhammad Jawhar, former president of the General Federation of Trade Unions in Jordan.

Collection of the family of the late unionist Haider Rashid, former president of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers.

Collection of unionist Yousef Hourani, former president of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers.

Collection of the General Union of Banks, Insurance, and Accounting Workers.

Collection of the General Union of Construction Workers.

Collection of unionist Ali Al-Hadid, former president of the General Union of Electricity Workers.

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Collection of photojournalist Ahmad Abdo.

Collection of photojournalist Hassan Al-Tamimi.

Collection of the family of the late Dr. Subhi Abu Ghanimeh.

Jordanian Labour Movement

A Visual History

This book presents a visual chronicle of the Jordanian labour movement from its early days to present time. It stands out from other publications on the Jordanian labour movement by its reliance on visual materials, especially photographs. These photographs and other visual sources serve as illustrative documents and significant information sources. This visual book on the history of the labour movement is an unprecedented effort in the history of documenting social movements in the Arab world, which depend primarily on documents and written narratives, with photographs acting as a “complementary” element to the text.

This book is part of a series of publications dedicated to documenting Jordanian social history through photographs and visual documents. It comprises 12 chapters that detail the rise and evolution of paid labour in Transjordan in the Ottoman era, as well as the emergence of the Jordanian labour movement since 1954 to present day. The chapters feature around 140 photographs and visual materials.

This book serves as a tribute to the Jordanian labour movement and its early pioneers, and marks the 70th anniversary of its inception (1954/2024).

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EBERT
STIFTUNG**

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AL URDUN AL JADID
RESEARCH CENTER (UJRC)



ISBN 978-9923-759-46-2

