

SUPPORT IRAQI OIL WORKERS



Organising over 23,000 workers in Iraq's oil and gas industries, the Federation of Oil Unions in Iraq (IFOU) is struggling against both the US/UK military occupation and the corporate-led privatisation of Iraq's industry.

The forerunner to the IFOU was the Southern Oil Company Union (SOCU), founded in May 2003 by worker activists from the Southern Oil Company. This and other unions from Amara, Basra and Nassiriyah provinces, merged in June 2004 to form the General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE), which has now grown into the IFOU. This union federation remains technically illegal, but President Hassan Jumaa states:

'We take our legitimacy from the workers'

Position on the Occupation

'It is a deep and patriotic feeling of all the union's members that the occupation forces must leave the country **immediately**, whatever the consequences'. Hassan Jumaa: 'Only a mercenary benefiting from the occupation would want it to continue any longer'.

Position on Privatisation

'The privatisation of the oil and industrial sectors is the objective of all in the Iraqi state/government. We will stand firm against this imperialist plan that would hand over Iraq's wealth to international capitalism such that the deprived Iraqi people would not benefit from it...we are taking this path for the sake of Iraq's glory even if it costs us our lives. Iraqis are capable of managing their companies and their investments by themselves'

Position on political Independence

'The GUOE in Basra is an independent union, not linked in the present phase to any [union] confederation.

Position on the previous regime

IFOU executive committee members, including its President, were part of the opposition against Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, and many were imprisoned by the regime. The unions in the federation have an ongoing battle with Ba'ath loyalist managers. The IFOU publicly opposes their continued presence in positions of authority, in particular in the oil industry.

The IFOU needs your solidarity and support

Naftana (Arabic: 'our oil'), is the IFOU's UK support committee. To sign up for our alerts, please send an email to: naftana-subscribe@lists.riseup.net . These are sent every month or so, and keep supporters informed of strikes, and other union activities. If you also send your **mobile phone** number, we will add you to the urgent alerts list, which will be used to mobilise protests in the event of attacks on IFOU members.

See also the federation's home page for regular news updates
www.basraoilunion.org

Timeline of oil union activity

April 2003

Activists launched the Southern Oil Company Union (SOCU) and banned US company Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) from entering oil Southern Oil Company locations. The SOCU made it clear they saw KBR as 'part of the invasion and occupation army'.

June 2003

Strike at Basra Oil Refinery in Sheiba. Workers had not been paid their wages since the invasion and occupation in March. Humiliated by having to report to KBR, 100 worker activists blocked the road in front of the refinery and confronted British troops in a five-hour stand-off. Negotiations with UK authorities resulted in workers winning the wages within the day.

August 2003

A two-day strike was held, with oil exports halted. The demands of the strikers focused on unpaid wages. This display of union muscle paid off when it came to negotiating over the wage table (see below).

August 2003

Iraqi Drilling Company workers repaired their first drilling rig by the end of this month. They rebuilt eleven more over the coming months, using little more than ingenuity and spare parts from the local legal and black markets. SOCU workers have also carried out autonomous reconstruction at Khor Al Omayeh offshore terminal; the Lehees crude oil Pumping Station; North Rumeilla crude oil pumping station, drilling and gas company.

October 2003

Following protests by workers, employees of the US company KBR were kicked out of workplaces and replaced by Iraqi labour.

December 2003

The SOCU executive committee drafted a workers wage table of their own, in response to the Occupation's 'Order 30' wage table, which had been passed in September 2003. The union's table takes into account rising rent, food and fuel prices. Negotiations ensued with the Ministry of Oil after the Union threatened general strike action. Workers were ready to defend their workplaces.

January 2004

Victory! Higher wages were won for all workers in the SOCU -- the minimum wage is now 102,000 Iraqi Dinar rather than 69,000. Two whole levels of the occupation-imposed wage table were eliminated.

February 2004

Basra Pipeline Company workers took strike action on the day of an official visit by the Oil Minister. They demanded that Hassan Jumaa should negotiate on their behalf. Exports were shut down for at least four hours. Workers also demand the same wages as the SOC workers.

June 2004

The General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE) was formed from a meeting of union council leaders in the nine companies in the southern Iraqi oil sector. It comprised workers in the Southern Oil Company; Southern Gas company; Southern Refinery Company; Iraqi Drilling Company; Oil Carrier Company; Gas Packing Company; Oil Production Company; the Oil Projects Company; and the Oil Pipe Lines Company.

July 2004 to March 2005

The GUOE grew, aiding the organisation of other unions in the process, including the port workers union in Um Qasr. Workers' reconstruction of drilling rigs, port equipment, pumping stations and worker accommodation also continued.

March 2005

An assassination attempt (by car bomb) was made against Samir Yasin Sabbah, leader of a local GUOE-affiliated union in the town of Fao. Despite criminals' activities and the hostility of the occupation and former regime towards them, the GUOE continues to organize.

May 2005

The GUOE held an historic anti-privatisation conference in Basra, attended by hundreds of local trade unionists, plus international delegates from US Labor Against War, Iraq Occupation Focus, PLATFORM and Jubilee Iraq. Unions and peace organizations from Korea to Argentina sent messages of solidarity.

June 2005

Protest strike action was held at Basra Oil refinery, with management excluded from the site by workers. Demands focused on allocation of land for employees; higher wages; for the 20 per cent of oil revenues currently directed to the Ministry of Defence to be abolished; for more oil revenue to be ploughed back into the local economy; and for Saddamist managers and Ministry of Oil figures to be sacked.

July 2005

Workers in the south of Iraq cut oil exports for 24 hours. While the media reported the strike action as 'supporting the Governor of Basra', the GUOE stressed that it was acting in its own, independent, interests.

October 2005

The Federation of Oil Unions in Iraq (IFOU) was created, with its centre in Basra, composed of unions representing the oil sector in Basra, Meisan, and DhiQar. The new federation announced that their 'doors are open to all workers in the oil sector throughout Iraq from the north to the south and we welcome the support of all civil society organisations to this federation.' The new federation's executive, including President Hasan Juma'a, repeated that it continued to hold a clear position against privatisation of Iraqi companies, and against the US/UK occupation.