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Defending the Rights of Unemployed and Working Poor
Arab Citizens of Israel



SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

The History of Arab Labour in pre-1948 Palestine and Israel



Nazareth,
December 2006

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Contents:

Abstract	1
Introduction	1
I. Historical Background	2
II. The Palestinian Arab Labour Movement before 1948	4
Early Stages of Organisation	
PAWS – The First Arab Trade Union in Palestine	
The Arab Revolt, 1936-1939	
The Arab Labour Movement in the Years before the Nakba	
III. Labour Zionism and the Histadrut	11
Labour Zionism	
The Histadrut	
Joint Organisation	
Hebrew Labour	
The New Histadrut	
IV. Arab Workers in Israel	16
The Arab Labour Force in Numbers	
Arab Women in Israel's Labour Force	
The Histadrut and Arab Labour	
The Wisconsin Plan: The Latest Example of Social and Economic Exploitation	
Conclusion	22
Timeline	24
Glossary	26
Works Consulted	29

Abstract

Separate and Unequal provides an alternative view on labour history in pre-1948 Palestine and Israel as well as an assessment of the current situation of the Arab labour force in Israel. The report attaches major importance to the Palestinian labour movement before 1948, as the prevailing historical narrative – at least in the non-Arabic speaking world – presents the Palestinian Arab labour movement as unauthentic. Popular movements of Palestine's native population are generally depicted either as puppets of the conservative Arab leadership or as a result of the Histadrut's efforts to organise Arab workers. Separate and Unequal emphasises the distinct features and achievements of independent, Palestinian Arab grassroots activism which played a crucial role in the political and socio-economic developments of the time and which enjoyed considerable support from the Palestinian working class and peasantry.

Moreover, Separate and Unequal provides insight into the relationship between Arab and Jewish workers and their institutions in Palestine and into the impact of Labour Zionism on the Arab working class and the political developments in general. The report concludes that on the one hand, contrary to the general perception, before 1948, there was a broad-based and diverse Arab labour movement in Palestine and on the other hand, that ideology and practice of the Histadrut contributed significantly to the separation of Arab and Jewish workers and to the dispossession and uprooting of the native Palestinian people. Moreover, today, the New Histadrut fails to live up to its mandate – the representation of all workers in Israel.

The findings of Separate and Unequal regarding the current situation are summarised as follows: Its history as well as current practices disqualify the Histadrut as a suitable and trusted representative of the Arab labour force in Israel. In order to combat the root causes of poverty and unemployment, working Arab men and women need an independent platform to meet, organise and learn, as awareness and access to decent work are basic requirements for the community's socio-economic well-being and wide-spread participation in civil society and public life.

Introduction

The existence of an Arab labour movement in Palestine before 1948 has virtually been erased from the collective memory of at least the non-Arabic-speaking world. No archives or other comprehensive, reliable written sources survived the [Nakba](#)¹ and the subsequent collapse of organised Arab labour in Israel. The historical narrative prevalent in the Western hemisphere presents political initiatives of indigenous Arab workers either as instigated and facilitated by the [Histadrut](#) or as a mere propaganda tool of the ruling Arab bourgeois "effendis". Certainly, there was no labour movement and no working class consciousness in the largely rural, semi-feudal society of early 20th-century Palestine, but the local population adjusted quickly to the new challenges posed by mass immigration, industrialisation and Western colonial rule. Between 1925 and 1947, Palestine had a thriving Arab labour movement - though at times weakened by internal struggles - led by the largest union institution [PAWS \(Palestinian Arab Workers' Society\)](#). The Palestinian Arab working class and their leaders displayed a diversity of political ideologies and different attitudes concerning the Histadrut and joint Arab-Jewish organisation. Palestinian Arab unions were also internationally recognised as legitimate representatives of the Arab workers in Palestine.

In its most recent poverty report, Israel's National Insurance Institute revealed that 52% of Arab citizens of Israel live below the poverty line, as opposed to 16% of Jewish Israelis.

¹ Note for the electronic edition: all hyperlinks in the text lead to a relevant explanatory note in the Glossary and from there back to the text.

The state of Israel is built upon the sweeping success of two interlinked political campaigns ran by the [Labour Zionist](#) movement in the first half of the 20th century in Palestine: namely, the [Conquest of Land](#) and the [Conquest of Labour](#). *Separate and Unequal* focuses on the latter – the conquest of labour – and how the local Arab population dealt with this challenge. Moreover, this report argues that the policy of “conquering” labour has never been abandoned by the Israeli labour movement and continues to be implemented by contemporary Israeli governments. Over time, this exclusive approach has created a separate, low-wage sector for a largely unskilled and unorganised Arab labour force in Israel, which is nowadays joined by migrant workers from South Asia and new immigrants from Ethiopia and the Russian-speaking countries. This low-wage, manual labour sector occupied by the Arab labour force is now in times of globalisation gradually being transformed into an unemployed labour sector, and growing poverty and unemployment are further exacerbated by economic policies eroding the last resort, the public social safety net. In its most recent poverty report, the [National Insurance Institute](#) revealed that 52% of Arab citizens of Israel live below the [poverty line](#), as opposed to 16% of Jewish Israelis (National Insurance Institute, 2006).

In the early 20th century, when Jewish mass immigration to Palestine began, the local Arab population was overwhelmingly rural and many cultivated land owned by aristocratic families who resided in Jerusalem, Beirut or Damascus. There was no urban working class in Palestine and thus no labour movement. Hence, related political ideology was prevalent among the new immigrants who arrived mainly from Russia, which was on the verge of a Socialist revolution. In the context of Zionism, however, the egalitarian and internationalist components of Socialism were made to fit the colonialist nature of Jewish national aspirations in Palestine. Thus, Labour Zionism emerged as a distinct political ideology, which proved to be the most successful movement in the nation-building process and which has – though at first glance it seems more “leftist” and less openly aggressive towards the indigenous population – contributed largely to the continuous marginalisation, exclusion and expulsion of the Arab population from Palestine. After World War I, with growing Jewish immigration and a new colonial ruler, the British Empire, the local Arab population was confronted with a number of new and unknown challenges, including rapid industrialisation and large-scale colonialist settlement. Therefore, Palestinian Arabs almost simultaneously developed labour and national liberation movements, which often followed the same goals. Both national as well as working-class consciousness among Palestinian Arabs developed quickly, catalysed by the growing threat of dispossession.

Separate and Unequal is an attempt to provide an alternative view on Palestinian Arab labour history and the situation of the Arab labour force in Israel today. In order to complete the picture, the development of the Jewish-Israeli labour movement, its institutions and politics, and its attitude towards Arab workers are described as well. The report does not cover the labour movement in the occupied Palestinian territories because it would open a whole new range of issues that go beyond the framework of this report and need to be discussed in a separate publication. Chapter I provides a historical perspective on the period covered by this report as a broad overview of demographic and socio-economic developments is crucial to evaluate the events discussed. Chapter II reconstructs the history of the Arab labour movement in Palestine before the establishment of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba in 1948. Chapter III explains the basic goals and ideas of Labour Zionism and recounts the history of its main institution, the Histadrut. It further mentions attempts at joint Arab-Jewish organisation outside the framework of the Histadrut. Chapter IV describes the situation of the Arab labour force in Israel today and provides an assessment of the root causes of poverty and unemployment among Israel's Arab citizens. The report further offers a brief timeline of relevant historical and political events and a glossary of important terms. During the writing of *Separate and Unequal*, *Sawt el-Amel* collected and processed information from a variety of sources in three languages (English, Arabic and Hebrew), from different (inter)national perspectives and contrasting political and economic ideologies.

Separate and Unequal concludes that the situation of the Arab labour force in Israel today bears striking similarities to the challenges and restraints it faced in pre-1948 Palestine, and that Arab workers are insufficiently represented by the general trade union Histadrut. They are in need of an independent institution that raises awareness about workers' rights and that educates and organises them in a suitable and sustainable environment. The conclusions are informed by the available historic sources and by *Sawt el-Amel*'s extensive first-hand experience with Arab workers' activism in Israel.

I. Historical Background

In order to understand the socio-economic and political processes and events discussed in this report, some basic facts about the historic landscape in Palestine/Israel as it developed over time should be provided.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine is a geographical but not a separate political entity. The region is part of [al-Sham](#), a province of the Ottoman Empire, administered from Damascus. Already in 1882, the first

wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine had begun. The settlers are Russian Jews who fled persecution and pogroms in Tsarist Russia. In 1897, Theodor Herzl founds the Zionist Organisation at the 1st Zionist Congress in Basle, marking the beginning of political Zionism and strategic settlement of Jews in [Eretz Israel](#), the land which Jews generally interpret as covering historic Palestine. By 1900, app. 5,000 Jewish settlers have established 22 [moshavot](#), agricultural settlements (Lockman, 1996). However, at the turn of the century, the majority of Jews in Palestine is still part of the indigenous population; their native language is Arabic.

In 1914, Palestine is populated by 730,000 Arabs (=92.5% of the population) and 60,000 Jews, with more than half of the Jewish population living in Jerusalem (McCarthy, 1990). The indigenous Arab population is overwhelmingly rural, living in a semi-feudal system controlled by a number of powerful, land-owning families – notably the [Hussainis](#) and the [Nashashibis](#) from Jerusalem. The majority of peasants cultivate the land of absentee owners, who live in Jerusalem or in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, such as Beirut or Damascus; the Naqab (Negev) desert in the south is populated by semi-nomadic Bedouin tribes. At that time, most Palestinians would probably have identified themselves first and foremost as members of a certain family or clan and secondly as Arabs from al-Sham; the importance of a distinct Palestinian identity grows with the external pressure of Zionist nation-building, as the – virtual – borders of Eretz Israel basically correspond to the geographical region of Palestine. No working class or labour movement exists in Palestine's Arab society in the early 20th century, as hardly anybody is employed as a wage-labourer in industrial production.

After the end of World War I, the remains of the Ottoman Empire are divided among the victorious powers Great Britain and France at the San Remo Conference in 1920, with Palestine and Iraq being assigned to the British Empire as so-called Class A Mandates. In the beginning, Palestine includes today's Jordan, until the [British Mandate Authorities](#) split the region into Palestine and Transjordan, later to become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. From 1920 to 1947, Palestine is ruled by the British Mandate Authorities, and already in 1917, Britain had expressed its support for the establishment of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine with the [Balfour Declaration](#). Thus, the traditional lifestyle and livelihood of the local Arab population are threatened by two separate powers – the colonial ruler Great Britain and the Zionist settlers striving for a Jewish nation state on the land populated by the indigenous Palestinian Arabs.

This complex situation has a significant impact on the development of both the local labour movement and the relation of the traditional Arab ruling class to the Arab masses. The emerging Arab labour movement combines national liberation with the universal class struggle of all workers against the establishment, and relations between Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine are dominated by these often irreconcilable goals. In contrast to the rest of the Arab world, where the ruling classes usually collaborate with the colonial regimes for reasons of opportunism, the Palestinian Arab elite is initially quite sympathetic to the local labour movement, as the masses and their struggle for self-determination are needed to defeat Zionism. However, growing strength of the popular movement changes this balance of power, and grassroots leaders are increasingly targeted and sabotaged by the traditional Arab leadership.

In 1936, Arab popular struggle against the British Mandate Authorities and the Zionist settlers accumulates in the [Arab Revolt](#), which lasts for three years. The traditional Arab elite takes advantage of this revolutionary momentum, establishes the nationalist [Arab Higher Committee](#) under the leadership of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, and endorses the goals of the uprising. Arab workers stage a six-month general strike in 1936, one of the longest general strikes in labour history. However, this achievement only contributes to further marginalisation of Arab labour as striking Arabs are substituted by Jewish workers. The Mandate Authorities further allow the building of a new port in Tel Aviv while the neighbouring port of Yaffa is closed down due to the Arab dock workers' strike.

In 1946, Palestine has a total population of 1,845,599 people, 67% of them are Arabs (UNSCOP, 1947). Out of the 1.2 million Arabs living in Palestine, approximately 900,000 live in the coastal plains that will become Israel (Sabbagh-Khoury, 2004). The first Israeli census three years later in 1949 counts about 1 million Jews and some 160,000 Arabs inside the [Green Line](#) (CBS Israel). In the years between 1947 and 1949, the vast majority of the Palestinian people become refugees, either internally displaced inside the newly-established state of Israel or in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and the neighbouring Arab countries. Among the 750,000 Palestinian refugees who after the war found themselves outside the borders of the new state of Israel are also the intellectual elite and most leaders of the Arab labour movement.

The remaining Arabs are given Israeli citizenship but remain subject to direct military rule until 1966. During that time, the military administration, i.e. Israel's Labour-led government, puts severe restrictions on movement, political organisation and employment of Arab citizens, thus virtually paralysing Arab society and its social,

political, economic and cultural life. After military rule is lifted, the means of exclusion become increasingly more subtle and sophisticated.

Arab workers have organised in union institutions since the mid-1920s, and they have a history of collision and cooperation with their Jewish colleagues and the Histadrut – until the Palestinian Arab labour movement virtually collapsed in 1948. Since 1959, Arab workers have been allowed to become full members of the general Israeli trade union Histadrut, the institution that had played a key role in their uprooting and dispossession a decade earlier. Until today, Arab workers in Israel have no forum for organisation other than under the umbrella of the Histadrut.

II. The Palestinian Arab Labour Movement before 1948

The history of the Arab labour movement in Palestine before 1948 is virtually unknown to Arab, Israeli and international labour activists alike, as its existence and struggles are overshadowed by the seemingly omnipresent Histadrut on the one hand and the conservative leaders of the Arab elite on the other. Labour Zionist historical discourse successfully positioned the struggle of the Arab working class and landless peasants against the bourgeois Arab “effendis” instead of acknowledging popular Arab rebellion against colonial rule and Zionist hegemony in Palestine. However, a close look at labour history in Palestine reveals that the local Arab population quickly developed grassroots movements aimed both at the emancipation of workers and at national liberation. This report also reveals that grassroots activism and non-violent means of resistance were used extensively by the local Arab population, while the traditional Arab leadership often only reacted to developments on the ground and took advantage of their momentum.

Early Stages of Organisation

When Great Britain claimed mandatory rule over Palestine, the local economy was dominated by family structures and small businesses in a semi-feudal system, like in many other non-European societies which had not experienced the profound socio-historical changes brought about by the age of enlightenment and industrialisation in Europe. 65% of the population were landless peasants, and about 25% - among them migrant workers from Syria, Egypt and Lebanon – worked as day-labourers, minor clerks and farm hands (Yamani, 1993). Furthermore, there was a small number of skilled craftsmen and traders. The upper class was made up of land-owning families and the clergy. Most day-labourers and their families lived in abject poverty and worked between 10-12 hours seven days a week (Yamani, 1993). Production was pre-industrial; very few workplaces had more than 10 employees. The main goods produced in Palestine were silk, textiles, glass, pottery, wicker, soap, olive oil, sweets, grain and sesame. Economic activity was concentrated in the Galilee, the coastal towns of Acre, Haifa, Yaffa and Gaza, Jerusalem (al-Quds), Nablus and Hebron (Khalil).

With the arrival of the British Mandate Authorities, economic life in Palestine changed rapidly. Means of industrial production were introduced, also to the local businesses, and extensive transport and communication networks were set up because geopolitically, Palestine was an essential asset situated between the Suez Canal and Britain's other mandate region Iraq. Therefore, big foreign companies such as the British-owned Iraq Petroleum Ltd. soon stepped in and created thousands of jobs in the port authorities, military camps, the railway, communication and postal authorities, refineries, quarries and the municipalities. In the decade of the 1920s, the Arab population in Palestine grew by 40%, but in the coastal industrial towns Yaffa and Haifa, it grew by 63% and 87% respectively (Lockman, 1996). By 1931, 59% of Arab Palestinians were peasants, 13% worked in the construction industry and mining, 8.5% in commerce, 6% in communication, 1.3% in administration, etc. (Kanafani, 1972).

Growing urbanisation and industrialisation also increased interaction between the local workers who were now concentrated in large workplaces rather than scattered across small workshops all over Palestine. And growing correspondence among the workers revealed that, for example, some workers were paid more than others or that in other parts of the world, workers had much better working conditions. It became clear to the local Arab workers that the British Mandate Authorities usually employed Jews in more favourable positions such as the civil service and that Jews generally earned much more than Arabs (Yamani, 1993).

In the first quarter of the 20th century, Arab workers began to organise jointly with their Jewish colleagues. A 1932 report of the British High Commissioner for Palestine states that four union institutions existed in Palestine before 1920 and that a total of 1,294 workers were organised in the railway and postal workers union, the Haifa club of public service workers, the Haifa port workers, and the Haifa bakers' union by 1919. 671 members were Arabs and 623 were Jews (Farah, 1987). When the Histadrut was established in 1920, it

absorbed these joint unions; members of these early unions automatically became members of the General Union for Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel.

Joint Arab-Jewish actions were often organised with members of the Socialist Workers Party, which was critical of Zionism and which in 1921 split into the [Palestine Communist Party \(PCP\)](#) and the [Poale Zion Smol](#), not to be confused with the [Poale Zion](#). In 1924, the PCP became the Comintern's Palestine section, which meant that according to the Comintern's official platform, the PCP had to be non-Zionist. Its initial exclusively Jewish membership gradually developed into a Jewish-Arab communist party until it was dissolved in 1943. However, the PCP often remained biased in favour of Jewish workers. The party admitted at its Seventh Congress in 1930:

"[The party has] essentially adopted an erroneous attitude towards the issue of Palestinian nationalism, and the status of the Jewish national minority in Palestine and its role vis-à-vis the Arab masses. The party had failed to become active among the Palestinian Arab masses and remained isolated by working exclusively with Jewish workers" (quoted in: Kanafani, 1972).

By 1925, the labour movement in Palestine was divided into the Labour Zionists, who established the Histadrut, Communist Arab and Jewish worker activists, who believed that class solidarity was essential and could only work in a non-Zionist context, and Arab workers who were skeptical of the benefit of cooperation with the Jewish newcomers and combined workers' activism with national liberation.

In the early 1920s, Arab railway workers started to organise separately from their Jewish colleagues. It should be mentioned here that the British Mandatory Administration provided no legal framework protecting the rights of workers, including the right to form unions. Unlike the [yishuv](#), which basically administered itself, Arab associations were dependent on registration by the British authorities. In 1923, three Syrian railway workers – the brothers Abdelhamid and Salim Haymur and Said Qawwas – established the [Arab Railway Workers Club](#) in Haifa, which started off with 30 members. The Club then elected a board, the Brotherhood Committee for Arab Workers, which discussed workers' issues such as salaries, health, and poverty. Even though the Club mainly engaged in charitable activities, the Histadrut felt threatened and started sanction campaigns against its members (Yamani, 1993). Apart from the Arab Railway Workers' Club, there was another influential figure for Haifa's Arab working class – Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the imam of the Istiqlal (Independence) mosque in downtown Haifa. During Friday prayers, he encouraged Arab workers to struggle by themselves and not to join the Histadrut.

However, many Arab workers joined the Arab sections of Histadrut unions, such as the [Union of Railway, Postal and Telegraph Workers \(URPTW\)](#), but the Histadrut's Zionist outlook increasingly led to irreconcilable differences between Arab and Jewish workers. At an URPTW meeting in Haifa in 1924, Arab railway worker and activist Elias Asad said:

[...] They saw on the membership card [of the URPTW] the words "Federation of Jewish Workers" [i.e., the Histadrut] and they cannot understand what purpose this serves. I ask all the comrades to remove the word "Jewish," and I am sure that if they agree there will be a strong bond between us and all the Arabs will join. I would be the first who would not want to join a nationalist labor organization. There are many Arab nationalist organizations, and we do not want to join them, and they will say we have joined a Jewish nationalist organization....The thousands of workers who established the Histadrut have done nothing of benefit for the workers, and the reason is that inscribed on their membership cards is the word "Jewish," and this leads to division and jealousy. If they take out this word we will unite and work together" (quoted in: Lockman, 1996).

Attempts by Arab workers and Jewish activists from the PCP and Poale Zion Smol to turn the Histadrut into a colourblind institution failed, and Arab workers became increasingly disillusioned by the idea of joint organisation.

At the end of 1923, the leaders of the Arab Railway Workers Club filed a request with the British Mandatory Government to establish a workers' organisation called the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society (PAWS). Despite extensive lobbying with the British authorities by the Histadrut not to grant permission to establish such organisation, the first Arab union institution PAWS was founded on March 21, 1925.

PAWS - The First Arab Trade Union in Palestine

Soon after its establishment, Arab workers who had formerly believed in joint Arab-Jewish organisation but were frustrated by its futility joined the nationalist PAWS. Among them was Elias Asad, who had spoken at the URPTW meeting one year earlier. While the PAWS had its core among the railway workers from Haifa, it soon developed into a general union, including branches in most Palestinian towns and most professions. The most prominent PAWS unions were the Arab Union of Railway Workers in Haifa, the tobacco workers union, the bakers' union, the municipal workers' union, the postal workers' union, the union of military camp workers and the unions of the refinery and quarry workers (Yamani, 1993).

According to its statutes, PAWS' purpose was:

- Organisation of Arab workers in Palestine;
- Educational, cultural and awareness-raising activities;
- Defend the interests of workers;
- Negotiate standards relating to working hours, salaries, benefits and compensation, and health service.

Moreover, in order to obtain official status as a registered organisation under British mandatory law, PAWS declared that "the organisation will not engage in any political or religious activism" (Yamani, 1993).

The early leadership of PAWS was made up of Arab nationalists like the Haymur brothers and Saïd Qawwas and of workers who had a history of cooperation with Jewish coworkers, such as Elias Asad. Ironically, the Histadrut denounced PAWS for being separatist and exclusionary and thus against the spirit of workers' solidarity. The Histadrut also claimed that PAWS was a trade union in name only, that it was really a tool of "rich Arab nationalist effendis and reactionary Muslim clerics" (Lockman, 1996). Thus, the Histadrut and its affiliated unions continued their efforts to recruit Arab workers in order to maintain control over the Arab working class. One tool to reach Arab workers was the Histadrut's Arabic-language newspaper *Ittihad al-U'mal* (Workers' Union), which provided Arab workers with information on workers' issues from a Zionist perspective.

However, PAWS' influence among Arab workers was constantly growing, and on January 11/12, 1930, PAWS organised the first national congress of Arab workers in Palestine. This event was a milestone in Palestinian labour history. The participants of the conference emphasised the importance of organisation for Arab workers, but noted that the struggle for better economic conditions was not the central issue for the Arab labour movement in Palestine. The overall goal was political, i.e. self-determination in an independent Arab state in Palestine. The two-day conference came up with the following resolutions:

- Establish a Central Council of 11 members, representing all PAWS branches in Palestine;
- Set up a Secretariat of the Central Council in Haifa;
- Establish new PAWS branches covering all Palestine and all professions;
- Draft statutes for each union;
- Hold a National Congress every year;
- Publish a PAWS newspaper;
- Continue the struggle for an independent, Arab state in Palestine;
- Stop Jewish immigration to Palestine;



PAWS logo

The Arabic text reads: Palestinian Arab Workers' Society in Haifa – We progress towards: – Work – Knowledge – Serenity. – Established in Haifa, March 21, 1925.

- Struggle for equal rights of Arab and Jewish workers and discourage Arab workers from joining the Histadrut;
- Demand from the British authorities to free all administrative detainees and let exiled leaders return;
- Create a convention, song and logo for Arab workers in Palestine;
- Each PAWS branch pays 10% of its income to the Central Council.

Apart from the decisions, the National Congress formulated the following demands to the British Mandatory Government:

- Return ownership of the Dead Sea to the local population (Britain had leased it to foreign companies);
- Set up health clinics in Arab villages;
- Lift sanctions and other restrictions from Arab villages;
- Abolish legislation undermining the freedom of the press in Palestine.

(Yamani. 1993).

Among the 11 elected members of the Central Council, three were from Haifa (one of them Salim Haymur); two from Jerusalem; two from Yaffa; and one each from Nazareth, Acre, Lod (Lod), and Shef'amer. A young worker named Sami Taha was recruited as the secretary of the new general secretariat of PAWS in Haifa. He should remain PAWS' General Secretary and most prominent leader until his assassination – probably by order of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini – in 1947.

The Congress was covered extensively by the local media, and membership and the PAWS' bargaining power steadily increased. On the other hand, the Histadrut geared up its anti-PAWS activities and targeted both Arab workers and Jewish employers who employed Arabs. Also the British authorities frequently cracked down on Arab unionists, and many were dismissed from their jobs, detained and exiled (Yamani. 1993). In this general atmosphere, it was difficult to meet on a regular basis, but PAWS continued successfully until the beginning of the Arab Revolt in 1936.

In 1934, another Palestinian trade union was established in Jerusalem, the [Arab Workers Society \(AWS\)](#).² Its founder was Fakhri al-Nashashibi - also called Fakhri Bek - nephew of Jerusalem's mayor Raghیب al-Nashashibi. The union was supposed to lend political support to the Nashashibi family, and Fakhri Bek played a highly controversial role in Palestinian labour history, as his social background created conflicts of interest. In other parts of Palestine, the AWS soon developed an independent identity, separated from Jerusalem politics and Nashashibi nepotism, particularly in its most powerful branch in Yaffa where two young leaders emerged – Michel Mitri and George Mansur. Under Michel Mitri, the AWS developed a strongly Palestinian nationalist identity and launched a counter-movement to the Histadrut's [Hebrew Labour](#) campaign, calling for a boycott of Jewish labour and products. Michel Mitri was assassinated by order of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini in the early 1940s. George Mansur was involved in the general strike and workers' uprising during the Arab Revolt and testified in front of the Peel Commission on behalf of the Arab working class in Palestine.

The Arab Revolt, 1936-1939

On June 6, 1935, the Mandatory Government refused to authorise a demonstration of about 1,000 unemployed Arab workers in Yaffa, and the Arab Workers Society (AWS) then warned the authorities that "the government would soon have to give the workers either bread or bullets" (Kanafani, 1972). This warning proved to be prophetic, but it also came as no surprise, since by the mid-1930s, the socio-economic situation of the Palestinian Arab working class and peasantry had become desperate. In the major towns, whole neighbourhoods had turned into slums, and the Arab peasants and Bedouin were gradually driven off their land.

Ownership of urban and rural land by Zionist institutions rose from 300,000 dunums³ in 1929 to 1.25 million dunums in 1930, leading to the eviction of 20,000 peasant families by 1931 (Kanafani, 1972). Apart from economic subsistence, agriculture was central to social, cultural and religious life of peasants and the semi-nomadic Bedouin, and the loss of land caused immense social disruption. A census in 1937 indicated that on average, the salary of a Jewish worker was 145% higher than that of his/her Arab colleague; in tobacco factories, it was up to 233% higher, and in textile factories employing women it was 433% higher (Kanafani, 1972). Furthermore, the Histadrut's Hebrew Labour campaign was taking its toll. For example, in the four

² In some publications, the Arab Workers Society is referred to as Arab Workers Federation.

³ 1 dunum = 1/4 acre.

Jewish settlements Mablis, Dairan, Wadi Hunain and Hadera, there were 6,214 Arab workers in February 1935. Six months later, the figure was down to 2,276, and one year later, shortly before the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, only 617 Arab workers were employed in the settlements (Kanafani, 1972). At the same time, the number of Histadrut workers increased exponentially. According to the Histadrut newspaper *Davar*, 115,000 Jewish workers were organised in the Histadrut by July 1936. Nine months earlier, their number had been 74,000, according to an official government report (Kanafani, 1972).

Such was the climate that finally led to a popular uprising of the Palestinian Arabs against the British mandatory rulers. There are many different interpretations of what exactly triggered off the three-year insurrection; however, one man must be mentioned in relation to the Arab Revolt: Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a Syrian, came to Haifa in 1921 as the imam of the Istiqlal (Independence) Mosque. He had taken part in the Syrian revolt against the French colonial rulers in 1919-20 and was condemned to death *in absentia*. His ideology combined religion with nationalism in order to achieve self-determination for the Arab peoples in the Middle East. The Qassamist guerilla activities and al-Qassam's death in November 1935 were a major factor leading to the Arab Revolt in 1936. As already mentioned before, Sheikh Qassam had considerable influence among the Arab working class, and his funeral was attended by a large crowd of impoverished workers and peasants. The first signs of a violent uprising showed in Yaffa in February 1936, and on April 19, 1936, the Arab popular leadership – not the traditional ruling elite, which only later jumped on the bandwagon and established the Arab Higher Committee – declared

A census in 1937 indicated that on average, the salary of a Jewish worker was 145% higher than that of his/her Arab colleague; in tobacco factories, it was up to 233% higher, and in textile factories employing women it was 433% higher.

a general strike that was to last for six months. The general strike of the Arab workers in Palestine was one of the longest strikes in labour history, and it was sustained by the majority of the Arab working class. In some areas, particularly in Haifa, an Arab unionist stronghold, the strike was not thorough as some local political and union leaders sabotaged the strike for political opportunism and personal gain. During the strike, the Histadrut engaged in strike-breaking activities; a handful of members of the [Palestine Labour League](#), the Histadrut's Arab department, acted as scabs, while the Histadrut provided the closed workplaces with Jewish workers to replace the striking Arabs. The British Authorities welcomed the readiness of Jewish workers to take over in times of emergency and allowed the building of a new port in Tel Aviv, just a few kilometers away from the old port of Yaffa, which was paralysed by the strike. Therefore, though the six-month general strike was an extraordinary collective achievement of Palestine's Arab working class, the repercussions of the strike and the uprising in general were devastating for Arab workers and peasants. Moreover, the uprising showed that the dream of class solidarity of Arab and Jewish workers against the bourgeois and imperialist oppressors had definitely ended – if it had ever existed in the first place.

Union leaders of both the Arab community and the yishuv were heard in front of the Peel Commission investigating the causes of the Arab Revolt. Not surprisingly, assessments by the two communities were contradictory: Labour Zionist leaders emphasised the benefits of Jewish immigration and settlement for the indigenous Arab population. The Histadrut insisted that “the workers of both communities, the Jews, consciously, and the Arabs, instinctively, realised that there exists a real and organic basis for the establishment of friendly relations between them” (quoted in: Lockman, 1996). George Mansur of the Arab Workers Society (AWS) in Yaffa, on the other hand, testified that the Hebrew Labour campaign had greatly contributed to poverty and unemployment among the Arab population. In his report to the Peel Commission, George Mansur concluded from a survey among 1,000 workers in Yaffa that 98% of Arab workers had a “well below average” standard of living. Moreover, 2,270 men and women workers were unemployed in Yaffa (Kanafani, 1972). Mansur gave five reasons for the high unemployment rate among Arabs, being:

- Settling of new immigrants;
- Urban migration;

- Dismissal of Arab workers from their jobs;
- Deteriorating economic situation;
- Discriminatory policy of Mandatory Government in favour of Jews.

(Kanafani, 1972).

Hence, ideological bonds between the yishuv's Labour leadership and Britain's Labour-led government resulted in a biased interpretation of events in favour of the Jewish version. In order to reinvigorate the Arab position, George Mansur published *The Arab Worker under the Palestine Mandate* in English, "to give the English reader some idea of why Arab labour is at one with the rest of the Arab population in its opposition to Zionist immigration [...] and to call attention to the inadequacy of the Royal [Peel] Commission's treatment of the relationship of Jewish and Arab labour in Palestine" (quoted in: Lockman, 1996). However, the publication had little impact on British public opinion.

In 1939, after more than three years of uprising, the Arab leadership was exhausted and the workers and peasants were worse off than before. Approximately 5,000 Arabs were killed and 15,000 wounded during the revolt; 9,000 were detained and houses and property were destroyed (Kanafani, 1972). Moreover, the yishuv had considerably improved its position as future successor of the Mandate Authorities. For instance, while the Arab population had its energies directed towards the uprising, 50 new Jewish settlements were established and large amounts of money were invested in building projects in the existing towns, including a paved road from Haifa to Tel Aviv, effectively cutting off Yaffa port from economic life (Kanafani, 1972). Furthermore, during the Revolt, the British army trained about 15,000 Jewish settlers in the "Defense of Jewish Colonies" (later: Colony Police) forces, who should later become the commanding officers in the [Hagana](#) and the Israeli Defense Force (Kanafani, 1972). The deteriorating political and economic situation of the Palestinian Arab population led to intensive union activity in the 1940s.

The Arab Labour Movement in the Years before the Nakba

In the early 1940s, the Arab labour movement grew considerably – in number, diversity and influence. In 1942, a group of young Communist intellectuals and working class activists around the Rays of Hope association established a new trade union, the [Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labor Societies \(FATULS\)](#), in Haifa. The new union, led by former PAWS activist Boulos Farah, challenged its established counterpart PAWS, which it considered conservative and too caught up in the nationalist struggle. The FATULS' political outlook was more internationalist than that of PAWS. At the end of the year, FATULS had between 1,000–1,500 members in Haifa alone (Lockman, 1996). The new competitor stimulated the efforts of the now veteran PAWS, and Palestinian labour activism flourished in the mid-1940s. As a consequence, also the Histadrut geared up its efforts to organise Arab workers in its Arab department, the Palestine Labour League (PLL), but growing skills and experience of the Arab labour leaders increasingly created obstacles to Zionist organisation of the Arab working class. One clear example of the confrontation between the PLL and the Arab trade unions are the events of May Day 1944. The PLL had tried to stage a May Day celebration for Arab workers, but Arab labour activists disrupted the meeting on April 30, 1944. The PLL then reported that the agitators had been agents of the police or of a local factory manager, with whom the PLL was engaged in a labour dispute. The Arab activists, however, reacted to this misinformation and issued a leaflet, saying:

"Brother Workers! Imagine to yourselves what you would say if this happened to you, if they expelled you from your job only because you were Jewish, if you saw your families hungry and your children crying for bread. Imagine to yourselves what you would say if these same people who yesterday expelled you from your job came to you today talking about May Day, even while declaring that tomorrow too they will put you out of work, if they can manage it. Right now, in these very days, the Histadrut has organized pickets at the [Akiva?] factory in Rishon Letziyon to drive the four Arab workers employed there from their jobs" (quoted in: Lockman, 1996).

It is worth mentioning that the leaflet was written in Hebrew.

At the time of this incident, the European Jewry was on the verge of extermination by Nazi Germany, where systematic persecution of Jews had begun about a decade earlier by means of excluding Jewish citizens from employment and public life.

In the 1940s, the Palestinian Arab labour movement was strongly influenced by a new all-Arab, Communist party, the [National Liberation League \(NLL\)](#). The NLL was founded in 1943, by Arab members of the Palestine Communist Party which was dissolved that year. Its leadership included the left wing of PAWS and most FATULS activists. Moreover, it enjoyed the support of many educated young Arabs. The NLL's platform combined a strong commitment to nationalism and self-determination with Socialist views of social reform and mass mobilisation. While it opposed Jewish immigration and Jewish statehood, it did make a difference

between the Jewish masses in Palestine and Zionism, which it opposed as a form of colonialism. The NLL's political vision saw an independent Arab state in Palestine, with a Jewish minority enjoying equal rights. Among the prominent members of the NLL were Emile Habibi, Emile Touma, Fuad Nassar, Mussa Dajani, and Boulos Farah. In 1947, the party split over the question of the [UN Partition Plan](#). While one faction supported the Plan out of loyalty to its ideological ally, the Soviet Union, another faction, among them union leader Boulos Farah, opposed the idea of partition. By 1948, Farah and others had resigned, and the NLL was finally absorbed by the new Israeli Communist Party Rakach in the 1950s. A number of Palestinian Arab Communists, among them Boulos Farah, continued their political activism in the new Israeli framework. Leaders of the NLL and FATULS founded the newspaper *al-Ittihad*, which is still today among the most popular Arabic-language papers in Israel.

One major reason for heavy union activity in the 1940s was intensified military-industrial production since the outbreak of World War II, and military camp workers played an important role in the Arab labour movement at that time. By 1943, about 28,000 Arabs worked in British military camps in Palestine, which were often administered by Jewish officers (Yamani, 1993). The union of Arab military camp workers, a PAWS branch, held a conference in Yaffa in 1943. The unionists discussed issues such as the need for equal wages for Arabs and Jews, sick leave, holidays and work hours. Moreover, the conference formulated a resolution, stating that the union of Arab military camp workers was the only legitimate representative of Arab workers in the camps; the Histadrut had no right to claim responsibility. In response, the Histadrut organised a conference for military camp workers in Tel Aviv, which was attended by Jewish and some Arab workers. The conference was a moderate success, and eventually, the British army recognised the Arab military camp workers' PAWS branch as the legitimate representative of Arab workers in Palestine. This was the first time that the British authorities acknowledged a Palestinian union as official representative of the Arab labour force.

Trade union density among Palestinian Arab workers was probably higher in the mid-1940s than it is among Arabs in Israel today.

Two years later, in 1945, PAWS achieved another historical success: at the preparatory conference for the [World Federation of Trade Unions \(WFTU\)](#) in London, the PAWS delegation, consisting of its General Secretary Sami Taha and its legal advisor Hanna A'sfur, reached international recognition as official representative of the Arab workers in Palestine. Also for the first time, Palestinian union leaders spoke to an international audience about the unfair practices of the Histadrut. The conference was attended by around 2,000 trade unionists from all over the world. At home, however, many left-wing labour activists were unhappy with Taha and A'sfur's performance, and after an August '45 meeting in Nablus, where Taha and A'sfur designated themselves as delegates to the WFTU founding conference in Paris, the Yaffa, Gaza, Jerusalem and other small PAWS branches disaffiliated and formed the [Arab Workers' Congress \(AWC\)](#). Soon after, FATULS merged itself into the AWC. This new union was thus closely aligned with the NLL, as both its PAWS members as well as most FATULS activists were Communists and members of the NLL. The AWC chose Boulos Farah and Mukhlis A'mru as its delegates to Paris, and so at the WFTU founding conference, Palestine was represented by three

delegations: PAWS, the AWC and the Histadrut. Due to its Communist platform, many participants immediately identified the AWC as an ideological ally and elected the delegation as official representative of Palestine's Arab workers. Taha and A'sfur of PAWS only enjoyed observer status. The AWC delegation proved to be highly successful and helped secure the election of Mustafa al-A'ris, a Lebanese unionist, as Middle East representative of the WFTU's executive board, defeating the Histadrut candidate.

1947 was a devastating year for the Arab labour movement in Palestine. On September 11, 1947, Sami Taha, Palestine's most outstanding though at times controversial union leader, was assassinated. The circumstances of his death remain unclear, but it is commonly assumed that the traditional leadership under Hajj Amin al-Hussaini was behind the killing. For decades, the traditional nationalist leadership had

undermined popular movements through violence and propaganda. The newspaper *Filastin* was a major tool of the Arab elite to denounce labour leaders. The controversy over the UN Partition Plan dealt another deadly blow to the Palestinian Arab left in general and the labour movement in particular. By 1949, the majority of the Arab working class and its leaders had been expelled from the newly-established state of Israel; only the AWC and the NLL remained in operation in a rudimentary state. The PAWS headquarters were first moved from Haifa to Nablus and then to Amman where PAWS finally had to rename itself Jordanian Workers Society (al-Jenedi). However, efforts to reorganise the Palestinian labour movement from Amman failed and most of the exiled leaders later left Jordan. By the mid-1950s, all Arab organisations of pre-1948 Palestine had either disappeared completely or were absorbed by new Israeli parties.

There are no clear data available as to how many of the 115,000 to 130,000 Arab workers in Palestine were organised in unions in their heydays. While government sources estimated a moderate 15,000-20,000, others put PAWS membership alone at 15,000 and AWC membership at 18,000 (Power, 1998). While we cannot establish exactly how many Arab workers were organised in pre-1948 Palestine, we can say that – assuming the average estimate is closest to the truth – trade union density among Palestinian Arab workers was probably higher in the mid-1940s than it is among Arabs in Israel today.

III. Labour Zionism and the Histadrut

The Labour Zionist movement and its official institution, the Histadrut, have played a major role, both in establishing the state of Israel and in shaping the relationship between Jewish and Arab workers in Palestine/Israel, and therefore, this report will dedicate particular attention to the history of the Histadrut, its political outlook and its relation to the Arab labour force. This chapter further describes attempts at joint Arab-Jewish organisation.

Labour Zionism

While political Zionism as developed by Theodor Herzl concentrated on securing international political and financial support for the establishment of a Jewish nation state, first in Uganda, then in Palestine, the Eastern European Jews who came to Palestine in the first two decades of the 20th century took a more hands-on approach. The majority of these immigrants were influenced by the revolutionary climate in their native Russia and held strong Socialist beliefs. On the other hand, those who decided to emigrate and settle in Palestine were obviously skeptical that a Socialist revolution would benefit the Jewish people in Russia and the rest of Europe. In the beginning of the 20th century, the Poale Zion party was formed in Russia, and branches soon emerged all over Europe and in the Americas. David Ben-Gurion joined the Polish Poale Zion branch in 1904. The political platform of Poale Zion combined Socialism with Zionism and argued that Jewish national liberation was a necessary step on the way to a true, Socialist society. And the struggle for national liberation was to be fought in Palestine.

In Palestine, the members of Poale Zion were the ones who laid the foundation for the “state in the making”, which should become Israel about half a century later. They founded the forerunner of the Hagana militia, which would later become the Israeli army; they established the first [kibbutzim](#), schools, health clinics and soup kitchens. Moreover, Poale Zion activists launched the Conquest of Land and the Conquest of Labour campaigns and the Hebrew Labour doctrine, which aimed at creating a Jewish agricultural and industrial working class, separate from the Arab masses. From the very beginning, the leaders of the Labour Zionist movement in Palestine were aware of the native Arab population, and they knew that the Conquest of Land and Labour could only be achieved at the expense of an already existing labour force. As early as 1906, the question of organising Arab workers is discussed at a Poale Zion meeting in Yaffa (Lockman, 1996). However, for the Labour Zionists, the issue of the Arab working class only became urgent in the 1920s, with growing urbanisation and immigration.

The Histadrut

In 1920, the Labour Zionist movement in Palestine was institutionalised with the establishment of the General Union for Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel, the Histadrut. It was founded by the parties [Ahdut haAvoda](#), the successor of Poale Zion, which had been dissolved in Palestine two years earlier, and [haPoel haTzair](#). David Ben-Gurion, later to become Israel's first prime minister, was the Histadrut's first chairperson.

The Histadrut, however, was not a trade union. It was rather a “state in the making”,⁴ or a “quasi-state”. Trade unionism was only a small part of the Histadrut’s work. The Histadrut was active in all spheres of life in the yishuv: it established youth and kibbutz movements and the Hagana; it ran schools, sport clubs (haPoel), a health service ([Kupat Holim](#)), and a financing institute (Bank haPoalim). And apart from being a trade union, it was also one of the largest employers in Palestine, owning major companies such as Tnuva (dairy products), Solel Boneh (construction), or Hameshbir (department store), which still exist today. After the establishment of Israel, the Histadrut became the state’s second-largest employer after the state itself. Thus, the Histadrut Empire had many different, and often conflicting, interests. For instance, its interests as an employer certainly did not always correspond to those of the Histadrut’s trade union department. On the other hand, this wide variety of activities created great efficiency and influence, as the kibbutzim served as training ground for the fighters of the Hagana militia; the schools taught Labor Zionist thought. And last but not least, the activities of the Histadrut generated enormous amounts of money.

The Histadrut is not a federation of autonomous unions but a general federation of labour and “association of individuals”, as it defines itself today. Workers join the Histadrut directly, and then every new member is automatically assigned to his/her appropriate trade union, according to profession. Every woman member of the Histadrut also automatically joins Naamat, the Histadrut’s women’s and volunteers’ department. The Histadrut also represents Israel’s workers internationally, as member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)⁵ and as representative in the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Histadrut is the only official organ for workers in Israel who wish to discuss their issues and share views on an international level.

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The constituency of the Histadrut, too, suggests that the organisation viewed – and still views – itself as a state-like entity rather than a representative body for workers, since membership is nationality-based instead of class-based. For instance, on the one hand, about 50% of the self-employed in Israel are Histadrut members, while on the other hand, membership has never been offered to the Palestinian residents of the occupied Palestinian territories, who are employed inside Israel⁶ (Shalev, 1996). Also migrant workers cannot become members of the Histadrut and have thus no protection mechanisms and instruments for collective action. In order to run for Histadrut elections, candidates do not need to be members of the working class; Histadrut membership is acquired like membership in a political party. Until 1994, the Histadrut was governed exclusively by the Labour Party. Haim Ramon was the first chairperson to be elected from a list not linked to the Labour Party.

⁴ On the Histadrut’s official website, the organisation describes itself as having had this “nickname”.

⁵ ITUC was founded on November 1, 2006, in Vienna. It unites the former International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU), of which the Histadrut was a member, the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and a number of formerly non-affiliated unions.

⁶ Note: This statement does not imply that the Histadrut should extend its mandate to the occupied Palestinian territories; it is rather meant to expose contradictions within the Histadrut’s identity.

The Histadrut went through various changes over time until its internal structure was revolutionised in 1994, when it was renamed [New Histadrut](#). In 1920, the organisation was established as the General Federation for Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel, a name which clearly set an agenda. Firstly, the institution was meant to be for Hebrew workers only, and secondly, it represented the workers of Israel, not Palestine, which was the region's official name in 1920. This self-definition continued to cause major contradictions between the organisation's exclusive ethnic-national identity and its Socialist ideals. Therefore, the Histadrut's relations, or non-relations, with the local Arab labour force remained of crucial importance for Labour Zionist political thought and practice, though the founding myth of Israel makes only minor mention of the existence of the indigenous Arab Palestinians and their collective political actions.

Only in 1959, Arab citizens of Israel were allowed to become direct members of the Histadrut, and six years later, in 1965, they could vote for the first time in Histadrut elections. The following year, the Histadrut officially dropped the term Hebrew from its name; however, apart from this nominal change, the constitution was not amended. Until today, no Arab citizen has held an executive position within the Histadrut Convention, the highest governing body.

The Question of Joint Organisation

Contrary to the general historic narrative prevalent in Israel and the Western hemisphere, which makes little mention of the native Arab population, the interaction between the Jewish immigrants, who were a minority in Palestine, and the local population has been of major concern to the political leaders of the Zionist movement – and for obvious reasons less so for the local Arab population, as the foreign settlers were neither invited nor particularly wanted.

The Labour Zionist leaders immediately understood that the Arab masses cannot simply be overlooked. In the early years of the 20th century, Arabs made up 90% of Palestine's population, and this enormous majority had to play a role in the class struggle as envisaged by the Zionist leadership. The question was how could the mass of landless Arab peasants and seasonal wage-labourers be integrated in the class struggle and at the same time be excluded from Jewish nationalist aspirations in Palestine. This dilemma is brilliantly illustrated by Labour Zionist attempts to organise Arab labour.

The colonialist nature of Labour Zionism was revealed by David Ben-Gurion at an Ahdut haAvoda party congress in 1921 where he argued that relations between Arab and Jewish workers should be:

“Joint economic, political, and cultural work, which is the necessary prerequisite for our redemption as a free working people and for the emancipation of the Arab working people from enslavement by its oppressors and exploiters, the dominant landowners and property-owners. [...It was] the conscious and cultured Jewish worker, whose historic mission is the building of a free community of labor in Eretz Israel, who must lead the movement of liberation and rebirth of the peoples of the Near East [...and] educate the Arab worker to live an orderly and cooperative life of labor, discipline, and mutual responsibility.” (Lockman, 1996).

Ben-Gurion's solution for the tricky question of joint organisation was the establishment of separate but equal trade unions for Arabs, which were not part of but linked to the exclusively Jewish Histadrut. He envisaged separate unions in mixed workplaces, which on the one hand allowed the Jewish workers to improve their position as workers by joint labour-related struggles with their Arab coworkers and which on the other hand preserve the exclusively Jewish character of the Histadrut and its nationalist goals. This division was of crucial importance for the Histadrut's other tasks, including the campaign for Hebrew Labour.

Haim Arlosoroff, another prominent Labour Zionist leader, suggested a more radical, but also more ideologically consistent approach to Zionist relations with Arab labour. In his essay “On Joint Organisation” from 1927 he argued that the real conflict is between a skilled, expensive Jewish labour force and an unskilled, cheap Arab labour force, and that joint organisation would not lead to improvements in the high-wage Jewish labour sector but rather to a deterioration of Jewish wages to the Arab level. Arlosoroff cited South Africa, where a minority of expensive white workers competed with cheap African and Indian masses. In order to solve the problem of competitiveness, South Africa had simply introduced a colour bar, which excluded non-whites from organised, skilled and well-paid jobs. Arlosoroff suggested that the Zionist Labour movement should follow the example of South Africa as otherwise the Zionist project was doomed.

Since 1932, the Histadrut's relations to Arab workers were facilitated by the Palestine Labour League (PLL), the Histadrut's Arab department. The PLL never gained significant influence among Arab workers as it was too obviously Zionist and thus identified as a threat rather than a partner in action. By 1937, the PLL reported that it had issued 1,100 membership cards all together and that currently, at the height of the Arab Revolt, no more than 15 Arab workers were loyal to it in Haifa and Yaffa, the region's industrial centres; all 13 trade

unions the PLL had established were defunct (Lockman, 1996). Most Arab workers, who did join or approach the PLL, saw the institution as an employment agency rather than a trade union. After the establishment of Israel, the PLL was renamed Israel Labour League until it was disbanded in 1959, when Arabs were allowed to become direct members of the Histadrut.

However, there were also serious attempts at joint organisation, promoted by Communist, non-Zionist or also moderately Zionist Jewish and Arab workers. The internal struggles within the Union of Railway, Postal and Telegraph Workers (URPTW), an affiliate of the Histadrut, illustrate both the ideological dilemmas of Labour Zionism as well as the influence of the emerging Arab labour movement. At a general meeting of the URPTW in January 1925, attended by Jewish and Arab workers and by the Histadrut's top notch Ben-Gurion, Ben Zvi and Arlosoroff, the Arab and some leftist Jewish delegates demanded that the Histadrut transform itself into a non-Zionist institution, otherwise the URPTW would disaffiliate from the Histadrut. In the long run, however, the Histadrut's leaders proved more powerful and the status quo was maintained. In the same year, PAWS was established.

Another organisation that approached Arab workers as equals was the Socialist Zionist movement [haShomer haTzair](#). The movement advocated bi-nationalism and equality between Arabs and Jews. In the 1940s, its leader Aharon Cohen tried to mobilise the Arab labour movement as a central ally of the moderate Zionists, but at that stage, the ridge between Arabs and Jews in Palestine had already become insurmountable. Like all other Zionist organisations, haShomer haTzair was trapped between theory and reality. Moshe Shamir, an Israeli novelist, described his experience in one of the movement's kibbutzim as follows:

"[...] We just simply lived with our nice theories to one side and the bitter reality to the other, and we saved ourselves any unpleasantness and the burden of thinking simply by never trying to look at the theories and reality side by side, for a first, elementary, basic examination of the extent to which they coincided or differed... We organized ourselves behind the fence, we prepared to defend ourselves, we spoke of "brotherhood among peoples" and we never in fact fulfilled a single serious obligation of [the principle of] brotherhood among peoples." (quoted from "My Life with Ishmael", in: Lockman, 1996).

In 1948, after the United Nations had presented a partition plan for Palestine, haShomer haTzair abandoned its bi-nationalism and merged together with Ahdut haAvoda into [MAPAM](#), the junior partner of the main labour party [MAPAI](#). Due to its closeness to the kibbutz movement and its "pioneer spirit", MAPAM would provide the newly-established state of Israel with a very large number of high-ranking army officers.

In the first decades of the 20th century, Arab and Jewish workers staged a number of broad-based and effective joint actions in Palestine. However, the socio-political developments on the ground soon revealed that class solidarity was to remain a dream as interests were too contrasting and power relations too unbalanced.

Hebrew Labour

In 1912, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, a prominent Labour Zionist leader, argued that:

"In certain historical circumstances, national interests must take precedence over class solidarity [...]. The organised and class-conscious Jewish workers in Palestine have the right to demand that cheap and unorganised Arab labour be excluded from jobs in the Moshavot and elsewhere in the Jewish sector" (quoted in: Quinn, 2002).

This view was the basis for the Hebrew Labour campaign, initiated by the Labour Zionist movement in Palestine in the early years of the 20th century and continued and sophisticated by the Histadrut. In 1921, Ben Zvi further elaborated his argument in the essay "The Arab Movement", defining the conflict between Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine as social rather than national, i.e. low-wage Arab workers vs. high-wage Jewish workers. Moreover, he described Palestinian nationalism as artificial and reactionary, an instrument of the Arab land-owning elite to perpetuate its exploitation of the Arab workers and peasants. This assessment of the situation soon became the mainstream Labour Zionist discourse as it established a new enemy - the Arab "effendis", the land-owning families and the clergy - and deviated from the racial exclusiveness of the Hebrew Labour campaign.

In 1929, at a Histadrut meeting, David Ben-Gurion exclaimed:

"I must rise up with all my strength against [joint organisation] and [the claim] that there is no place for the demand of Hebrew Labor at one hundred percent in the colony. I believe that we must fight especially for one hundred percent [...] I'm not afraid to say that we must seize the moment for several things: strengthening the Hagana, accelerating the [Zionist] enterprise, and also for imposing Hebrew Labor" (quoted in: Glazer, 2001).

The essence of the Hebrew Labour campaign is best illustrated with the Histadrut's picketing campaigns between 1927 and 1936. In this period, the Histadrut ran picketing campaigns against Jewish employers who

employed Arab workers. In the early stages, pickets were set up in citrus groves in rural areas, and with growing popularity of the campaign, picketing was extended to urban construction sites. The Histadrut argued that the employment of Arab workers would hamper the influx of new working immigrants and lower the wage level of Jews in general. Picketers used violence against Arab grove workers and manipulated public opinion by staging arrests and injuries.

In 1934, High Commissioner Wauchope signed an amendment to the 1926 Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance, making work disputes over an employee's race, religion and language illegal. Subsequently, several Histadrut members were charged with incitement and violent picketing. Their trial was publicised by the media, and the picketers' defiant behaviour and vow not to abandon their struggle for Hebrew Labour earned them the respect of large portions of the yishuv, including the middle class. As a result, the picket lines were increasingly manned by middle-class intellectuals and Bohemians, such as actors, students, teachers, doctors and even tourists. Moreover, the picketing campaign for Hebrew Labour reached Tel Aviv, and organisations like the Association of Hebrew Writers and the Teachers' Federation issued resolutions and poems denouncing the Jewish grove owners and the Arab workers. The Teachers' Federation issued an endorsement of pure Hebrew Labour and linked the labour issue to land acquisition and the mandatory use of the Hebrew language (Glazer, 2001).

Steven Glazer argues in his article "Picketing for Hebrew Labour: A Window on Histadrut Tactics and Strategy":

The picketing campaign represents an important phase in the acceleration of violence between the Zionist and Palestinian communities. As such, an examination of the campaign provides clues to the thinking of the Labour Zionist movement, particularly regarding issues of separatism and exclusivism. A study of the campaign also allows one to compare the Histadrut's rhetoric of the day – which insisted that the Zionist labour union put the highest priority on efforts to achieve Arab-Jewish cooperation – with the reality of confrontation and conflict that broke out at these work sites" (Glazer, 2001).

The picketing campaign ended with the outbreak of the Arab popular uprising in 1936. Repercussions of the Hebrew Labour doctrine, however, are still felt by the Arab labour force in Israel today.

The New Histadrut

In 1994, the Histadrut had 1.6 million members including dependents (=85% of all wage-earners in Israel, or one third of the overall population), and approximately 150,000 (=9.5% of all members) of whom were Arab workers.⁷ Due to the radical changes in structure and policy, membership dropped to 650,000 only one year later. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), trade union density in Israel was down to 23% in 1995, which is lower than in most European countries and also lower than in neighbouring Egypt, where trade union density was 39% (ILO, 1997)

The 1994 Histadrut elections ended the Labour hegemony; Haim Ramon became the first chairman not affiliated to the Labour List. His "New Life" List including members of the leftist-liberal Meretz and orthodox Shas parties won the elections by more than 10 percent points. The new Histadrut leadership brought about two revolutionary changes in the Histadrut's structure and mandate. Firstly, the [National Health Law](#) of 1995 severed the ties between the provision of health service by the Histadrut's Kupat Holim Clalit and mandatory Histadrut membership, and secondly, the Histadrut's business branch, the [Workers' Company](#), sold all its enterprises, at least partially. Thus, the Histadrut finally became a trade union in the commonly accepted sense of the term: it ceased to be union and employer at the same time, and membership was no longer tied to the provision of services not directly linked to worker's rights and education. Amir Peretz, Histadrut chairman from 1995 to 2006, is generally associated with the new image of the Histadrut as a "real" union.

As a direct result of the National Health Law in 1995, Histadrut membership dropped from 1.6 million in 1994 to 650,000 in 1996. No official data are available as to how many of the approximately 150,000 Arab members before 1995 left due the new legislation; however, most likely the number is very high as the Histadrut's Kupat Holim is often the only health service available in Arab villages.

Even though the New Histadrut was no longer an employer, it still maintained its close relations with the Israel Employers' Union, with which it had been directly involved for so many years. This way, the New Histadrut succeeded in keeping parts of its constituency. On January 9, 1995, nine days after the National Health Law came into force, the Histadrut struck a smart deal with the Employers' Union: employers would deduct 0.9% of

⁷ The Histadrut does not provide exact data on Arab membership; estimates from other sources range from 100,000 (Encyclopedia of the Orient) to 170,000 Arab members (Library of Congress) in the late 1980s.

their employees' salaries directly for automatic Histadrut membership, and in return for this favour, the employers allegedly keep a small portion of the money ("Towards an Independent Trade Union Movement", 1998). In 1996, a Histadrut Control Committee reportedly found that 92% of the Histadrut's members have their fees deducted automatically from their paycheck, while only 8% - i.e. 50,000 workers – consciously paid their membership fee ("Towards an Independent Trade Union Movement", 1998).

The New Histadrut unites 78 trade unions formally representing all branches of employment in the Israeli economy. The basic unit of the Histadrut is the Works Committee in every enterprise. All Histadrut members in each district elect the local Histadrut branch, the Labour Council, and a Council elected by the union membership governs each union. Today, the Histadrut has four main fields of activity: trade union organisation, social services (health insurance, retirement homes, pension funds), education and culture (vocational schools, theatres, sports clubs), and economic development (industrial enterprises still partially owned by the Histadrut). Naamat, the women's and volunteers' department, is active in the fields of child-care, nursery schools, summer camps for children of working mothers, and vocational training for women and girls. Furthermore, a Legal Advice Bureau for the Individual was opened in 30 regional branches of the Histadrut. According to the Histadrut's own definition, the Bureau "gives advice and will represent members of the Histadrut even if they are employed in places of work that are not organised" (Histadrut Website, 2006). Hence, all these services are not - or only to a very limited extent – available to members from the Arab community, as Histadrut branches in Arab towns are often dormant.

Out of the 280,000 employed Arab workers in Israel, a generous 35,000 are in effect organised.

The New Histadrut further hails the Employment Agencies Law, passed in 2000, as a major victory for the trade union. This law limits the hiring of workers from private employment agencies to only nine months, and the Histadrut claims that it thus ended the ongoing exploitation of workers by private manpower companies. The situation on the ground, however, is somewhat different as the Law in fact perpetuates exploitation of temporary workers. Now, thousands of workers are employed for a period of nine months, fired and then re-hired, denying them their entitlements to social benefits and pension claims resulting from longer-term employment.

According to the New Histadrut's official website, the union federation has now a membership base of 700,000 people, and an educated guess would put Arab membership at no more than 55,000 (19.5% of all Arab wage-earners in Israel, or 4.5% of the overall Arab population). This estimate is informed by the fact that already before 1995, Arab workers made up less than 10% of the Histadrut's members and that the health service was a major incentive for many Arabs to join. It should be noted that these numbers include the members' dependents, which means that out of the app. 280,000 employed Arab workers in Israel, a generous 35,000 (= 13%) are in effect organised.

IV. Arab Workers in Israel

This chapter deals with labour force characteristics of Arab citizens today and the root causes of poverty and unemployment among Palestinian Arabs in Israel. Moreover, it discusses the role of the Histadrut within the Arab community and in maintaining socio-economic double standards in Israel. The author does not claim to present a complete picture of labour activism in Israel today; due to the concise format of the report, initiatives of political parties and other civil society actors cannot be covered in much detail. The main objective of this chapter is to provide the reader with solid statistical background information in order to support the arguments presented in this publication.

The Arab Labour Force in Numbers

Before discussing specific aspects related to Arab workers in Israel, some striking socio-economic features of Israel's population as a whole shall be presented here, as the growing gap between rich and poor is a threat not only to Arab citizens. On August 30, 2006, the National Insurance Institute (NII) issued the latest edition of its bi-annual poverty report, covering the year of 2005. The findings of the report identified a wide range of so-called "red flags" pointing towards a growing social crisis in the country (Sawt el-Amel, Sept. 7, 2006):

- *Increase of overall poverty rate:* almost 100,000 Israelis (overall population: 7 million) slipped below the poverty line in 2005, more than half of them children;
- *Disproportionately high child poverty rate:* 35% of children in Israel are poor, a record for the developed world. Child poverty has increased by 55% since 1998;
- *Extreme – and growing – discrepancies along ethnic lines:* 52% of Arab citizens live below the poverty line as opposed to 16% of Jews; while the poverty rate among Jews has been stable over the past year, the Arab population has seen an increase of more than 2%;
- *Regional differences in income distribution:* the North remains the poorest region in the country; 29% of families and 40% of children in the North are poor; the national average stands at 20.6% and 35.2% respectively;
- *Widening gap between high and low-income classes:* Despite a general improvement of the economy, real wages in sectors such as hospitality and textiles dropped; salaries rose only in positions requiring higher education. Poverty increased in families with only one breadwinner and/or with four or more children;
- *Alarming increase of working poor:* the percentage of working poor grew from 38% in 2002 to 43% in 2005; in 2005, 60% of working poor held full-time jobs.

Globally, traditional representatives of the socially and economically disadvantaged, such as trade unions, are still struggling to find proper responses to the challenges and threats of globalisation, and in the meantime, poverty and exploitation take their toll. In this context, Arab citizens of Israel are faced with the double jeopardy of the already existing internal means of exclusion and the external pressure of the globalised economy.

The following tables provide a statistical backup for the arguments presented in this report – namely the fact that until today, Palestinian Arabs are treated as second-class citizens in Israel and are excluded from the country's economic wealth and social services. In relation to the Arab labour force, this segregation is reflected in low labour force participation rates, high unemployment and a concentration of Arab employees in the low-wage sectors.

General Statistical Data for Israel⁸	Jews (and others)	Arabs	Total
Population (in thousands)	5,529	1,340	6,869
Population (in %)	80.5	19.5	100
Population aged 15+ (in thousands)	4,064	812	4,876
Population aged 15+ (in %)	83.3	16.7	100
Thereof in civilian labour force (percentage of people aged 15+)	58.2	38.6	54.9
Thereof unemployed (percentage of people in civilian labour force)	9.2	11.3	10.4
Citizens below the poverty line (percentage of overall population)	15.9	52.1	20.6

Arab Labour Force in Israel, 2005⁹	Not in civilian labour force	Unemployed (in civilian labour force)	Temporarily absent from work	Worked part-time	Worked full-time	Total (in civilian labour force)	Grand Total (Arab population aged 15+)
Total (in thousands)	498.3	35.6	10.1	65.1	203.1	313.9	812.2
Total (in %)	61.4	11.3	3.2	20.7	64.7	38.6	100
Men (in thousands)	168.8	24.6	5.6	33.1	179.2	242.4	411.2
Men (in %)	41.1	10.1	2.3	13.7	73.9	58.9	50.6
Women (in thousands)	329.5	11	4.5	32	23.9	71.5	401
Women (in %)	82.2	15.4	6.3	44.8	33.4	17.8	49.4

⁸ Derived from: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Israel, *Israel in Figures*, 2005.

⁹ Derived from: CBS Israel, *Labour Force Survey 2005*, Table 8.1.

Employed Persons ¹⁰ in Israel, by Industry, 2005 ¹¹	Jews in %	Arabs in %	Arabs in thousands
Total	86.1	13.9	346.8
Agriculture	78.4	21.6	10.8
Manufacturing (Mining and Industry)	84.5	15.5	60.7
Electricity and Water Supply	94.4	5.6	1.2
Construction	57.2	42.8	54.4
Wholesale, Retail, and Repair	84.0	16.0	53.8
Accommodation and Restaurants	81.5	18.5	21.3
Transport, Storage and Communications	86.3	13.7	22.2
Banking, Insurance, and other financial institutions	96.0	4.0	3.3
Business Activities	92.1	7.9	26.6
Public Administration	93.0	7.0	8.1
Education	88.3	11.7	36.6
Health, Welfare and Social Work Services	89.5	10.5	27.8
Community, Social and other Services	88.8	11.2	13.1

In short, these data reveal that:

- Arabs make up 16.7% of the population aged 15 and older;
- Arabs make up 13.9% of employed persons in Israel;
- The official unemployment rate among Arabs is 11.3%, compared to 9.2% among Jews;
- Only 17.8% of Arab women are in the labour force, 45% of whom in part-time positions and 15.4% unemployed;
- Almost half of the Arab employed persons work in the low-wage sectors manufacturing, construction, retail trade;
- 52% of Arabs live below the poverty line, as opposed to 16% of Jewish Israelis.

Arab Women in Israel's Labour Force

One of the most striking features of the Arab labour force data is the extremely low representation of women. Certainly, traditional social structures within Arab – particularly Muslim – society play a key role in preserving strictly divided gender roles that put the woman in the private sphere. However, *Separate and Unequal* will not elaborate on these social restrictions but rather focus on external means of exclusion of Arab women from the Israeli labour market.

First of all, it should be noted that apart from the low labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate among Arab women is disproportionately high at 15.4%. This allows the conclusion that there is little demand for Arab women workers in Israel. In fact, in 2005, only 24,000 Arab women in the whole country worked in full-time positions. The following aspects should be mentioned as major obstacles to employment for Arab women in Israel:

- Social restrictions faced by Arab women are further exacerbated by insufficient infrastructure, such as the lack of industrial zones in Arab communities, poor public transport accessibility and no day-care facilities;
- Public measures to advance the status of women, including gender-sensitive schoolbooks, have so far not been introduced to the Arab education system;
- The majority of Arab women works under appalling working conditions, often illegally without a contract and far below the minimum wage level;
- There is no public institution in Israel willing to enforce workers' rights in the low-wage sector and the informal economy or prepared to raise awareness about the principle of decent work among unskilled and unemployed workers.

¹⁰ "Employed Persons" include employees, employers, self-employed, kibbutz members, and unpaid family members.

¹¹ Derived from: CBS Israel, *Labour Force Survey 2005*, Table 2.1.

Thus, the Histadrut and Naamat, its women's department, have virtually no constituency among Arab women in Israel, apart from a small group of educated middle-class women. The vast majority of Arab women workers have no possibility to get organised.

The tragic situation of working Arab women in Israel is illustrated by the history of the local textile industry. In the 1970s and 1980s, tens of thousands of Arab women were employed in the numerous Israeli garment companies (such as Delta, Polgat and Kitan) in the Galilee or worked for small subcontractors based in the northern Arab villages. By the mid-1990s, after the peace treaty with Jordan, almost all textile production had been outsourced to Egypt and Jordan, to so-called Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ), where Israeli companies profited from cheap labour and tax deductions. Moreover, a clause in the peace treaties between Israel and its Arab neighbours stipulated that products from these QIZs could be exported tax-free to the United States if Israeli companies are involved in the production process. So, Arab women workers in Israel became the victims of neo-liberal globalisation and also found themselves on the losing end of the "peace dividend". Most textile workers from the Galilee have been unemployed ever since they were laid off ten years ago.



In 2005, only 24,000 Arab women in the whole country worked in full-time positions (Photo: Sawt el-Amel, May Day demonstration 2005)

The Histadrut and Arab Labour

When the state of Israel was established in 1948, the Palestinian Arab labour movement collapsed, with the working class including many of its leaders displaced in or outside the new borders. Only the AWC remained functional until the mid-1950s, when it finally dissolved itself. Its leaders tried to reorganise in the Israeli Communist party Rakach, which advocated civil equality between Arabs and Jews within the framework of the Israeli state and its institutions. From then on, the only platform available to Arab workers was the Israel Labour League, the Histadrut's Arab department formerly known as Palestine Labour League, which had already been defunct before the Nakba and the establishment of Israel. Moreover, Israel's Arab population was subject to direct military rule, exercised by the Israeli government, i.e. the labour parties MAPAI and MAPAM. Until 1966, when military rule was lifted, the military government imposed severe restrictions on movement, public association and political organisation, and on many other fields of social, economic and cultural life within the Palestinian Arab community in Israel. Due to the Histadrut's close affiliation to the military administration of the MAPAI/MAPAM governments, Israel's trade union federation was not particularly popular among Arab workers, also after the Histadrut opened its doors to Arabs as full members in 1959. In the period of military rule, Histadrut membership among Arabs was associated with opportunism and collaboration, as Histadrut membership cards often helped obtain laissez-passers for Arabs. And Arabs, who were issued government permits, were suspicious. Therefore, even today, many Arab citizens still view Arab Histadrut members as "collaborators".

After 1966, the Histadrut slowly established itself in the Arab community. However, membership was often motivated by political opportunism rather than by workers' activism. Histadrut membership meant to be part of the ruling class, and in Arab communities, many local Histadrut officials dedicated most of their time to collecting votes for the labour party – and thus also strengthening their social position within the local clan structures. Labour activism was – and still is – close to non-existent in the Histadrut branches in Arab towns.

Moreover, after the establishment of Israel, the Histadrut continued its hostile attitude towards Arab workers, especially when their demands did not correspond to those of Jewish workers – or those of the Jewish state. The most radical example is related to the events of 1976 that inspired Land Day. In February 1976, the Labour government under Yitzhak Rabin expropriated 30,000 dunums of land belonging to the Galilean villages of Arrabeh, Deir Hanna and Sakhnin for military purposes. Thousands of Arab citizens of the Galilee took to the streets and demonstrated for their rights to the land, and in March 1976, the Arab leadership called for a general strike. In response, the Histadrut's Labour Council in Haifa decided not to back Arab workers on strike and thus worked once more as a strike breaker for Arab labour activism and contributed to

The Histadrut has never taken any serious action to change the balance of power in favour of Arab workers and of blue-collar workers in general, including low-earning Jewish and migrant workers.

the escalation of civil disobedience into violence. Six Arab citizens were shot and killed by police and army during the clashes. The Palestinian community in and outside Israel commemorates [Land Day](#) every year on March 30.

Apart from direct confrontation, there is a glass ceiling for Arab workers denying them access to the Histadrut's most powerful Labour Councils, which are traditionally made up of white-collar workers from the civil service and government companies occupied with, among others, electricity and water supply, communication technology, banking, and the port authorities. And all these fields are practically locked by a colour bar, as Arab citizens are not employed in so-called security-sensitive positions. For example, despite a 2000 amendment to the Government Corporations Law (1975) that prescribes equal representation of Arabs on boards of directors of government corporations, five years later, in 2005, out of 551 directors serving on 105 boards, only 50 were Arabs, including 10 Arab women (Sikkuy, 2006). This shows that more than half of the government-owned corporations have no

Arab board member. Moreover, no government company has more than two Arab directors on its board. However, thanks to the new law, Arab representation on the companies' boards is much higher than the proportion of Arab employees in these security-sensitive enterprises. In the following governmental authorities, there are no or just a handful of Arab employees:

- Bank of Israel;
- Council for Higher Education;
- Second Authority for Television and Radio;
- Anti-Trust Authority;
- Anti-Drug Authority;
- Nature and National Parks Protection Authority;
- Postal Authority;
- Government Companies Authority;
- Antiquities Authority;
- Israel Broadcasting Authority;
- Airports Authority.

According to data from 2002, only 0.8% of employees of government companies are Arabs (Sikkuy, 2006).

The employment situation in the civil service is similar. For instance, in 2004, only 5.5% of Israel's civil servants were Arabs, and 56% of whom worked in the Health Ministry alone. The Finance Ministry employed three Arabs, the Communications Ministry had two, and one Arab worked in the Public Security Ministry. No Arab citizen worked in the Water Commission, the Electricity Authority, and the Firefighting and Rescue Commission (Sikkuy, 2006).

Arab Representation in Civil Service, Government Companies and the Local Authorities¹²	Jews	Arabs	thereof Arab women	Overall percentage of Arabs
Civil Service (excl. teachers, employment service, National Insurance Institute)	53,760	3,154	1,048	5.5
Directors of government corporations	501	50	10	9.9
Employees of government corporations	50,000 (app.)	400 (app.)	?	0.8
Union of Local Authorities Employees	1,009	13	?	1.25

¹² Derived from: Sikkuy, *Sikkuy Report 2004-2005*, Jerusalem/Haifa: Sikkuy, 2005.

The Histadrut has never taken any serious action to change the balance of power in favour of Arab workers and of blue-collar workers in general, including low-earning Jewish and migrant workers. The Histadrut further refrained from intervening in collective cases of racial discrimination against Arab workers, such as mass lay-offs of Arabs after the outbreak of the second *intifada* in 2000; a labour dispute of Arab and Jewish employees with the Dead Sea Hotel Nirvana in 2003, when an Arab manager was fired because he refused to forbid his coworkers to speak Arabic in front of tourists and fire them if they did; McDonalds Israel's policy decision in 2004 not to allow Arabic to be spoken in the restaurants, even if both the employee and the customer are Arabs; or the appalling incident at a construction site in the Knesset building in 2004 when Arab workers' helmets were marked with a red X, to facilitate assassination by marksmen in case of emergency.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the period of privatisation of Histadrut-owned companies, the Histadrut's trade union department was not overly zealous to engage in labour disputes with the new owners of their old companies. In 1998, in Upper Nazareth, for example, the local Histadrut branch supported the striking Arab and Jewish workers of the Kitan textile company, which was moving away to Jordan, only half-heartedly by negotiating an appropriate compensation for the laid-off workers – instead of supporting the workers' demands to keep the workplace open.

Finally, the Histadrut has most recently suffered another major blow to its image, from an Arab perspective at least. During Israel's war against Lebanon in July and August 2006, Defense Minister Amir Peretz, commonly known as the New Histadrut's chairman of the past decade, displayed a relentless and hawkish attitude towards Lebanon's civilian population. So, once more, the Arab working class associates Israel's labour movement with violence and aggression.

The Wisconsin Plan: The Latest Example of Social and Economic Exploitation

The so-called Wisconsin Plan is part of the government's multi-year Economic Recovery Plan. On 1 August 2005, this welfare-to-work pilot programme for long-term unemployed, facilitated by four international private companies and their Israeli partner corporations, began for 14,000 welfare recipients in the regions Nazareth/Upper Nazareth, Ashkelon, Jerusalem, and Hadera (including seven Arab villages).¹³ In case of "non-cooperation" or work refusal by a participant, his/her income benefits are cut for one or two months respectively. If the companies do not save the state more than 35% of its welfare expenditures, they are sanctioned. Participation in the Wisconsin Plan is compulsory for all welfare recipients residing in the pilot areas.

The Wisconsin Plan has devastating effects on the populations in the pilot areas, which are made up mainly of Arab citizens and new immigrants from Russian-speaking countries and Ethiopia. In Nazareth, the only pilot area in Israel including a whole town, the Wisconsin Plan has caused a sharp increase of poverty and social disruption. The Plan exacerbates the socio-economic problems in Nazareth, the biggest Arab town inside Israel, and other disadvantaged communities and feeds upon the discriminatory practices that led to poverty and exclusion of the Arab citizens of Israel. Structural deficits such as the lack of employment opportunities, low levels of education, low workforce participation among Arab women, and insufficient work support services such as transportation and childcare make a sustainable implementation of the Plan impossible. The private companies further exploit these disadvantages, and hundreds of citizens were already driven to waive their right to social security. The Wisconsin Plan is a continuation of the ongoing discrimination against Arab citizens and their exclusion from sustainable development initiatives, and with its implementation, the Government of Israel has delegated its obligation to adequately develop and protect certain racial groups to private entities.



Demonstration of Wisconsin Plan participants in front of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, organised by Sawt el-Amel (Photo: Sawt el-Amel, May 28, 2006)

¹³ Today, the number has risen to 18,000. The Nazareth pilot area has 6,000 participants.

In July 2006, one year after the launch of the Wisconsin Plan, *Sawt el-Amel's* field research produced the following data (*Sawt el-Amel*, June 26, 2006):

- 6,358 people are enrolled in the Wisconsin Plan in Nazareth and Upper Nazareth as of June 2006. These are app. 1,200 people more than at its launch in August 2006;
- 871 participants have "disappeared" from the Plan, i.e. they are neither registered as workers nor as unemployed;
- 2,479 participants had their income benefits cut for one month due to "uncooperative" behaviour. The interpretation of uncooperativeness is at the discretion of the case manager;
- Of the 1,003 jobs the implementing company claims to have facilitated for participants, the vast majority were menial jobs in agriculture and building maintenance that lasted for no longer than several days or weeks;
- Only 65 participants refused a job placement – a sign that there is no real work to be accepted or refused.

In September 2006, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour introduced major amendments to the programme. Minister Eli Yishai had appointed a committee to investigate the sustainability and feasibility of the Wisconsin Plan, and the amendments reflect the recommendations of the committee's report to the Ministry and also key points of criticism voiced by *Sawt el-Amel* and other civil-society organisations. The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour presented the following changes to the Wisconsin Plan, which affect (*Sawt el-Amel*, Sept. 21, 2006):

- Men and women within seven years of the retirement age;
- Long-term unemployed who have received income benefits for more than five years;
- Single mothers with children up to 12 years, holding part-time jobs;
- Mentally and physically challenged people (according to recommendations from an independent committee).

Apart from half-hearted declarations, the Histadrut has played no role in the civil-society struggle for the Wisconsin Plan participants' rights to decent work and social security. In 2005, *Sawt el-Amel* conducted a survey among 100 Wisconsin Plan participants from Nazareth, who had come to the office in search for advice (*Sawt el-Amel*, June 2006). Out of the 100 participants, only 16 had considered the Histadrut the relevant address and approached the union before turning to *Sawt el-Amel*. All 16 participants further reported that they were turned away with the explanation that the Histadrut was in no position to represent them because they were not "workers".

V. Conclusion

The previous chapters reveal two little known, yet fundamental findings concerning the history of labour in Palestine and Israel – namely that on the one hand, pre-1948 Palestinian Arab society developed thriving and diverse popular movements for self-determination and the emancipation of workers and that on the other hand, the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut has played a leading role in the separation of Jewish and Arab labour and in the continuous exclusion of the latter from Israel's labour market. Today, the Arab labour force in Israel is still faced with structural problems similar to its situation in pre-1948 Palestine, i.e. concentration in the low-wage sector, unequal pay, lack of infrastructure and other obstacles that contradict the principle of decent work.

In particular, *Separate and Unequal* presents alternative interpretations of the following, commonly accepted statements:

There was no independent, "authentic" Arab labour movement in pre-1948 Palestine.

- Palestine's native population quickly adapted to the new challenges posed by mass immigration, industrialisation, and Western colonial rule and developed popular liberation and labour movements with considerable support of the masses.

The Histadrut is a trade union.

- The Histadrut was established as a "state in the making", a nation-building enterprise active in all spheres of Jewish life in Palestine. Only in 1995, it became a trade union according to the common definition.

Class solidarity is one of the Histadrut's main ideological pillars.

- With the Hebrew Labour campaign, the Histadrut actively drove Arab workers out of their jobs in the 1920s and 1930s. Today, many Histadrut members are self-employed Israelis while migrant workers cannot join.

Not only does the Histadrut have a history of racial exclusion of Arabs and foreign workers; it also repeatedly proved its inability to solve conflicts of interest in favour of its constituency, the working class. Due to its historical ties to the Employers' Union and the hegemony of the white-collar Labour Councils within the Histadrut, blue-collar workers of all ethnic backgrounds have little influence in today's New Histadrut. This lack of interest in the country's original working class is reflected in the Histadrut's hesitation to admit migrant workers to its ranks and its unwillingness to address the social injustice of current economic policies, including the welfare-to-work programme "Wisconsin Plan". Therefore, the findings of *Separate and Unequal* regarding the current situation are summarised as follows:

Its history as well as current practices disqualify the Histadrut as a suitable and trusted representative of the Arab labour force in Israel. In order to combat the root causes of poverty and unemployment, working Arab men and women need an independent platform to meet, organise and learn, as awareness and access to decent work are basic requirements for the community's socio-economic well-being and wide-spread participation in civil society and public life.

Arab citizens of Israel are important stakeholders in the region, and the advancement of the socially and economically disadvantaged as well as broad-based participation in public life and the democratic process are crucial for a sustainable future of the Middle East.

Timeline of important political events and decisive moments of labour history in pre-1948 Palestine and Israel

1882	Palestine is part of al-Sham (historic Syria) within the Ottoman Empire. First wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine begins
1897	Theodor Herzl founds Zionist Organisation (later: World Zionist Organisation) at 1 st Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland
1909	First Kibbutz Degania is established on land which the Jewish National Fund had acquired from the Arab village of Umm Juni near Tabariyya (Tiberias) Tel Aviv is founded as the first exclusively Jewish town in Palestine
1914	Palestine has a population of 790,000 (app. 92% Arab) Beginning of World War I
1917	Balfour Declaration supporting the establishment of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine
1918	End of World War I and Ottoman Empire
1920	Establishment of Histadrut by Ahdut haAvoda and haPoel haTzair. David Ben-Gurion serves as the first chairperson
1921	Socialist Workers Party splits into Palestine Communist Party (PCP) and Poale Zion Smol Yitzhak Ben Zvi's essay "The Arab Movement", recognising the existence of such movement, but defining it as artificial Establishment of Workers' Company under the Histadrut. The Company owned all profit-making enterprises
1923	Arab Railway Workers' Club established in Haifa Arab labour activists file request to British Mandate Authorities to establish PAWS
1924	PCP becomes Comintern's official Palestine section
1925	March 21: Establishment of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society (PAWS), the first Arab union institution in Palestine Histadrut approaches Arab workers, e.g. with Arabic-language newspaper <i>Ittihad al-U'mal</i> (Workers Union)
1927	PAWS organises a number of successful strikes in Haifa, Nesher and Shef'amer, leading to improvements of working conditions for Arab workers Haim Arlosoroff's essay "On the Question of Joint Organisation", promoting the introduction of a colour bar dividing a high-wage Jewish and a low-wage Arab labour sector Histadrut begins picketing campaign for Hebrew labour in citrus groves, which soon spreads to the coastal towns and to Jewish middle-class
1930	January 11/12: First National Congress of Arab workers in Palestine, organised by PAWS Social-democratic MAPAI is formed by the parties Ahdut haAvoda and haPoel haTzair
1931/32	PAWS leads more than 20 strikes of Arab workers all over Palestine
1932	Establishment of Palestine Labour League, the Arab section of the Histadrut; after 1948 renamed Israel Labour League
1934	Arab Workers Society (AWS) founded by Fakhri Nashashibi in Jerusalem Amendment to 1926 Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance that makes work disputes over an employee's race or religion illegal
1935	February: PAWS leads large strike of refinery workers at Iraq Petroleum Ltd. – the reluctance of both PAWS and the Histadrut to cooperate brings the strike to an early end Qassamist guerilla activities; Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam killed by British troops
1936	Beginning of Arab Revolt; six months general strike. British Mandate Authorities allow building of new port in Tel Aviv after strike of dock workers in Yaffa Establishment of Arab Higher Committee, led by Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, Mufti of Jerusalem Peel Commission examines causes of Arab Revolt; suggests two-state solution and population transfer
1937	Census reveals that Jewish workers earn 143% more than Arabs (among women textile workers 433% more)
1939	End of Arab Revolt Beginning of World War II; increased Jewish immigration due to persecution in Europe; increased military-industrial production in British mandate regions
1942	Establishment of Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labour Societies (FATULS)

Palestine part of Ottoman Empire

Palestine under British Mandate

1942	30% of working-age Arab men in Palestine are employed in industrial production	State of Israel
1943	Union of Arab Military Camp Workers, a PAWS affiliate, organises major conference. British military command recognises PAWS as legitimate representative of Arab military camp workers in Palestine National Liberation League (NLL) formed by Arab members of the former PCP	
1945	Establishment of Arab Workers Congress (AWC) AWC represents Arab Palestinians at founding conference of World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in Paris	
1946	Palestine has a population of 1.8 million (67% Arab) Two women are elected to the AWC's executive body	
1947	UN Partition Plan; beginning of civil war in Palestine Sept. 11: Sami Taha of PAWS assassinated, probably by order of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini Arab unions and political parties split over UN Partition Plan and lack of leadership Dec. 30: Bomb attack on Arab job seekers at Haifa Refinery by Jewish militant group ETZEL, killing six and wounding 42; Arab workers subsequently clash with their Jewish colleagues – 41 Jewish workers die; 49 are injured Dec. 31: As a revenge for the Haifa Refinery killings, militants of the Hagana's elite force Palmach commit a massacre in Balad ash-Sheikh, the home of many Arab refinery workers - 60 Arab men, women and children die.	
1948	Palestinian Nakba; establishment of State of Israel, leaving the remaining Arabs subject to direct military rule	
1949	Israel has a population of 1.7 million (14% Arab)	
1954	AWC dissolves itself, marking the end of organised Arab labour in Israel	
1959	Histadrut admits Arabs as direct members	
1965	Arabs are allowed to cast a vote in Histadrut elections	
1966	End of military rule over Arab population in Israel The term "Hebrew" is taken out of the Histadrut's official name; the constitution, however, remains the same	
1967	Six-Day War: Israel occupies West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza	
1976	March 30: Land Day: Arab workers of Israel stage general strike in protest of extensive land expropriation in the Galilee; six Arab citizens are killed by police during demonstrations	
1980s	Economic crisis: Histadrut starts selling its enterprises; large lay-offs of Arab workers from the occupied Palestinian territories and from inside Israel	
1994	Haim Ramon elected Chairperson of the Histadrut; he was not a candidate for the Labour Party but for a newly-established list ("New Life") Histadrut becomes the "New Histadrut"; it has 1.6 million members, app. 150,000 of whom are Arabs	
1995	Jan. 1: National Health Law decouples Kupat Holim health service from Histadrut membership; large decrease in membership Jan. 9: Agreement between Histadrut and Israeli Employers' Union to deduct 0.9% of employees' salaries for automatic Histadrut membership fees	
1996	Histadrut Control Committee finds that 92% of the Histadrut's remaining 650,000 members have their membership fees automatically deducted from their salaries; only 8% pay the fee consciously Histadrut sells most of its enterprises (companies, holdings and banks) Majority of textile factories in the Galilee closed down and moved to cheap-labour and low-tax areas in Jordan and Egypt	
2000	Outbreak of second <i>intifada</i> , which leads to mass lay-offs of Arab workers inside Israel due to economic crisis and increased hostility against Arabs	
2005	Launch of the welfare-to-work programme "Wisconsin Plan", implemented in areas overwhelmingly populated by Arab citizens and new immigrants	
2006	Former Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz becomes Israel's Minister of Defense; during the war on Lebanon, he takes a hawkish position and advocates military aggression Histadrut has app. 700,000 members, an estimated 55,000 of whom Arabs. Israel's working age population (over 15) is 4.9 million	

Glossary

Ahdut haAvoda (Hebrew: Unity of Labour): Labour Zionist party formed in 1919 as successor to Poale Zion in Palestine. Together with haPoel haTzair, it established the Histadrut. In 1930, Ahdut haAvoda and haPoel haTzair merged into the labour party MAPAI. New forms of Ahdut haAvoda kept coming up until it was finally absorbed by the new Labour party Maarach in 1968. Prominent member: David Ben-Gurion.

al-Sham: Historic Syria, including today's Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian National Authorities, and Syria.

Arab Higher Committee (Lejnat al-A'rabiya al-U'liya): Nationalist political group of Palestine's elite, promoting the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine and opposing British rule, Zionism, and Jewish immigration to Palestine. It was founded in 1936, under the leadership of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, and played an important though not leading role during the 1936-39 uprising.

Arab Railway Workers' Club (Nadi U'mal Sikkat al-Hadid al-A'rab): First association of Arab workers in Palestine, established in Haifa in 1923, by Syrian railway workers Abdelhamid and Salim Haymur and Said Qawwas. The Club was mainly a charitable organisation for Arab workers and was strongly opposed to joint Arab-Jewish organisation. The leadership of the Club, organised in the Brotherhood Committee for Arab Workers (*Lejnat al-Akhawiya al-U'mal al-A'rab*), founded PAWS.

Arab Revolt (1936-1939): Palestinian Arab popular uprising against British colonial rule and Zionism, organised on grassroots-level rather than by the traditional leadership, who took advantage of the rebellion. Its early stage was marked by a six-month general strike of large parts of the Arab labour force in Palestine. The central demands were: end of mass immigration to Palestine, end of land purchases by the Zionist institutions, and national independence of a Palestinian Arab state. The causes of the Revolt were examined by the Peel Commission (Palestine Royal Commission), which concluded in 1937 that the British Mandate over Palestine be abolished and substituted by two states – one Arab and one Jewish – possibly including population transfer.

Arab Workers' Society, AWS (Jama'iyat U'mal al-A'rab): Arab labour union, founded in Jerusalem in 1934 by Fakhri Nashashibi, a member of Palestine's elite and nephew of Raghib Nashashibi, mayor of Jerusalem. In 1935, Michel Mitri from Yaffa took over the AWS' leadership. The AWS strongly opposed the Histadrut's Hebrew Labour campaign and in turn called for "Arab labour". Prominent leaders: Michel Mitri and George Mansur from the Yaffa branch.

Arab Workers' Congress, AWC (Mu'tamar al-U'mal al-A'rab): Arab trade union established in 1945, by Communist PAWS members and FATULS; politically linked to the National Liberation League. The AWC represented Arab Palestinians at the WFTU's founding meeting in Paris the same year, while PAWS only reached observer status. The AWC survived the Nakba but dissolved itself in 1954. Prominent leaders: Mukhlis Amru, Boulos Farah.

Balfour Declaration: Declaration issued by the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, on November 2, 1917, stating the following: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

British Mandate: After the end of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the territories of the former Ottoman Empire were divided among the victorious powers as so-called mandate regions. In 1920, Britain received a provisional mandate from the League of Nations over Palestine at the San Remo conference. The mandate included today's Israel, Palestinian National Authorities and Jordan. In 1922, Mandatory Transjordan (today's Jordan) was separated from Palestine. Great Britain also held the mandate region of Iraq. Great Britain laid down its mandate over Palestine in 1947 when the United Nations presented a partition plan for the establishment of an Arab and a Jewish state.

Conquest of Labour (Kibbush haAvoda): Doctrine adopted by the Labour Zionists in Palestine in the early 20th century. Its idea was to encourage Jews to work as manual labourers in manufacturing and agriculture, as opposed to being just plantation owners and traders. In connection with the slogan Hebrew Labour (*Avoda Ivrit*), which preferred Jewish labour over Arab labour, Arab workers were marginalised and increasingly excluded from labour. The Histadrut was the main platform to promote these concepts.

Conquest of Land (Kibbush haAdama): This doctrine is closely linked to the Conquest of Labour. The Kibbutz movement, which is part of the Histadrut, was a major tool in this campaign. The Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet leIsrael*) provided the financial means for huge land purchases from absentee Arab landowners.

Eretz Israel (Hebrew: Land of Israel): In Jewish religious tradition, Eretz Israel designates the land promised to the Jewish people by God. In modern Zionist thought, the term is generally interpreted as covering approximately the territory of historic Palestine (up to the Litani River in today's Lebanon). However, the idea of Eretz Israel has no definite borders. Some Revisionists believe Eretz Israel to be the land between the "two rivers", i.e. the Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates in Iraq.

Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labour Societies, FATULS (Ittihad Naqabat w Jama'iyat al-U'mal al-A'rab): Arab trade union founded by radical intellectuals and working-class activists in Haifa in 1942. FATULS was politically close to the National Liberation Party. Its outlook was more internationalist than that of PAWS. In 1945, it merged itself into the AWC. Prominent leader: Boulos Farah.

Green Line: Armistice line of 1949, dividing the newly established state of Israel from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, the Sinai, Lebanon and the Golan Heights

Hagana (Hebrew: defense): Jewish militia in Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel. After 1948, it became Israel's official army and was renamed IDF (Israel Defense Force).

haPoel haTzair (Hebrew: The Young Worker): Labour Zionist party; co-founded the Histadrut with Ahdut haAvoda. In 1930, the two parties merged into MAPAI. Prominent member: Haim Arlosoroff.

haShomer haTzair (Hebrew: The Young Guard): Socialist Zionist youth movement founded in 1913 in Eastern Europe. In pre-1948 Palestine, it was also a political party and linked to the Kibbutz movement Kibbutz Artzi. HaShomer haTzair advocated equality between Arabs and Jews in a bi-national Palestine. However, being Zionist in ideology, haShomer haTzair's theoretical platform often differed from the reality on the ground. Prominent member (in Palestine): Aharon Cohen.

Hebrew Labour (Avoda Ivrit): Slogan adopted by the Labour Zionists in Palestine, which is to be seen in connection with the concept of the Conquest of Labour. The idea was that Jews should not hire others to do the manual labour. The Histadrut promoted the slogan as well as the segregation of expensive Jewish and cheap Arab labour.

Histadrut (since 1994: New Histadrut): General Federation of Workers in the Land of Israel, Israel's general trade union federation.

Hussaini: Powerful family in pre-1948 Palestine, politically strongly nationalist, anti-British and anti-Zionist. Prominent family member: Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, leader of the Arab Higher Committee and Mufti of Jerusalem.

Kibbutz: Cooperative Jewish settlement in Palestine/Israel, based on the Socialist ideal of collective ownership of capital and means of production. The first kibbutz was founded in 1909, on land acquired from the Arab village of Umm Juni near the Sea of Galilee. The kibbutz movement was later organised under the umbrella of the Histadrut. Until today, kibbutzim are Jewish-only communities; Arabs are excluded from membership.

Kupat Holim (Hebrew: Sick Fund): The Histadrut's health service. Until 1995, Histadrut membership was a prerequisite for the provision of service.

Labour Zionism: Developed from Socialist Zionism, which originates from early 20th-century Russia and was advocated by Poale Zion. The ideology combines Socialism with Zionism, arguing that Jewish national liberation is a necessary step towards a truly Socialist society. Labour Zionism played a key role in the establishment of Israel as all major institutions of the yishuv (Histadrut, Hagana, Kibbutzim) were Labour Zionist; it was also the ideological basis for the Conquest of Land and Labour campaigns.

Land Day (Yom al-Ard): In early 1976, the Israeli government headed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expropriated large parts of municipal lands of Deir Hanna, Sakhnin and Arabeh villages in the Galilee for military purposes. On March 30, the Arab leadership in Israel called for a general strike in protest of the massive land expropriation; six Arab citizens were killed by the security forces during demonstrations. The Histadrut decided not to back Arab workers during their strike. Land Day has been commemorated by the Palestinian community in and outside Israel ever since on March 30.

MAPAI (Acronym: Land of Israel Workers Party): Social-democratic Labour party formed by the merger of Ahdut haAvoda (Unity of Labour) and HaPoel haTzair (The Young Worker) in 1930, under David Ben-Gurion. MAPAI remained the dominating party also in Israel until it merged into the Labour Party (Maarach) in 1968.

MAPAM (Acronym: United Workers Party): Socialist Zionist coalition of the new Ahdut haAvoda and haShomer haTzair, formed in 1948. More “leftist” than MAPAI in its ideology but also more “hands-on” in its practices. Together with MAPAI, it formed the first government of Israel as the second-largest party (after MAPAI) and provided a disproportionately high number of high-ranking commanders for the Israeli Army.

Moshav: Cooperative agricultural Jewish settlement with limited private ownership. The first moshavot were established in the late 19th century, by immigrants from Russia.

Nakba (Arabic: catastrophe): The uprooting of the Palestinian people in 1948. Every year, when Jewish Israelis celebrate Independence Day, Palestinians in and outside Israel commemorate Nakba Day.

Nashashibi: Powerful family in pre-1948 Palestine, politically more moderate than the Hussainis and leaning towards the British and Hashemite (in Transjordan) rulers; anti-Zionist. Prominent family member: Raghil Nashashibi, mayor of Jerusalem.

National Health Law (1995): This law separates Histadrut membership from the Kupat Holim health service. Before that law, every citizen who visited a Kupat Holim health clinic – in many villages the only service available – had to join the Histadrut. In 1995, Histadrut membership dropped by almost 80%.

National Insurance Institute (NII): Israel's public institution in charge of all contributory and non-contributory transfer payments made by the state to its citizens and residents (e.g. unemployment support, income benefits, child allowances).

National Liberation League, NLL (Usbat at-Taharur al-Watani): Arab offspring of the Palestine Communist Party, which was dissolved in 1943. The NLL advocated international workers' solidarity as the key to a just solution for Palestine as an independent Arab state with a recognised and protected Jewish minority. The party split over the UN Partition Plan and shortly after the Nakba it was integrated into the new Israeli Communist party Rakach (New Communist List). Prominent members: Boulos Farah, Emile Touma, Emile Habibi.

New Histadrut: New name of the Histadrut after major political and structural changes in the mid-1990s.

Palestine Communist Party (PCP): Founded in 1921, as an offspring of the Socialist Workers Party that split into the PCP and the Poale Zion Smol (Left). It became the Comintern's official Palestine section in 1924. Critical of Zionism; developed from a Jewish into a Jewish-Arab party. It was dissolved in 1943; its Arab members then formed the NLL.

Palestine Labour League (PLL): The Histadrut's Arab department, established in 1932. After 1948, it was renamed Israel Labour League and dissolved itself when Arabs were allowed to become members of the Histadrut in 1959.

Palestinian Arab Workers Society, PAWS (Jama'iya al-U'mal al-A'rabiya al-Filastiniya): First Palestinian Arab trade union federation, founded in March 1925, mainly by Arab railway workers from Haifa. Its political outlook combined the class struggle and Palestinian Arab nationalism. It suffered a painful setback with the assassination of its leader Sami Taha in 1947 and was exiled during the Nakba. Prominent members: Abdelhamid and Salim Haymur, Said Qawwas, Boulos Farah, Hanna A'sfur, Sami Taha.

Poale Zion (Workers of Zion): First Socialist Zionist party founded in Russia around 1900; branches of Poale Zion soon emerged all over Europe and in the Americas. Prominent members: Ber Borochov, Nahum Syrkin, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, David Ben-Gurion.

Poale Zion Smol (Workers of Zion – Left): Moderately Zionist offspring of the Socialist Workers Party, founded in 1921. The party advocated joint Jewish-Arab organisation and campaigned for a separation of the Histadrut's trade union department from its nation-building efforts.

Poverty Line: In Israel, the poverty line is defined as 50% of the median income, adjusted to family size. In 2005, the poverty line was drawn at NIS 1,866/month for a single-person household, NIS 3,957/month for a three-person household, and NIS 8,361 for a nine-person household (National Insurance Institute, 2006).

Union of Railway, Postal and Telegraph Workers (URPTW): Affiliated to the Histadrut. In the 1920s, internal struggles within the URPTW reflect the ambiguous relation between class solidarity and Zionism.

UN Partition Plan (1947): In General Assembly Resolution 181, the United Nations recommended the withdrawal of the British Mandate Authorities and the establishment of two independent states, one Arab and one Jewish, no later than 1 October 1948. The Arab state included app. today's West Bank and Gaza, the Galilee and the enclave of Yaffa. Jerusalem was to be governed by an international administration. The two states were to be linked in an economic union. The Partition Plan was not accepted by either of the two parties; only the British Mandate Authorities withdrew.

Workers' Company (Hevrat Ovdim): The Histadrut's economic branch, established in 1921, that owned all enterprises until they were sold in the mid-1990s.

World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU): The WFTU was established in 1945 to bring together trade unions across the world in a single international organisation, similar to the United Nations. With the beginning of the Cold War, however, most Western trade unions (including the Histadrut) left to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as a counterpart to the Communist unions (mainly) from the Eastern Bloc.

Yishuv: The Jewish community in Palestine before the establishment of Israel. The historical narrative generally describes the development of the yishuv and its transformation into the state of Israel in a vacuum, with little reference to its interaction with or the mere existence of the indigenous Arab population.

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Wikipedia, at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Sawt el-Amel: The Laborer's Voice is an independent grassroots organisation founded by Palestinian Arab workers in Nazareth in 2000, in order to defend and promote the rights of economically disadvantaged Arab citizens of Israel, who struggle for socio-economic justice and against discrimination in the labour market and welfare system. In particular, *Sawt el-Amel* strives to:

- ▶ Eradicate systematic discrimination by state and general public, which is the root cause of continuous socio-economic crises within the Palestinian Arab community in Israel;
- ▶ Promote awareness of the principle of decent work among the unemployed and working Arab citizens in Israel, including the right to organise and stand up for one's rights collectively;
- ▶ Involve women in all stages of decision-making and public activism.

In order to reach these overall objectives, *Sawt el-Amel* takes legal action, facilitates grassroots activism, educates the public, networks and conducts advocacy. The organisation works on local, national and international levels.

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