

National and class struggle

The congress rejected the notion that class struggle in the occupied territories should be frozen until after liberation. It accused rightists of using this line to strike deals with the management of firms at the expense of the workers. The dialectical relationship between the national struggle and class struggle is very important in the current phase. Sections of the bourgeoisie continue to exploit workers, and sectors of the bourgeoisie have adopted a capitulationist orientation which makes class struggle inevitable.

The congress reports stated that there was a crisis in the working class movement in the occupied territories. The Palestinian right wing is responsible for splitting the General Federation of Trade Unions. Unity is lacking within legitimate general unions. There now exist parallel unions for workers in the same occupation, and the right-wing has objected to workers of the same occupation establishing their own united unions. These practices isolate the trade union movement from the masses.

For working class unity

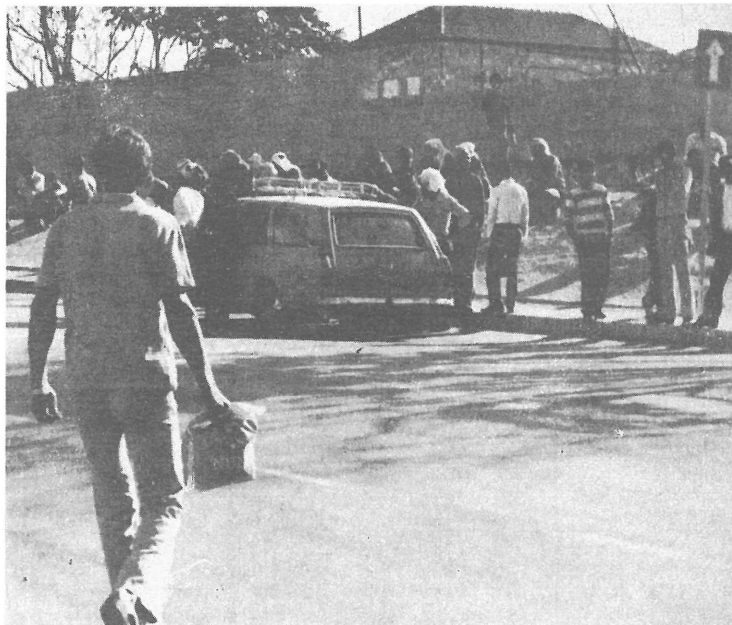
To meet the current crisis, the PFTUA vowed to expand existing branches of its unions and to form new ones in all parts of the occupied territories. The purpose of broader organization is to better workers' conditions and to organize workers in the national liberation struggle. Specifically, the Front will focus on forming trade union organizations in all work places and residential areas of the Gaza Strip. It will coordinate efforts with other progressive forces to bring down the reactionary leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Workers in Gaza.

Programs were formulated for education of workers, to raise their political and trade union consciousness, as well as for training more union organizers. The PFTUA will publish a newsletter entitled *The Worker* on a regular basis. In addition, bulletins for individual unions will be published, along with pamphlets with topics related to the state of the Palestinian

working class and its role in the national struggle. The PFTUA will work to solidify its self-sufficient financial base in order to remain independent.

But the main task of the Front is to reactivate the militant role of the working class in the trade union movement in the political struggle - the struggle against all Israeli occupation schemes, the struggle against Israeli laws which restrict the freedom of trade union organizations, the struggle to defeat the Amman accord and the Palestinian right wing's line, the struggle to return the PLO to the national line, and the struggle to prevent Jordanian and rightist figures from moving to put the Amman accord into effect through meetings with Zionist officials.

Jerusalem slave market: Palestinians reduced to finding daily work in Israel.



Why the Split?

Background to the division in the Palestinian trade union movement

Palestinian workers were among the first in the Arab world to organize themselves, the first trade union being formed in Haifa in 1921. From the beginning the Palestinian trade union movement had a political as well as a labor focus. Beside defending their rights vis-a-vis the British colonial authority (a major employer), workers mobilized against the encroachments of Zionist colonization which aimed to deprive Palestinians of work altogether.

Originally trade union activity was most concentrated in the coastal area of Palestine, but with the Zionist occupation of 1948, it shifted focus to the West Bank, having been banned in the Zionist state. With the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the implicit political significance of the General Federation of Trade Unions in the West Bank became even greater, as part of the Palestinian masses' resistance to occupation.

Being under occupation only accentuates the importance of working class unity. Yet the Palestinian right-wing's efforts to dominate the scene in the Federation, as elsewhere, eventually led to division. The right-wing of Fatah's leadership insisted on dominating the Federation's leadership through

organizational means. They mobilized members who supported them, keeping out new members and unions where the progressive forces dominated. In 1981, the right-wing engineered an undemocratic election in the Federation where their men, Shehadi Minawi, replaced Adel Ghanem, long-time General Secretary of the Federation and progressive trade unionist. Many local unions refused to recognize this election. De facto there were two federations: the legitimate one headed by Adel Ghanem and including the progressive forces; and the split led by Minawi, which received the funds from the PLO-Jordanian joint committee, as well as from reactionary regimes. Though this split occurred in 1981, it reflects in general the differences that have more recently divided the PLO, after the right-wing's policy began to openly deviate from the national program.

Unfortunately problems have also arisen within the progressive federation because it has clung to outdated rules and regulations which block the admission of new members and recognition of newly formed unions. The Progressive Front for Trade Union Action works to mobilize these forces who are kept out of the federation. Those in the Progressive Front who are members in the federation headed by Adel Ghanem, naturally retain their membership and activity in the federation.