

International Labor Solidarity Is More than a Slogan

[Resolution for submission to the 2013 AFL-CIO Quadrennial Convention]

In the wake of the departure of U.S. military forces from Iraq at the end of 2010, Iraqi workers have experienced increasing repression. The government of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki has ignored the provision of the new Iraqi constitution that calls for respect of worker rights to organize and collectively bargain. It continues to enforce the 1987 law imposed by Saddam Hussein that made it illegal for public workers and employees of public enterprises to organize and bargain, and has enacted additional anti-union decrees. The Iraqi parliament has failed to adopt a basic labor law as called for by its constitution.

The U.S. military occupation of Iraq may have ended but the war on workers there has not. The attacks on worker rights in Iraq are being visited on workers around the world, including in the United States, by both governments and multi-national corporations.

This year, the al Maliki government escalated its attack on the Iraqi labor movement by attempting to criminalize the routine activities of unions and their leaders. The Ministry of Oil filed a criminal complaint against Hassan Juma'a Awad, President of the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions. South Oil Company, for which he works, charged that he undermined the Iraqi economy by instigating strikes and work stoppages by oil workers who were protesting unresolved grievances, broken promises, safety violations, privatization of Iraq's oil industry and refusal to respect worker and union rights. Heavy fines have also imposed on a number of other union leaders by the Ministry of Oil in retaliation for their union activities.

In reaction to this attack on basic labor rights, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, the International Federation of Trade Unions, IndustriALL, U.S. Labor Against the War and the Iraq Civil Society Solidarity Initiative launched an international campaign to demand that the charges be dropped and that a labor law be enacted that conforms to International Labor Organization standards for the protection of worker rights.

The global labor movement responded. More than 150 international, national and local labor organizations and NGOs from 24 countries signed an open letter calling on the Iraqi government to drop the charges and respect the right of all workers, public and private, to organize and bargain.

After months of delay and repeated postponements, a hearing on these charges was finally held on July 1st in a Basra Court. The judge ordered management to produce evidence to support its claim that the Iraqi economy had been damaged by actions taken by oil workers. The company attorney could produce no evidence, but claimed that the strikes had caused "moral damage" to the economy. The case was dismissed.

Labor solidarity has always been organized labor's strongest weapon for defending the interests of working people. In an era of ever greater globalization and in the face of a growing employer assault on working conditions and labor rights, labor solidarity across national borders becomes even more critical.

Resolved that the Alameda Labor Council, one of the earliest affiliates of U.S. Labor Against the War, is proud to have participated in the campaign to support Brother Hassan Juma'a and congratulates him on this important victory.

Further resolved, that this Council reaffirms its commitment to defend the rights of Iraqi workers and unions and to the principle and practice of international labor solidarity, and calls on the AFL-CIO to more actively involve its affiliates in solidarity with Iraqi and other workers in our common struggle for dignity, respect of labor and union rights and a decent standard of living for the working people of every country.

Submitted by Michael Eisenscher, delegate, Peralta Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1603 7/11/13

ADOPTED BY THE ALAMEDA LABOR COUNCIL

