



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Iraq Leather workers win strike for back wages, 2009

6 October

2009

to: 7 December

2009

Country: Iraq

Location City/State/Province: Baghdad

Goals:

- Payment of back wages from 1 January 2008
- Payment of safety benefits
- Settlements for those fired for political reasons during Saddam's regime

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 038. Marches › Protesters participate in peaceful demonstration in Baghdad.
- 106. Industry strike › Public Enterprise for Leather Production Enterprise announce new strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Federation's pamphlet distributed at several companies to call other labor groups to action.
- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 106. Industry strike
- 107. Sympathy strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 106. Industry strike › continued even after the administration agrees to concessions until they receive their expected cash in hand.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- leather workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Sa'ad Issa and Munadhil Atiya, leaders of the leather workers' committee of the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI) and FWCUI President Falah Alwan

Partners:

Cotton industry workers

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq
- Leather workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Cotton workers

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Enterprise of Leather Industries and Iraq's Ministry of Industry

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

At October 6 protest, protesters were confronted by Iraqi armed troops firing rubber bullets. Strike leader, Munadhil Atiya, was beaten and arrested.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign counted as many as 1500 members participating in the movement and drew in the support and participation of many other labor organizations.

In 1987, the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein passed Resolution 150 which prohibited public sector workers from organizing independent trade unions. Though this policy had yet to be replaced following Hussein's removal from power, public sector workers began organizing nonetheless. One such group that sparked a number of other labor groups to mobilize was the leather workers who led a strike in 2009 with the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI).

On 6 October, the leather workers participated in a peaceful demonstration along with a series of demonstrations and marches organized by other workers of the Ministry of Industry. The demonstration took place in the International Zone of Baghdad where the demonstrators were confronted by armed troops who opened fire on them. After this violent incident, authorities agreed to meet the demands of the leather workers: payment of back wages, payment of safety benefits, and the settlement for those fired for political reasons under the Hussein regime.

The authorities' promise proved empty, however, and on 13 October, the leather workers announced and launched a new strike from "The Public Enterprise for Leather Production".

The strike continued and on 3 November, the FWCUI called for an expansion of the leather industries strike into other industries. Union activists distributed pamphlets at numerous other companies. Through this, the leather workers were able to gain support by the cotton workers, though many employers prohibited their employees from participating by preventing them from leaving the building.

Finally, on 21 November, administrators agreed to release back wages and reveal the details of payroll and accounting. Further settlements were reached in early December when the leather workers were promised a 25%-30% increase to their salaries for working in hazardous conditions. Referring to their experience with the empty promises on the part of the authorities from the 6 October demonstrations, the leather workers insisted on continuing their strike until they had received the money in cash.

On 7 December, the strike was successfully concluded with all of the leather workers having been paid their stipend in cash.

Because union organization continued to grow stronger after this victory, however, the Ministry of Industry exercised their

power by transferring strike leader and FWCUI president Falah Alwan to another location so as to limit the union's organizing abilities.

Research Notes

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A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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Source URL (retrieved on 07/10/2020 - 21:42): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/iraq-leather-workers-win-strike-back-wages-2009>